

PAPER- LITERARY CRITICISM

Explication of *Principles of Literary Criticism*- Chapter 1 - Part 1

Introduction

John Crowe Ransom, in *The New Criticism* (1941) insists on beginning his book with a “discussion of New Criticism with Mr. Richards. The new criticism very nearly began with him.” In terms of the influence Richards exerted on the minds of young critics and writers of the time, it could be inferred that Richards had been the most important theoretician in the first half of the twentieth century. He published three volumes of poetry, but he is remembered primarily as a literary critic and teacher, not as a poet.

Ivor Armstrong Richards was a scholar of semantics, and along with the philosopher, writer and editor Charles K.Ogden formulated *Basic English*. *The Meaning Of Meaning* (1923), written in collaboration with Ogden, is an important contribution to linguistics. *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) was followed by *Science and Poetry* (1926), *Practical Criticism* (1929) and *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934). Richards rejected positivist criticism, which considers that human achievements have some bearings on the psychology of an individual, the period in which he lives and the race to which he belongs. Richards is of the view that the literary text should be studied independent of these three factors. He was fascinated by the developments in psychology and wanted to evaluate art in terms of the state of mind induced by it. He promoted a psychological theory of value, which has now become outdated due to later researches in psychology.

The Chapters in Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism*

In the Preface to *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards mentions that criticism is the endeavour to “discriminate between experiences and to evaluate them”. It would be impossible to distinguish between the experiences and the procedures of evaluation without the knowledge of the nature of experience, the theories of valuation and communication. He mentions that modern day critics believe in exciting the emotions in the mind appropriate to their subject matter. The chapters in this book perform the dual functions of providing an interesting commentary on the state of contemporary culture and acting as a new and powerful instrument in inculcating critical insight. Most of the chapters included in the text provide a psychological background to specific aspects of aesthetic appreciation and communication.

The thirty-five chapters in the text are

- I. The Chaos of Critical Theories
- II. The Phantom Aesthetic State
- III. The Language of Criticism
- IV. Communication and the Artist
- V. The Critics' Concern with Value
- VI. Value As An Ultimate Idea
- VII. A Psychological Theory of Value
- VIII. Art and Morals

- IX. Actual and Possible Misapprehensions
- X. Poetry for Poetry's Sake
- XI. A Sketch for a Psychology
- XII. Pleasure
- XIII. Emotion and the Coenesthesia
- XIV. Memory
- XV. Attitudes
- XVI. The Analysis of a Poem
- XVII. Rhythm and Meter
- XVIII. On Looking at a Picture
- XIX. Sculpture and the Construction of Form
- XX. The Impasse of Musical Theory
- XXI. A Theory of Communication
- XXII. The Availability of the Poets Experience
- XXIII. Tolstoy's Infection Theory
- XXIV. The Normality of the Artist
- XXV. Badness in Poetry
- XXVI. Judgement and Divergent Readings
- XXVII. Levels of Response and the Width of Appeal
- XXVIII. The Allusiveness of Modern Poetry
- XXIX. Permanence as a Criterion
- XXX. The Definition of a Poem
- XXXI. Art, Play, and Civilization
- XXXII. The Imagination
- XXXIII. Truth and Revelation Theories
- XXXIV. The Two Uses Of Language
- XXXV. Poetry And Beliefs
- Appendix A On Value
- Appendix B On Mr. Eliot's Poetry

Summary of the arguments presented by Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism*

Richards is principally concerned with obtaining value from the arts, the emphasis being given to the art of poetry. The concern for the attainment of value from poetry forms the foundation of his principal critical and artistic pronouncements.

Richards begins the book by pointing out that there are several impediments that prevent valid criticism. "Experimental aesthetics", as Richards terms it, is the attempt to render human tastes and actions conducive to laboratory examination. Criticism is so involved in pursuing insignificant aspects of arts that it disregards the value of art. The use of indistinct vocabulary mars proper understanding of critical concepts. He cites the instance where critics talk about objects of art as if they possess certain attributes, whereas what they should point out is that the objects trigger effects in us. To overcome these obstacles, Richard emphasises the need to understand the nature of experience initially, and then formulate a convincing theory of assessment and communication in the arts.

Richards proceeds to approach the first topic, which is experience that is analysed within the framework of psychology. Chapter eleven titled "A Sketch for a Psychology," describes the mind that forms a part of the nervous system where sense impulses are influenced by various stimuli. Human response to the stimuli rests on the needs of the body at the specific moment. This would mean that the basis of aesthetic experience would lie in the impulses that arise in the mind as a result of various stimuli. These stimuli may be both new and independent or associated with earlier experience. Several facets of experience such as memory, emotion, coenesthesia, and attitude are detailed in separate chapters.

