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Literary Analysis of Critical Theory of I. A. Richards

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Abstract: *I. A. Richards was one of the founders of modern literary criticism. He was a famous British literary critic in the 20th century. I. A. Richards was one of the most significant voices of modern literary criticism, who enthused a generation of writers and readers through his writings. He was an influential supporter of the young T.S. Eliot. Principles of Literary criticism were the text that first established his reputation and pioneered the movement that became known as the "New Criticism" and highly controversial when first published. Principles of literary Criticism remains a work which no one with a serious interest in literature can afford to ignore. Pathology of Interpretation and literary analysis in critical theory of I. A. Richards has preserved knowledge for emerging writers. Practical criticism in Richards theory provided the basis for an entire critical method of literary analysis. Richards literature acts as a mirror not only for society but also for the emerging writers. His approach is pragmatic and empirical. I. A. Richards has made literary criticism factual, Scientific and complete. His work is milestone in the history of literary criticism regarding verbal and textual analysis, interpretation and evaluation.*

Key Words: Literary criticism, critical theory, pragmatic, empirical, verbal and textual analysis, method.

I. A. Richards was that Cambridge professor of criticism who turned literary criticism upside down in the 1930's. He inspired the New Criticism and won the admiration of poets such as T.S. Eliot. Trained originally in psychology, Richards penetrated into a new level of hard-headed thinking to literary criticism, pushing through the effusive waffling of critics past. Richards' work dealt mainly with poetry and in short, his burning question is what makes a poem great.

Richards dismisses all visual imagery from legitimate poetic criticism. The conjuring of mental images is an uncontrollable process. Indeed, Richards argues that for criticism to be legitimate, it must concern itself with things that can be experienced in the same way by different people. Talk of things that vary from person to person is useless. This point is so central that Richards literally defines a poem as a group of words that evokes a particular experience that does not vary greatly when read by different sensitive readers. Furthermore, the experience depends crucially on the sequential arrangement of words. The emphasis on experience may seem to be excessively abstract. However, Richards chooses the high road of meaning as the starting point of poetry because people would otherwise concentrate on irrelevant concrete details such as rhythm and rhyme. Concrete technical features like rhythm are fine in a poem but it is hardly what makes a poem interesting. As interesting thought experiments, Richards's takes lines from famous poems and substitutes them with prosaic and nonsensical lines that bear the same rhythm. As you can imagine, the substitutes do not sound particularly poetic.

It is the meaning of the words that determine the success of rhyming and rhythm. Richards proselytizes against the schools of literary criticism that hold the form as the paragon of poetry. Without the idea behind them, the form itself becomes a meaningless cage, all the more dazzling because they are empty of essence. There is nothing particular ennobling about the sonnet form, or the iambic pentameter. The haiku is no more mysterious than the rhyming couplet. Rather, it is what past poets has tried to say within these forms that have made them great.

Still, this is not to say that poetic devices are unimportant. Otherwise, there would be no difference between prose and poetry. In his definition of a poem, Richards specifies that in a poem, an invariant experience is evoked through the use of, amongst other things, the sequential ordering of words. In prose, the sequence of words is relative unimportant as long as the meaning is conveyed. In poetry, on the other hand, the relation of words further back in the poem exerts an almost magical influence on later words to create new patterns of meaning. This rich insight owes



much to Richards' training as a psychologist. Richards' argues that readers have an innate psychological tendency towards pathology of interpretation to look for patterns in a sequence of words - whether it be patterns in rhyming, scansion or rhythm. When one is reading prose, this tendency is normally repressed whereas in poetry, this tendency is exploited. When a line is read, one has a expectation that something similar will occur. When something similar does follow, aural associations are made and simultaneously, meaning associations are also made.

He exerts himself to establish a "scientific" theory of literary criticism, and for this purpose he applies psychological and semantic theories to literary criticism, which produces a profound and far-reaching influence on British and American literary criticism in the 20th century. And he enjoys great prestige in the world as the acknowledged "father" of New Criticism. This paper aims to study Critical theory of Richards for reasons that poetry has always greatly fascinated Richards and that his literary theory is mainly directed at poetry. Richards believes that in this modern society where traditions are threatened to dissolve and creeds are shaken, we can find comfort and support from poetry, so our mind can attain a complete equilibrium through poetry experience. Therefore, poetry still has great value in modern society as it did in the past.

