CHAPTER IV

Coleridge and the American New Critics

The relation between Coleridge and the American New Critics has been commented upon by a number of critics among whom Murray Krieger and Richard Foster deserve special attention. Krieger claims that the New Critics are "significantly different from the romantics" because for them "the unique poetic knowledge is controlled by the mode of discourse and not by some transcendent psychology or intuition." Foster, on the other hand, insists that "being certain classicist principles lies a romantic sensibility which mostly constitutes the real identity of the New Criticism as a literary movement." Both these points of view are true to the extent that the New Critics "oppose poetry to science in the manner of the great Romantics" like Coleridge and, at the same time, unlike

3 Ibid. p. 34.
Coleridge, treat poetry as a conscious and complex art which has nothing to do with the poet's intuition.

The whole issue of the relationship between Coleridge and the New Critics however goes beyond Krieger's categories of the type of knowledge involved as well as Foster's categories of emotion, faith, and metaphysics; and we need a broader perspective and framework to analyse the roots of certain tendencies in New Criticism which are based on a modification of an originally romantic notion of 'exclusion' of culture. These roots can be analysed by looking at the Croce, the Imagist movement, Eliot and the early Richards—all offering premises to the New Critics for orientation of criticism towards an object, new methodological forms and an epistemological structure. The remarkable difference between the New Critics and Coleridge in terms of ontology and epistemology, is that whereas they are fused together in Coleridge's critical formulations, there is no such fusion in the work of the New critics; their position is one of oscillation between ontology and epistemology. Again, while Coleridge perceived a significance in the relationship between

'experience' and 'expression', the New Critics separated the two and established a sort of critical 'monism' which may perhaps be their greatest drawback.

It is important to point out that the American New Criticism — the work of a loosely grouped school of critics, born and nurtured during the late twenties and early thirties — is still considered to be one of the most influential critical movements of the twentieth century. Though the credit for introducing the term 'New Criticism' goes to Joel Spingarn, its development is associated with the title of a collection of essays (The New Criticism) by Ransom published in 1941. Today it is usually applied to several men associated with Ransom from the early 1920's — men like Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks — and to others who share their ideas. In their contribution to the understanding of the poem's structure and intention as a symbolic form of man's experience, these New critics offer such a varied account that to link it up into a systematic, coherent and cogent theory, and assess its scope as a method, is a difficult though, at the same time, an important task. The difficulty arises because critics are yet to find among them an agreed programme or a common aesthetic which could

5 Krieger in The New Apologists for Poetry p. 4n., records the earlier usages of the term New Criticism by F. Brunetière in 1906; J.E. Spingarn in 1910; Ludwig Lewisohn in 1919; and Edwin Berry Burgum in 1930.
be considered as their critical stance. What is usually singled out is their common stand to defend the uniqueness of art against the literary and non-literary onslaughts, particularly against those of science. J.H. Muller, considers the New critics' jealousy or distrust of science as "the final explanation of their whole critical position." The point, to a great extent, is legitimate because, obviously 'New Criticism' is anti-scientific but then almost all humanists, against whom the New Critics revolted, were anti-scientific in so far as they found science seriously oppressing the humanities in education. Naturally we need to look for something more concrete which will not only relate this movement to the main stream of English Criticism but will also indicate its contribution to the twentieth century critical thought.

An idea of such a framework has been given, though in a limited way, by R.W. Stallman and Frank Kermode


who have suggested that the modern view of art as autotelic has been accompanied by a conception of 'the isolation of the artist.' \(^8\) The isolation coupled with a process of dissociation, which according to Tate is not between thought and feeling but rather between "mind and the external world", \(^9\) resulted in the "loss of tradition", "the loss of fixed convention providing the poet a unifying relation to his society", and the "loss of an objective system of truths embedded in a homogeneous society". In order to analyse the broader implications of this framework in relation to the actual ideology of New Criticism it is essential to view New Criticism in the light of its 'Agrarian' antecedents and its social context.

The American New Critics lived at a time of "spiritual crisis" when "traditional reference system of religion, morality, social mythology, and ideas were disintegrating", \(^10\) and science was the dominating influence


both on man and society. The freedom of an individual to do what he liked was being challenged by that much larger group constituting what Marcuse calls an "affluent society". The main characteristics of this society, according to Marcuse, are:

(1) An abundant industrial and technical capacity which is to a great extent spent in the production and distribution of luxury goods.

(2) A rising standard of living.

(3) A high degree of concentration of economic and political power.

(4) Scientific and pseudo-scientific investigation, control, and manipulation of private and group behaviour.

In such a set up, the students of literature often had moments of panic in which it seemed that literature was of no use and no responsible adult should give it the time and energy demanded by graduate studies. In fact some continental philosophers like Marcuse himself, and Edmund Husserl, had attempted a critique of the 'objective outlook' of modern science that substituted for the real sensuous world of nature and society a world of abstract quantitative categories artificially constructed and raised to the level of natural law. But these philosophers had no impact on the contemporary American society in the sense that there still


12 Ibid.
prevailed what Arnold calls 'anarchy' rather than 'culture'. As Richard Gray has rightly pointed out:

Science and industry demand control of nature and in pursuance of this man has had to exploit his reason and deny his sensibility. The image of the whole man, consequently, has been replaced by a concept of personality which emphasizes its "appetitive and economic" functions at the expense of everything else.

