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Cleanth Brooks' Critical Principles in the Light of Indian Aesthetics

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Abstract

New Criticism distinguishes itself from other schools of literary criticism by its “close reading” of texts, both poetry and fiction. The New Critics valued the independence of the text over its meaning. They believed in the structural unity of the text. This structural unity is synonymous to ‘harmony’ and ‘balance’ in a work of art. They used paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension as means and mediators to discover the unified structure. Ancient Indian Poetics, like the Greek Poetics, concerns itself mainly with drama, but poetry in the Indian concept is an integral part of drama, and also since drama is a kind of poetry, there are several observations on the nature of poetry found in Indian treatises on Poetics. This article focuses on Cleanth Brooks' New Criticism in comparison with the Theory of *Dhvani* propounded by Anandavardhana. Both theories emphasize that different kinds of meanings are present to lead the reader into a significant aesthetic experience.

Keywords: New Criticism, Theory of *Dhvani*, Close Reading, Aesthetic Experience

Cleanth Brooks' Critical Principles in the Light of Indian Aesthetics

“The New Criticism has taught a whole generation to read.”

---David Daiches

(Scottish Literary Historian and Literary Critic)

Introduction

New Criticism distinguishes itself from other schools of literary criticism by its “close reading” of texts, both poetry and fiction. The best practical New Criticism has *explication de text* as its characteristic feature. When a New Critic examines and evaluates the text, he assumes that the text is a spacious complex of interrelated words. The text is a *Well-wrought Urn* constructed as an impersonal and a historical artefact. That the text exists as an autonomous object was more

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important than the fact that it signifies something, that is, 'being' preceding 'meaning'. The New Critics, thus, value the independence of the text over its meaning. Allen Tate once declared, "In a manner of speaking, the poem is its own knower, neither poet nor reader knowing anything that the poem says apart from the words of the poem."¹ Thus, the critical description and judgment is fully focused on the text and includes everything external to it. The New Critics also believe in the structural unity of the text. This structural unity is synonymous to 'harmony' and 'balance' in a work of art. And they use paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension as means and mediators to discover the unified structure. "What New Critics ended with, then, was the theory and practice of reading, which presupposed that unified structure of numerous tensions and divergences constituted the goal of analysis as well as the true nature of literature."²

Form and Content

The problems of unity and form became the obsession of the New Critics. Cleanth Brooks wrote in *The Kenyan Review* in 1951: "The primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity, the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole."³ The New Critics believe that form and content cannot be separated. For them, form is meaning, and literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic. The formalistic critic is interested not in the author or the audience, but the work itself. Concentrating on the work alone, the formalistic critic makes two assumptions: first, that the author's intention as realized is the intention that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do, and secondly, that he is dealing with an ideal reader, that is, instead of focusing on the several possible readings, he attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel.⁴ Thus, the New Critics employ an objective method of interpretation of poems and novels and they are basically concerned with the structure of the text. This principle, in fact, was criticised by the later schools of criticism. Nevertheless, the New Critics' stance is quite strong and rigid, and there are several explications done by them which prove their stand to be quite meaningful.

New Criticism also studies ideas and statements in a poem more seriously than other forms of criticisms, because it wants to confirm the relationship between thought and language in the process of reading. For them, literature is a special form of knowledge, and therefore it is one of its functions to find out the nature of this knowledge. Brooks himself believes that language is a deep concern because according to him, language preserves the purity of thinking and purity in expression. This conception of language, thus, relates itself to Brooks' extraordinary concern to metaphor in poetry. Brooks looks upon metaphor as "the microcosm of the poem."⁵ The best instance of Brooks' obsession with metaphor can be traced in his explication of Donne's poem "Canonization":

The poem opens dramatically on a note of expats exasperation. The "you" whom the speaker addresses is not identified. We can imagine that it is a person, perhaps a friend, who is objecting to the speaker's love affair. At any rate, the person represents the practical world which regards love as a silly affectation. To use the metaphor, which involves a sort of paradox on which the poem is built, the friend represents the secular world which the lovers have renounced."⁶

Here we notice that within a few lines, Brooks could suggest the theme of the poem, which involves a metaphor, which in turn involves a paradox. Thus, the New Critics learnt to appreciate the value of metaphor from their study of the metaphysical poets.

