CHAPTER ONE

(A)

The Rise of the New Criticism: the Context

The ‘New Criticism’ was a specifically American, rather South American, or what is commonly called Southern, phenomenon. Hence a critical survey of its background is bound to be a survey of the critical movement in America, with European influences infiltrating here and there.

The Socratic principle that the life that remains unexamined is not worth living was perhaps best exemplified by the all-pervading influence of criticism in the context of America where not only the field of literature but every sphere of life, whether it was economy, education, religion, ethics and, last but not the least, politics, was invigorated by a ‘critical’ spirit. However, there was nothing of the sort as pure ‘literary’ criticism till the end of the nineteenth century. As M. D. Zabel trenchantly points out in Literary Opinion in America, volume 1, “When there appeared, toward the end of the nineteenth century, a ‘critical movement in American life,’ literature played a part in it with manners, morals, and social institutions, but usually a subordinate part” (3). The condition was appropriately designated by Edgar Allan Poe [1809-49] as one of “absolute quagmire” (qtd. in Zabel 1: 3). There was little collaboration between the creative spirit of the artist and the discriminating taste of the critic. Easy popular recognition was assured for anyone writing a book, provided he or she could persuade the editor of a journal to publish a favourable critical review. Mutual commercial interest between the author and the editor ensured each other’s survival and prospects. It was this situation that led Herman Melville to declare dramatically, “I feel an exile here” (qtd. in Zabel 1: 4).
Of course, there were serious literary pursuits by luminaries like Poe, Lowell, Melville, Thoreau, and Hawthorne. But their apparently golden achievements were flawed by a critical poverty or lack of definite critical norms. The true artist, in most cases, was marked by an “instinctive withdrawal from the indignities of the public literary market.” The situation demanded a change towards the end of the nineteenth century as a sense of the lack of seriousness in matters of aesthetic curiosity became widespread. To put it in the words of Zabel, “The skeptical spirit abroad in the land was stimulating and healthy, but it needed translation into positive criteria of value and taste” (Zabel 1: 5).

People of eminence like Poe, Emerson, Lowell, and Whitman put in their best individual efforts. But there was no concerted approach to redress the situation. The arduous task ahead was one of “harmonizing tradition with the complexities of modern life” (Zabel 1: 6) on the one hand, and educating the critical intelligence in the aesthetic principles on the other.

The task was initiated by Henry James. However, as he discovered to his dismay that nourishment of his critical sensibility was impossible on the American soil, he headed for Europe where he diligently imbibed the current critical principles, whether it was Gautier’s “art for art’s sake,” Pater’s Impressionism, Zola’s Naturalism, or Balzac’s Realism. But he always strove for reconciliation between the extremes. To him, “aesthetic quality was as indispensable as realistic documentation, but to insist on one without the other, or on either without the harmonising presence of a moral conception, was futile” (Zabel 1: 7). This over-riding sense of a moral conception fusing the opposing tendencies remained with James life-long.

After James left his native land, the task he initiated was carried on by William Dean Howells and William Crary Brownell. Howells was equally touched by the practices of the French Naturalists and the humanitarian concepts of modern sociologists. He found realism as
the best means for the faithful portrayal of the modern democratic society. However, all his critical endeavours were marked by his staunch ‘Americanism’ and his ethical prejudice.

Brownell, toeing in the line of Matthew Arnold, conceived of art as the “criticism of life,” and criticism, in turn, as a co-ordinating principle between life and letters. Unlike Howells, he had no faith in the integrity of the American people. He found them spiritually deficient; and he found the cure in the critic’s holding up of a cultural ideal. It was his sticking to this ideal that made him look upon Naturalism and Impressionism as aberrations from the norm. It was, again, this Arnoldian ideal that determined for him the relation between art, criticism, and people.

While Brownell set the standard of a cultural ideal, James Huneker lifted the principle of ‘taste’ out of the bounds of satire, and made the American people aware of ‘taste,’ as it was conceived in the Continent. With his initiative, a kind of aesthetic movement set in in America. He was a close follower of Walter Pater’s appetitive ideal and Anatole France’s doctrine of aesthetic exposure. For Huneker, the critic must aim “to spill his soul” and “humbly to follow and register his emotions aroused by a masterpiece” (Zabel 1: 11). His contribution was twofold: he taught how to obtain aesthetic pleasure from literature, painting and music; and at the same time, he provided a moral satisfaction by saving ‘taste’ from the domain of Puritan prejudice.

In the formative years of the American criticism, George Santayana claims a special place for his psychological approach to criticism, superseding the didactic and historical approaches by aesthetic appreciation. For him, aesthetic judgements were “phenomena of mind and products of mental evolution.” In Sense of Beauty in 1896 he was motivated by the purpose of re-arranging “the scattered commonplaces of criticism into a system, under the inspiration of a naturalistic psychology” (Zabel 1: 12). He brought the aesthetic exposition out of the closets of
philosophy, and supplied a kind of realistic motivation by making the philosophical theories applicable to existing masterpieces.

Criticism in America took almost a dramatic turn at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was conscious effort on the part of the critics to bridge the gap between conventionality and modernist experimentation. It was clearly reflected in the pioneering activities of Van Wick Brooks and H. L. Mencken. Paul Elmer More had declared in the first volume of his Shelburne Essays in 1904: “Before we can have an American literature, we must have an American criticism” (qtd. in Zabel 1: 13). Van Wick Brooks superseded Elmer More when he expressed his belief that Americanisation must take precedence over any formulation of American literature or American criticism. Brooks and his associates wanted to have “a fresh and realistic understanding of what America itself meant” (Zabel 1: 13). Their approach was accounted for by the two purposes they had in view – the demolition of the genteel tradition and a re-discovery of the American spirit. The role of history was also re-defined as one of “creating a usable past.” Engrossment with commercial and materialistic interests had prevented the emergence of a national culture in America. As Van Wick Brooks says in Letters and Leadership in 1913: “Our ancestral faith in the individual and what he is able to accomplish as the measure of all things has despoiled us of that science, art, philosophy, the self-subordinating service of which is almost the measure of the highest happiness” (qtd. in Zabel 1:13-14). What was needed was a co-ordination among the personal initiatives in order to serve an impersonal end. All these activities were justified by the title of one of Brooks’s books: America’s Coming-of Age.

While Brooks’s critical spirit focused on the negative aspects of Puritan prudery, H. L. Mencken’s influence was positive in character. His Book of Prefaces, published in 1917, contained a remarkable essay on Dreiser. The value of the essay lies in its positive treatment of
Dreiser's Americanism. For Mencken, the critic serves as a mediator between the work of art and the spectator. The critic provokes the spectator to react to a work of art. Without the critic's assistance, the spectator would stand unimpressed. Mencken brushes aside the popular conception that the critic advances the enlightenment by disseminating psychological, epistemological, historical, or aesthetic doctrines. The idea of "constructive criticism" is rejected by Mencken as being based on the false assumption of immutable truths of the arts.

While the wind of liberalism from the Puritan prejudice swept over the land, the forces of reaction were also re-organising themselves. The reactionary movement appeared in the name of 'Humanism' under the guidance of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt. The manifesto of the movement has been aptly worded by M.D. Zabel in his Introduction to Literary Opinion in America, volume 1, and it is worth quoting:

It was a creed which defined one central enemy, the Romantic Movement; one chief source of grievance, Rousseau; one main purpose, the integration of literary criticism with ethical; and one chief means of deciding the quality of a work of literature, its validity in moral qualities. Inheriting the Puritan austerity of the early American fathers, it had skirted the skepticism of Emerson and his generation in such a way as to remain aloof from commitment to religious faith and dogma. It preferred the discipline not of theological beliefs but of human norm, and it looked for salvation not by sacrificing personal energy to an acceptance of supernatural authority, but by enhancing its sense of human values through restraint and self-control. Art thus became a means of judging man's nature chiefly in the degree to which it expressed this discipline." (29-30)
In the first volume of his *Shelburne Essays*, published in 1904, Paul Elmer More’s philosophy rested on the assumption of binding together the aesthetic and the moral sense. The nineteenth-century critics like Arnold were deficient in this respect, and this resulted in a lopsided development of the critical spirit. The outcome was the emergence of what More calls “the modern heresies of naturalism, impressionism, subjectivity, and moral anarchy.” According to More, literary criticism is “the specific exercise of a faculty which works in many directions. All scholars, whether they deal with history or sociology or philosophy or language or, in the narrower sense of the word, literature, are servants of the critical spirit, in so far as they transmit and interpret and mold the sum of experience from man to man and generation to generation” (Zabel 1:30). It was this binding Humanist ethic of submitting to the “sum of experience” that guided all the critical adventures of More, including his conception of art.

