PREFACE

John Crowe Ransom shot into critical eminence with the publication of his epoch-making book, *The New Criticism* in 1941. Though the term, 'new criticism' was previously used by Joel E. Spingarn, it was Ransom who first attached it to a definitive critical movement.

In *The New Criticism*, Ransom summarily dismissed various critical practices then in vogue, such as impressionistic criticism, historical criticism, biographical criticism, etc., and insisted that literary criticism must primarily be literary and as objective as science. He pointed out that the value of a literary work as historical or sociological document is very different from its value as a literary work *per se*. In other words, a literary work must be judged by literary criteria alone. Starting from this assumption, Ransom advocated the establishment of criticism as an academic discipline.

In the context of his basic assumption that a literary work is an aesthetic object, he put forward his theory of structure and texture, and the idea of *Dinglichkeit*, a German word, which he translated as 'thinginess.' By 'thinginess,' he refers to the particularity of physical objects. The world of things, for Ransom, consists not only of sticks and stones, but of 'precious objects,' objects which are exempted from fair or market valuation. He also tries to show how a poem derives its energy from the interaction of structure and texture. However, it would be wrong to think that Ransom tries to reduce criticism to scientific abstractions. On the contrary, his originality lies in his defence of the particularity of physical objects against the predatory inclinations of science which tries to reduce the world to abstractions.

A close reading of Ransom's critical writings, however, reveals his struggle for reconciling poetic autonomy with poetic relevance, or a poem as an aesthetic object and a poem
as a cognitive discourse. In very broad terms, the problem is that since a poem, or any literary object for that matter, in addition to being an aesthetic object, is also a cognitive discourse, a critical consideration of the statements made in a poem or the idea or the thesis of the poem becomes necessary for a concrete evaluation of a literary work. This cognitive aspect of a work brings in its wake the inherent problems of the relation between poetry and belief, poetry and history, poetry and philosophy, etc.

In my study, I propose to examine the various critical assumptions of Ransom, their strengths and weaknesses, and to make an attempt to assess his contribution to the development of modern criticism.

I have, in general, followed the MLA style as enunciated in the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, published in 2009 by The Modern Language Association of America, New York. However, I have deviated from the MLA style on certain points: I have used a font-size larger than the regular 12-point font-size for typing the titles of the chapters; I have used boldface for the titles as well as in places when I wanted to mark an expression out prominently; I have used single quotation marks, instead of the usual double quotation marks, to indicate that a particular word or expression has to be understood in a special sense; in the Works Cited list, I have refrained from indicating the source of an entry as print or web, as I have cited books with print publications only; and, I have first arranged Ransom’s books and then his articles in the Works Cited list, as a matter of convenience. I have done these with the kind permission of my Supervisor, of course, and only to ensure a smooth flow in reading and understanding. I have resorted to the British orthography, except in quotations where I have retained the original spelling, British or American, as I found in the texts I consulted.
Finally, I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my Supervisor, Dr Pradip Kumar Dey who has helped me hone my critical sensibility in understanding the nuances of literature. I am also grateful to Dr Mohit K. Ray for his valuable suggestions from time to time when the thesis was in progress. In fact, it is to Dr Ray that I owe my interest in criticism. I also acknowledge the assistance provided by many people from behind the screen, specially the staff of the various libraries I have used in course of my research work, my teachers in the Department of English at the University of Burdwan, my colleagues and friends, and of course, my family members, specially my mother who has always provided me with courage and inspiration to bring the work to its completion.

I hope my dissertation will generate interest among scholars of literary theory and criticism to pursue further investigation into the various facets of the New Criticism.

ARINDAM MODAK

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