Brooks and Poetry

The New Critics not only took the metaphysical poems and lauded them, they also took the Romantic, Victorian and Modern poems and explicated them showing their success as well as their failure. In Brooks' analysis of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", we can notice how Brooks has taken it as an independent poetic structure and looked in for irony and paradox. Brooks concludes that Wordsworth wrote the ode with the dark side of his mind, that is, the poem emerged out of his unconscious and his conscious rendering to it was minimum. Brooks also praises the consistent symbolism in the poem. He mentions that the poem is about the human heart, its growth, nature and development. In a similar analysis of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Brooks considers the phrase 'cold pastoral' to be the central paradox of the poem. According to him, the urn itself is cold, and the life beyond life which it expresses is life which has been formed and arranged. The urn, according to Brooks, is as enigmatic as eternity is: its history is beyond time. Brooks, thus, believes that the Romantics are capable of bringing in several images and symbols to suggest a paradox of ambiguity, yet they cannot compete with the Metaphysicals for the conceits that are employed by them in their poetry.

Tennyson, according to Brooks, is the last of the Victorians who gave importance to the subtleties of paradox and ambiguities. However, Brooks does not consider him a great poet. Modern poetry, according to Brooks, is difficult. Few are difficult because they are bad – the total experience remains chaotic and incoherent because the poet cannot give it a form. Few are difficult because of the special problems of civilization. And a great deal is difficult for the reader, because few people are accustomed to reading poetry as poetry, and it is difficult to get it across. According to Brooks, the Modern poet has thrown the responsibility to the reader. The reader must be on the alert for shift of tone and ironic statement, and for suggestion rather than a direct statement. The reader must also be well acquainted with the general tradition – literary, political, and philosophical. After having talked in detail about the different kinds of poetry, Brooks concludes in *The Well Wrought Urn* that a successful poem "is not only the linguistic vehicle which conveys the thing communicated most 'poetically', but that it is also the sole linguistic vehicle which conveys the thing communicated accurately. In fact, if we are to speak exactly, the poem itself is the only medium that communicates the particular 'what' that is communicated."⁸ Brooks, sometimes, also limits himself to the conventional observation that poetry can help us understand ourselves and conceive more vividly the reality of each other's existence. Such an observation can be attributed to Brooks' Christian commitments. Thus, Brooks examines the course of English poetry and finds that with the rise of science and the discrediting of the imagination, poetry from Dryden onwards exhibits little of the wit, irony and paradox, which characterize the best Elizabethan and Metaphysical verse. The Romantics inherited only an inadequate theory of metaphor as mere ornament, and the Romantic revolution was abortive. However, according to Brooks, in the poetry of Eliot, Yeats, Auden, Ransom and Warren, a 'powerful restatement'⁹ of the Elizabethan views can be traced. He further states that the great strength of modern poetry lies in the fact that it attempts a complete liberation of the

imagination; compared to the poetry of Donne and Eliot, most nineteenth century efforts are immature.

Brooks and Fiction

Brooks' criticism of fiction is based on the formal methods of approach, as his criticism of poetry. He continues to see form as meaning and coherence as structure in fiction. He does not see any difference between the dissection of a poem and that of a novel. For instance, in his explication of Faulkner's novels in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963), Brooks does a close reading of Faulkner's novels, considering their structure and theme. Brooks follows a pattern of analysis. Firstly, he talks about human beings strained away from nature and how while growing up, due to education and experience, again he moves away from nature. From the individual, Brooks moves on to the society; the problem of the Twenties in his country. Later, he goes on to the theme of man's endurance, the definition of man and a commentary on humankind. And again, he goes to the past and considers history as an imaginary construct which leads on to the last one, that is, again the initiation of a boy into manhood, which is quite similar to the first theme as man slowly straining away from nature.