The contribution of Irving Babbitt has been succinctly described by M. D. Zabel in his *Literary Opinion in America*, volume 1, and one can do little better than quote his observations at length:

Irving Babbitt was always a keener controversialist than More, and to him fell the more polemical role in the Humanist revival that broke out late in the ’twenties. He was less a critic of books than of ideas, and the ideas he attacked inevitably led him back to the chief source of his vexations, Rousseau. He assayed creative works rarely, but made an exhaustive study of the influences and cultural circumstances that produce them—educational systems, political movements, religious bodies, academic standards, classical traditions, ethical beliefs. The ‘modern’ condition of these he invariably deplored as anarchic and decadent. He accepted in his early years the classical ideal, and declared himself the enemy of
all that opposed it under the romantic canon: democratic individualism, freedom of press and speech, free aesthetic experiment, any vestige of the eccentric or idiosyncratic in art or conduct. He formulated the tenets to which the younger Humanists subscribed— the ideals of wholeness, proportion, and the human norm; the constants of tradition as against the limiting “specialism” of the time-spirit; the discipline of reason, of imagination when controlled by reason, and of the virtues of restraint and humility which are the final evidence of the ethical dignity of man. (31)

Finally, there was the Marxist strand that appeared prominently in the work of Edmund Wilson. Wilson was a versatile critic, and diverse influences made their presence felt in him in different periods of his life. He began his career by making a study of the social and moral forces that produce literature, being under the influence of the French critics like Sainte-Beauve, Taine, and Renan. At one point, his social and political sympathies led him to a study of the principles and methods of Marxist theory in *To the Finland Station* in 1940. In the meantime, his commitment to the symbolist tradition which had started with his *Axel’s Castle* in 1931 was carried forward with *The Triple Thinkers* (1938) and *The Wound and the Bow* (1941) — where his symbolist studies verged on the psychological. Thus strands of historical, Marxist, and Freudian motives joined hands in him. It was, as Zabel says, “neither an aesthetic nor an analytical criticism, but a study of literature in its human and cultural values” (1: 27).

All the reigning critical methods in America in the beginning of the twentieth century as enunciated above thrived on an emphasis on extra-literary norms. In other words, they employed
for the judgement of literature yardsticks that were beyond the bounds of literature. None of these can be equated with or taken for granted as the New Critical method, while each of these can be held responsible for the emergence of the New Criticism.
CHAPTER ONE

(B)

The Rise of the New Criticism: the Formative Influences

It is often alleged that “The New Criticism is no more new” and the denomination is no less than a misnomer. While labelling such allegation, we tend to forget that the New Criticism was not new even in 1941 when John Crowe Ransom is supposed to have “canonized” (Litz 53) the principles of the New Criticism in his eponymous book. For, the objective of the New Criticism is as old as the first literary critics in oriental and occidental schools. Criticism has been formal in approach since the time of Plato and Aristotle on the one hand, and Bharata and Abhinaba Gupta on the other. Aristotle, who has been hailed as “the master of them that know,” has been decidedly formal in his analysis of Sophocles’s Oedipus Rex which he holds up as the model of tragedy in his Poetics, the Bible of literary criticism. Plato, the mentor and predecessor of Aristotle, was apparently concerned with the sociological aspect of literature, confining himself to the discussion of the emotional effect of literature on society, which he considered pernicious to the sound psychological development of the citizens of a state. However, on closer analysis, we find that the so-called sociological, rather affective, criticism of Plato is derived from considerations of the formal devices that constitute the being of literature. Plato went through the imagistic, linguistic, and rhythmic analysis of literature, and concluded that such formal devices could stir the emotions of the reader and disturb his mental equilibrium, prompting him to behave in an unbecoming and irresponsible manner. Thus both the doyens of literary criticism in the western world have interpreted literature from a formalistic viewpoint.
Rome was another centre of critical activity, and Horace had almost the same stature in Rome as Aristotle had in Greece. Horace in his *Ars Poetica* emphasised the harmony of structure achieved through the coherence of the parts. His most remarkable contribution to literary criticism has been his insistence on the need for maintaining ‘decorum.’ By ‘decorum’ he means that the subject chosen should be proportionate to the poet’s powers, the word to the meaning, the style to the subject, the treatment to the literary ‘kind,’ the ‘sentiments’ to character, and so on. The poet should spare no pains to attain a perfect polish in the observance of ‘decorum’ which, as has been explained, is a formal aspect of poetic composition.

In medieval times, criticism in England was chiefly concerned with the interpretation of the Scriptures. The scriptural text was often embedded in allegorical form. So the interpretation inevitably involved the unfolding of the layers of allegorical meaning. One could reach the pith of spiritual significance only by analysing this formal feature of the Holy Writ. In the twelfth century A.D., John of Salisbury held the art of eloquence in great estimation. For him, it was one of the potent assets of human civilization, and undermining this art was as good as undermining human civilization. The manner of saying something was of equal importance as the matter conveyed.

In the criticism of the Indian aesthetes, the form of literature again receives the utmost importance. In ancient times, drama was inextricably interlinked with poetry in the Sanskrit texts. So when Bharata, the first known critic, wrote the *Natya Shastra*, it turned out to be a treatise in poetics as well. In his discourse Bharata concentrated on the structural aspects of poetic composition. Bharata’s points were further illuminated by the *Abhinava Bharati*, a commentary on *Natya Shastra* by Abhinava Gupta, another renowned critic. However, it was Ananda Vardhan who in his *Dhanyalok* made some acute observations on the nature of poetry,
which inevitably centred round the stylistic and structural devices employed by the poet in order to express the vision of truth with the support of his Imagination.

The Chinese aesthetes believed in the retention of the principles of equilibrium and harmony for a healthy mental state. When different feelings are present in the mind but are not manifested, the mind may be said to be in a state of equilibrium. When these feelings are stirred and co-operate in due degree, the mind is in a state of harmony. Both equilibrium and harmony are desirable principles. But these cannot be produced by content, because one kind of content can be countered by another. So it is the form that is responsible for the attainment of such a state in great works of literature.

Hence it is abundantly clear from the foregoing discussion that the origin of the formal approach to poetics can be traced back to earliest epochs of critical practice in both the Eastern and Western countries. So the New Criticism was not new even in the early decades of the twentieth century when Ransom & Company had their heyday. It was only when there was conflict of ideologies that the content of literature began to be exploited to substantiate the claims of the warring factions, whether it was the conflict of Ancients and Moderns, English and French, or Rightists and Leftists. However, in modern times ideologies have become so numerous and ideologists so vociferous that no clear conception can be formed. The New Criticism was completely opposed to the use of literature for serving the narrow interests of any kind of ideology, and wanted criticism to focus on the literariness of literature. This objective approach to literature made widely current by the New Critics has been foreshadowed in many of the critical opinions of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, William Empson, and Yvor Winters.
Ezra Pound was not a systematic thinker; neither did he build a body of coherent critical thinking. Yet the critical pronouncements that he made now and then can be pieced together to form a thesis that reveals Pound’s line of critical conjectures. Actually, he held criticism to be inferior to original composition. He writes in Pavannes and Divagations: “The value of criticism to actual making is less than one to one hundred. The only critical formulations that rise above this level are the specifications made by artists who later put them into practice” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 154). And yet, it is his critical formulations that have ensured him a place in the world of English letters. In Literary Essays (1954) he attributes two functions to criticism:

1. Theoretically it tries to forerun composition, to serve as gunsight, though there is, I believe, no recorded instance of the foresight having ever been of the slightest use save to actual composers. . . .
2. Excernment. The general ordering and weeding out of what has actually been performed. . . . The work analogous to that which a good hanging committee or a curator would perform in a national Gallery or in a biological museum. (qtd. in Wellek 5: 152-3)

He does not attach much importance to the first one. His role as a critic has rather been focused on the second function, a preference unambiguously indicated by Pound himself when he writes in his Polite Essays (1937), “I am for say 80 per cent exhibit and 20 per cent yatter [sic],” or “Critics to be judged far more by their selections than by their palaver” — a function that René Wellek succinctly epitomises as “exhibition, pointing out, selection” (Wellek 5: 153). In consonance with his belief, Ezra Pound has been a tireless promoter of new talents, some of his well-known beneficiaries being Joyce, Frost, Eliot, Williams, Moore, H. D., and Loy (Litz, Menand, and Rainey 7: 58). He also wanted to help people cultivate a taste for the best in literature which prompted him to write works like How to Read (1931) and ABC of Reading
T. S. Eliot, while editing Pound’s *Literary Essays* in 1954, described his criticism as “the most important literary criticism of its kind” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 152). Pound made clear his own brand of criticism in 1915 when he wrote to Harriet Monroe, “Poetry must be as well written as prose” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 662). Pound went on to elaborate the special qualities of prose he wanted to lay particular stress on:

There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions. It must be as simple as De Maupassant’s best prose, and as hard as Stendhal’s . . . . Rhythm must have meaning. It can’t be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense . . . .

There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalese. The only escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what [one] is writing . . . . Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression: no hindside-bbeforeness, no straddled adjectives (as “addled mosses dank”), no Tennysonian-ness of speech; nothing— nothing that you couldn’t, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say. (Paige 48-9)

The ‘hardness’ and ‘precision’ eulogized here are repeated time and again in Pound’s writings. In *Literary Essays* he writes, “By good art I mean art that bears true witness, I mean art that is most precise”; or, “the arts give us our data of psychology, of man as to his interiors, as to the ratio of his thought to his emotions, etc. The touchstone of an art is its precision”; or, like
Ransom, in *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), “reality existed only in the particular” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 156). No wonder he was, like Flaubert, a strong adherent of ‘mot juste.’

Pound laid great emphasis on accuracy in art and considered art to be as good as science. For example, he says in *Literary Essays*, “The arts give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man considered as a thinking and sentient creature,” which is the culmination of what he famously wrote in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910): “Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like, but equations for the human emotions” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 156) — a statement which is supposed to have inspired Eliot to propound his theory of the ‘objective correlative.’

In *Little Review* (1918) Pound declares, “Poetry is the statement of overwhelming emotional values, all the rest is an affair of cuisine, of art,” and in *New Age* (1915), “emotion is the organizer of form,” or in *Literary Essays* “intentness on the quality of the emotion to be conveyed makes for poetry” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 156) — an opinion which may apparently reflect that Pound ascribed only a minor role to architectonics or the overall form of a literary work. This falsifies the fact that Pound attached a great importance to matters of technical innovation, including metres and stanzaic forms. As early as in 1913 he published a manifesto known as “Don’t” in the journal, *Poetry*; the manifesto recommended “direct treatment of the thing, economy of words, and composing in the sequence of the musical phrase” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 155). For Pound, “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 663). His definition of ‘image’ as “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 155) speaks of its orientation in contemporary psychology. In 1913 Pound came to be acquainted with Ernest Fenollosa’s “The
Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” and found the Chinese ideogram to be the most convenient for carrying out his idea of precision. He illustrates his point by explaining how the Chinese write ‘Man sees horse.’

... the Chinese method follows natural suggestion. First stands the man on his two legs. Second, his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of an eye, a modified picture of running legs but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on its four legs.” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 663)

Pound’s fondness for the method of the Chinese ideogram follows from his belief that in it “things work out their own fate” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 663). It is based on the principle of function and structure. In this method the composing elements retain their individuality yet contribute to the wholeness of the effect. In his advocacy of the ideographic method Pound obviously sounds Ransom.

Pound shows his dislike for biographical and historical approaches to literature, which seemed to him to have encumbered the study of literature, in the very opening paragraph of How to Read in quite unambiguous terms.

When studying physics we are not asked to investigate the biographies of all the disciples of Newton who showed interest on science, but who failed to make any discovery. Neither are their unrewarded gropings, hopes, passions, laundry bills or erotic experiences thrust on the hurried student or considered germane to the subject. (qtd. in Chandra 48-9)

Pound invokes the spirit of science in the study of literature on two counts. Firstly, science does not concern itself with the biographies of scientists; far from it, science concentrates on their...
objective achievements. Secondly, in the world of science there is no place for minor or insignificant contributions which do not enrich it in any way. Pound pleads for a similar objective approach to literature which would save the reader unnecessary labour spent on “diluters” and “Belles Lettrists” (starters of craze), rather than “inventors” and “masters.” Hence he argues for the application of the “loose-leaf system” in literature as in book-keeping “so as to have the live items separated from the dead ones” (Chandra 49). Though not consistently, Pound also stood for the principle of the art-for-art’s-sake so that it is not used as an instrument to serve any ulterior purpose beyond its own. To quote from Literary Essays, “Now art never asks anybody to do anything, or to think anything, or to be anything. It exists as the tree exists” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 156-7).

What was left abstract in Ezra Pound became concrete in T. S. Eliot. It is not for nothing that T. S. Eliot is considered a more immediate influence on the emergence of the New Criticism than Ezra Pound. The objective approach to literature that was to be espoused so ardently by the New Critics has been given a strong voice to by T. S. Eliot. Ransom himself considered him “one of the most important sources of a new criticism” (Ransom, New Criticism 140, emphasis added). Besides being a critic, Eliot was also a poet and a religionist. His criticism was conservative, marked by his scholarship, finesse, and a distinctive prose style. But his poetry, both in tone and structure, broke new ground. Again, in terms of religion he was an Anglo-Catholic. In this respect, he famously declared in the introduction to For Lancelot Andrewes in 1928 that he was a Royalist in politics, an Anglo-Catholic in religion, and a Classicist in literature (Ransom, New Criticism 137). Each aspect of his personality invigorated the others, but Eliot never allowed one aspect to come in the way of the others. Eliot’s critical taste, as he himself confessed, was that of a Classicist. He termed poetry “autotelic” (138), and believed that
judgement of poetry should not be vitiated by religious, moral, political, and social considerations. In Eliot’s later years, religious, political, and philosophical writings formed the bulk of his prose literature, and there was little literary criticism as such; but his earlier views remained unchanged.

Eliot found English criticism in a state of disorder and sought to impose order on it. For him, art was a quest for order in life, and criticism, in turn, was a quest for order in art. But the English critics were not in a position to voice clearly their differences, not to speak of composing those differences among themselves. The difference, Eliot discovered, originated from the contending claims of Classicism and Romanticism. England, a country of individual liberty, has always upheld the claims of Romanticism. So Classicism, which demands allegiance to an outside authority, has never had a sound footing in England. But, for Eliot, the matter is not a question of national or racial prejudice, but one of rightness; and Eliot ironed out the problem by arguing in favour of Classicism. He argues that showing allegiance to an outside authority is quite natural in a human being, whether he is showing it as a citizen to the government of his country or as a believer to the church. Similarly, in criticism also there should be some common criterion of judgement to which the critic has to submit. But the champions of individual liberty rely upon, what Eliot calls in *The Function of Criticism*, their ‘Inner Voice’ (qtd. in Prasad 231). This being their sole guide in the interpretation of a work of art, there is no external standard to vindicate such interpretation. So, instead of facts, which alone can bring out the reality about a work of art, the critic gives his own opinion about it. The result is that fact is supplanted by fiction. The function of criticism, which Eliot holds in the eponymous essay to be “the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste” (231), thereby gets defeated. In order to fulfil this function of fact-finding, Eliot implores the critic to be objective in his approach. He
prescribes two things to attain this objectivity. Primarily, his "highly developed sense of fact" will prevent the intrusion of his personal opinion into his judgement; and secondly, his tools of "comparison and analysis" (232) will help him understand the position of the literary work in terms of its modification by and of other literary works, and bring out its ontological significance. For example, Eliot takes up the popular judgement on Swinburne that the beauty of Swinburne's verse is the sound, and he had little visual imagination, and remarks that such inference can be made only through the comparative method. He compares lines and passages from Swinburne with those of other poets, and makes the observation how, unlike in other poets, in Swinburne there is no complete realisation of the musical or imagistic or ideational value of a word; in other words, Swinburne does not correlate a word with its objective content. Thus Eliot puts in practice Arnold's 'touchstone' method. But unlike Arnold, he does not confine himself to the same lines and passages. He chooses lines similar to the ones under discussion. And here lies the importance of Eliot's insistence on the awareness of tradition. One can apply the comparative method of judging poetry only with a comprehensive knowledge of one's tradition.

