CHAPTER THREE

Critical Theory of Ransom as a New Critic

The New Criticism was not a well-organised critical movement, and it had no acknowledged leader as such. However, among the members of the group, John Crowe Ransom provided leadership in more ways than one. He gave the movement its name which was eponymous with the title of one of his well-known books, published in 1941. He was, again, teacher to most of the New Critics by virtue of their association with Vanderbilt University where Ransom was a member of the faculty. Though leading the movement from the front, Ransom can hardly be lumped together with his New Critical brethren from whom he distinguished himself in a number of ways.

Ransom sets the tone of his critical practice in the preface to his very first book of criticism, *The World's Body*. Ransom is not willing to call the papers collected in the volume criticism proper. Instead, those papers, dealing chiefly with poetic theory, are supposed to prepare the grounds for criticism. Poetic theory, however, is not enunciated in isolation, but comes out from Ransom's study of poetic instances — which at once puts us in mind of the critical method adopted by Aristotle for expounding the principles of the Greek drama. Ransom's added advantage was that he himself was a practising poet, a fact that made him conversant with the craft of poetry-writing. In an age dominated by the rationalisation of science, poetry, for Ransom, is an intellectual exercise. Hence the kind of poetry which tries to escape from the unpleasant or unsavoury aspects of real life and construct a private world of wish-fulfilment has no place here. Neither can that kind of poetry which, by the saturation of the heart's desire, fails to create any ripple, find a place in this scheme of things. "The true poetry has no great interest
in improving or idealising the world,” says Ransom, and adds, “It only wants to realise the world, to see it better.” In other words, poetry brings out the system which governs the arrangement of “the whole and indefeasible objects” (Ransom, *World’s Body*) of which the world is made. Poetry explores “the untechnical homely fulness of the world” (xi), while the form in which it is couched supplies the means to have its full effect.

Ransom considers ‘anonymity’ an essential condition of poetry. By ‘anonymity’ he does not mean that the poem should not have a title, or that it should not have the full name of the poet. What Ransom wants to mean is that the poet should try consciously to erase his own identity from the poem. To quote Ransom, “A good poem, even if it is signed with a full and well-known name, intends as a work of art to lose the identity of the author” (Ransom, *World’s Body* 2). Ransom’s argument seems to be an echo of Keats’s idea of ‘negative capability,’ a quality he found so profusely embodied in Shakespeare. Ransom cites Milton’s “Lycidas” as illustrating this feature of anonymity. In this poem Milton takes up the role of a Greek shepherd; but even adopting this dramatic method cannot completely suppress the man. The poet and the man are equally expressive in the poem. Milton knows that while the poet as a person expresses his feelings in a poem, the feelings must be disciplined by the technical norms of the literary composition. Milton follows a particular metrical pattern in composing the poem, “Lycidas”; but he subtly varies the pattern in order to give expression to his natural self.

‘Form,’ as envisaged by Ransom, is another means of furthering the purpose of ‘anonymity.’ According to Ransom, there are two kinds of form — economic forms, or those which serve the practical purposes of utility; and aesthetic forms, or those which apparently do not serve any such purpose. However, aesthetic forms have a greater justification for themselves. When an artist approaches his object of contemplation, he does not deal with it directly. Instead,
he approaches it through the means of ‘form’ which establishes the necessary aesthetic distance, and divests the artistic creation of the crudity of treatment. It is very close to T. S. Eliot’s doctrine of ‘impersonality’ which demands from the artist “a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (qtd. in Prasad 235). Ransom, however, is more specific than Eliot in stressing upon the means of achieving this impersonality. ‘Form’ helps the poet to cast his thoughts in a metrical pattern which, in turn, gives logical identity to the poem. But more importantly, form helps to create the atmosphere of make-believe which gives the poem its special aesthetic identity. Further, art has to be differentiated from science to which it is closely related. While the scientist analyses and classifies an object with the intention of bringing it under the control of his predatory and acquisitive instincts, the artist studies the object for its own sake, as having its own existence. As Ransom points out unambiguously, “The fierce drives of the animals, whether human or otherwise, are only towards a kind of thing. All the nouns at this stage are common nouns. But we, for our curse or our pride, have sentiments; they are directed towards persons and things; and a sentiment is the totality of love and knowledge which we have of an object that is private and unique” (Ransom, World’s Body 36).

Among the New Critics, Ransom’s distinctive speciality lies in his defence of the particularity of physical objects. For Ransom, the world is an assembly of objects which are, as René Wellek interprets, “particular, individual, concrete, dense, but also contingent, heterogeneous, and diffuse” (Wellek 6: 159). Each of the objects is a source of inexhaustible variety and concrete energy. In his discussion of the world of physical objects, Ransom uses the German word Dinglichkeit which he translates as “thinginess” (Ransom, World’s Body 113). By ‘thinginess’ he obviously refers to the particularity of physical objects. The world of things, for Ransom, consists not only of sticks and stones, but of “precious objects” (Ransom, “Poetry
Final” 643), objects which are “exempted from the fair or market valuation” (Ransom, World’s Body 213). Ransom elucidates his point of view in the essay, “Sentimental Exercise,” included in the volume, The World’s Body. Ransom’s observation is that in public life we often project ourselves strictly as men of business. But that hardly helps us to conceal our sentimental attachment to certain things, even though these things might have lost their utilitarian values. The kind of object likely to cause such attachment is a “familiar, antiquated, individual object,” worthy of knowing as a “complete or individual object” and worthy of being protected “against our other and predatory kind of knowledge which would reduce it to its mere utility” (Ransom, World’s Body 216). Such an object involves sentiment spontaneously and involuntarily. Objects which elicit sentiment cannot be classified in terms of typical features. It is the individual characteristics which cause sentimental attachment. Ransom also observes that women are more susceptible to sentiments than men, because women are largely free from economic obligations, and, therefore, are careful to study the individual peculiarities of everything. Friendship and love explore the complex of personalities with more than functional utility. Like the arts, sentiments are also a means to aesthetic knowledge. Sentiments, however, have a much wider field of operation than the arts. Long acquaintance with an object breeds sentiment, while the artist, with intense concentration, brings even an unfamililiar object into aesthetic existence. The “masterly grip” of the artist induces critics to label inferior specimens of art as “sentimental.” Moreover, the knowledge gained from sentiments “may be inarticulate and only half-conscious,” while it becomes explicit in the work of art.” Also, the artistic enjoyment is for the initiated few, but the sentimental experience is “fairly universal” (231). Ransom, therefore, concludes, “The works of art are specially brilliant but detached fragments of knowledge” (232).
The range of the animate and inanimate objects which constitutes the world of "precious objects" for Ransom is interesting. It includes "father and mother, husband or wife, child, friend; one's own house, 'view,' terrain, town; natural objects 'at large' which familiarly invest our lives, such as sun and moon, sky and sea, mountain and forest, river, plain; and even objects that are far less tangible when we try to comprehend them as wholes, though we must have had many tangible experiences within them, such as one's nation, church, God, business, 'causes,' and institutions" (Ransom, "Poetry Final" 643) — in other words, objects to which one is sentimentally attached. The knowledge of this world of things is called 'ontology' by Ransom. The ontology of poetry, or art for that matter, is "the reality of its being" (Ransom, *World's Body* 111). Science abstracts only one property of an object that relates to its pragmatic aspect, thus destroying the "rich and contingent materiality" (Ransom, *World's Body* 116) of the object. The inference Ransom draws is: "We should be less than human if we did not confess to attachments for these objects quite disproportionate to their utility" (Ransom, "Inorganic" 292).