Brooks and Coleridge

Brooks' analysis of poems and novels remind us of what T.S. Eliot had remarked once: "The criticism of today indeed, may be set to be in direct descent from Coleridge."¹⁰ And S.E. Hyman had affirmed that Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) can be said to be "The Bible of Modern Criticism"¹¹. And New Criticism is most indebted to Coleridge. Among the New Critics, Brooks is most indebted to Coleridge. Three major critical tenets to Coleridge – Organic Unity, Poetic Imagery and Reconciliation of Opposites – have been employed by Brooks in his critical analyses.

Through the organic concept of art, a fine balance of unity is achieved between the guiding principle and spontaneous response. Coleridge is against the rules imposed from outside. The principle of organic unity is a direct outcome of his theory of imagination. According to this theory, a truly imaginative work is a complete organic whole in which the constituent parts mutually explain and support each other. The complete meaning of a work is determined only after a careful examination of the constituent words, images, plot and symbols. Brooks inherits the organic conception of work of art from Coleridge. According to Coleridge, organic images possess a deeper meaning, as they are the outcome of the synthetic imagination of the poet. With his imaginative faculty, the poet is able to modify the images and feelings by placing them in a certain order to create a unified whole.

Coleridge also maintains that throughout a literary discourse, opposites have to be reconciled. This activity can be accomplished by the unifying power of imagination. This was again taken up by the New Critics through critical terms like Paradox, Tension and Ambiguity. Brooks' comments on Coleridge's Theory of Imagination:

Coleridge was prepared to believe that the uniting of the opposite and the discordant was one of the legitimate functions of the imagination, and further, that more than a mere yoking or reconciliation might be accomplished.¹²

According to Brooks, the 'paradox' would bring about this unity. Led by the principle of organic unity, Brooks asserts that "the poet attempts to fuse the conflicting elements in a harmonious whole"¹³. Thus, Brooks' concept of irony and paradox is a re-interpretation of the Coleridgean idea of unity in diversity which points out the co-existence of antithesis and synthesis in a work of art.

Brooks and The Theory of *Dhvani*

Brooks' method of criticism also reminds one of the Theory of *Dhvani* propounded by Anandavardhana. Ancient Indian Poetics, like the Greek Poetics, concerns itself mainly with drama, but poetry in the Indian concept is an integral part of drama, and also since drama is a kind of poetry, there are several observations on the nature of poetry to be found in Indian treatises on Poetics. Bharata, the first Indian critic, devotes some of the most important chapters of his treatise *Natya Shastra* to the language of drama, literary composition, metres, excellences and flaws of style, figurative expression and the construction of plot. These contentions were elaborated by Abhinava Gupta in his commentary on Bharata – *Abhinava Bharati*. Nevertheless, it is Anandavardhana, who is considered the principal aesthete of Sanskrit criticism. The Theory of *Dhvani* in his treatise *Dhvanyaloka* is a landmark in Sanskrit aesthetics because here, he makes *Dhvani* and *Rasa*, the principal aims of poetry. Next only to the *Rasa* Theory in importance, the Theory of *Dhvani* considers suggestion/*Yvanjana* as the characteristic feature of literary discourse. Anandavardhana uses the term '*dhvani*' for his theory of poetic suggestion. Kunjuni Raja in his article "Theory of *Dhvani*" remarks about Anandavardhana:

He says that this term is taken directly from the grammarians; just as the sounds of utterances reveal the integral linguistic sign, so also a good poem with its sound as well as the literal sense reveals over and above the literal sense, a charming sense which has great aesthetic value.¹⁴

Thus, Anandavardhana suggests that a good poem has got something deep within it, and on explication or close reading, it reveals the charming sense of the poem. Therefore, critics are supposed not to just go to the surface level meaning of the poem, they ought to do a closer reading of the poem. And this is exactly what the New Critics propose too.