Eliot had a strong sense of history. He is, however, not just a historical scholar who acquires knowledge of history, and relates this knowledge to the poet's life, or the intellectual propensity of his age, or the poetic school to which the poet belongs. Eliot is a historical critic who uses his knowledge of history for the literary understanding of the poet. He tries to understand whether a poetic tradition is in accord with the standard or norm set by the main stream or tradition of English or European poetry, as the case may be. Such historical knowledge does not usually determine the aesthetic value (whether a poem is good or bad) of literature. But Eliot goes beyond, and uses his historical learning as the basis for passing critical remarks. Here one may pertinently recall what he writes in "The Frontiers of Criticism" (1956): "The greatness
of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards” (qtd. in Borklund 176).

One of Eliot’s famous pronouncements about criticism is, “Criticism, by definition, is about something other than itself” (qtd. in Wellek 5: 181). The concept of autotelic criticism is virtually non-existent. So the claim of interpretation as a valid tool of criticism is ruled out. In interpreting a work of art, the critic, instead of saying anything about it, gives voice to his own opinion. Similar is the case with Impressionism. It is a record of the impressions of a sensitive mind when it comes in contact with a work of art. Hence it does not conform to Eliot’s concept of criticism as faithful elucidation. Eliot also dismisses criticism that judges a work of art by its conformity to the precepts of the ancient critics; for such criticism does not enquire into the nature of a work of art sufficiently. To Eliot, the concept of true criticism is synonymous with the concept of scientific enquiry into the nature of an art-work. It is for this reason that Eliot considers Aristotle to be the ideal critic. Like a botanist or zoologist, Aristotle dissected a work to such an extent as to know about the underlying principle that could explain it. Other kinds of criticism are merely wish-fulfilment on the part of the critics. It is, again, this observation that led Eliot to believe that creative artists are more dependable as critics than professional critics, with the sole exception of Aristotle. Moreover, the creative labour expended in composing a literary work is critical in nature, involving “the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing” (qtd. in Prasad 234).

However, it is Eliot’s theory of impersonality as propounded in his essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” written as early as 1919, that makes him the closest forebear of the New Critics. There he famously says, “No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone.
His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (qtd. in Borklund 173). Eliot conceives of ‘tradition’ as being built by the additions of newly created works to the existing ones. When a new work is created conforming to the standard traditional practice, the existing order is modified to accommodate the new creation; and subsequently, the proportionate relation of each work to the whole order is re-defined. But how is such a thing to be accomplished? Eliot asks the poet to adopt the process of what he calls “depersonalization”: “The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 151). The poet’s mind acts as a catalytic agent that helps the poetic ingredients to mix in the consciousness of the poet, without itself taking part in the process. Eliot identifies the elements that go into the making of poetry as emotions and feelings. But the emotion perceived in art is quite different from the emotion as experienced in real life. The emotion of practical life gets transmuted in art to aesthetic emotion in the process of imitation. Thus an aesthetic distance is created. Moreover, the emotion in real life is too dominating to allow us to experience objectively the feelings in the heterogeneous and particular details of an experience. In the course of poetic transformation, through a process of gestation, emotion loses its intensity and is purged of any personal element. For obvious reasons, Eliot refutes Longinus’s principle of ‘sublimity’ which subsists on the greatness or intensity of emotions. So Eliot’s conclusion is: “Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 664-5). The upshot of the whole issue, according to Eliot, is that “honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry” (qtd. in Prasad 236).
Corollary to Eliot’s theory of impersonality are his conceptions of the “objective correlative” and the “dissociation of sensibility,” the first of which occurs in the essay, “Hamlet and His Problems,” and the latter in “The Metaphysical Poets.” The concept of the “objective correlative” is necessitated by the fact that the poet cannot transmit the emotions directly to the reader. He has to convey them through something concrete—“a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events,” according to Eliot (qtd. in Borklund 174). His idea of the “objective correlative” is further clarified in the essay, “The Metaphysical Poets” where Eliot says that the Metaphysical poets “were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling” (qtd. in Wimsatt & Brooks 609). The emotion the poet has to convey will be objectified through these, and as soon as these are presented to the reader, the particular emotion will be immediately evoked. The “dissociation of sensibility” is a characteristic fault of English poetry after the seventeenth century, which resulted from the bifurcation of thought and feeling. The antidote for this fault lies in the “unification of sensibility.” For the composition of good poetry, ideas are not enough. The poet has to convert his thoughts or ideas into feelings, so that those feelings can steal their way into the reader’s heart. Eliot cites the poetry of Chapman and Donne as possessing unified sensibility, while Tennyson and Browning, though they had ideas, could not “feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose.” On the other hand, “A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility” (qtd. in Ransom, New Criticism 180).

T. S. Eliot’s critical principles left their indelible marks on the New Critical techniques. This has been acknowledged in unambiguous terms by John Crowe Ransom himself in the essay, “The Cathartic Principle”: “I suppose our modern critics have learned to talk more closely about poems than their predecessors ever did. The closeness of Mr. Eliot in discussing a text may well
be greater than anybody's before him, and he in turn may now be even exceeded in closeness by Mr. Blackmur, and perhaps others. These are close critics, and define our age as one of critical genius" (Ransom, World's Body 173). Eliot appears to Ransom to be “closer and more patient” than even Dryden and Dr. Johnson (Ransom, New Criticism 140), in his critical analysis. His critical writings have also “suppleness” and “charm” (139) — qualities which endow his writings with literary value.

I. A. Richards, by his philosophical and conclusive critical pronouncements, laid a solid foundation for the New Criticism. J. C. Ransom, the founder of the New Criticism, begins his chapter on I. A. Richards in The New Criticism with the remarks: “Discussion of the new criticism must start with Mr. Richards. The new criticism very nearly began with him” (3, emphasis added). While other critics criticized in the light of a particular critical theory, Richards offered a comprehensive aesthetics which was applicable not only to poetry, but, with minor adjustments, to other arts as well.

The German philosopher Kant, following Descartes, held that our knowledge of the objective world is coloured by our subjective experience. This is exemplified by the Romantic poetry which is sustained on the projection of the self. Modern fiction, despite its claim to realism, also springs from the expression of the conscious self. It is in this context that I. A. Richards sets out to analyse poetry from the psychological standpoint and explain its intrinsic value. He says that poetry agitates the interests of the mind, and prescribes that the agitation must end in balance or poise as the interests will order and organise themselves. But Richards repudiates the element of cognition. How the system of clashing interests can result in poise without the cognitive element is a tricky question. For it is through a cognitive process that Imagination, working upon images, brings to light the particularities of Nature. With the passage
of time, Richards, however, has recognised the cognitive value of poetry; but he finds that the poetic assertions are merely mythical or pseudo-statements. So we can either ignore their lack of scientific precision or suspend our disbeliefs, and enjoy the images as they serve our interests. The problem can be overcome if we classify the assertions according to their degree of verifiability. Some poetic utterances simply present observed phenomena. Again, poets sometimes transfer human emotions to lower forms of animal life and even to inanimate objects — which is known as 'pathetic fallacy.' In the process even abstract qualities and entities are personified. Such personifications, though certainly mythical, can be taken as one form of cognition. When, for example, we watch physical objects, we unconsciously read consciousness into them. And the poet who, in the process of grasping their particularities, personifies them does the same thing. Richards, under the influence of Coleridge’s idealist philosophy, has come to conclude that poetry is more creative than science. His point is that both the poet and the scientist obtain the knowledge of Nature in the same way. But, whereas science abstracts only one aspect and studies it in a focussed manner, poetry studies the images with much more fullness.

In his first book, *The Meaning of Meaning* in 1923, written in collaboration with C. K. Ogden, Richards discusses the process of meaning-making in prose discourse. However, his argument extends to include poetic discourse also. In this book there is almost a paradoxical juxtaposition of nominalism and positivism. Nominalism believes “that a word which seems to refer to the objective world, or to have an objective ‘referent,’ really refers to a psychological context and has no objective referent” (Ransom, *New Criticism* 5). Positivism, on the contrary, holds that only science, by its reference to the objective world, can claim perfection. This curious juxtaposition of nominalist and positivist positions is exemplified by the “two companion tables”
In which Richards enumerates the meanings of Meaning and the meanings of Beauty. In the table on Meaning, the progression is towards the cognitive, while in the case of Beauty, the progression is from the objective to the affective states – therefore, towards the aesthetic. Distinguishing science and poetry, Richards says that in symbolic statements, science is concerned with “the correctness of the symbolization and the truth of the references” (8), while in evocative statements of poetry “the essential consideration is the character of the attitude aroused” (8). In other words, Richards attributes to poetry a psychological function, not a cognitive one.