Ransom discusses Aristotle's theory of 'catharsis' in the essay, "The Cathartic Principle," included in *The World's Body*. The essay is occasioned by Arthur Quiller-Couch's volume, *The Poet as Citizen and Other Papers* that resumes discussion about Aristotle's theories of catharsis and mimesis. Ransom finds that Quiller-Couch forms his opinion on Butcher's authority. According to Aristotle, the function of tragedy is catharsis, or purging of the emotions of pity and fear from the mind. Butcher, modifying the sense, says that pity and fear must have an aesthetic outlet, and the emotions themselves are to be purified and clarified in the process. The second part of his contention, however, results in abstruse formulation. He says that the deeds and fortunes of the individual actors must illustrate the "universal law and the divine plan of the world" (qtd. in Ransom, *World's Body* 178). This, according to Ransom, is far from Aristotle.
When Aristotle says that the events and characters in a tragedy should be probable, he does not seek to justify the divine scheme; rather, he explains how the illusion of reality should be built up. According to Quiller-Couch, tragedy eliminates the harmful emotions from the soul and leaves the spectator morally improved. On the contrary, for Aristotle, catharsis was a medical term; and his point was that pity and terror should be periodically eliminated in order to avoid what Ransom calls “auto-intoxication” (180). The paradox lies in the fact that while catharsis presupposes the presence of unwanted matters, pity, if not fear, is a noble emotion, not quite undesirable. This leads to the obvious question: Are pity and fear the appropriate emotions for tragic catharsis? Aristotle believed that only systematic and dutiful conduct can lead to happiness in human life. But he noticed that most people were unduly given to brooding over unjustifiable sufferings. This made them addicted to pity and fear. They must be relieved of this addiction, so that the emotions do not impede their regular business. And the best way to do so is to provide them with imitated spectacle of undeserved misfortunes, thereby draining their pity and fear. To clarify his point, Ransom draws analogy from the fields of music and religion. One who is excessively enthusiastic about music may be cured of his passion for music by indulgence in that art. In case of religion, people may be cured of religious frenzy by periodical indulgence in orgiastic rites. As in tragedy, comedy excites the sense of the ridiculous in the spectator, and through cathartic effect, saves him from encountering an irrational universe. Cathartic effect is also possible in respect of other art forms, like the epic and the lyric, though Aristotle does not discuss that.

Ransom’s views on ‘mimesis,’ another Aristotelian principle associated with art forms, are expressed in the essay, “The Mimetic Principle,” also included in The World’s Body. Aristotle identifies art with ‘mimesis,’ a Greek word, meaning “imitation of nature” (195).
Mimesis serves to create an illusion, a substitute for the original. For example, a real murder cannot be enacted on the stage, but a playwright can present an imitated spectacle. Interest in imitation does not grow from any specific motive; it is a common human trait denied to beasts. Aristotle, while he wanted to focus on the reasoning ability of man, was not blind to the universal human love for imitation. An object of imitation is conducive to knowledge only, but nature, the original of imitation, can be both known and used. But the point is that the aspect of use is so dominating in nature that it almost obscures the aspect of knowledge. Science and art offer two modes of registering the knowledge gained from nature. Science reduces the world to types or forms; art invests it again with body, thereby performing a balancing act. A work of science is a work of classification in terms of universals; a work of art is a work of imitation in terms of particulars. Discovery of likeness in an art-object gives pleasure, while universals of science are necessary for getting hold of natural law and ordering the universe. In enumerating the principle of probability, Aristotle meant to give art a look of naturalness. He holds poetry truer than history. His reason behind this contention is that poetry deals with what should happen, even though impossible in reality. On the other hand, history concerns itself with what actually happened — which may go against the probable. For the same reason, the painting of a landscape is superior to its photograph — the painting, a work of imitation, being more probable than the photograph. Moreover, taking a photograph is a mechanical process; but the pains involved in doing a painting invest it with a psychological attitude. Finally, Ransom probes the relation of catharsis with mimesis. Art, sustained by the human love for imitation, helps, through its various forms, to purge off the unhealthy emotions and make people fit for “responsible public life as citizen, scientist, worker, or whatever career was sober and desirable.” However, art is not integrated to the “usual actions of living” (210). We indulge in arts occasionally and
cannot obtain aesthetic enjoyment in our activities of the workaday world which is governed rather by scientific principles. Hence the need for the cathartic function — “to intensify the aesthetic moment in order to minimize and localize it, and clear the way for the scientific moment” (211).

In a related essay, “Art and Mr. Santayana” in *The World’s Body*, Ransom discusses George Santayana’s views about art. The immediate occasion for this essay was the enthusiasm around the publication of Santayana’s book, *The Life of Reason* in 1905. Ransom refers the readers specifically to the volume 4 of this book which is entitled *Reason in Art*. Santayana characterises art as combining usefulness and expressiveness. The utility of art is an objective feature and is proportionate to the satisfactions it provides to human beings. While in case of an industrial art, its utilisation value is quite manifest, the fine arts for their utility depend on the illusion of reality they create. They have utilitarian values so far as they are “true to life” (Ransom, *World’s Body* 307). On the point of ‘expressiveness,’ Santayana’s view is that art expresses certain worthless impulses which evidently place art in a disreputable category. But even if art is taken to be the expression of personality, it goes contrary to the aspect of utility which rests on objective value. The utility of a work of art brings it close to science, while the expression of personality differentiates it from science in objective terms.

Santayana revised his position in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* in 1923. William James’s opinion was that belief in mind or matter was optional. But Santayana thoroughly contradicted him, and said that belief in mind and matter alike was conditioned by the environment. Scepticism, that is unbelief in mind does not behove a living being. Similarly, unbelief in matter leads to a speculative life, resulting in inaction and death. According to Santayana’s position, art is another instance of animal faith, hence indistinguishable from science. But a lover of art
intuitively feels that the possession of artistic faculty differentiates man from other animals in kind, whereas science makes man merely more powerful or efficient than other animals, elevating him in degree.

Santayana again revised his position in two subsequent books, *The Realm of Essence* in 1927 and *The Realm of Matter* in 1930. What Santayana calls ‘essences’ are the refined version of Plato’s ‘ideas.’ The ‘essences,’ though of bodily origin, exist on a level far above the material plane. Artists abstract these essences from the natural world and preserve them for future imagistic reference. Scientists also abstract essences, but theirs’ are a surer version meant for utilitarian application; while the artists’ version is, Ransom says, for “innocent contemplation” (*World’s Body* 319). Santayana finds corroboration of his formulation in Proust’s testimony. The French novelist goes to reveal how a particular sound or odour in the present finds correspondence in a foregone experience, and tries to explain how they are related by their ‘essential’ pattern. Santayana finds fault with Proust in that Proust repeats an earlier experience to abstract the essence of it. Proust salvages bits and pieces from his repertory of memory, and links these to aesthetic enjoyment. Recanting his earlier stand and echoing Schopenhauer, Santayana finally looks upon art as the only activity where man transcends his animal self and, in Schopenhauer’s formulation, has “knowledge without desire” (325).