On account of this function, the term '*dhvani*' is applied to suggestive poetry when the suggested sense predominates over the literal sense. According to Anandavardhana, suggestion is the soul of poetry. Every poem would possess a literal and an implied meaning. The literal meaning or '*vacya*' is found only in the parts of the poem, while the implied meaning or the '*pratiyamana*' depends on the whole poem. Thus, the criticism also depends on an organic unity in the poem. The suggested sense, according to this theory, is understood only by men of taste who know the essence of the poetry, not by those who know only grammar and lexicon. And since this sense is the most important element of poetry, all good poetry gives prominence to it. Therefore, the Sanskrit aestheticians consider a poem as an organism and each part of the organism combine together to make a unified whole. This is a major point of coincidence of the Sanskrit Critical Theory and the New Critical Theory.

Therefore, the highest type of poetry, according to the Theory of *Dhvani*, is "such poetry in which the words and their literal meanings occupy a subordinate position, suggest some charming sense, an idea, a figure of speech, or any notion is called *Dhvani*"¹⁵. And *Dhvani* becomes an all-embracing principle that explains the structure and function of the other major elements of literature like the aesthetic effect (*rasa*), the figural mode and devices

(*alamkara*), the stylistic value (*riti*) and excellences and defects (*guna-dosa*). Thus, a combination of *rasa* and *dhvani* theories are adequate and sufficient to analyze the constitution of meaning in literature.

The 'meaning' that they refer to here is derived from within the work of art itself. New Criticism also believes in deriving the meaning from within the text. And they look in for the meaning with the help of such devices like metaphor, irony, image, symbols, tension, ambiguity, and paradox. Similarly, the Sanskrit aestheticians derive the meaning with the help of *rasa*, *alamkara* and *riti*. Therefore, the text in itself is of a greater value than any other external factor. However, the Theory of *Dhvani* is only an extension of the *Rasa* Theory propounded by Bharata "according to which, the main object of the dramatic work is to rouse a *rasa*, or aesthetic emotion in the audience"¹⁶. And Anandavardhana extended this theory to poetry. It stresses the method of treatment in poetry. This doctrine is again found in New Criticism. For instance, in Brooks' article "The Motivation of Tennyson's Weeper" found in his book *The Well Wrought Urn*, Brooks analyzes Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears". Tennyson seems to be concerned with the nature of the tears in the poem. But Brooks asks, "Are they idle tears or are they not rather the most meaningful of tears?"¹⁷ However, as a reader reads the poem, he would notice that the tears originate in some divine despair. And within the poem, the images from the past rise up with a strange clarity and sharpness that shock the speaker. Brooks, later, explicates the last stanza:

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for other; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in life, the days that are no more.

("Tears, Idle Tears")

This stanza is supposed to be very significant, according to Brooks, because "(it) evokes an intense emotional response from the reader"¹⁸. It is the emotion which suspends the readers for a while, and the reader might tend to think on philosophical terms about life and death. However, this stanza cannot be read in separation. It should be linked to the rest of the poem. It is this emotional response which Bharata talks about in his *Rasa* Theory, applicable for drama and later used by Anandavardhana in his Theory of *Dhvani*.

Once again, this reminds us of Aristotle's *Poetics*, wherein Aristotle talks about tragedy.

Tragedy...is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions.¹⁹

This theory can be applied to poetry as well. Aristotle uses the term 'catharsis', which is equivalent to purgation of emotions, that is, the emotional response of the reader/audience. Finally, all these theories give more importance only to the words, their sequence and language in general, which in turn evoke the favorable response among the readers. However, Anandavardhana reiterates that "suggestion by itself is not enough in drama or poetry; what is suggested must be charming, and this charm can come only through *rasa* or emotion"²⁰.

Abhinavagupta mentions three different psychological stages in the realization of *rasa* in literature. Kunjunni Raja puts them down in his article 'Theory of *Dhvani*':

The first stage involves the cognition of the formal or intellectual elements of the poem, and serves as a means to the second. The second stage consists of idealization of things in poetry or drama by the power of imagination in the reader or

spectator. The third stage can be marked as the climax of the inexpressible, effective emotional condition of the reader or spectator.²¹