Ransom observes that in the scientific life man is reduced to being 'the tender of machines' — an object of science whose existence is mechanized and made subordinate to 'the dictates of machines'. So he argues:

It is because industrialism gives an undue encouragement to science, and too much right of way to appetite, that we have to take the

13 Matthew Arnold's 'culture' is a critical repudiation of the prevailing civilization of mechanical and material interests which he calls 'anarchy'. As he writes in Culture and Anarchy ed. J. Dover Wilson (1932, rpt., Paperback) London: Cambridge University Press, 1971 p. 6, his purpose is to "recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world";

position that industrialism is far too
dangerous a thing for us to indulge in.
But for a similar reason we have to
oppose the cult of science on its purely
theoretical side, when it tries to
monopolize our intellectual life. 15

Taking refuge in Nashville, a city which the New Critics
considered 'The Athens of the South' 16 was a means to
achieve the above mentioned end: "to oppose the cult of
science on its purely theoretical level." Here they
published their first periodical The Fugitive in 1922
which, they thought, initiated the Southern Renaissance.
But from their early writings it is clear that they wrote
without feeling at home in South in transition, feeling
no sympathy for the New South and rejecting the old one. 17

Ransom's "South Old and New" and Tate's "Man of Letters
in the Modern South" give obvious indications of this
feeling. Ransom and Tate, both Southern Agrarians as well
as Fugitives, reacted sharply to the evils of industrialism
and pointed to poetry and literature as the only antidote

15 Ransom, God without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defence
pp. 216-17.

16 Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group: A Literary History
(Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana University Press, 1959) p.5.

17 For a detailed discussion of the Fugitive and Agrarian
phase of the New Criticism see John Fekete, The Critical
Twilight pp. 52-84.
and cure. Talking of the old traditional southern society in which scientism and industrialism had not yet built their stronghold, Tate observes that they (the New Critics) were acting "humanely and not merely economically toward the material basis of life and toward one another."¹⁸ And in Ransom's interpretation of the organisation of such a society "the aesthetic forms [were] a technique of restraint, not of efficiency."¹⁹ The outcome of industrialism is that we get in place of the Christian or Moral man, an Economic man, a living abstraction who is the mere expression of another abstraction — economic productiveness.²⁰ It is the failure or limitation of science that led the New Critics to poetry.²¹ In other words, the withdrawal of the group from an active participation in the construction of social forms led to a retreat into craft-consciousness and to a concern with the formal elements of art.

Here one recollects the close association of Coleridge and Wordsworth, their settlement in the lake district and

²⁰ Reason in Madness p. 209
publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, clearly indicates "how consideration of the poetic process became entangled with more general questions of the artist and society."  

Both Coleridge and Wordsworth rejected or revolted against some of the underlying assumptions of the French Revolution and the eighteenth century conception of poetry which, Coleridge believed, was deeply influenced by Newtonian Science. As a result of their alienation from society their new attitude towards art and life emerged which is best expressed in their writings.

It is interesting to note that both Coleridge and the New Critics have attempted to contrast art with science by stressing the complexity rather than the simplicity of the experience art deals with. They have asserted that in a hostile environment — a scientifically oriented world all too ready to assume that what cannot be explained in purely rational terms either doesn't exist, or is unimportant — that our deepest and most important experiences cannot be contained without residue in the generalizing, conceptualizing language of the discursive reason and that only poetry, the

organic form of art, with its oblique mode, is capable of rendering these experiences.

Having pointed out their similarity it is necessary to distinguish between Coleridge and the New Critics because although they confronted a common enemy (a rationalist view of life and art), and although their defences sometimes looked very much alike, they were conducting the campaign from very different positions. The New Critics inherited from Coleridge the concept of organic unity but modified it under the influence of various philosophies which resulted not only in their ambivalent attitude to Coleridge but also their partial understanding of him. The ambivalent attitude is perhaps best indicated in the following statement of Ransom:

Coleridge is probably the best practitioner of criticism that we have in the classics of our language, and his interest is ubiquitous, but we have the greatest difficulty in capturing and consolidating any set methods or principles out of his vagaries of speculation, and few of us would care to underwrite the immortality of his fantastic language. 23

Ransom sees that the characteristic act of the creative imagination propounded by Coleridge is the formulation of metaphor. He observes that Coleridge is continually talking about poetic imagination as an 'esemplastic' faculty, reconciling opposites into a unity. Its work is a 'coadunation', and it also furnishes a kind of 'inter-inanimation' between the opposed parts of the metaphor, which, in the words of Richards, are the 'tenor' and the 'vehicle.'