In “Wanted: An Ontological Critic,” a well-read essay from *The New Criticism*, Ransom tries to elaborate on the point of differentiation between prose and poetry. Ransom says that the distinctive quality of poetry is not its moralism. For, prose is a much better vehicle for the moral content, and many poems do not offer a moral content. Again, the formulation that poetry is an expression of emotionalism or sensibility makes poetry “disreputable” (279), and it is not always possible to identify the affective states. Therefore, for Ransom, the point of
distinction for poetry lies in its structural identity. The structure of a poem is not so “tight and precise” (280) as that of a scientific discourse; and poetry introduces details which are irrelevant to the structure proper. To quote Ransom, “... the poem is a loose logical structure with an irrelevant local texture” (280). A scientific prose discourse reduces the world to abstract formulations. Poetry, on the other hand, reconstructs the world by concentrating on the particularities of the 'precious objects.' Thus poetry deals with an order of existence which is different from the one treated in prose. This is the ontological argument of Ransom.

Ransom finds only Charles W. Morris, a philosopher, to come very near to giving an ontological account of poetry. For Morris, “all discourse consists in signs, and any sign functions in three dimensions” (Ransom, New Criticism 282) — syntactical, semantical, and pragmational. The syntactical dimension involves the logic of the sign; the semantical makes reference to an object; and the pragmatical makes reference, implicit or explicit, to the psychological, biological, and sociological uses. Ransom takes exception to placing the pragmatical on an equal footing with the other two dimensions. Art, like science, is not necessarily concerned with pragmatics. The pragmatical dimension of poetry, if any, is few and far between, and cannot be applied in general to all poems. It is technology, or applied science, which has its pragmatics proper.

In another sense, art is closer to technology and further away from science. Art, like technology, is concerned with making something ('poem' means 'making') as well as with knowing something, while pure science is restricted to knowing only. Again, the sign used by science is a symbol that does not go beyond its semantic object, but an aesthetic sign is iconic in that while subsuming the referential object it goes far beyond in its suggestions which cannot be summed up in a mathematical formula. It leads to the conclusion that a scientific sign deals with an abstract object, while an aesthetic sign deals with a whole object. Even if the scientific sign
concerns itself with the whole object, it is the essential qualities of the generalised object that it defines, and not the particular object which is the matter of discussion of art.

As icons, aesthetic signs resemble or represent objects. But in case of music or reflective poetry or abstract painting, the aesthetic signs do not necessarily refer to concrete objects. They strike the imagination and sends waves of amorphous suggestions. However, that does not rob them of their status as aesthetic signs. The solution that Ransom finds out is that icons here evoke mental images. To quote Ransom, “The technical use of language by the poet is one that lifts words out of their symbolic or definitive uses into imaginative or image-provoking uses” (286-7).

A scientific discourse, Ransom holds, is represented exclusively by pure symbols, while an aesthetic discourse is represented essentially, but not exclusively, by iconic signs. Objects conjured up by these symbols or iconic signs have certain value-properties determined by their contexts. Value-property of an object in a scientific discourse is different from the value-property of an object in an aesthetic discourse. For example, an object can be insipid, sublime, menacing, oppressive, or gay in an aesthetic discourse, whereas it may have certain mass, or length, or velocity in a scientific discourse. A close look at the value-properties of an aesthetic discourse suggests that they are affective or psychologistic in nature, whereas the value-properties in a scientific discourse are objective and physical.

A symbol in a scientific discourse uniformly refers, throughout the discourse, to a specific value-aspect of an object and to that aspect only. Ransom calls this the “semantical purity” (290) of a scientific discourse. But an icon in an aesthetic discourse “refers to the whole or concrete object,” and is not bound by “the rule of consistent definitive reference” (291). Unlike science, instead of dealing with specific value-aspect, art gives us the sense of actual
objects. Only the “argument” (292) of an aesthetic discourse offers a “single-value system,” but beyond the argument the particular iconic signs are “contingent and unpredictable” (293).

While composing a poem, the poet tries to use a language which will at once “make the sense” and “make the meter” (294). But metre and meaning are two unrelated properties, though both are organic to the process of poetic composition. If the poet secures perfection in one aspect, it will entail some compromise in the other aspect. Hence the final composition cannot be the most perfect [Ransom uses the term “superlative” (296)] in terms of both metre and meaning. However, the compromises made may lend variety to the composition.

Ransom focuses on language as having two basic properties: the phonetic and the semantic. Primarily, it is a sequence of objective physical sounds; and secondarily, the sequence makes units which conjure up objects beyond the speech sounds. When a poet composes a poem, he keeps in mind two things: (a) an intended meaning, and (b) an intended metre. However, the components, that is, the words he chooses to express his logical meaning may have to be replaced with words for the sake of making the metre, and the substitute words may better suit the metre than the meaning. Conversely, the words that make a perfect metre may have to be replaced with words that may better suit the meaning than the metre. According to Ransom, the latter option is more desirable as meaning is considered by most poets and readers as more important than metre. The adaptations made on both sides will result in an indeterminate meaning and an indeterminate sound-structure, which will combine to give the poem its finished form. However, as Ransom says, these strokes are “too subtle and rapid to record” (300), and aptly re-affirm the age-old saying that “art lies in concealing art.”

In Ransom’s analysis, a poem has four elements: determinate meaning which forms the logical structure, indeterminate meaning or deflections made by metrical obligations, determinate
sound-structure which is the metrical pattern adopted, and indeterminate sound-effect or exceptions to the metrical pattern. The proper study of criticism, according to Ransom, is the study of the "coexistence and connection" (302) of determinate meaning and indeterminate meaning. It is commonly accepted that the ideology of a poet is contained in the determinate meaning. But poetry is a peculiar kind of discourse. It does not aspire after perfect logical expression. Instead, much store is set in poetry by the indeterminate meaning. Hence it is essential to make a close study of the indeterminate meaning in the garb of which is hidden much of the poet’s ideology.

The poet makes syntactic, semantic, grammatical, and linguistic revisions of his logical structure to achieve what Ransom says “a language that is metrical enough, and close enough to his intended meaning” (304). The worksheets of poets as well as the finished poems themselves amply reveal these evidences of revision. Ransom cites a passage from Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*:

... there,

As in a mansion like their proper home,

Even forms and substances are circumfused

By that transparent veil with light divine,

And through the turnings intricate of verse

Present themselves as objects recognized

In flashes, and with glory not their own. (*New Criticism* 304)

where the noble expressions fail to make a coherent sense. Ransom quotes the following passage from Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*:
Close by those meads, forever crowned with flowers,
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,
There stands a structure of majestic frame,
Which from the neighboring Hampton takes its names.
Here Britain’s statesmen oft the fall foredoom
Of foreign tyrants and of nymphs at home;
Here thou, great Anna! Whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take — and sometimes tea. (New Criticism 306)

where nicely improvised expressions conceal lapses of logic. Even Milton, who renounced
rhyme, the chief metrical device, could not adhere to the strictness of logic, avoiding deficiencies
and superfluities. In Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress,” the indeterminacies of the logical
structure are commensurate with the requirements of the metrical symmetry.

In Ransom’s opinion, indeterminacies, when studied as result of the metrical compulsion,
may seem superfluous and irrelevant in relation to the logical argument which is determinate in
nature. But these indeterminacies have a positive aspect in that they bring out the particularities
of the objects — which form the poetic texture. The process is that the poet employs his
imagination, and from the store-house of images selects an image, iconic in nature, which has its
contextual relevance to the logical object, so that the importation looks natural. However, all
poets do not succeed equally in exploring the poetic texture. Wordsworth, in The Prelude, does
not pursue his abstract argument diligently to produce either a coherent logical structure or a
commendable poetic texture. Pope has a narrative skill that takes care of the sequence of actions.
Milton positively deals with the details that produce the desired effect, while Marvell, in spite of
the shallowness of his argument, particularises the textural details with innovative skill.
In Ransom’s structural scheme, the logical structure and the metrical or phonetic structure run parallel in a poem. The minimal unit of a logical structure, i.e., the word, and the minimal unit of a metrical structure, i.e., the foot, may not be the same. But the two structures start together and finish together; and as we read a poem our ear perceives the phonetic effect, while our discursive mind follows the course of the argument. The concept of ‘phrase’ as a period in the argument and as a definable element in the metrical structure supports this stand. Though the logical and metrical structures are co-ordinate, meaning is considered more important than the metre, the latter in the process forming a texture to the former as structure.