The intellectual elements of the poem, according to Cleanth Brooks, would be irony, paradox, ambiguity, tension, metaphor, simile, images and symbols. Brooks' close reading of a poem or novel would comprise the excavation of these ideas. He believes that all these elements would suggest the theme of the work of art. This is the first stage in the Theory of *Rasa*, which leads on to the second, that is, the power of imagination. Here again, we can equate the Sanskrit aestheticians with the New Critics. The New Critics, especially Brooks, was influenced by Coleridge's Theory of Imagination, as suggested before in this article. According to Brooks, it is the legitimate function of the reader's imagination, which would help in finding out irony or paradox or ambiguity in a work of art. And the imagination works in the minds of the reader to bring about an organic unity that is bringing two discordant features together. For instance, in the analysis of Keats' "Old on a Grecian Urn", Brooks brings out all the major paradoxes in the poem at the outset, and finally concludes that a resolution is achieved at the end of the poem by the famous line "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" (Keats). Here, the resolution is achieved by the power of imagination of the speaker himself. Thus, the poem achieves an organic unity.

Nevertheless, the exact equivalent of imagination in Sanskrit poetics is 'Pratibha'. Abhinavagupta points out that it is imagination from which all creative works spring. For the awakening of the poets' imagination, there must be an initial emotional thrill in his heart. Again, the imagination of a poet who is genuinely under the influence of *rasa* can conceive only such fancies and images, and order them only in such ways as are most in harmony with his predominant emotional mood. Therefore, imagination is considered as a guiding star towards the awakening of *rasa* or emotion in the minds of the speaker or poet, and thus in the minds of the reader too.

Thus, this imaginative faculty leads to the third stage, which is the emotional response among the readers. The formal/intellectual, imaginative and emotional elements of a poem blend into one predominant sentiment and "awaken the *sthayibhava* of the reader or spectator, the relish of *rasa* is manifested as a unity in the heart, leaving no trace of the constituent elements; and this is why *rasa dhvani* is called *asamlakshyakrama – vyangya* or the suggested sense with imperceptible stages"²².

In *Dhvanyalokha*, Anandavardhana has presented a structural analysis of indirect literary meaning. He has classified different kinds of suggestion and defined them by identifying the nature of suggestion in each. Anandavardhana's verbal suggestion is further explained by Prof. Kapil Kapoor in his *Literary Theory: Indian Conceptual Framework*: "If we are able to explain how indirect meaning arise systematically, we are able to claim that all potential meanings are inherent in the text – all that the reader does is to exploit this system of verbal symbolism to construct a particular meaning. No doubt the text constitutes itself in each instance of reading, but this constitution is based in a finite system"²³.

Thus, Anandavardhana strictly believed in looking for meanings within the text. These meanings are attributed by the words that are inherent in a text. Therefore, one reading would suggest one particular meaning, and then the further successive readings would attribute different meanings to the text. However, a finite system of reading is necessary, that is, it should move in an orderly manner. Everything happens within the text. Tzvetan Todorov, a Narratologist (Russian) remarks: "Anandavardhana was perhaps the greatest of all theorists of textual symbolism"²⁴.

Nevertheless, Anandavardhana is indebted to Bhartrhari's *Sphota* Theory and he acknowledges it in *Dhvanyaloka*. By *Dhvani*, Anandavardhana meant "the sound structure of words (*sabda*). The

semantic aspect of *sabda*, the *Vyanjakasor* suggestors and the revealed or suggested meaning as such and the process of the suggestion involved”²⁵. Therefore, the Theory of *Dhvani* is a theory of meaning and symbolism, and this principle leads to the poetry of suggestion being accepted as the highest kind of poetry. Similarly, the New Critics believe that meaning, symbols and images only lead to the suggested meaning of the text, and the poem which possess the best suggested meaning is the highest kind of poetry.

Anandavardhana also proposes three levels of meaning, *abhidha*, *laksana* and *Vyanjana*. By *abhidha*, he means the primary meaning of a word, that is, the literal sense of a word. By *laksana*, he means a function of the word denoting a reference different from its normal and primary one, but somehow related to it. It may also be rendered as metaphor or transfer, the conditions of the transfer being either the unsuitability of the primary meaning in the context, or some relation between the primary and the actual referent or the sanction for the metaphorical or transferred sense of popular usage.