Similarly Cleanth Brooks is inevitably impressed by the Coleridgean theory of reconciliation of opposites as is seen in his theory of 'paradox' which, according to him, is the "reconciliation of active and passive, more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order". He however states that whereas Coleridge's interest is in the poet "our interest in the way in which one part of a poem relates to another and is made to contribute to the unity of the whole springs from a concern for the poem itself as a structure of meanings". Brooks is in full agreement with Ransom in saying that "what the modern poets inherited from Coleridge ... is the conception

24 Ransom, The New Criticism (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1941) p. 76.


26 Modern Poetry and Tradition p. xii.
and use of metaphor." Allen Tate also speaks of Coleridge's direct influence which he believes to have been "very great" but he is, at the same time, more impressed by the indirect influence as it came through Edgar Allan Poe and the French Symbolists. Tate, like his fellow critics, holds strong reservations concerning the value of much of Coleridge's writings, feeling that they lead us eventually away from the poem into what has become known as the psychology of poetry. What is evident is that the New Critics look at Coleridge through the lenses not only of Richards' interpretation of him — "a materialist trying to interpret ... the utterances of an extreme idealist" — but through diverse strands of philosophical and critical thought related to Benedetto Croce, French Symbolism and Imagism.

Croce's influence on the New Criticism is easy to trace. With the publication of A.E. Powell's *The Romantic Theory of Poetry* (1926) Spingarn's endeavour to introduce a slogan 'Back to Croce' was strengthened and an attempt was made to show that the concept of creative imagination

---

29 Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* p. 19.
entertained by Coleridge was the same as the 'aesthetic' concept elaborated a century later by Benedetto Croce. Croce's own doubts about Miss Powell's conclusions apart, one notices a striking difference between Coleridge's creative theory and that of Croce's. Croce, unlike Coleridge, denies the reality of nature in art and, as a result was led "to deny it everywhere and to discover everywhere its true character, not as reality but as the product of abstracting thought." 'Spirit' in the Crocean philosophy is the "absolute reality" and it is this spirit that generates the content of experience or real intuitive knowledge. One can point to the remark of Giovanni Papini:

If you disregard critical trivialities and didactic accessories, the entire aesthetic system of Croce amounts merely to a hunt for pseudonyms of the word 'art', and may indeed be stated briefly and accurately in this formula: art=intuition=expression=feeling=imagination=fancy=lyricism=beauty... Every word is merely a different series of syllables signifying absolutely and completely the same thing. 32

30 W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, in Literary Criticism: A Short History p. 500 indicate Croce in Conversazioni Critiche, Third series (Bari, 1932), pp. 7-13 has some doubts about Miss Powell's understanding of Croce's philosophy.


The Crocean system rejects all notion of art as illusion or as mechanical reproduction of, or substitute for external beauty. It asserts that the notion of external physical beauty is a verbal paradox. Besides asserting that "Art is essentially free from practical interest," Croce observes as follows:

The thoughts and actions and emotions of life, when sublimated to the subject-matter of poetry, are no longer the thought that judges, the action effectively carried out, the good and evil, or the joy and pain actually done or suffered. They are all now simply passions and feelings immediately assuaged and calmed, and transfigured in imagery.

To Croce goes the credit for discouraging all didactic criticism, all scientific, realistic, informational, and mimetic norms, and also the overtly intentionalistic, inspirational and biographical preoccupations. More than that he gave the concept of imagination as the process of reconciliation of Images; the concept that was further

---


strengthened by the Imagist Movement, led by T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, introducing a poetry "distinguished by objectivity; economy of language, and freedom of form." Underlying this concept is the assumption that imagination is the shaping power bringing the artistic elements into wholeness. One can also relate this to imagism which stressed the need of invoking an image instead of describing it.

Ezra Pound, it is to be noted here, had a great influence on T.S. Eliot and through him, on the American New Critics. In many of his critical writings like *Retrospect on Imagism* (1928), Pound tried to equate science and art by indicating that just as when studying physics one is not supposed to investigate the biography of Newton, one must have the same attitude towards literature as well. In other words, one must deal exclusively with forms and techniques of poetry without any reference whatsoever to


its meaning content or to the biography or the self of the poet. Besides, it was Pound who introduced T.E. Hulme to the English speaking world and, according to Stallman

The affinity between the Southern Critics and Hulme lies in their common claim that our present disunity has been created by the confusion of two categories: the aesthetic vision, which is concerned with quality and the scientific vision which is concerned with quantity. 37

The New Critics followed Hulme in discriminating between poetry and science as two separate categories and, at the same time, in establishing the superiority of poetry over science. They do it by claiming that poetry is an independent form of knowledge, a kind of cognition equal to the knowledge of science, and the difference is only that the former gives us — in the words of Bergson borrowed by Hulme — the "intensive manifold" and the latter the "extensive manifold." 38