Again, the metrical structure has its own texture. As the poet adapts his metre to the meaning, a time comes when any further adaptation would mean a compromise with the meaning. So the ‘variations’ from the metrical pattern remain and introduce the indeterminate sound-structure which is a texture to the determinate sound-structure. The indeterminate sound-structure, like the indeterminate meaning-structure, is marked by “contingency and unpredictability,” and represents “the ‘actuality’ of the world of sound” (Ransom, *New Criticism* 318).

However, the variations or indeterminacies allowed to the standard metre must be of certain kinds only. The logic is that if the metrical pattern is allowed a few variations, it will make language flexible enough to accommodate the meaning. Ransom takes up the case of the iambic metre, the most used metre in English, and quotes lines from Shakespeare, Donne and Milton. A close study of the lines shows that in spite of their innovative inclination, they kept themselves within the bounds of the permissible variations. Ransom notes that the permissible variations on the iambic metre are the trochaic foot, the ionic or the double foot, and the extra syllable accounted for by what is known as ‘elision.’ He also notes two exceptions to this
conventional norm: that of the Elizabethan dramatists following Webster who made the iambic metre quite loose, and that of Coleridge who adopted the anapaestic foot as a variation to the iambic.

That meaning and metre ‘un-determine’ each other is quite obvious. It also happens that poets sometimes cultivate the indeterminacies of their own accord, as these add to the aesthetic value of their composition. But the indeterminacies of meaning and metre cultivated wilfully again affect the metre and the meaning respectively. So, not only determinate meaning, indeterminate meaning also un-determines the metre; and not only determinate sound-structure, indeterminate sound-structure also un-determines meaning.

Ransom comes to a feature of the language known as euphony. Euphony is commonly understood as “pure luxury of sound” that “pleases the musical ear” as well as “the articulatory sense,” as in Swinburne’s line, “By the tideless dolorous midland sea” from his poem, “The Triumph of Time.” It is achieved by (a) “the liquidity of the consonantal sequences,” (b) “the elimination or reduction of harsh consonantal combinations,” and (c) “the fixing up of the succession of vowel sounds” (325). Euphony gives a refinement to the phonetic texture, and by taking away from its private character makes the texture more consistent with the structure. So euphony may be considered a determinate phonetic principle like the metre.

Ransom proceeds to disprove the popular belief among some philosophers that the phonetic effect, besides making the poem metrical and euphonious, also makes it “expressive,” expressive in the sense that the phonetic effect “resembles or partly is or at least suggests the object that it means” (326). He also summarily rejects the idea that a phrase or a sustained passage, in its movement, closely resembles the situation evoked. Ransom, however, recognises the wonderful harmony, the “enduring stability” (327), in which the phonetic property and the
semantic property, two extremely divergent properties, co-exist in a poetic phrase. He enunciates an ontological principle which says that two identical, alike and homogeneous properties cannot cohere. For coherence, the properties must be divergent, unlike, and heterogeneous. Only then a ‘One’ can be formed out of the ‘Many’ (328). A poem exists in the words (phonetic property), and at the same time, it exists in the world beyond words (semantic property); and lest we forget the words, they are put into a metrical pattern to engage our attention.

Ransom illustrates his point that sound and sense combine into an inalienable entity with Dante’s line, “In la sua volontade è nostra pace” — which Arnold and Eliot uphold as a ‘touchstone’ line. But the line, when translated into English as “In His will is our peace” — loses much of its aesthetic value. The sound does not cohere with the meaning. The translated version suffers what Ransom describes as “ontological annihilation” (329). But for that matter it would be fallacious to say that the sound resembles or suggests the object in Dante’s version.

The lines or passages usually cited as ‘touchstones’ are of some length. The matter of the length ensures that they acquire some semantic significance. The phonetic structure also requires a certain number of words to group them into a metrical pattern. Ransom, however, is quick to point to the difference between the phonetic and the semantic structure — which is more remarkable. The unit of the semantic structure is word, but the unit of the phonetic structure is syllable. Though apparently unrelated, the phonetic and semantic structures combine into an unalterable whole in a poetic phrase which is a single event.

Ransom’s scheme of structure-texture receives elaboration in the light of Ransom’s discussion of paradox and the role of metre in the essay, “Why Critics Don’t Go Mad” in Beating the Bushes: Selected Essays 1941-1970. The title of the essay seems to be a misnomer. For the essay does not offer a plausible explanation of the issue raised. Rather, it questions why critics
should be spared the bliss of divine frenzy which is a prerogative of the poets only. However, the essay soon diverts to a discussion of Cleanth Brooks’s acute and scholarly analysis and interpretation of the minor poems of Milton.

A follower of Duns Scotus, Brooks upholds the individuality of a poem rather than its formal shape; and the individuality, for him, lies in its metaphors. In other words, a poem derives its energy from metaphors. Hence it would be wrong to reduce a poem to a scientific abstraction and to confuse the essence of a poem with its paraphrase. As Ransom memorably says, “. . . the poetic object must be defended in its full and private being” (161). However, that does not deny a poem its status as a logical discourse. A poem is an “act of predication” (161), and the metaphors have to assert their identity within it. This is the paradox that delights Brooks.

Ransom mentions one of the many examples of Brooks’s engaging discussion of paradox in poetry. Brooks seizes upon the light and shadow image of “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso” — both poems by John Milton, and shows how the shadowiness that permeates the latter poem is really brighter than the light that illuminates the former. Brooks’s interpretation constitutes an unconventional discussion of the element of paradox.

The movement of Milton’s verse is relaxed like that of Spenser’s. The language is not witty, nor does it contain conceits. Yet, there is an energy in the language which stylistically brings it close to the Metaphysical poetry. It is what Ransom describes as the ‘pithy’ or ‘grave’ style, not the ‘periodic’ or ‘full’ Spenserian style (166). In addition, what is remarkable about this stylistic feature is that it is enforced through an innovative metrical scheme. Milton broke, even in his early poetry, the monotony of the pentameter lines by interspersing them with trimeter lines. This finds a close parallel in Andrew Marvell’s “Horatian Ode” where tetrameter couplets are followed by trimeter ones. To confirm this Metaphysical feature, Brooks quotes
Donne's line, "All whom the flood did, and fire shall, o'erthrow" (167), and explains how the irregular rhythms of the phrases and the regular flow of the metrical beats serve as counterpoints to each other. This leads Ransom to modify the idea of a poem as paradox, where "logic tries to dominate the metaphors and metaphors try to dominate the logic," by including the element of metre, and argues for a "trinitarian existence" of the poem, in which metres "enforce themselves against the logic and the metaphors, but against resistance" (168).

Ransom rounds off his discussion of paradox by saying that the Metaphysical poets achieved a high lyric perfection, but that did not endanger the positions of other poets who did not write in the metaphysical manner. Brooks's principles of 'equilibrium' and 'organic structure' ensure their respective positions in the field of letters.