Brooks’ Theory of wit, paradox and irony also reminds one of the theories of Bhamaha and Kuntaka, both of whom thought that the essence of poetry is to be found in *vakrokti*, or the deviation that one sees in poetic speech, that is, in its obliqueness. Science or *Sastra* uses a language devoid of all its obliqueness, and it confines itself to the denotative or *abhidha*, while poetry or *kavya* exploits the denotative as well as the connotative, which is *laksana*. According to Kuntaka, the poet, exploitation of both the dimensions gives rise to a new dimension. They acquire this new dimension through *vaichitrya*, that is, strangeness:

...a strikingness of expression which is different from the established or current mode of speech, such as we find in *sastras* and the like. It is thus a deviation from the matter of fact, manner of treatment established in the sciences and the scripture, or more widely from established usage in general.²⁶

This ability to impart and obliqueness to speech is born of *kavi-pratibha*, or the power of imagination. He, therefore, says that it is these elements that come together and convert a normal speech or a mode of expression into poetic expression. Since this is the way speech becomes poetic, Kuntaka makes *vakroktia* basic constituent of all poetry, and thus builds a theory of poetics on its basis. This is very similar to Brooks’ Theory of Irony and Paradox. For Brooks, paradoxical elements are a formal requirement in poetry because they suggest how poetic is the work of art, that is, they show the unique qualities of being a poem. Thus, both the Sanskrit Aesthetic Theory and the New Critical Theory stresses on the *kavi-kausala*, that is, the craftsmanship of a work of art. However, the Theory of *Dhvanitoo* has an important point to make about the poetic expression:

While in a scientific proposition, the meaning of a word remains the same in whatever context it is used, in poetic expression the meaning of a word changes with the context and is not rigid within the same context, but sways and spreads like a wave. This activity of the poetic word is called *tarangayamanatva*. This is characteristic not merely of the poetic word, but of all artistic symbols... the essence of poetic expression lies in its spreading and spraying. It is in this spreading spraying, or, to vary the metaphor, resonating (*dhvanana*), that poetic expression lives, moves and has its being²⁷.

Thus, Brooks does a close reading of a work of art similar to what the Sanskrit aestheticians did. In “The Heresy of Paraphrase”, the last chapter of *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), Brooks, having examined ten superior works from *Macbeth* to the present, concludes:

...The common goodness which the poems share will have to be stated not in terms of content or subject matter in the usual sense in which we use these terms, but rather in terms of structure²⁸.

The New Critical Protocol

Therefore, the value of a poem for a New Critic depended not on its content, but on its structure. And they gave a great deal of importance to the structural unity or harmony that could be derived from a work of art. According to the New Critics, the conclusion of the poem is a working out of the various tensions that are set up by propositions, metaphors and symbols. And this unity is achieved by a dramatic process. In performing a close reading, the New Critical Protocol was laid down by the School of New Critics:

Select a short text, often a metaphysical or modern poem; rule out genetic critical approaches; avoid receptionist inquiry; assume the text to be an autonomous, ahistorical, spatial object; presuppose the text to be both intricate and complex and efficient and unified; carry out multiple retrospective readings; conceive each text as a drama of conflicting forces.; focus continually on the text and its manifold semantic and rhetorical interrelation; insist on the fundamentally metaphorical and therefore miraculous powers of literary language; eschew paraphrase and summary or make clear that such statements are not equivalent to poetic meaning; seek on overall balanced or unified comprehensive structure of harmonized textual elements; subordinate incongruities and conflicts; see paradox, ambiguity, and irony as subduing divergences and insuring unifying structure; treat (intrinsic) meaning as just one element of structure; note in passing cognitive, experiential dimension of the text; and try to be the ideal reader and create the one, true reader which subsumes multiple readings.²⁹

This system of protocols distinguished New Critical Formalist “close reading” from the practices of other schools.

