



TRUE ESSENCE OF SUBJECT MATTER IN I. A RICHARDS' CRITICAL THEORY

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Abstract

The scope of literary criticism is wide which is subject to change with every age, era, and generation, intellectual and emotional developments. Richards, like the Russian formalists focusses on the subject matter rather than historical and biographical background of the writers. He focusses on the aesthetic nature of poetry, reader-response to literature, the meaning of poetry and benchmarks the standards of good poetry. Poetics of I. A Richards is expressive and astonishing in its resemblance with the aesthetic principles of Indian acharyas like Abhinav Gupta w.r.t the poet, poem and reader-response theory, and is also ungirded by a strain of non-Platonism imbibed from Coleridge. This paper focusses on the aspects of Richards' critical theory corresponding to elements of a literary text that provides pleasure in poetic process. This paper also studies the synaesthesia theory, a blend of harmony and equilibrium in poetry; aesthetics and beauty in poetry, and Richards' philosophy of good and bad poetry.

Keywords: Aesthetics, critical theory, literary criticism, poetics, synaesthesia.

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

In English grammar, the word aesthetic is an adjective whose experience is felt in relation to words like beauty, ugliness and intermediate experience. Richards's theory of aesthetics is not only centered on value of poetic beauty but is also concerned with the notable difference in aesthetic and ordinary experience. He suggests a scientific speculation to the idea of beauty and its aesthetic sense; his analysis of aesthetic experience is significant to the study of modern aesthetics.

Richards emphasizes that a poet is influenced by external forces and is discriminate with regard to it. A poet differs from an ordinary man in his freedom to explore and communicate through different elements of his experiences. Richards points out that a poet's state of mind can revive any

of his experiences. Indian aesthetics also asserts that a poet's concealed pre-disposition or latent inclinations can be revived besides memory. Richards' analysis of the poetic process is also scientific and he uses terms such as vigilance, attitude and attention to describe it.

Richards' psychological description of poetic creation is a process that goes on in a poet's mind. This scientific basis has its foundation in Coleridge's Coleridge on Imagination which Richards describes as an emotive imagination that empowers the poet to a heightened state of consciousness that triggers an exaggerated state of vigilance. Richards' scientific theory explains the relation between self and non-self. The poet's mind actively handles stimuli which may be strong or weak stimuli. Rather than passively receiving stimuli, a poet's mind

selects a particular stimulus that produces a number of impulses. Unlike an ordinary person, a poet or an artist does not suppress these impulses but organizes them effectively. An impulse is a psychochemical process that makes a poet subjective rather than objective. The relationship between stimuli and experience gives rise to a poetic experience on the part of the reader that brings harmony and equilibrium of our impulses creating beauty and poetic aesthetics called synaesthesia.

1.2 RICHARDS' THEORY OF SYNAESTHESIS:

In his work *The Foundation of Aesthetics*, Richards surveys the subject of aesthetics bringing forth his psychological and scientific theories of his own aesthetics through choices and rejections in understanding the true essence of poetic beauty. His theories reject traditional approaches to aesthetics through his scientific orientation. Richards outlines the subject matter in a pluralistic and pragmatic manner believing in appreciation of beauty in any form of art through adequate knowledge.

Richards points out that the term beauty itself may have different connotations in different minds. According to him the term beauty is synonymous to nature, truth, ideal, perfection, etc.; also, as an intrinsic and objective quality it is defined in dictionary which does not enlighten the reader. The fourth sense of beauty is relevant to the subject matter which believes in exploitation of a medium that causes pleasure.

Richards and his co-authors have explained the emotions in art with reference to empathy. But Richards denies the direct relationship between empathy and aesthetic experience considering empathy to be an experience of daily life. To explain this, Richards put forth the stimulus-response theory which considers a beautiful work to bring us close to exceptional personalities as this process triggers impulses that increase emotions of joy, fear, melancholy, horror, anger love, etc.

1.3 THE RICHARDIAN POETIC EXPERIENCE:

Richards provides a practical way of defining a poem in terms of a class of experiences which differ in degree and character from standard or ordinary experience. Poetic experiences reflect the

states of minds and every individual experience comprises of a fraction of actual experiences. Richards has a pluralistic approach to beauty in appreciating the aesthetics of an object w.r.t parts of a situation. The theory of beauty introduces the various functions of language as being emotive or scientific, as discussed in the previous chapter. The dual function of language provides an aesthetic sense to poetry not in the object but in its aspect, irrespective of the existence of truth or untruth. Further the symbolic functions of language that provide the foundation of beauty in literary work includes symbolization and its communication to the listener. Richards views criticism as a process of discriminating and evaluating experience.

Richards puts forth his empirical representation of the reading process in the form of a diagram which includes six events beginning from the visual sensations of the printed words to emotions and attitudes. Richards draws attention to the causal relations between events in the mind and that influenced by the environment when he explains the relation of thoughts to simple words or auditory verbal imagery like onomatopoeia that impacts understanding and comprehension. He also asserts that means should not be confused with ends.

