

Page - (01)

B.A. Part I (English Honours)

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Trends in Twentieth century criticism

Modern criticism is marked by different approaches. The most unimportant and cornered is the historical approach. It has more or less been discarded and has been replaced by textual or analytical approach. The surveys of the development of English criticism say that there is no continuity. They have seen "a record of chaos marked by sudden revolution" on the other hand Eliot's statement that "the criticism of today, indeed may be said to be indirect descent from Coleridge" may lead us to a different conclusion. Twentieth century criticism is not a "record of chaos", there are connecting strands between different critics of the period. Pound may be said to be a connecting link between Eliot and Yeats. Eliot's theory of 'objective correlative' is inspired by Pound's definition of poetry as

"a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like, but equations for the human emotions." Then comes G.A. Richards's emphasis on the social value of poems - importance of language and communication. His theory of imagination has links with that of Coleridge. Richards provides a link between Eliot and the 'New Critics' who believe in analytical criticism. By saying all these things by way of introduction the writer wants to point out that the different trends of modern criticism do not stand in isolation but have links among them. Some of the trends in modern criticism are (i) Workshop Criticism. It is a sort of prolongation of the poet's thinking that goes on to form his own verse. This sort of criticism has two limitations - (a) this cannot be applied to the works of other poets except the author and to

the works which is antipathetic to the author, (b) the critic's judgement may be unsound outside his own art.

(ii) Criticism of explanations by origins or criticism mingled with scholarship - Such types of criticisms are never helpful to the readers so far as understanding of poetry is concerned, they are not criticisms but investigation works which leave the reader more bewildered. His enjoyment of the poem is lost among the investigations. Mr. Eliot puts a very pertinent question - does it matter? If the explanation or investigation helps the reader in understanding a poem, it is all right but as Eliot says "For myself I can only say that a knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding a poem too much information about the origins of the poem may break my contact with it." Eliot is referring to Read's and Bat

(4)

son's investigations about Lucy's identity.

(ii) Psychological criticism - That is application of psychological theories to literary works. Such criticisms become more difficult than the work itself. First we have to understand the theory of Freud and Jung and then the poem which is definitely a tedious work. It may add more to our knowledge of psychological theories but may not necessarily enhance the understanding and enjoyment of a particular poem.

(v) Lemon squeezer school of criticism - This type of criticism had its origin in the classroom methods of G.A. Richards which in itself was a reaction against the method which diverted the attention from the poem to the poet. What the critics did was to squeeze each and every drop of meaning from a poem without any reference to the poet. It is a good method but it has certain dangers or demerits (a) the assu-

Page (05)

omption of the critic that there is only one interpretation of the poem he is dealing with and only his interpretation is right, (b) the danger of assuming that the interpretation is an account of what the poet was trying to do and (iii) the danger related to the understanding of that poem with which the reader is not acquainted.

The end.

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