By his inclination to psychologism, Richards believes that knowledge is the expression of our subjective emotions and desires, and not a reference to the objective world. He considers science autonomous, because its cognitive value is determined by other cognitive validations, whereas arts lack autonomy by reason of the affective states produced by them. From this preliminary assumption, Richards goes on to embrace newer developments like behaviourism and neurology. He finds the correspondence between thought and muscular movement in behaviourism unconvincing. However, his adherence to neurological psychology has been rather long-standing. The term “neurological psychology” may be a misnomer; for neurology proceeds on the assumption that all our experiences get registered in the mental tissue, and one can study physical and psychological condition from the state of the neural tissue. On the other hand, psychology analyses the mental state by studying thoughts, images, and emotions that constitute experience. The objective data of neurology can scarcely go with the subjective impulses of psychology. Richards was aware of this difficulty. He found the field of neurology “too large” (Ransom, New Criticism 14) to have an application in aesthetics. He overlooked the fact that the
consciousness of a writer is captured through language; and it is a psychological process, not a neurological observation.

His psychological bias led Richards, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* in 1924, to identify the cognitive, emotive, and conative elements in aesthetic experience with the cause, character, and consequence respectively, thus determining their respective importance. For him, the object which sets in motion the emotive element is merely the stimulus which ultimately results in a set of attitudes. However, art does not deal with passions directly. In its careful arrangement of matters, the cognitive element always dominates the emotive and the conative, though the cognitive object does not manifest itself always. Richards does not look for the cognitive object. He considers the emotive element as the basic component of aesthetics. He rubbishes the intelligent reader's attempt to find an intellectual thread in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. According to him, "...the items are united by the accord, contrast, and interaction of their emotional effects" (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 17-18). His contention is that even if the emotional experience is rationalised, it does not stand in the final form. However, even when Richards strives to explain the emotional state, he actually discusses the cognitive cause. He characterises Eliot's poetry as "music of ideas" and tries to show how ideas serve to produce "a coherent whole of feeling and attitude" (19). In the process he seems to forget that it is the objective sound-structures which, when arranged in a harmony or counterpoint, leads to the stirring of emotions. Emotions cannot be characterised in purely emotive terms; for emotions are always directed towards cognitive objects or situations, though the cognitive objects or situations may not be easily intelligible.

There are many and different impulses operating in a human mind. Co-ordination of their activities is essential so that they can be properly organised. But this co-ordination does not
always give rise to overt action which can be observed from muscular movements. The co-
ordination often takes place at an "imaginal and incipient" (24) stage. The tendencies to action at
an imaginal and incipient stage are called "attitudes" (24) by Richards. The extremely variant
multiplicity of the attitudes makes their analysis and classification nearly impossible. There are
many complicated adjustments among the attitudinal impulses which may not be observable in
outward behaviour. The understanding of a work of art depends on how far a human being can
make requisite adjustments in the activities of these imaginal and incipient impulses. In science,
these impulses are considered significant only so far as they are subservient to the functional
needs of the main line of argument. On the other hand, says Ransom, "...the texture of poetry is
one of incessant particularity, and each fresh particular is capable of enlisting emotions and
attitudes" (25).

According to Richards, an attitude remains confined in the private mental and bodily
world. It is stirred into activity by events both within and outside the organism. Richards labels
the activity aesthetic only when the stimulus comes from a cognitive object outside the organism.
But an attitude and a stimulus do not become inter-involved. As soon as an attitude is stimulated
into activity, it detaches itself from the cognitive object, takes up a new position, and gets ready
for receiving the influence of another stimulus.

In chapter 17 of The Principles of Literary Criticism Richards explains that the metrical
feature in a poem strikes us not because it is a pattern in itself, but it makes us patterned in our
response to it. Richards's point is that the formal elements are so manipulated by the artist that a
uniform response is ensured from those who experience the artistic communication. But he does
not clarify how a uniformity in response can be achieved. Richards does not allow criticism to
analyze "the complex organization of the attitudes" (Ransom, New Criticism 31-32) in terms of
"the complex organization of the object [cognitive object]" (32). At the same time, he, however, stresses the presence of some element in the cognitive object which directly affects the organisation of the attitudes.

One major problem of aesthetics concerns the enjoyment of poetry containing religious or philosophical statements on outmoded beliefs; in other words, how to reconcile poetry with beliefs? Richards’s explanation is that one does not read poetry to verify the doctrines enunciated therein; instead, one looks for emotional interconnections among attitudinal responses in poetry. Richards speaks of a "suppressed conditional clause" in poetry: "If things were such and such then... and so the response develops" (qtd. in Ransom, New Criticism 34) – which aptly echoes Aristotle’s doctrine of probability or poetic truth. A poet is free from the necessity of making any assertion which must conform to the objective facts. So he can accommodate irrelevancies and present an experience in its integrity or wholeness. Contrasting poetry with science on this point, Richards explains in Science and Poetry (1926) that in science a statement must categorically conform to the truthfulness or falsity of the proposition, while in poetry the validity of a statement lies in its producing the right kind of attitude and emotion, even if the statement lacks cognitive value. However, Richards does not clarify how a statement which does not allow for cognitive satisfaction can be poetically significant.

Richards’s remarkable contribution to literary criticism lies in his disengaging the emotive and conative phases of experience from the cognitive phase. But, for that matter, he does not consider the emotive and conative phases as detached from the cognitive; for that would amount to the justification of an illusive view against the realistic approach of science. The component parts of a scientific discourse are entirely functional. They are necessitated so far as they contribute to make the discourse a complete whole. Hence there is little to diffuse the
interest. But in a poetic discourse every detail stands for concrete object or situation, and at the same time interrelation of the terms makes for the wholeness of the discourse. Richards closely echoes Coleridge's line of thinking here. Richards's point is that the structure of a poetic discourse is more realistic than a scientific one, because the real world is not at all streamlined like a scientific discourse. In the real world every detail asserts its concrete identity. The scheme of a poetic discourse aptly represents this. Even aspects like gods, demons, and Ptolemaic spheres which have been proved to be illogical by science can be accommodated in poetry so far as they are not historically antiquated.

In 1929 Richards published *Practical Criticism*, a book of seminal importance. In this book he tried to teach how to bring out the 'sense' or 'thought' of a poem. For this purpose he examined 'protocols' or papers submitted to him by the Honours students of Cambridge University, and pointed out their deficiencies both in their understanding of the poems and in their critical comments. Richards had keen psychological insight. He was also free from "psychic inhibitions" and "academic stock responses" (Ransom, *New Criticism* 45). This put him in a unique position to interpret acutely the experience of reading poetry.

Richards speaks of four 'meanings' of a poem: Sense or Thought, Feelings, Tone, and Intention. 'Attitudes,' which appeared in his earlier discussion, have been lumped with 'feelings.' His point is that if the right feelings are produced, the attitudes will be created spontaneously. But no such correspondence exists between cognitions and feelings. They are coordinate categories of study. There is one-to-one correspondence between them; and no feeling can exist without a corresponding cognition.

We possess a powerful logical faculty for analysis of sense or thought; but we do not have any such faculty to separate out the attributes of feeling or understand their internal
organisation. Yet we make subtle linguistic discrimination among emotions or emotional attitudes. We often describe an object by what Richards calls "projectile adjectives," like "splendid, glorious, ugly, horrid, lovely, pretty" (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 49) which do not so much describe the object as our feeling towards it. Moreover, there is a definite order in the organisation of emotions by virtue of which certain emotions go with others (grand and sublime, glorious and beautiful), while some do not comply with each other (pretty and sublime, pretty and beautiful). All these reflect our comprehensive understanding of the feelings. Poets are supposed to use metaphor with a view to communicating feelings. But metaphors subsist on objective situations, not on feelings. Feelings are the correlates of the objective situations. Richards holds the opinion that if the feelings exceed the objective occasion communicated through the text, it results in sentimentality.