37 Critiques and Essays in Criticism p. 493.

38 A detailed discussion of these terms in relation to the New Criticism is to be found in David M. Miller's The Net of Hephaestus particularly on p. 14.
The influence of the above mentioned critical formulations is seen in the writings of T.S. Eliot. In "Tradition and Individual Talent", for example, he uses an analogy from chemistry; just as chemical substances need a catalytic agent to form a new chemical compound, the raw materials of poetry — experiences, impressions, images, ideas, feelings, rhythms, musical harmonies and verbal phrases — need the poet's personality to form an 'artifact'. However, Eliot argues that just as in the chemical reaction the end-product does not have any trace of the catalyst in it, so in the poem there should be no trace of the poet's personality. Here is the hint for the critic not to involve himself in historical, sociological or biographical details about the poet, but to take the poem as a work of art independent of the personality and emotions of the poet. Sutton rightly points out that "Eliot was an affective leader, carrying forward a programme already launched by T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound, and later taken over from Eliot by the New Critics." 39

39 Walter Sutton, Modern American Criticism, p. 102.
Following Eliot and his immediate predecessors, Hulme and Pound, the New Critics pointed to one primary object of critical attention — not the critic's own intention, not the writer's biography or psychological background, not his intellectual, social or historical context, not the creative process or the readerly response, but the one central, ascertainable object that critics could discuss in common and constantly refer to: the text, the 'words on the page'. Their basic stand was that the artist's experience real or imagined, is finally concentrated in his work and, accordingly, the work itself and not the man who made it, is the reader's proper concern. Based on this concept of the unique properties of a work of art are the various names attributed to formalistic criticism: Ontological criticism, Contextual criticism, and Intrinsic criticism, all implying that the literary work as a closed entity points inward so as to create a total context, and the work itself contains all the materials and information necessary for its understanding and evaluation. As indicated by Ransom in "Wanted: An Ontological Critic", a poem has its own reality, its own objective status, and the meaning conveyed by the poem is never something outside it or
separate from it. Poetry, says Ransom, "is a kind of knowledge which is radically or ontologically distinct." Tate also believes that "the high form of literature", namely poetry, offers "the only complete, and thus the most responsible, versions of our experience", because in its "radical discontinuity" from scientific truth, it unifies in the spiritual realm what scientific analysis has disunited in the physical. Carried within this ontology is what Wimsatt calls "the concrete Universal" — a paradoxical union of the universal or ideal and the particular. Though Ransom has a doubt about Wimsatt's use of the term and is ready to substitute for it "Complex Universal", the basic concept of ontology — from Onto meaning "existing things" and Logos meaning "knowing" — remains the same. From this ontology is developed a

40 The New Criticism p. 281.

41 Ibid p. 281.


further assumption that a poem needs a different treatment or a different mode of analysis. Cleanth Brooks criticizes what he calls the "average teacher's doctrine" which regards poetry as communication "rather than a total form, that is, as poetry." He also points out the danger of historical, linguistic, and moral studies or any other special studies "which deal with some abstract or prose content taken out of the work."

The problem emerges when these New Critics, side by side with the ontological aspect, discuss the cognitive element of art. Both Ransom in *The New Criticism*, and Tate, in *Reason in Madness*, are at pains to show how poetry, far from being non-sense, is a complete mode of knowledge. The claim for literature as knowledge proceeds from a realization and demonstration of the defective nature of scientific


45 *The World's Body* p. 344.

46 Ibid p. 345.
knowledge, and the inability of science to know the reality owing to its own extensive limitations. Ransom noting the limitations of science says that science failing "to observe the particular objects"\(^47\) creates fiction "where its limits of knowledge are reached"\(^48\) and reduces "natural phenomena to human understanding."\(^49\) Accordingly, the New Critics believed that science presents an abstract and therefore a partial description of nature while poetry attempts a total description and restores "the world's Body". Applying this theory of knowledge to a poem by Thomas Hardy Ransom observes that Hardy's language "is not content with the concepts, but is constantly stopping to insert or to attach the particularity which is involved in images; a procedure which might be called the imaginative realization of concepts. A genuine

\(^47\) *God without Thunder*, p. 59

\(^48\) Ibid. pp. 61, 74.

\(^49\) Ibid. pp 22-23. Compare with it Coleridge's remark that the source of all error in the eighteenth century was "the growing alienation and self-sufficiency of the understanding".
poetic energy will work with both these dimensions."  

Similarly Allen Tate maintains that "if the poem is a real creation, it is a kind of knowledge that we did not possess before."  

Here again, it is to be noted that the New Critics reject the four main doctrines in aesthetics: Idealistic, Moralistic, Pragmatic and Psychological, because they want art to serve as a means or vehicle for communicating or "enforcing" abstract ideas.  

Accordingly they give

50 "Honey and Gall", The Southern Review VI (Summer, 1940) p. 10.  