Brooks and Other Schools of Criticism

However, New Criticism was pulled in conflicting directions by several pressures that surrounded it. The necessity to fight battles on several fronts forced the school to stretch its concepts till they became ambiguous. There were many who tended to reduce literary meanings to mere messages without the use of critical language. For such criticism, New Critics held that a poem should not mean but be, and that a paraphrase of a poem should never be confused with the poem’s meaning. They also believed that poetic meaning was embedded in the organic being of the literary structure. Thus, a poem was seen as an objective entity. It was absolutely self-sufficient. Gerald Graff, in his article “What was New Criticism” reiterates:

A continuity of assumption connects the New Criticism with the more radical skepticisms of recent continentally influenced movements, such as the “negative hermeneutics” defended by Hartman and practiced in different ways by Bloom, Paul de Man, Barthes, Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, and Hartman himself. Like the New Criticism, this negative hermeneutics participates in the understandable but misconceived reaction against positivistic certainty, which got underway with the romantic revolt against science.³⁰

Nevertheless, several other critical schools came up later, and few of them defended the New Critical stand, while the rest were opposed to it. Structuralism, though they give more importance to structure in terms of deep and surface structures, and is quite similar to New Criticism, they too question few New Critical stands. However, Deconstruction is in many respects “old ambiguity and irony writ large”³¹. In both the strategies, they dislocate and unmark the meaning of the work from the meaning seemingly intended by the author. Gerald Graff adds:

Just as a New Critic knows in advance that all literature manifests “the language of paradox” and thus can read virtually any text as an instance of this characteristic, the deconstructionist critic knowing in advance that all literature is by definition “about” its own textual problematics, can generate a new reading of any text whatsoever.³²

Nevertheless, as a New Critic, Brooks fought a number of literary battles, most of them successfully. He had a severe fight with Yvor Winters. When he reminded Winters that the paraphrase of a poem was quite different from its total meaning, Winters replied that he knew that, and then added that in his literary criticism, Brooks was the best paraphraser around. However, Brooks reserved his deepest contempt for the Deconstructionists who were, in his opinion, the end of everything. He was very articulate on almost every subject and he was deeply conservative in many ways and very serious about religion too. He was a traditionalist in all aspects of his life. His sense of the purpose of criticism was reflected in his appreciation of the varied modes of critical expression, not only vocal but also written. Although he was committed to writing well and spent most of his time composing lectures and essays, working on books, and writing letters, Brooks had a good regard for conversation too. He recognized the act and art of talking as fundamental to the creation, shaping, and maintenance not only of the literary community but also of the civilized community as a whole.

Brooks and Warren

Brooks and Warren met in 1924 in Nashville, and since then they shared a very good relationship which resulted in the publication of five textbooks and an anthology – *An Approach to Literature* (1936), *Understanding Poetry* (1938), *Understanding Fiction* (1943), *Modern Rhetoric* (1949), *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (1973) and *An Anthology of Stories from “The Southern Review”* (1953). They were together on four campuses, Vanderbilt in the 1920s, a one-year overlap at Oxford in 1930, LSU from 1934 to 1942 and Yale from 1950s till their retirements in the 1970s. On September 16, 1983, Warren wrote to Brooks:

I want to thank you devoutly for the pains you took with the poetry manuscript. It was very useful to me, and surprising in a few instances... Our long collaborations always brought something new and eye-opening to me, seminal notions, for me, often couched in some seemingly incidental or casual remark... (recorded as one of the letters written to Brooks in *The Southern Review*).

Warren also wrote an article “Conversation with Cleanth Brooks” in the book *The Possibilities of Order* and this article shows their ideas. They were two unusual men who gladly shared their delight in literature. Warren died on September 15, 1989 and Brooks died on May 10, 1994 due to the cancer of the liver. With his death, another chapter in American and Modern letters came to a close. Nevertheless, his legacy continues to live in the minds of those who are committed to literature and the criticism of it.

Conclusion

The Theory of *Dhvani* emphasizes that different kinds of meanings are present to lead the reader into a significant aesthetic experience. The artistic experience, formulated through words, word combinations and technical devices transcends them and asks the reader to go beyond these and into the total realized and suggested meaning of a work of art. And Brooks did a close reading of a work of art similar to what the Sanskrit aestheticians did.

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