Richards considers 'Tone' the third element in poetry. By 'tone' Richards means the attitude of the poet to his readers as determined by the argument of the poem. A poem may not express striking thought or exceptional feeling, but even then it may be highly rated because of its perfection of tone. Gray's well-known elegy is an instance in point. The reflections or thoughts in this poem are commonplace, and the feelings are also familiar. Yet Gray manages to offer such a proportionate treatment that the poem achieves a rare distinction. Good manners or treatment according to proportion is the hallmark of tone, and the eighteenth century poets distinguished themselves in this respect.

Tone also presupposes the presence of dramatic situation. Excepting poems composed in the grand or classical style, poems generally represent a speaker addressing a listener, which brings out the subtle traits of his (the speaker's) character. So it is impossible to think of Browning's dramatic monologues without dramatic situations. Dramatic situations create the
requisite environment in which the argument of a poem has its growth. Hence Warren and Brooks' *Understanding Poetry* always looks for the dramatic situation in which the thesis of a poem flourishes.

‘Intention’ is identified by Richards as the fourth kind of meaning. By intention is meant the order and degree of prominence given to various parts of a composition in order to bring home the logical argument. Sometimes, as in a play, the argument cannot be paraphrased from a literal composition. Thus the reader has to rely upon the element of intention to bring out what is left unsaid.

Metaphor is one of the several features of poetry, which make poetry structurally different from prose. Richards discusses the element of metaphor extensively. In *Principles of Literary Criticism* he takes up the metaphorical expression, “sea of troubles” from *Hamlet*, shows how the expression conveys the sense of hopelessness, and therefore concludes that the metaphor has a perfect logical base. But he recants his conclusion, finding that metaphors cannot always be accounted for logically. It is sometimes said that metaphor is used to clarify in concrete terms an abstract argument. Contrary to such opinion, poetic metaphor brings in “disparate and hitherto unconnected things” (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 66) which do not fit in logically with the argument. It is the effect of the metaphor upon the attitude and the impulse which helps the mind establish connection with the foreign element in the metaphor. Richards admits that the imported metaphorical element disturbs the unity of the argument, but at the same time it supplies the material that gives wholeness to the poetic discourse.

In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) Richards discusses metaphor from the objective viewpoint. He introduces two terms, ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle,’ which have since found permanent place in literary criticism. By ‘tenor’ Richards means “the original context, the given discourse,”
while ‘vehicle’ refers to “the importation or foreign content” (Ransom, New Criticism 67). For Richards, metaphor originates as the tenor, but is modified by the vehicle. In other words, the interaction between the tenor and the vehicle gives rise to metaphor. However, the vehicle is not mere excuse in illuminating the tenor; for, the moment we try to replace one vehicle with another, the metaphor collapses. But usually a metaphor is not always elaborate and explicit, and the vehicle also does not assert itself firmly. As in Robert Burns’s well-known lines, “O My Luve’s like a red, red rose, / That’s newly sprung in June,” we are at a loss to find out the point of similarity between the tenor and the vehicle. At the same time, we cannot deny that the importation of the rose into a poetry about one’s ladylove helps to “densify” (73) the poem.

In Coleridge on Imagination (1934) we have an idea of how Richards’s conception of metaphor differs from Coleridge’s. For Coleridge, poetic imagination, which he calls the ‘esemplastic’ faculty, unifies the opposed parts of a metaphor into one. Consequently, Coleridge sets more store by relevance than irrelevance, whereas Richards talks about the smuggling in of the irrelevant and alien content of the vehicle. The invitation of analogy calls for the introduction of irrelevant materials. Hence scientific discourse steers clear of metaphorical language, while poetic discourse thrives on it.

Richards discusses the puzzle of ‘catharsis’ in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in the light of Coleridge’s theory of “the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (Coleridge 36). Tragedy is primarily concerned with the impulses of pity and fear, impulses which do not find sufficient outlet in our everyday experience. Pity is the impulse to approach, fear, the impulse to retreat. Catharsis is effected by the unification of these contrary impulses, resulting, according to Richards, in a “sense of release, of repose in the midst of stress, of balance and composure” (qtd. in Ransom, New Criticism 86). Richards says that the profound
poetic experience that tragedy is, it scrupulously avoids suppressions and sublimations of the impulses involved; and the pleasure that attends the experience of watching a tragedy is achieved by psychological equilibrium, not any theological intervention. But the problem is that Aristotle never says that pity and fear are conflicting emotions; on the contrary, he points up that pity and fear always go together to create the necessary tragic situations. Richards's position presupposes the gratification of the emotion of pity and suppression of the emotion of fear. But that is hardly tenable. Only in terms of affective psychology it could be said that a positive impulse like pity wins over a negative impulse like fear.

According to Richards, tragedy can incorporate all kinds of impulses so far as they do not disturb the relation among the components of a tragic play. There are two ways in which impulses are organised in poetry: exclusion and inclusion. In poems which deal with a single emotion, attitude or mood, several impulses run parallel. There are also poems which are marked by heterogeneity of impulses. Here the conflict of impulses invests the poem with an ironical dimension. And such poems which follow the principle of inclusion are considered richer by Richards than the ones composed on the principle of exclusion.

Ivor A. Richards inspired a number of pupils. William Empson was the most famous of them. Empson's contribution to the rise of the New Criticism has been acknowledged by John Crowe Ransom in unambiguous terms in *The New Criticism*. Ransom describes Empson as "the closest and most resourceful reader that poetry has yet publicly had" (102). Empson conceptualised the poetical device of 'ambiguity' in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, published in 1930. The element of emotion occupies a central position in Richards's discussion. But Empson almost marginalises the emotional element and concentrates on the cognitive content of a discourse. From Ransom's discussion of the topic, some characteristics of ambiguity clearly
come out. They may be enumerated in the following manner: (i) there must be two meanings of a poetical item; (ii) the meanings must be opposite or contradictory to each other; (iii) there cannot be any reconciliation between the two senses, or, to quote Ransom, “both cannot hold at once” (*New Criticism* 114). That is why Ransom characterises ambiguity as an ironical device, for, as in irony, the effect of ambiguity remains unresolved or indecisive.

Summing up Empson’s observations, Ransom says, “Ambiguity is a poetic device in a logical structure” (103). It is unwelcome in a scientific discourse. However, Empson never says that ambiguity is the chief poetic device. Rather, the pride of place of being the elementary poetic device is given to ‘diffuseness.’ ‘Diffuseness’ is explained by Ransom as “the scattering of attention over the field of local particularity,” or “pure heterogeneity of meaning” (103). Obviously, it points to the textural content of a poetic discourse. At one point, Ransom says that diffuseness is the alternate poetic device to ambiguity. But his observations that follow only emphasise the point that ambiguity and diffuseness can reinforce each other, instead of being mutually exclusive. Ransom quotes William Empson’s illuminating comments on a sestina composed by Sir Philip Sidney. The sestina is a poetic form that requires six stanzas of six lines each and a final triplet, and the lines in each stanza end with the same words but in different order. Sidney more than discharges his duty by offering thirteen stanzas. Empson shows how Sidney explores the semantic heterogeneity contained in the words ending the lines, and in the process of exploring the textural aspect, he pairs off the opposite senses contained in the words. Thus the thought-content of the words results in ambiguity which is a structural feature. Ransom remarks that such penetrating observations set Empson apart as a New Critic. Ransom goes on to comment that while the words in their ‘particularity’ display ambiguous structuring, the overall effect of the sestina is that of a tragedy. The catastrophe is revealed through the dialogue
progressively. The departure of the beloved lady points to the ‘reversal’ of fortune, as required by Aristotle as the basic component of tragedy. The conflict between the good and the evil results in the evil outdoing the good. Not only lexical ambiguity, Empson quotes from Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” and shows how his muddled way of thinking produces philosophical ambiguity.