Richards points out the impact of structures on the effect when he compares a lyric to a prose composition saying that the latter should be longer to produce comparable impact on the reader. Richards scientifically analyses the correlation between visual, auditory and sensory responses in reading a text. He considers the mind as an integral part of the nervous system that direct multiple responses.

1.4 POETIC VALUE IN RICHARDS' THEORY:

Richards emphasizes on the subject of poetic value as one of the most critical tasks to criticism distinguishing between experiences. Value enables a critic to categorize experiences as good or bad. Richards denies G.E Moore's claim of ethical property of a work. For Richards, the approach is psychological in differentiating between good, bad or indifferent experiences. Any exposition of feelings

in a statement is a psychological reflection based on the states of mind.

Richards' theory of value assigns value to experiences like aesthetics and an experience formed by one may be condemned by another. In describing valuable experiences, Richards asserts the connection between poetry and life. In fact, in the modern era characterized by scientific and technological advancements, poetry like other forms of art records valuable experiences. Chatterjee explains this by pointing out,

Richards affirms that the arts are our storehouse of recorded values. They spring from, and perpetuate hours in the lives of exceptional people, when their control and command of experience is at its highest... Richards contends that those constitute the most important judgments we possess as to the value of experience. (112)

1.5 GOOD AND BAD POETRY:

Richards laments the badness in poetry which has never been privileged to receive the attention it deserves. Like ugliness in poetry, bad poetry is ignored for its depreciating value and critics focus on the goodness of poetry. In identifying the badness in poetry Richards uses the parameters of communicative ability and value.

Richards definition of bad poetry is restricted to worthless communication but the process does occur. He describes poetry lacking in communication as being defective poetry. However, critics attribute badness in poetry to displeasing experiences but Richards believes that the original experience may have a value attached to it but failure in communication deprives it of its original value. In this way Richards also distinguishes bad poetry from defective poetry. Hence Richards logically concludes that the critical part reflects value whereas technical part determines the effectiveness of the object of communication. Moreover, value is attributed to experiences and not objects the critical part becomes the parameter for judgment of value.

Richards criticized other critics focusing on the goodness of poetry rather than the complications of badness in poetry. While other

critics attribute badness to displeasing experiences, Richards points out the flaws in communication that deprives poetry of value associated with experience. Richards distinguishes between bad and defective poetry by relating the former to critical part and latter to the technical part. The bad poetry, a critical part determines the value of experience whereas the technical part is concerned with the effectiveness of the object of communication. According to Richards, tone of the poet is crucial to the success or failure of communication in poetry and a bad poem withdraws the reader from valuable experience through artificial fixations of attitudes. Tone represents a disorder of personality creating suspicion.

Richards validates his point by comparing the sonnets of Wilcox and Keats. Wilcox's sonnets represent a disorder in tone and hence the consequences of bad poetry. Richards discards the verse form of Wilcox sonnets. As we move from the sonnets of Wilcox to Keats, the refinement in sensibilities becomes the course of education. Richards points out that the value of poetry is proportional to the nature of experience communicated by it. In *Practical Criticism*, Richards explains the goodness and badness of poetry in the form of ideas and responses. Chatterjee explains,

If good poetry owes its value in a large measure to the closeness of its contact with reality, it may thereby become a powerful weapon for breaking up unreal ideas and responses. Bad poetry certainly can be their guardian and ally. Bad poetry encourages unreal ideas and responses. Nearly all good poetry is disconcerting, for a moment at least when we respond to it, for it tends to break up our old, routine stock responses to experience. (138)

Richards also elaborates the theory of badness in poetry by relating it to the notion of sentimentality. He explains the term sentimental as emotions that are easily stirred, or a response that is too great for the occasion. Richards identifies the quality of a poem in qualitative terms, whether a poem is categorized as crude or refined. Richards states that quality and not violence of emotion

endows poetry with quality and hence poems which are moving are bad. He also emphasizes concreteness and coherence in poetry. A poetry can alienate itself from the risk of sentimentality by being confined to concreteness and coherence.

Reading of poetry should lead to an act of choice involving the acceptance of good poems and rejection of the bad. Chatterjee explains,

All that arguments or principles can do is to protect us from irrelevances, red-herrings and disturbing pre-conceptions. They may prevent our using bad arguments, but they cannot supply good ones. As Richards warns us, bad poetry has a seductive appeal for most of us, while good poetry has a secret repugnance Richards points to deep-seated treacheries within us which interfere with the right reading of poetry. (141)

1.6 CONCLUSION

Richards proposes his unique theory of synesthesia which is not completely tangent to other aesthetic theories. However, his theory of aesthetics provides a new perspective to analyzing the subject matter under consideration. Richards' conception of beauty and aesthetics is scientific in approach but has an empathetic attitude for emotions. For Richards, the poetic experience and poetic value is critical to a literary text which objectively and logically demarcates good and bad poetry.

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