51 "Literature and knowledge" rpt. in Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959) p. 595.  

their own concept of how aesthetic knowledge enters the poetic sensibility, and the code in which it finds expression. Translated into their own terms, the two dimensions embodied in a poem, according to the New Critics, are 'structure and texture', or 'extension and intension' or 'idea and image'. A detailed discussion of these terms is found in Ransom's "Poetry - A Note on Ontology" and "Wanted: An Ontological Critic"; and in Tate's "Three kinds of Poetry" and "Tension in Poetry". In these essays Ransom and Tate attempt to differentiate the subject-matter of poetry from that of prose or scientific discourse and, at the same time, indicate that a poem has a unique 'ontology' or 'objective status', a reality of being, which distinguishes it from other types of discourse. According to them, there is a logical structure, pattern or meaning in poetry, analogous to scientific formulation. Poetry, on the other hand, has not only logical meaning but also a texture-meaning which is made of "heterogenous and irrelevant details." Science is only "the cognitive department of our animal life" because


54 *The World's Body* p. x
it the "technical or abstract" way of knowing whereas poetry makes known "the world which is made of whole and indefeasible objects." Poetry, therefore, is the complement of science which, restricting itself to universals, can mirror only a world of abstractions. Obviously, the New Critics handover the realm of the universals largely to science, and retain for poetry no more than an apprehension of the particulars:

The differentia of poetry as discourse is an ontological one. It treats an order of existence, a grade of objectivity, which cannot be treated in scientific discourse.

In short, Epistemology and Ontology, as Blackmur says, are the media through which Ransom and the other New Critics experience the problem not so much of the relation between 'thought' and 'feeling' as of the relation between 'science' and 'poetry'. But in contrast to Coleridge or even

55 The World's Body p. 67.

56 Ibid p. xi.


Richards, there is in their argument an oscillation between the two — Epistemology and Ontology — which needs to be examined closely. The problem can be summarised in the following words: are the two "knowledges" — the knowledge given by science and the knowledge given by poetry — on the same level? Can they be kept from fusing or do they function intermittently?, in which case there is no reason for trying to find any connection between them.

It is true that poetry contains in it the knowledge that is neither in science nor in any other mode of knowing that man has ever known, but this knowledge can be packed in words only with the utmost technical skill. The critic's business then is to release the knowledge from the bonds of the words by spelling out those devices of technique which put the knowledge into words. Now the technique

for the New Critics is the Texture which goes into the making of the poem and which includes such items as diction, happy combination of words into phrases, imagery, stresses, and rhythms, etc. How is texture obtained? If it is a deliberate act, then the presence of a pre-existent idea or feeling in the process of composition of poetry cannot be denied, and that is what the New Critics have disallowed at the outset. According to them, it is not previously possessed knowledge that necessitates the search for a particular texture, but texture which discovers knowledge lying hidden in words like the spark in flint. Texture gets organized or patterned into a structure which denotes the total form of the poem resulting from the phrases, images and allusions cohering together.

Even a consideration of the 'structure' of the poem in Brook's sense raises the question of formal

---

60 See how Ransom in The New Criticism pp. 300-2 defines 'the vocation par excellence of criticism' as the distinction of the determinate and indeterminate elements of meaning in the work of art.

61 Brooks in The Well Wrought Urn, p. 194 indicates that "the structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of the balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings."
consistency Vs. logical consistency. If logical consistency is also part of structure, then the critic is also to discuss the development of the idea in the poem — something which is amenable to paraphrase, the content-meaning of the poem. Yet the New Critics have held that the paraphrasable content is not the concern of the critic otherwise he will drift into some sort of commitment. Ransom, after defining the moralistic critic as one who wishes "to isolate and discuss the 'ideology' or theme or paraphrase of the poem", goes on to say that in his view "the business of the literary critic is exclusively with an aesthetic criticism." Ransom, after defining the moralistic critic as one who wishes "to isolate and discuss the 'ideology' or theme or paraphrase of the poem", goes on to say that in his view "the business of the literary critic is exclusively with an aesthetic criticism." Tate says the same: "from my point of view the formal qualities of a poem are the focus of the specifically critical judgement because they partake of an objectivity that the subject-matter, abstracted from the form, wholly lacks."

On the other hand — and this is another side of the problem — to demand that art should be autonomous is to require that it should be 'meaningless', since what is totally unique is by its very nature intelligible. The writer who seriously attempts his poem must, literally,

62 "Criticism as a pure speculation" pp. 101-2

63 The limits of Poetry. p. 57.
'not mean but be'. Yet not everyone among the New Critics who speak of art as autonomous and who quote Macleish's famous phrase with approval is recommending that poetry should be void of meaning. Ransom's words are worth quoting here:

The poem is not a poem at all without its free poetic "texture", of course; but its "texture" is incidental to its main "structure", which is scientific; so that I should have to concede that the poem is really achieved under the patronage, or perhaps we should say the unwilling auspices, of a scientific discourse. 64

Similarly, Brooks believes that "poetry gives truth, through metaphors, it is cognitive", 65 and Tate asserts that "good poetry is a unity of all the meanings from the farthest extremes of intension and extension." 66

64 "Positive and Near-Positive Aesthetics", Kenyon Review vol. 5 (1943) p. 446.