After enumerating the seven types of ambiguity as categorized by Empson, Ransom discusses how Empson’s own explanation of the first quatrain of Shakespeare’s Sonnet No. 73 goes beyond such categorisation. In this sonnet the tenor is not named. It is expressed in terms of a vehicle (‘boughs’) and this vehicle is clarified by another vehicle (‘church choirs’). We have to identify the tenor. This is known as the restrictive or predicative kind of ambiguity. In his zeal for identifying the resemblances between the vehicle of the ‘boughs-without-leaves’ and that of the ‘bare ruined choirs,’ Empson goes to a point more than necessitated by the context. And we, as readers, have to elect, among those resemblances, the relevant ones. Ransom denominates this as “the total theoretical ambiguity of metaphoric usage” (New Criticism 130). Ransom’s parting comment is that it is possible to invent resemblances between any two objects; but in case of poetry, its logical integrity should never be lost sight of.

Another critic who finds a special place in J. C. Ransom’s estimate is Yvor Winters. Ransom considers Winters a logical critic, and the reason is that Winters concerns himself with the analysis of the structure of poetry. There were other critics, like John Sparrow and Max Eastman, who also analysed the structure of poetry, but they were conservative in outlook and censured the departure of modern poetry from the traditional poetic structure. Himself a poet, Winters criticised modern poetry with an approving attitude. When Winters is labelled as a
logical critic, it does not mean that he was unaware of the element of texture; he knew about texture, but he distinguished himself in the analysis of poetic structure.

Winters's *Primitivism and Decadence* (1937) is an authoritative volume on his critical ideas and methods. Though a critic of poetic structure, Winters's professed aim was to offer moral insights. Critics on the line of Horace were also aware of the moral function of poetry. But while they held that poetry should be instructive, they also upheld, like Horace, the pleasure principle. On the other hand, Winters denied to poetry any other interest than the ethical one. This conviction and tone of finality marks him out. However, Winters's ethical interest is not a conventional one. He makes a subtle philosophical analysis which goes under the name of ideological study. Of course, Winters's interest in the ethical aspect of poetry narrows his area of criticism, but the closeness of his analysis makes him a positive influence on the New Criticism.

Winters considers Irving Babbitt, the Humanist, "one of the few great critics of modern years" (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 216). The reason is that Winters found in Babbitt a corresponding chord of his moral interest. But he criticised Babbitt because the latter did not know how the morality works in a piece of poetry. A poem, for Winters, must offer to the reader new perceptions about the factual world and human experience as well. The job of the poet is to produce these perceptions through sensibilities. It is notable that while for Eliot sensibility is an affective organ that secretes feelings, for Winters it is a cognitive organ that gives perceptions.

Winters's originality lies in his emphasis on the technique by which the perceptions are generated by the poet's sensibility. While composing a poem, the poet attends at once to the logical structure and to the metre. The logical structure refers to the meaning he has in mind, and the meaning requires appropriate words. But the metre, a phonetic item, also demands appropriate words. So the words which compose meaning are altered to suit the requirements of
the metre. The poet does this by exploring the logical details of the meaning words, and to suit the metre, uses a detail which belongs to the word, but not to the logical structure. Hence there are departures (like periphrases, ellipses, metaphors) from the rational use of language. This results in a two-fold structure-texture relationship. The metre is a texture to the meaning at the beginning, the structure; and the final meaning is a texture to the original logical structure. The process invests the abstract words with a richness, with a sense of being, so to say.

Mallarmé believed that words have a rational meaning and "a fringe of feeling" (Ransom, *New Criticism* 220), the latter he held essential. That means that a poet can dispense with the rational meaning which is non-essential. This exaggeration of the role of texture results in a confusion. Denying Mallarmé's observation Winters says that the rational content is indispensable for a poem as well as for a work of prose; but a poem has "a fringe of feeling" — which Ransom explains as "the local particularity of meaning" (221) — which is denied to a prose-piece. The interaction of different items or elements of a piece of poetry extends, for Winters, "the poet's vocabulary incalculably," resulting in a "fluid complexity" (221). There is unpredictability in the experience, but it cannot be precise as Winters demands; for an experience which is unpredictable cannot work according to plan.

Winters observes that the total intention of a poem may be different from its logical content. Winters paraphrases the logical content of Allen Tate's sonnet, "The Subway" thus: the poet's ideas in a cosmopolitan environment lead him to madness. In the poem there is only an indication of the possibility of madness and how the poet develops a moral attitude towards it. The logical content keeps out this moral attitude, the feeling of dignity and self-control in the face of a difficulty. The total intention of the poem is the final meaning the poet arrives at, and it contains particular details which are not part of the logical content the poet starts with.
Allen Tate might or might not have yielded to the peril before he came to write his poetry. But Baudelaire did yield to the temptation of evil, and also wrote poetry about his experience. Though the origin of the logical content is evil, that does not mar his aesthetic achievement, because, as Eliot has observed, the distinction between art emotion and life emotion is absolute. Through a process of depersonalization, Baudelaire's experience of 'evil' is distilled into an aesthetic experience embodied in *Flowers of Evil*. This obviously leads to the inference that aesthetic experience is beyond good and evil, confirming Kant's observation, "the satisfaction which occasions the judgement of taste is disinterested" (qtd. in Ransom, *New Criticism* 226).

To conclude the discussion, the influences that shaped the New Criticism were many and varied. The critical opinions that are discussed above are only the prominent ones which have deeply influenced the thought-pattern and critical procedure of the New Critics. The New Criticism, as it has already been stressed, was nothing new. It was, in fact, the foregrounding of some critical principles which put the emphasis on the objective reading of literature. Those who became well-known as New Critics took the cue from the critics of yesteryears or their contemporaries, and laid a solid foundation which directed the teaching of literature in a scientific spirit for a long time.
CHAPTER ONE

(C)

The Rise of the New Criticism: the Initiation

If we try to locate the origins of the New Criticism, we will encounter a number of persons, and almost all those persons had their moorings in and around Vanderbilt University, a hallowed institution of learning in the city of Nashville in Tennessee, an American State in its mid-southern part. The story of the origin begins with one Sidney Mttron Hirsch. Born in 1885 in Nashville, he distinguished himself with his interest in the cult of mysticism and esotericism, his life of adventure in oriental countries, and his physical charm that brought him into close contact with the famous artists and men of letters of the time, including Rodin, George Russell, and Gertrude Stein. The mystical element that lay deep in Hirsch's heart found a strong impetus when Russell advised him to search for deep-seated meaning even in apparently insignificant poems. Hirsch found a ready occasion to apply his doctrine to Edwin Arlington Robinson’s poems when he came from Paris to New York. Hirsch’s interest in discovering the common bond that bound the universal poetic mind also led him to a study of remote languages. After spending years in a life steeped in mysticism, Hirsch returned to his home-town, Nashville in 1915.

Nashville, by that time, came to be compared with the ancient Greek city of Athens, mainly because of the enlightenment spread by the University of Vanderbilt, a Methodist institution established in 1875, with the sacred aim of grooming young clergymen. When James M. Kirkland was appointed Chancellor of the university in 1893, it brought him at loggerheads with Bishop E. E. Hoss who, being the head of the Church, was also the ex-officio head of the university. The bone of contention between them was whether the retention of religious purity or
the raising of academic standards should get priority. By an intervention of the Supreme Court, Kirkland got a favour which went a long way in bringing around young intellectuals of the time to Vanderbilt. John Crowe Ransom was the foremost among them.

Ransom was born to a Methodist clergyman who was also a skilled linguist, on April 30, 1888, in Pulaski, a small village in the province of Tennessee. At the young age of fifteen, Ransom graduated in Classics with the highest distinction, and entered Oxford to study Literary Humanities. It was during his stay at Oxford that he came in contact with Christopher Morley, and joined his 'Midwives' club where Morley helped him to inculcate a taste for English literature which bloomed in full when he came to teach the subject at Vanderbilt University, under the able guidance of Edwin Mims, the Chairman of the Department of English, who, in spite of Ransom's not having any graduate degree in English literature, made him a member of the faculty of the department. The taste for Modern English poetry that he acquired following his association with Christopher Morley influenced his teaching as well as his critical concepts and opinions.