Ransom clarifies the role of metre in the context of his structure-texture dichotomy in his discussion of Yvor Winters's essay, "The Influence of Meter on Poetic Composition," in The New Criticism. In Ransom's estimation, Winters is the only one of the New Critics who thinks that the evaluation of poetry is closely linked with the study of the metres. Before explaining Winters's position on the subject, Ransom cites instances of scansion of two lines from Donne's "The Canonization," done by an advanced university student, and of Yeats's poem, "After Long Silence," done by the veteran critics Brooks and Warren. These critics claim to interpret the functional aspect of metrical arrangement. According to them, the poets' departures from the metrical norm make the lines 'expressive.' In their keenness to explain the lines as expressive, they overlook that the lines could be interpreted as conventional. And here Winters differs from other critics who claim to be 'new' and 'un-academic' in their study of metres. Winters, in this respect, according to Ransom, is "a great formalist" (259-60). He believes that metrical effects "have to be secured within the meters; and the looser the meters, the less the metrical effects"
(260). For Winters, formal metres have two functions: one indirect and the other direct. The poet, in the course of perfecting his metres, alters the words he used to secure his meaning; this is the indirect function that makes the meaning 'richer' and 'unpredictable.' But a poet also attends to the metres and the metrical variations for the sake of their own phonetic effect; this is the direct function of metres. However, according to Ransom, matters are "more complicated than that" (260). A poem has two precise structural levels and also their corresponding textures. One is the logical structure, and it has a meaning-texture. The meaning-texture is formed according to the poet's intention, and also in the process of securing metrical formalities. At another level, a poem has a metrical structure; and the metrical variations form a texture to this structure. Besides these two primary levels or layers, there is a third layer. The logical structure has a musical quality which comes from outside and serves as a texture to the logical structure. This texture is formed by the metrical pattern, with or without the variations.

Ransom further elaborates his ideas of structure and texture in another article on Yvor Winters, also included in The New Criticism. At one level, a poem is a complex of meaning, and it has a logical structure and a texture. At another level, a poem is a complex of sound, and it has a metre as a structure and a musical phrasing which serves as the texture. Again, at still another level, if we subordinate sound to the meaning, the meaning serves as the structure, while the sound functions as the texture. The texture must be located within a context; and in all the above instances, the structures serve as contexts to support the textures. In a prose-piece, the textural items are wholly determined by the structure; so the textural elements cannot assert themselves. But in a poem the local particularities go beyond the limits of the argument or logical structure. "They luxuriate, and display energy in unpredictable ways" (270), as Ransom says. Then, can we have a poem all texture, without any structure? Ransom says that although the argument of a
poem is rather commonplace, we cannot locate the texture without the argument. Ransom, in this context, explores the psychological process of understanding a poem. The opening image of a poem engages our attention, and we provide a provisional context for it. As we go on reading the poem, the context becomes larger until the whole of the context is grasped, suspense sustaining our attention throughout. At the end, we have, along with the context, a great surplus of local values which constitutes the texture. What is noteworthy is that the quality of the poem depends on the quality of the texture. If the structure is difficult, the poem loses the richness of texture. The richness of the texture can be ensured only if the structure is rather commonplace. That is why, according to Ransom, the mathematician, the scientist, the philosopher, and the pure moralist expose their arguments in prose. Prose, having a less qualitative density, does not burden their expositions with irrelevant details.

In this connection, it would be worth recalling Ransom's ideas on 'free verse,' as discussed in an article in The New Criticism. Ransom considers Winters's essay on 'free verse' "the most intelligent examination of free verse" (261). Winters definitively says that any variation must come under a standard metrical pattern from which it makes a departure. Winters refutes the conventional idea that there is nothing fixed in free verse. He says that free verse is not fixed in terms of standard metres, but it is fixed in relation to prose. The practitioners of free verse use a foot which is "longer and more variable" (262) than the conventional metrical units. It is more variable in the sense that it uses three types of syllables — syllables with primary or heavy accents, those with secondary or light accents, and unaccented syllables. However, Winters admits the difficulty in keeping distinct heavy and light accents. One has to train oneself rigorously to maintain this distinction. Even then it is quite difficult to do the scansion; and even if the scansion is done, it still remains difficult to read a free verse poem after scansion. Then,
where lies the value of free verse? Ransom says that we enjoy poems written in standard metrical pattern more fully after reading free verse poems. Winters's opinion is that free verse is useful when a poet expresses only one powerful feeling. But Ransom says that this can be expressed in standard metres equally well. However, when a complexity of feelings is to be rendered in poetry, free verse is quite unsuitable.

Ransom explains Winters’s position in terms of his structure-texture theory. The “powerful feeling,” for Ransom, refers to the feeling that attaches to the logical structure, while “complex feelings,” “diverse qualities,” “overtone,” “freedom of movement,” and “range of materials” (266) in Winters’s phraseology call up the textural details or local particularities of a poem. In other words, the logical structure of a poem can be rendered by free verse, but the free verse is a poor vehicle for rendering the textural details that bestow upon the poem a richness of meaning. Winters speaks of two more points of departure from traditional metres in free verse. One is substitution, and the other is the infinite variation in placing the accents. In traditional metres, words are replaced continuously until perfection is attained in the formal metrical pattern. The variations in placing the accents are also perceptible in fixed metres. But both the features are lacking in free verse as there is no formal metrical pattern and also there is no precise placing of accents.

Ransom concentrates on the topic of irony in one of the articles on I. A. Richards in The New Criticism. Cleanth Brooks has been the most cogent proponent of this literary device. Brooks characterises the irony as some form of “conflict” and “inclusion of opposites” (95) in the structure of a poem. He believes that poetry has a specific quality, denied to science, which can resolve or reconcile the opposites. Ransom refutes him and says that the existence of opposites create a “tension” (95), leading to irony which produces an indecisive effect and the
conflict remains unresolved. By the way, it was Allen Tate who introduced the term, ‘tension’ in the article “Tension in Poetry” in 1938 to refer to the inclusion of the general idea and the particular image in an integral whole.

Ransom quotes from I. A. Richards’s *Principles of Literary Criticism* for his conception of tragedy and irony. 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 poems with an ironical dimension, and such poems which follow the principle of inclusion are considered richer than the ones composed on the principle of exclusion.

At this point, Ransom poses an important question. If all poems were written on tragical and ironical principles, would it make literature richer? Tragical and ironical compositions deal with, says Ransom, “the practical failures” and “the ambiguous anticlimactic half-successes” (100) of human efforts respectively. But human efforts do not consist of these two aspects only. There are also successful human efforts. Hence literature composed only on tragical and ironical lines would be devoid of human interest to a great extent, and artists would be regarded as misanthropic. So Ransom's solution is that tragedy and irony can be “features in the gross effect of a poem, which would be the structural whole, rather than in the area of its qualitative sensibility, which would be its texture” (101). What we experience in real life is given a qualitative density in works of art.