65 The Well Wrought Urn, p. 260.

66 Collected Essays, p. 63.
The above discussion indicates that the nature of 'structure' and the relationship between 'texture' and 'structure', as analysed by the New Critics, are vexed problems: elements of texture coherent with knowledge may be linked together in a structure that may be foolish or absurd or otherwise opposed to our wanted concept of knowledge; or to put it differently; can relevant and coherent texture support an inconsistent and incoherent structure?\textsuperscript{67} These vexed problems are the outcome of a method which, according to Holloway, derives "in part from a keener sense of the distinctiveness of poetry, which was an asset, and in part from excessive though perhaps half-conscious respect for science, which was a liability."\textsuperscript{68} Such a dualistic attitude is present in every New Critic

\textsuperscript{67} The absurdity has been discussed by Theodore Spencer, "How to Critize a Poem" \textit{The New Republic}, CIX (Dec. 6, 1942) pp. 816-818.

and particularly in Ransom — the most philosophical of the New Critics. He says:

For there are two summary propositions which seem to need putting. Sometimes I find myself thinking that one of them is primary, and the other is secondary; but at another time I think the reverse. A. The poem is not included in its paraphrase. B. But the poem must include its own paraphrase, or else a logical argument capable of being expressed in paraphrase.

It has been argued that the function the New Critics accord to statement or 'structure' in poetry resembles very closely that accorded to statements or 'sense' in poetry by the early Richards. Obviously for the New Critics as well as for Richards, the statements made in a poem are important only in so far as they are a means to something else — in the New Critics' case to 'particularity' and in Richards' case to 'attitudes'. Once this fact is established, the


The dichotomy between science and poetry persists and, with it, persists the notion, which the New critics tried to evade: the cognitive element of poetry is not only different from that of science but is also very limited. Such a drawback or difficulty is "inherent in any critical theory which begins by slicing apart value and knowledge —— whether it be Richards' cutting the emotive use of language free from the referential or Ransom's cutting the valuable illogical "texture" free from logical "structure"."\(^7^2\)

Significantly enough Richards solved the poetry-science dichotomy (of his earlier stage) by absorbing science in myth. Instead of treating 'meaning' as a psychological problem as in his earlier phase, he made the transition to an epistemological problematic, showing a new orientation towards the cognitive role for art. This Neo-Kantian (and also Coleridgean) epistemology of a formative consciousness constitutes and maintains the world of our experience through the mythopoetic-linguistic activity. Mythology, in this analysis, unifies our powers,


orders our possibilities, and controls the growing order of the mind in response to the universe. Richards affirms:

1. The mind of the poet at moments, penetrating 'the film of familiarity and selfish solitude', gains an insight into reality, reads Nature as a symbol of something behind or within Nature not ordinarily perceived.

2. The mind of the poet creates a Nature into which his own feelings, his aspirations and apprehensions, are projected. 73

These two doctrines, according to Richards, "are neither consequences of a priori decisions, nor verifiable as the empirical statements of the science are verifiable; and all verifiable statements are independent of them. But this does not diminish in the least their interest, or that of the other senses in which they may be true."74 In the central chapter of the book Coleridge on Imagination — 'The Wind Harp' — Richards claims that prose discourse projects either 'mind' or 'nature' and cannot speak, without error, the unity of objective nature and mind. On the other hand, this unity of object and subject is linguistically embodied only in poetry. Naturally, poetry

73 Coleridge on Imagination p. 145.

74 Ibid pp. 147-48.
alone is able "to preserve us from mistaking our notions either for things or for ourselves [on the basis of this subject-object unity] ... poetry is the complete mode of utterance." 75

The relation of this attitude of Richards to Coleridge on the one hand and to the New Critics on the other, can be indicated by looking at Coleridge's definition of symbol and allegory. The distinction that Kermode wants to make 76 is the Ontological one ("the image is") that Coleridge had made when he wrote that symbol "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible", 77 while allegory is "unsubstantial" a "translation of abstract notions into a picture language." 78 In so many words, symbol, in Kermode's analysis, is ontologically full while allegory is thin at best, and at worst "unsubstantial", only an illusion of being. As a special unarbitrary mode of language, symbol not only permits us a vision of ultimate being — this is the epistemological implication of "translucence" in Coleridge's definition — but because it "partakes" of being, symbol permits us, as well, to partake of being as it

75 Coleridge on Imagination p. 163
76 See Kermode's Romantic Image pp. 56-61.
78 Ibid.
closes the distance between our consciousness and the ultimate origin of things. So the remarkable difference between the New Critics and Coleridge is that whereas there is an oscillation between ontology and epistemology in the former, there is no such thing in Coleridge's critical formulation; he finds significance in their fusion.