Hirsch who had by that time returned to Nashville attracted, by his encyclopaedic knowledge, a number Ransom's students who became regular visitors to his abode outside the university campus. Davidson and Johnson sat late into the night with Hirsch, discussing matters as abstract and philosophical as poetic inspiration and distinction imposed by the poetic profession. Davidson and Johnson invited Ransom as they knew that Hirsch's intellectual ability could be matched only by Ransom's. The group soon realized that they should focus their attention on particularities, instead of concentrating on abstractions and generalities. As a measure towards that end, they took upon themselves the task of discussing the poems composed and recited by the members of the group. That was the origin of the group known as 'Fugitives'
which gradually transformed itself into the New Critics. The group was joined by some other members from the English Department of the Vanderbilt University, prominent among them was Allen Tate who, by his academic brilliance, had already attracted the attention of his teachers in the department, and who, along with his teacher Ransom, led the New Critical movement from the front. When the poems grew in number, the idea of bringing out a magazine struck them. They very appositively named the magazine ‘The Fugitive.’ The idea was strongly opposed by Edwin Mims who found it impossible to digest the fact that the members of his department should flock round a self-taught man like Hirsch. However, he showed the munificence of his heart by appreciating the magazine when it was brought out.

No less intriguing was the name ‘Fugitive’ given to the group and also to the magazine. No historical record exists as to the choice of the name. Years later, Allen Tate commented that the name attracted public attention. Ransom explained it as reflecting the dissociation of and drifting away of the members of the group from the elite aggressive culture of the South. However, there is cogency and ingenuity in locating the nomenclature in Hirsch’s frequent allusion to “the fugitive, haunted, persecuted character of the poet – the outcast wanderer with mysterious knowledge, the superior exile standing in lonely splendour like an angel who had lost his heaven and was in ceaseless search for it” (Chandra 85).

The interesting fact about the Fugitives is that they came to the problems of poetry from discussion of particular poems recited by the members themselves. It was not, as in most cases, first improvising a theory and then fitting the facts into it. This practice gave the Fugitives a concrete base. Though Hirsch, the leader, was devoted to abstractions and speculations, the command gradually passed from Hirsch to other members as they grew in years and wisdom. It was under the initiative of Hirsch that the journey of ‘The Fugitive’ started, but ‘The Fugitive’
was made famous by the contributions of Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. They focused their attention not so much on a generalised discussion of poetry as on the particular aspects of a poem. They concentrated not on the idea content of a poem, but on the formal elements of a poem, like imagery, style, metre, etc. Once a poem was recited, it was subjected to intense and ruthless criticism from the members in terms of its technical elements. In times of vacation, manuscripts were sent to members of the group, who returned the copies with comments on the margin.

The members of the Fugitive group were quite original in their creative work as also in their critical concepts. When their poems appeared on the pages of ‘The Fugitive’ and other magazines, critics pointed out that they had been influenced by the Metaphysical poets and T. S. Eliot. Ransom gainsaid this by saying that he had not read Donne or Eliot till then. Similar was the case with Allen Tate. He read Eliot’s Poems 1920 and was overwhelmed only when Hart Crane wrote to him of the influence of Eliot after reading his poem in a magazine called Double Dealer. The note of similarity that the critics located may be a mere case of intertextuality. The similarity may be traced to the fact that the Fugitives and the Metaphysicals, or Eliot for that matter, reacted to their cultural environment in an almost identical manner. Though there may be some substance in tracing the influence of Eliot on the critical concepts of the Fugitives, it must be kept in mind that they showed interest in criticism of poetry from the third issue of The Fugitive itself.

In spite of the fact that they belonged to a group, the members were allowed sufficient freedom to hold on to their individual opinions. Tate engaged himself in argument with Ransom, who was his teacher, a number of times on a number of issues. Remarkable among these was their contradictory reactions to Eliot’s poems. Ransom reviewed The Waste Land in a manner
that seemed to damage its reputation to a great extent, while Tate described Eliot's *Poems 1920* as simply overwhelming. Ransom defended Eliot's idea of 'tradition' only as a check on reckless experiment; on the other hand, Tate not only adhered to Eliot's idea of 'tradition,' but also elaborated it along with his concept of the 'dissociation of sensibility.' The individual approach of the critics to different issues helped to explain the issues with lucidity and perspicuity. This individuality is seen in one more aspect. Though Ransom was teacher of most of the Fugitives and gradually emerged as their natural leader, there was no slavish submission to his authority. However, Ransom had a positive influence on the group. It was chiefly because of his influence that the Fugitives tried to free poetry from sentimentality and ornateness, dismissing in the process the poetry of the nineteenth century, while according utmost importance to the poetry of the seventeenth century and the modern age.

The Fugitives hailed from the southern part of America, but they did not like to be associated with any kind of regionalism. They protested strongly against the attribution of 'Southernism' upon them. They also avoided a number of vices associated with literature composed in the southern states, notably ornateness and non-functional beauty of language. Yet there was something unique about them which could only come from what John L. Stewart in *The Burden of Time* described as "a rapport with their time and place" (qtd. in Chandra 91). Stationed at Vanderbilt and insulated from outside influences, the Fugitives cultivated their talent most diligently. Unlike other groups in other parts of America, they did not migrate to Paris or New York, and except Allen Tate, they did not settle as professional writers. They were amateurs in the true spirit of the Southern tradition. That their belonging to a particular region had much to do with their emergence as a group has been pointed up by Donald Davidson himself in *Southern Writers in the Modern World*:
The fact is that no similar group appeared in the North or West . . . I will venture a hypothesis . . . suppose that all the members had come from different parts of the country, would this Fugitive group then have appeared, even if we had exactly the same degree of literary interest and ability? I cannot imagine such a phenomenon. There would have been individual poets no doubt, and they might have known each other, even casually worked together, but there could not have been a group in any cohesive sense, much less this particular ‘Fugitive Group.’

(qtd. in Chandra 91)

It was in the discussions and deliberations of the Fugitive group that the critical principles had taken their roots. After a poem was recited by a member of the group, it was subjected to intense criticism by the other members in terms of its technical aspects. It was from this practice of the Fugitive days that the New Critics became self-conscious craftsmen. This consciousness of technical perfection eventually influenced their judgement of literature. That is why the New Critics concentrated their attention on the form and technique of poetry. Though critics have tried to ascertain the influence of Eliot and others on the New Critics, the pages of The Fugitive provide a far more dependable ground for accessing the source of New Criticism.

From the third issue of The Fugitive itself Ransom showed his critical inclination. Some of the major issues that engaged the attention of the Fugitives were the future of poetry, the claims of tradition, the opposite pulls of the ideological content, and the metrical perfection of literature. In his review of Robert Graves’s On English Poetry in the October 1922 issue of the magazine, Ransom valiantly defended the necessity of the metrical form. His ‘apology’ for the metrical form became necessary in the face of the practice of the American poets to create a well-built phrase. They did not care for metre and considered it an archaic anomaly in view of
the present demands on poetry. Ransom, however, demanded that the poet must achieve felicity of expression and perfection of metre through a rigorous artistic discipline. The poet, while he has to be truthful to what feels, has to be careful about the precision of metre also.

There is another aspect to this proposition concerning the contending claims of form and content. The South represented the pre-industrial agricultural civilization, while the North was pre-eminently industrial. After their defeat in the civil war, the South was reduced to a peculiar psychological position. They tried to protect their agricultural heritage from the industrial inroads of the North. The Fugitives were in the vanguard of this revolutionary endeavour. They made their ideological stand clear in a collection of essays entitled, *I'll Take My Stand*. The industrial civilization that reduced human beings to the level of the slaves of machine society was looked upon as the embodiment of the ‘Evil.’ This ‘Evil’ took everything under its power and employed the reviewer and the critic to serve its own interest. And the interest of this ominous force could be best served by focusing attention on the idea or thought content of the poem, to utter neglect of its technical virtuosity. They tried to bring out the prose sense or the paraphrasable message of the poem. One of the potent devices employed by this industrial interest was the spirit of scientism. In the face of such a calamity, the Humanities subjects took a beating, keeping “their peace,” as Donald Davidson pointed out, “by imitating the technique of their rivals, so that one studies the biology of language, the chemistry of drama, the evolution of the novel, and the geological strata of the fossil forms of literature and fine arts” (qtd. in Chandra 111). To save civilization from an imminent disaster, it was necessary to re-direct attention from the idea content to the formal element. The Fugitives, later as the New Critics, did exactly that. By analysing imagery, metre, metaphor, and a host of other technical elements in a scientific spirit, they shifted the focus to the formal aspects of the poem to withstand the ravages brought
about by the undue privilege given to the prose sense of the poem. It had been a ceaseless endeavour of the Fugitives to reconcile the contending claims of the semantic content and the sonic content of a poem. This was to be well reflected in the critical principles of the New Critics.