This idea is a legacy of the British Romantic Criticism. Since poetry is so important, critics are obliged to tell readers what are good literature are, and how to read and evaluate literature. But the opinions yielded by the best minds since Aristotle, in Richards' eyes, are mostly conjecture and whimsies. In addition, impressionistic and aesthetic criticisms prevail at the beginning of the 20th century, and the criteria of value judgment are confusing. To battle this trend, Richards determines to establish a "scientific" theory of literary criticism, and "scientific", he understands, is to apply the latest development of modern science, specifically psychology and semantics to the theory of criticism. This approach demonstrates his intellectual courage and empirical tendency. So Richards is a mixture of empiricism and romantic idealism, a compromise and complementarily in which the one corrects for the limitations of the other. This paper intends to make a comprehensive and systematic study on critical theory of literary analysis, especially his theory of value and of communication, for they are the two pillars upon which his theory of criticism rests. It will also examine Richards in the tradition of Western criticism, exploring the mutual influence of Richards and other critics upon one another.

Artistic activity in literary analysis of I.A. Richards is a process in which the author communicates his experiences to the reader. Technology of interpretation distinguishes themselves from other valuable experiences in that artistic experiences are communicable. Impulses which commonly interfere with one another and are conflicting in him combine into a stable poise. This synthetic and magical power, Richards appropriates the name of imagination, reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities. Richards tells us that to judge a literature we must distinguish the communicative aspects and the value aspects of it. Sometimes art is bad because communication is defective, and sometimes because the experience communicated is worthless. But it is known that the vehicle and the experience cannot be separated.

In the work of Richards' most influential student, William Empson, practical criticism provided the basis for an entire critical method.

In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) Empson developed his undergraduate essays for Richards into a study of the complex and multiple meanings of literary analysis. His work had a profound impact on a critical movement known as the 'New Criticism', the exponents of which tended to see literature as elaborate structures of complex meanings. New Critics would usually pay relatively little attention to the historical setting of the works which they analyzed, treating literature as a sphere of activity of its own. In the work of F.R. Leavis the close analysis of texts became a moral activity, in which a critic would bring the whole of his sensibility to bear on a literary text and test its sincerity and moral seriousness.

Richards did not recommend unhistorical reading, isolated from the context. But his emphasis on the text as an autonomous entity, and his example of a criticism that is practical rather than pedantically historical, was enthusiastically taken up by the New Critics. A Survey of Modernist Poetry, by Robert Graves and Laura Riding.



published in London in 1927, contained a detailed analysis of Shakespeare's 129th sonnet, "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame". They demonstrated how several meanings may be interwoven together within a single line of verse. This inspired Empson, a student of Richards, and formed the model for a study of multiple meanings in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930). William Empson (1906- 1984). defines ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions" and classifies it into seven types representing advancing stages of difficulty. In his next book, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), interest shifts to the total meaning of whole works; the close readings present here reveal the influence of Marx and Freud. Empson's later essays, on Shakespeare, Milton and the novel, take due cognizance of the context of the work. He had no hesitation in going against one of the tenets of New Criticism, and declared (in 1955) that "A critic should have insight into the mind of his author, and I don't approve of the attack on 'The Fallacy, of Intentionalism.'" Richards's own analysis of specific texts is in the organicist tradition of poetic theory descending from Aristotle through the Germans to Coleridge. I.A.Richards was unusual in combining interest in reader response with scientific aims, but he took a simple psychological view of the reader. Later critics have investigated the role of the reader in much more sophisticated terms. The Constance school of phenomenologists (Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss) recognize that the reader's cultural and historical situation is a key factor in responding to the text. Some features of Richards's theory, such as his materialistic concept of poetic value, or his theory of communication, lack clarity and sophistication. It remains unclear why a more complex organization of impulses should be better than a less complex one and how a system of balances can be said to contribute to the growth of the mind. Nor is it clear that poetry is communication of specific emotional experiences of an author and that reading a poem enables us to have an identical or very similar experience.

But many features of Richards's criticism have not become outdated. They have become established parts of the Anglo-American critical tradition. These are his empiricism and humanism, and his organicist insistence on close reading, on careful attention to every detail of a text, on the principle that a literary text, like a living organism, functions through the interaction of all its constituent parts. In *Practical Criticism*, he carefully distinguished between the sense, feeling, tone and intention of a text. The discussion of rhythm and metre in *Principles of Literary Criticism* clearly showed that sound and meaning, metre and sense cannot be separated. Content is not something that can be discussed in isolation from the expression. In the words of R.N. Wellek, "The stimulus that Richards gave to English and American criticism (particularly Empson and Cleanth Brooks) by turning it resolutely to the question of language, its meaning and function in poetry, will always insure his position in any history of modern criticism."

Conclusion- Present paper concluded that the literary analysis in critical theory of I. A. Richards has preserved knowledge for emerging writers. Practical criticism in Richards theory provided the basis for an entire critical method of literary analysis. Richards literature acts as a mirror not only for society but also for the emerging writers. His approach is pragmatic and empirical. I. A. Richards has made literary criticism factual, Scientific and complete. His work is milestone in the history of literary criticism regarding verbal and textual analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

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