The New Critics inherit from Coleridge the concept of 'organicism' and do not bother about the dialectics of subject and object, about the reconciliation of man and nature or even the relation between poetry, poet and poem. Ransom, for example, in his very first articles on poetics — "Wastelands" and "Thoughts on Poetic Discontent" — rejects the 'reconciliation' aspect of Coleridge's criticism and pleads for a sophisticated dualism. The same attitude is also reflected in his later essay — "The concrete universal" — where he rejects the Hegelian conclusion of Wimsatt that poetic language is a 'perfect synthesis' of the universal and the particular. According to Ransom the logical argument (universal) of the poem


never incorporates within itself all the irrelevant textual
details (particular); therefore the universal never quite
grasps the concrete. He argues that a poem is an "organicism
in action" and labels its organs as the head, the heart,
and the feet; each organ playing its separate part but each
interrelated with the other and not quite fused. Against
this Coleridge's definition of a poem in chapter XIV of
the Biographia Literaria — part of which is quoted by
every New Critic — is a very sound and comprehensive one.
Coleridge starts with the product — a definition of poem:

A poem is that species of composition, which is
opposed to works of science, by proposing for its
immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from
all other species (having this object in common
with it) it is discriminated by proposing to
itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible
with a distinct gratification from each component
part. 81

Coleridge does not stop here but proceeds to give
an idea of the poetic process. He observes that "the poet
brings the whole soul of man into activity", and "diffuses
a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were)
fuses each into each, by that synthetic and magical power"
called imagination which "reveals itself in the balance or

reconciliation of opposites or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative " Accordingly the criterion of poetic excellence is an inclusiveness which harmonizes the discordant qualities; and this criterion is basic to Coleridge's metaphysics. It is the criterion of creation and it renders the manifestation of the many a necessary possibility. As Coleridge put it: "grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you." The two basic entities required in poetic creation are the infinite and the finite, the subject and the object of experience.

The New Critics, not only neglect the subject-object relation in Coleridge's view of imagination but also as would be analysed further in the next chapter — mix up together Coleridge's definitions of poem and imagination. Ransom observes:

83Ibid. p. 196.
I should hardly define imagination as Mr. Richards does, hardly even as Coleridge is represented in Mr. Richards' latest book as having done. I should say that imagination is an organ of knowledge whose technique is images. 84

Brooks follows Ransom in modifying Coleridge's imagination when, after applying Coleridge's definition of a poet to his own definition of poem, 85 he states that "one expects in good poetry "images, not mechanically linked together in the mode of Fancy, but organically related." 86 Both Ransom and Brooks apparently ignore the fact that, according to Coleridge, "the most general and distinctive character of a poem originates in the poetic genius" 87 and "images, however beautiful, though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proof of original genius only so far as they are modified by a predominant passion." 88 It is this 'predominant passion' that determines the place and function of each part or detail that enters into the composition. Bowyer taught Coleridge that there is

84 _The World's Body_, p. 156.
85 _The Well Wrought Urn_, pp. 18-19. Brooks equates the definition of Coleridge's imagination "as reconciliation of opposites" with his own definition of metaphor and adds "It [Coleridge's definition] is a great and illuminating statement but in a series of paradoxes. Apparently Coleridge could describe the effect of the imagination in no other way."
86 Ibid. p. 27.
87 _Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism_, vol. I, p. 166.
88 _Biographia Literaria_, vol. II, p. 16.
a logic of poetry, more precisely a logic of expression in poetry: In the truly great poetry "there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word." From this follows a corollary: "Whatever lines can be translated into other words of the same language, without diminution of their significance, either in sense, or association, or in any worthy feeling, are so far vicious in their diction." The untranslatability into the same or a different language serves the necessity and value of form in fine arts. Form can be dispensed with only when we are prepared to give up the imaginative activity; and then the work ceases to be a work of art.

The New Critics, on the other hand, look at a poem as a partly self-creating process because, according to them, the poet does not, in the composition of a poem,

89 Biographia Literaria vol. I, p. 4.

record an experience, he undergoes an experience. While writing a poem, he always grapples with "Meaning and Metre", "denotation and connotation", "extension and intension", and hence the need for a critical theory that "involves both poetic content and poetic form" and, at the same time, demands the "interdependence of these two". The interdependence of content and form, according to Brooks, makes poetry "suggestive and indirect, not stating its meanings but rendering them dramatically in images, metaphors, symbols, characters, and situations." 

Every New Critic, accordingly, attempts to analyse these images and metaphors in order to establish the


hypothesis that the poetic medium is complex and he does not bother about the complexity of poetic process which results in a complex medium. The outcome of this one-sided and partial approach to poetry results in a mechanical analysis of texts and in what Crane calls "critical monism." 