Ransom throws considerable light on the nature of aesthetic discourse in “The Concrete Universal: Observations on the Understanding of Poetry,” the final essay in the collection,
Poems and Essays. Unlike other New Critics, Ransom did not believe in the organicity of poetry — which they inherited from Coleridge’s idea of “the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities” (Coleridge 36), and T. S. Eliot’s idea of the “unification of sensibility” (qtd. in Prasad 237). Referring to Coleridge’s theory in the article, “Poetry: I. The Formal Analysis,” Ransom says: “I cannot but think that the recent revival of Coleridge’s involved critical language has been obfuscating, and there is little doubt that it has been dull, and against the grain of the living language” (439). Ransom, on the contrary, believed that contradictories co-exist in a piece of poetry. He defines a beautiful poem as “one which proceeds to the completion of a logical structure, but not without attending to the local particularity of its components” (Ransom, New Criticism 53). Metaphorically modifying his version, Ransom says, “A beautiful poem is a democratic state, so to speak, which realises the ends of a state without sacrificing the personal character of its citizens” (54). His conception finds a cogent expression in this essay. Ransom borrows the term, ‘concrete universal’ from Hegel’s philosophy which, in turn, is a development of Kant’s philosophical thought. Ransom offers an explanation for introducing a philosophical concept into the discussion of literature. It is often feared that the introduction of philosophy would bring in undue abstruseness into the realm of literature. Ransom brushes aside this apprehension, and says that philosophy contributes to a radical and decisive understanding of poetry.

Kant’s influence on English poetry is evident in the Romantic poets, particularly Coleridge. The aesthetic humanism of the Romantic poets had its origin in Kantian philosophy. Their aesthetic excellence was merged with a definitive programme. The political preoccupation outweighed the aesthetic in Byron, while Keats was more concerned with the aesthetic content. Shelley struck a balance between the two. The break came with Tennyson; he had nothing
particularly philosophical in his poetry. Browning had traces here and there; but there was no whole-hearted attempt on his part. It was in Arnold's early poetry that Keats's aesthetic interest was revitalised. But, as Arnold grew up in years, he became more and more interested in matters academic and cultural; and the Keatsian strain was lost beyond recovery.

The term 'concrete universal' is made up of two terms: 'concrete' and 'universal.' The universal is the general idea as it exists in the mind, and it is made up of heterogeneous parts which serve to produce a whole and single effect. The concrete is the objective element which contributes to the universal. For example, jealousy is a universal passion. Through the specific and concrete example of Othello, Shakespeare has illustrated this universal passion.

There are two types of concrete universal — concrete universal as applicable to science and that as applicable to poetry. The particular objective elements that go into the making of a universal in applied science are so pruned by the scientist that there is "not one necessary part missing, nor one unnecessary part showing." The fact that scientific instruments are continually being improved upon is often held up as evidence that they are never perfect. Ransom refutes this by saying that they are "perfectible" (Ransom, Poems and Essays 164).

However, such scientific precision cannot be claimed in the matter of poetry, as its purpose is quite different. The purpose of a poem is not to fulfil our organic or appetitive needs. The universal of a poem depends on the assumption of a moral order. The unpredictable and particular details that combine to build the moral order need to be convincing — 'convincing' in the sense that the moral order should conform to the pattern existing in nature. In other words, a piece of poetry, unlike science, does not go to nature to find the component parts of the concrete universal. It does not try to explain nature; it re-creates it in poetry by following the universal principle vibrant in nature.
Hegel’s conception of the moral universal, however, differs from what is stated above. His idea is that moral universal, in order to make its presence felt, instead of conforming to nature, alters the order in nature, even if a little. Ransom here holds up the replacement of the old agrarian life by the modern urban society as an example in point. As the human society grows in complexity, the natural world becomes mechanised. In the process poetry loses its pristine glory. It even has to give way to the art of fiction as advocated by the social school of critics. Ransom here raises a relevant question—whether the art of fiction can do without being poetic.

It was Kant who offered a valiant defence of poetry. He started with the assumption that the moral world and the natural world are opposed to each other. The moral world is wholly inner and free, while the natural world is external but determinate and mechanical. But he could ultimately correlate the two when he found that nature, far from being specific and single, is invested with a dense “manifold of sense” (167); and it appears beautiful to us when we find it sympathetic to our moral purpose. It is in these moments that the faculty of poetic imagination, by virtue of the collaboration of two apparently unrelated worlds, engages itself in creativity. Kant’s conception anticipates Coleridge’s explanation of the faculty of poetic imagination which, says Coleridge, “reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.” Kant elaborates his theory when he says that “Poetry is the representation of natural beauty.” In a garden, the foliage of a plant conforms to the gardener’s sense of the geometrical universe, and yet the plant displays its beauty luxuriantly. Kant characterises the situation as “freedom under the law” (171).

Kant objects to the explication of natural beauty in terms of moral and theological universals; for, the moral and theological universals are peculiar to the human understanding, and do not bear relevance to the beauty of nature. While Shakespeare is praised for putting on his
guard on this count, Kant condemns Browning's "Pippa Passes" for indulgence in this fallacy; because Kant believes — a belief also shared by Coleridge — that nature is basically amoral.

The Universal and the Concrete of a poem may be recited sequentially — the Universal which is intellectual in nature coming first and the Concrete being introduced to illuminate the Universal. But the image from nature may also come first to be humanised by the Universal content. There are poems like Shakespeare's Sonnet No. 73, beginning with "That time of year thou mayst in me behold," where the Concrete used as a metaphor displaces the Universal; for, as Ransom says, the Concrete is "more visible, more audible, more tangible, better focussed for the senses" (179). And lines like "... evening spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table" (175) may be read either from the natural end or the human end. The conclusion that Kant reaches is that the language of the Universal is wanting in expressing the feeling precisely. Ransom pertinenty recalls what Cleanth Brooks says: "that there is no other way for language to express what it wants to express without having recourse to metaphor; without going to the Concrete of nature for its analogy" (180). It is the metaphor that gives, to quote Ransom again, "objective or Concrete existence to the homeless moral Universal" (181).

Kant's conception of the Concrete Universal in terms of metaphors deals with a poetic phrase, or passage, or a short poem. But is it equally applicable to long poems? Ransom answers in the affirmative in the sense that long poems can well be read as an organised sequence of "metaphorical transformations" or "little poetries" (185).

One of the objectives of the New Criticism was to establish literary criticism as an independent discipline. In "Criticism, Inc.,” the final essay in The World's Body, Ransom makes it a point to uphold the claim of literary criticism as a discipline in its own right. In Ransom's opinion, only three kinds of persons are professionally qualified to undertake critical activity.
First, the artist himself, because he knows about the technical virtuosities of an art-work, but he is handicapped by his inability to explain what he feels intuitively. Like the artist, the philosopher can be a good critic; but he is concerned so much with generalised principles that he loses sight of the individual art-work. Hence the most competent critic, according to Ransom, is the university professor; but he also evades his duty and merely compiles data about the work in hand. Ransom prescribes that criticism be established as a science, in the sense that it should be made precise and systematic. It is likely that criticism cannot achieve the rigorous precision of a natural science. But that need not deter us, as disciplines like psychology, sociology, and economics, though similarly deficient, are fairly recognised as sciences.

Ransom moots the proposal that criticism should be taken up as a professional activity under the enterprise, “Criticism, Inc.” or “Criticism, Ltd.” (329). It was Ronald S. Crane of the University of Chicago who initiated some new measures to that end. In his paper, “History versus Criticism in the University Study of Literature,” published in The English Journal, he pleaded for dissociation of historical studies from critical activities and the shifting of focus to the latter. In other words, students must be allowed to “study literature, and not merely about literature” (330).

There have been prior precedents when scholars revolted against preoccupation with history in the study of literature. But they were not well-versed in history to counter the incursion of history into literature, nor were they capable of good critical activity. The New Humanists, led by Irving Babbitt tried to divert the traditional course of English studies. But they were not aesthetically motivated. For them, art concerns itself with “high seriousness,” and “high seriousness” obviously involves “moral self-consciousness” (332).
The New Humanists attack Romantic poetry on the moral ground that Romantic poets are emotional, and project their escapist subjective selves which fail to "adapt, to the social and political environment" existing around them. However, from the stand-point of the Romantics, it can be re-phrased the other way round, that is, "the failure of society and state to sympathize with the needs of the individual" (333). Side by side, one can place the aesthetic objection of T.S. Eliot who found Romantic poetry deficient in objectivity or aesthetic distance, resulting in the weakening of the structural effect.

