

ENGLISH (Hons): Part-3; Paper-5 Unit:-01; Topic-  
New Criticism: Lec-seri- 55; by: GIANGESH KUMAR  
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## NEW CRITICISM:

The term New Criticism was first used in 1910 by Spingarn, a professor of the University of Columbia. Different Critics, whether of England or of America, evolved a new metaphor, which went long in strengthening the movement of the New Criticism. This new literary movement advocated close reading of literary text and laid emphasis on textual analysis of poetry rather than focusing on the mind and personality of the poets. It does not have any concern with the socio-political history of the time when the text was written or socio-political and cultural backdrop of the readers in their interpretation of text. It can be said that ~~text~~ New Criticism was obsessed with 'the text itself', the text supposed icon of human values, which is deployed against the 20th century cultural barbarism. Moreover, New Criticism being scientific in its approach of looking at the text focused on objectivity as a criterion of analysis and favoured disinterested criticism of text, primarily poems.

This critical movement of New Criticism finds its origin in the works of Early 20th Century Critics of England such as T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, William Empson and others. Eliot's critical works are thought to be the prime influence on New Criticism. His "Tradition & Individual Talent" (1919) is important to this brand of Anglo-American criticism. In this essay Eliot talks about art

at least two things in particular:

- The historical sense: - a sense of tradition of creative writing in which poet must situate themselves
- Depersonalization: the artist effort to attain the impersonality.

Eliot's ideas like 'Depersonalization', Objective Correlative and his other critical essays gave birth to diverse development of New Criticism where the emphasis is laid on scientificity, objectivity and impersonality.

The other important critics of this era, immediately after the end of the first world war were I.A. Richards, William Empson and F.R. Leavis. They were the main proponents of New English at Cambridge. This time, Cambridge was ~~the~~ the place where English literature was emerging as a central discipline. I.A. Richards' "Principles of Literary Criticism" (1924) laid down an explicit theoretical parameter for literary study which tried to free criticism from subjectivity and emotionalism. He differentiated the 'emotive language of poetry' from the 'referential' language of non-literary discourse.

Richard's students William Empson focused on "Ambiguity" as a defining characteristic of poetic language in his famous work "Seven types of Ambiguity". Detaching literary texts from their context in the process of 'reading' and focusing on the ambiguities of a poetic creation

became very influential in New Criticism.

Thus, the British Critics in the beginning of the 20th Century started focusing on the text itself for its interpretation within the text to find meaning.

American New Criticism emerged in 1920 and became a dominant mode of critical activity in U.S. Academia in the 1940s and 1950s. The founding essay of New Criticism in U.S is of John Crowe Ransom's "Criticism Inc." (1937). His book on Eliot, Richards and others titled 'The New Criticism' (1941) which gave the movement its name. Ransom in his "Criticism Inc" points out as to how the role of criticism should be. According to him, criticism should become more scientific or precise and systematic and student should 'study literature' and not "merely about literature". Restating Eliot's thrust on denouncing the Romantic literature as having no scientificity and objectivity; and criticism as not ethical, linguistic or historical studies, Ransom emphasized that critic should be able to point out the residue or tissue which makes the poem poetical.

Cleanth Brooks, along with Robert Penn Warren contributed so much to New Criticism. Brooks's The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry (1947) and the works like "Understanding Poetry" (1938) and "Understanding Fiction" in

Collaboration with Robert Penn Warren are of much importance. The other two works of which are importance to New Criticism are 'The Intentional Fallacy' and 'The Affective Fallacy' by W.K. Wimsatt, an author of "The Verbal Icon": Studies in the Meaning of Poetry" - in collaboration with Monroe Beardsley.

Though, the New Criticism focused principally on poetry as its object of concern but two essays by Mark Schorer 'Technique as Discourse' and 'Fiction and the Analogical Matrix' attempt to deploy new critical practice in prose.

The new critics are divergent in their views on criticism, but on certain issues they think alike. These basic issues are:

- a poem should be treated as poem and nothing else; only as self-sufficient verbal agent.
- New Critics believe that literature is conceived and constructed in a special kind of language, in opposition to the language of scientific and of practical and logical discourse.
- The New Critics tend to read the text very closely and consequently close reading of the literary text is one of the important features of new criticism.

Thus, New Criticism was a popular mode of criticism in the early and mid-twentieth century mostly in the American