A method of mechanical analysis or what Eliot calls the "lemon squeezing" method is a characteristic of every New Critic and particularly of Brooks to whom we now turn for technical criticism. Ransom resorts to "lemon-squeezing" practice when he praises Milton's "Lycidas" as "an anonymous poem" and rejects Shakespeare's sonnets "for being ill-constructed." The same practice is at the basis of the


96 The World's Body p. 12.

objection raised against Eliot's *The Wasteland* and *Murder in the Cathedral*. Even when Ransom 'recants' in his 'Afterword' he does it with typical grace and self-effacement, and, as George Core asserts, "the reader should be alert to the fact that the critic does not radically alter his fundamental objection either to Shakespeare's sonnets, or, more particularly, to *Murder in the Cathedral*. It is because every New Critic has found his standard for great poetry in the work of the seventeenth century Metaphysicals, which, besides achieving a union of emotion and thought, joins widely divergent and conflicting elements in imagery that is functional rather than decorative. It is also because of the New Critic's


respect for science. Commenting upon Tate's discussion of Donne's "A valediction, Forbidding Mourning" and Brook's analysis of "Tears, Idle Tears" and "Break, Break, Break" Holloway observes how both Brooks and Tate apply a norm —— whereby they derive their own conclusion —— derived from an alien, a scientific, mode of thought. Even when analysing Macbeth's words "Out, out brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow" Tate comments: "the lines ... are certainly not 'true'. We know that life is not a shadow, it is a vast realm of biological phenomena."

Besides the above mentioned shortcomings in the actual analysis of texts there is in the New Critics a serious defect of critical monism which should merit special attention. This critical monism maintains that a poem should be studied only for its linguistic texture, patterning and structure, which will include sounds and rhythm and nothing else. It would indicate words in relation to other words, denotatively and canannotatively, i.e., with reference to what they mean in

102 "Critical Intimidations" pp. 480-89.

103 The Limits of Poetry, p. 109.
themselves and what addition or variation in their meaning they receive when taken in their context. A poem, accordingly, is an 'artifact' made out of words in which every word reacts to and reflects one another and there is a reciprocal change and gain in their meaning. The task of literary criticism, then, is to bring out the total effect produced by denotative and connotative use of words, their sounds, stresses, rhythms and even their printed shape on the page. Even in the linguistic-structural analysis the New Critics go about for a special kind of structure which is based upon irony, paradox or tension. Having discovered it, they proceed to demonstrate how the irony, paradox, or tension was necessitated for expressing the particular meaning the poet wanted to express. Cleanth Brooks laid down an axiom that all good poems must be built upon an irony or paradox by which opposites or apparently unrelated entities are brought together in some sort of relationship unthought of before.\textsuperscript{104} The paradoxes spring, according to Brooks, "from the very nature of the poetic language: it is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations."\textsuperscript{105} Ransom and

\textsuperscript{104} The Well Wrought Urn, pp. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid p. 8.
Tate have basically the same idea as is clear from Tate's statement that "Intension is connotation or Ransom's texture; extension denotation or Ransom's structure." 106

The theory propounded by the New Critics, therefore, is subject to two serious objections. First, these critics claim that the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity of experience in modern life makes direct expression impossible, and so the poet has recourse only to ironical and paradoxical forms. Even if this be true of modern poetry, what sanction do the New Critics have to look for the paradoxical structure even in the poetry that was written in earlier times before this compelling necessity was there. Yet while advancing their theory as one that is appropriate to modern poetry, the New Critics cannot restrain themselves from asserting that it must inevitably apply to all poetry. 107 Secondly, if all good poems are founded on an irony, paradox or tension, how do we


107 See Brooks' Modern Poetry and Tradition (Chapel Hill, N.C.,: University of North Carolina Press, 1939) particularly page XII, where Brooks states: "our interest in the way in which one part of a poem relates to another and is made to contribute to the unity of the whole springs from a concern for the poem itself as a structure of meanings. This kind of concern, it should be pointed out, can be applied to the poems of a Wordsworth as well as to those of an Eliot, to those of a John Keats as well as to those of a John Donne."
determine different kinds and degrees of goodness in various poems all of which are good? Crane rightly points out:

What we call poetry is not all alike, even if collectively it appears to constitute one distinctive branch of human activity; we value different poems for the different peculiar pleasures they give us, and we are aware that these differences are determined, in no simple way, by interrelated differences in language, subject-matter, technique of principles of construction. 108

How the Chicago critics determine these differences and how their approach is closer to Coleridge's 'organicist theory' will be discussed in the next chapter.

The above analysis of the New Critics indicates that whatever be the merits of New Criticism — in fact

there are many\textsuperscript{109} — the New Critics are Coleridgeans only in so far as they seek unity and reconciliation in a sensibility which had been torn under the conflict between science and experience, ideas and objects, reason and feeling. The way they seek a unity and propound an ontology and an autotelic existence of art leaves much to be explained. Even the terms they use in order to propagate the organic theory of art suffer from internal self-contradiction. We may conclude with the words of Richard Fogle that "the doctrines of the organic theory and of irony, themselves children of the romantic mind of Coleridge, would never be recognized by their father in their present condition" because "they have become meagre in substance and unbearably dogmatic in their speech."\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} New Criticism has its value for which it has a legitimate claim on our attention. Historical, scholarly, sociological, biographical, psychological and such other varieties of literary criticism had so dominated the scene that we gave assent to them without taking a full measure of the dangers that were inherent in them. New Criticism made a serious and earnest effort, within its own limited way, to extricate literature from such dangers, and propounded the ontological and autotelic existence of art.