The Leftist critics also raised objections against the history-centred study of literature. But theirs also was a moral ground; for they valued literature in terms of the class-consciousness it portrayed. They would not endorse the judgement of literature in terms of literary values.

Criticism is inter-involved with communicating the understanding of literature. The professors who read aloud a literary piece and enforce an intuitive appreciation upon the readers, or those who advocate the technique of memorisation do a commendable job for the establishment of criticism as distinctive discipline. Of course, historical and linguistic scholarships are of great import in case of Chaucer or any other author belonging to a distant past. For, we can make out little of the contemporary references and linguistic peculiarities without the aid of historical and linguistic studies. But these studies should be instrumental and not be the end in themselves.

Ransom suggests certain exclusions from the critical activity. First, criticism should not be vitiated by registering the impact of the work upon the critic as reader. To that end, words like 'moving,' 'exciting,' 'entertaining,' 'pitiful,' 'great,' 'admirable,' and 'beautiful' (343) should be excluded from the critical list, as these are qualities actually discovered in the subject. The definition of an art-work in terms of its impression upon the subject meddles with the
autonomous identity of the work. Secondly, synopsis and paraphrase should not be resorted to, because they are only ‘abstracts’ of the ‘real content.’ Thirdly, historical studies which try to locate autobiographical evidences and bibliographical items in the work, and also analogous literature should only be sparingly used as ‘aids’ to understanding. Fourthly, linguistic studies which help in interpreting a work by explaining archaic and foreign words and identifying the allusions contribute little to proper critical activities. Fifthly, moral studies which only partially explain a literary work should be left out. Finally, partial studies like Chaucer's command of medieval sciences or Shakespeare's knowledge of the law may illuminate other disciplines, but the literary critic should discuss them in the way they are assimilated to the whole content of the work.

In the final section of the essay, Ransom discusses the proper function of the critic. Study of technique, according to Ransom, certainly belongs to the sphere of criticism. When a critic takes up a poem, he obviously looks for the devices which give it a distinct poetic identity. Ransom's prescription is that the critic should look upon the work in hand as having an ontological identity. "The critic should find in the poem a total poetic or individual object which tends to be universalised, but is not permitted to suffered this fate" (348). The logical self to which the poet reduces the poem places it in a universal category, while the 'tissue' or 'the totality of connotation' preserves its distinct individual identity. "The character of the poem resides for the good critic in its way of exhibiting the residuary quality" (349), the differentia which keeps it poetical or entire. To quote Ransom's words in another essay, "The Bases of Criticism": "The professional critic is always avant garde, occupying himself with poetic effects that are strange, and eventful for the development of poetic practice" (570).
Ransom discusses the contribution of the academicians at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and thereafter to the study of the Humanities more fully in “Humanism at Chicago,” included in Poems and Essays. The Chicago critics, as they are commonly designated, divided the study of literature into four segments: language, analysis of intellectual ideas, history, and criticism. They selected criticism as their special province, without neglecting the other three. Led by R. S. Crane, the academicians included, besides Crane, W. R. Keast, Richard McKeon, Norman Maclean, Elder Olson, and Bernard Weinberg. They contributed twenty essays to Critics and Criticism, published in 1952, which elaborated the background and the critical doctrine of the school.

The Chicago critics adopted the critical theory of Aristotle, as enunciated in Poetics, as their guiding principle. So they may be called Aristotelians, more appropriately neo-Aristotelians. Aristotle framed the rules keeping in mind Greek poetry, Greek drama, and Greek epic. His rules needed extension and supplementation to suit them to the Shakespearean and modern drama, and also modern fiction. The Chicago academicians had a certain piety and broadness of feeling in their application of Aristotelian rules to serve their purposes.

Aristotle started with investigating the purpose and process of poetic composition. The purpose being pleasure, it is experienced through the catharsis or purgation of the emotions of pity and fear. The parts that constitute a literary object are plot, character, thought, and diction — in that order of importance.

Aristotle considers ‘plot’ or muthos the soul of a play. The stories in Greek plays were familiar to the audience, but the playwright gave a novel turn to the already familiar story by his ‘invention.’ Aristotle stresses on the tight organisation of the actions composing the plot: “Each action must be the effect of the previous action and cause of the following one, by logical
necessity” (94). Ransom questions whether Aristotle’s emphasis on the causal relation of actions will derive the right sort of emotional response from the audience, or whether a loose plotting will not be more suitable for the purpose. He also raises doubt whether the pleasure must be the pleasure of purgation or it will be a general pleasure.

By ‘character’ Aristotle means ethos or ethical character, which is different from the concept of character as dramatis persona in Latin. The character in Shakespearean and modern drama which engages the attention of the viewers by virtue of its individual physical traits and psychological complexity rather than ethical uprightness lies beyond the purview of Aristotle who, Ransom says, was more concerned with the universal than the “accidents of personality” (96).

‘Thought’ or dienoia refers, in Aristotle’s conception, to one’s ability to articulate thought and feeling through the speeches consistently throughout the play. This reveals the motives behind one’s own actions as well as the effect of other people’s actions on one.

‘Diction’ or lexis is the effect produced by the use of words or phrases. Greek plays used poetic diction. To Aristotle, poetic diction stood for (i) metered language, and (ii) figurative language or “fondness for unusual words and word-uses” (97). Aristotle does not show any important use for metres, and the figurative language is also likely to interfere with the plot. That is perhaps the reason Aristotle advocates the use of poetic diction “in the pauses of the action” (97). But in case of Shakespeare, the language is most lively when the action is at its height. This is because the poignant occasions in the play provides him with ample opportunity to use his poetic power. Aristotle does not use more than ten words to write about poetic diction. On the other hand, one of the Chicago critics, Elder Olson explains elaborately that there remains little after we have used up the denotative power of language. The Chicago critics show their
preference for plot to poetry, while there are others who prefer poetry to plot. Both may be termed 'monistic' or 'monolithic' in their exclusive interest in only one of the elements.

After discussing Aristotle's theory in some detail, Ransom puts forward his own theory. For Ransom, three poetic objects are realised with the poem as a whole. First, there is the logical construct, or the plot, or more appropriately, the argument — for, in the lyrical poem there is no sequence of actions constituting a plot. The 'argument,' as Ransom would have it, is constituted by the words “when used in their simple denotative aspect” (100). Secondly, words, even after being used in their denotative aspect, have a kind of energy which conjures up objects in their original, inviolable, and particular aspect. This world of objects develops along with the logical construct when the latter is being moulded into shape. Finally, there is the metered construct which is both visible and audible. The metered language compels the words to assume their proper places in the poetic construction. The metres envelop the other two constructs. All these constructs combine to make the poem a pleasurable whole.

The New Criticism has often been thought to be an English version of the *explication de texte*, practised as a critical method in French schools. Ransom castigates the practice of the French *explication de texte* or paraphrasing the logical content as a valid critical method in his paper, “The Bases of Criticism,” published in the *Sewanee Review*, Volume 52. The event that occasioned the writing of this paper was the publication of reviews of a sonnet of William Wordsworth by Maclean and W. B. Yeats's poem, “Sailing to Byzantium” by Olson, published in the *University Review*. Maclean and Olson were both members of the Chicago group of critics, known as the neo-Aristotelians. Both the reviews impress Ransom as mere attempt at writing the interpretations or prose arguments or paraphrases of the poems. What disconcerts Ransom more is the endorsement of the critical method by R. S. Crane, the leader of the Chicago critics, whose
efforts at establishing criticism as an independent discipline have been hailed by Ransom time and again. Ransom quotes from Olson to show how his discussion centres round the logical argument of Yeats’s poem and veers towards establishing the formalistic perfection of the poem. Crane, in his “Prefatory Note” to the Review, admonishes the literary critics not to employ what he calls “commonplaces” (558) in their criticism. By ‘commonplaces,’ Crane means considerations which are not oriented towards poetry, but are imported from other fields. Crane considers his advocacy as pure or literary type of criticism which had its origin in Aristotle. Ransom cites the case of moral considerations as one the examples of the ‘commonplaces’ Crane speaks of. Ransom feels that withholding the relevant commonplaces would deprive the critic of anything substantial to speak of. Ransom finds this gesture of the neo-Aristotelians as comparable only to the philosophical speculation of Croce about the uniqueness of a poem. Ransom rhetorically asks whether it would be possible for Olson to reach the logical argument of Yeats’s poem without bringing to bear upon it the commonplaces of logic. What Maclean and Olson actually do, according to Ransom, is to make paraphrase of the poems; and a paraphrase is merely an abstraction of the poem. The Chicago critics profess to respect the “inviolable particularity” (559) of the poem, and yet at the same time, their indulgence in paraphrase-making seems to nullify their claim to the noble profession. Olson seems to understand the problem, which is evident from his observation quoted by Ransom: “Although the argument as we have stated it clearly underlies the poem, it would be erroneous to suppose that this in itself constitutes the poem, for in that case there would be no difference between our paraphrase and the poem” (560). Olson also points to the organic nature of the poem when he says that a critical enquiry, “properly executed, would terminate in a discovery of the parts of a work and the interrelations through which the parts are parts of a whole” (560). He fails to understand that “Poetry is an
ambivalent discourse if it has a prose or logical element and yet a body of imagery too energetic to collapse into the prose” (560). Ransom proposes to solve the riddle with the help of Plato's theory of imitation. The matter of real consequence in a poem is the poem itself, which is the object imitated, whereas the argument is only a means to reach that end. One cannot have pure aesthetic experience separated from the logical argument. The logical argument is the pragmatic occasion that justifies the aesthetic effects; hence it is necessary. Ransom finds support for his stand in Aristotle in whose opinion the ‘necessary’ is “the means without which the end cannot be realised” (563). The poet has to take care of the pragmatic occasion to get the poetic license. However, the poet need not always present his argument plainly; he may introduce variety by leaving the argument obscure and not easy to get at.

Ransom finds that Aristotle himself was not averse to employing commonplaces for critical judgement whenever he found them relevant. Ransom proposes to discuss the commonplaces usually applied to criticism under three heads: semantical, syntactical, and pragmatical commonplaces. Semantical commonplaces are those which lend a sense of objectivity or realism or naturalism to a poetic discourse. These form the scientific aspect of the poem. In a sense, however, poetic discourses are more naturalistic than the empirical sciences. While the empirical sciences abstract the logical properties of nature, poetic discourses, through imitation, “represent the many-propertied heterogeneous substances which are the natural objects themselves” (566). The naturalness of the poetic imitations is attested by what Aristotle calls the ‘sense of recognition’ that they produce in us. Syntactical commonplaces are the logical ones which help us to identify the terms which do not suit the logical argument of the poem. Aristotle identifies six features of poetic drama, of which Plot, Character, and Thought contribute to its syntactical significance. Song and Spectacle are mere embellishments. Diction is sustained by
metered language and figures of speech, both of which contribute not to syntax, but to what Ransom calls “dystax” (568). Pragmatical commonplaces are concerned with the practical uses of the poem for human beings. The motives that make us to enjoy poetry are obscure. Even Aristotle’s identification of the use of arts with “expression of emotion” and “source of pleasure” do not seem sufficient causes to Ransom to justify the universal favour that poetry enjoys.

Ransom discusses the social commitment of art in “The Communities of Letters,” included in Poems and Essays. According to Ransom, “Art is the freest and fullest and most sympathetic image of the human experience” (109). He cites the case of a young Negro writer, Richard Gibson who refused to write about the racial problem in America on the ground that he was primarily a writer who happened to be a Negro. In other words, he placed the human interest before his racial interest.

Ransom is quite aware of the fact that despite his claim to artistic freedom, the artist has to cater to the tastes of the public to earn his livelihood. In return, the consumers shower praise on the artist and share in the understanding of his work. The artist represents in his writings “heroic and elemental behaviours, and generous and social behaviours” (112), reminding man of his nobility. Even when the art is satirical in tone, its purpose is to cleanse the harmful, while the affirmative tone “fortifies the faith” (112). This, in Ransom’s opinion, clearly indicates the social commitment of the artist and the moral influence exerted by him.

Richard Gibson names five novelists — Joyce, Proust, Mann, Gide, Kafka, and five poets — Eliot, Valéry, Pound, Rilke, Auden — who set the standard for Modern literature. Their “revolutionary” (113) achievement is in their abandoning “the old tidy compositional schemes and the old plodding logic of language” (113) which could not withstand the disintegration of the social order by “the destructive analysis of religious and intellectual ideas once universally held”
(113). Though the ideas contained in the works of these Modern writers are ahead of their times, they can effectively "market" (114) their product by bringing their readers to a new elevation of thought and spirit.

The most recent development has been to illumine the essentially private experience. However, in its factual private state, the experience hardly leaves any appeal. Hence the use of the device of "literary fiction" (115) which the writer adopts to disclaim that the identification of the persona of the literary product with himself is co-incidental. And there clusters round the writer a community, formed not by massed populace, but by select members of the society, beyond the boundaries of nationality and language, who locate their own experience in the experience of the persona of the writer — which, in turn, helps to release their pent-up feelings.

To conclude, the various critical formulations of John Crowe Ransom discussed above should make one aware of the vibrancy of the movement. Though the New Critics never emerged as a unanimous group, each of them had an original bent of mind. This should be evident from the way Ransom, the propagator of the movement, expressed his divergence of opinion from the other New Critics. In all his critical formulations — whether it was the advocacy of anonymity, or the imposition of form to attain impersonality, or reviving the concept of mimesis, or defence of the traditional metrical system, or condemning the adoption of free verse as a substitute to metre, or upholding the simultaneous existence of contradictories in a single piece of poetry, or awareness of the social commitment of art, or the exposition of the structure-texture dichotomy, or rejection of the organicity of poetry — his professed aim was to defend the organic nature of civilisation. His propagation of the concept of Dinglichkeit or his repeated focus on the ontological existence, with the wide range of 'precious objects' forming the ontological base, reflects his deep involvement with life free from the abstractionist and
reductionist implications of the scientific and technological attitudes so much widespread in society. His critical outlook becomes quite manifest in the preface to *The New Criticism*. Writing in 1941, Ransom unhesitatingly admits that the New Critical methodology is as yet unformed in principles and does not have any concrete philosophical base. He criticises the so-called New Critics for their use of psychological affective vocabulary and their inclination to moralism. Ransom's prescription is that a critic should concentrate on the structural pattern of poetry, and study the ontological elements — elements which go into the making of a poem and differentiate poetical structures from scientific structures.