Richards delineates another feature of experience, which is the difference between the experiences of the poet and an ordinary man in chapter twelve, "The Poet's Experience." He points out that "range, delicacy and freedom" are the three parameters that decide the nature of relationships that can be made from experience. The ability to make available the experience of the artist decides the poet's ability to remain in a specific state of mind when required. The artist possesses a higher degree of "vigilance", which is the capacity to organize the impulses satisfactorily and completely. The poet is better equipped to make use of his experience.

After elucidating the cause, nature and effect of experience, Richards concentrates on the other two aspects, namely value and communication. The arts are the "storehouses" of recorded values. A critic should not be concerned with value and morality. In chapter seven, "A Psychological Theory of Value," Richards defines value as anything that satiates a desire within an individual. Additional value is achieved when any desire is sacrificed to another. Value, defined in relation to desire, is the exercise of impulses and the fulfillment of their desires.

The artist is more apprehensive about values than anybody else. He constantly engages in recording and disseminating the experiences, which he thinks are more valuable to him. He would be the only person to have valuable experiences to record. He would be better equipped to organise the significant and trivial impulses that are a part of experience. The poet would be able to lay the foundation of morality because morality depends on value from life. This means that Richards denounces the "Art for Art's sake" theory of poetry, a theory which refutes external values in art. Richards advocates the harmony between real life and the world of poetry, for any severance would result in "imbalance, narrowness, and incompleteness in advocates" of the aesthetic theory.

Values, according to Richards can decide the quality of a poem. In chapter twenty-five, "Badness in Poetry," Richards asserts that art would be ineffective if communication is defective or if the experience communicated is not valuable. Effective communication is the prerequisite if value in arts is to be perceived by the spectator. In Chapter four, "Communication and the Artist" Art is the "supreme form" of communication, even though communication is not his primary objective. The artist is engaged in making the work suitable for his readers. Richards asserts that individual minds are able to relate to particular experiences, but the process of relation takes place under specific conditions. There can never be the actual transference of or participation in the shared experiences. Communication is a complicated process that occurs when the mind of an individual acts upon another mind and effects a change similar to it.

If art is recognised to be the ultimate form of communication, it follows that the artist is faced with the challenge of transmitting his experiences to the reader effectively. To achieve this, the artist must remain in a state of normality. No matter the amount of past experience available to the artist, he must be normal enough to communicate it. For effective communication, uniform responses that are initiated by stimuli and handled physically, are required. The artist should be able to organise his responses otherwise it would be disastrous.

After analysing nature of experience, the essence of value, and the importance of communication in the arts, Richards goes on to describe the three credentials of a good critic. First, he must be able to experience the soundness of the mind so that he can criticise a work of art. Second, the critic must be able to differentiate experiences by analyzing their subtle features. Third, he must be an expert at judging values. A critic who is unable to pass sound judgments on poetry in spite of having these qualities, is unsure of what exactly poetry is.

Richards is of the view that one of the reasons for the poor quality of criticism is the critic's inability to decipher what he is evaluating. The critic needs a definition of poetry that is practical. Richards considers poetry to be a group of experiences that differ minutely from standard experiences. This definition is more significant than calling poetry, the artist's experience because it would mean that only artists possess experience. In Richards' view, the reader's involvement is necessary for completion of the poetic experience.

The principal areas under discussion in *Principles of Literary Criticism* are experience, value, communication, poetry and the critic. The other matters taken for studies are analysis of a poem in chapter sixteen; rhyme and meter in chapter seventeen; allusiveness as a characteristic feature of modern poetry in chapter twenty-eight; creative imagination in chapter thirty-two; and the two uses of language in chapter thirty-four. The final chapter is on "The Poetry of T. S. Eliot," an appendix which was added to the second edition of the book in 1926. In many parts of the discussion on the poem, poet and imagination, Richards shows his allegiance to the theory of Coleridge. He agrees with Coleridge on the concept of imagination as a power that synthesizes and balances dissimilar qualities. The main principle behind the influence arts rests on this fact.

Principles of Literary Criticism ushered a new dimension of criticism that the literary world had never been exposed to before. Every modern critic, from a traditionalist like Lionel Trilling to a new critic such as Cleanth Brooks, has been influenced by this work because of its penetrating study of experience, value, and communication and its definition of poetry.

Some Important Discussions in *Principles of Literary Criticism* in Brief

- Richards attempts to establish a theoretical frame work for criticism which would free it from subjectivity and emotionalism.
- He proposes a psychological theory of art. Art is valuable because it helps to order the impulses.
- He dismisses the concept of a special aesthetic taste. Aesthetic experience is similar to ordinary experience.

- Art experience is complex and unified. Art experiences do not merely have intrinsic value. It is possible to analyse art experience and examine its value in ordinary life.
- Value and communication are the “two pillars” upon which the theory of criticism rests. The arts are the absolute form of the communicative activity.
- Art is concerned with getting the work to embody the artist’s experience.
- The mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. It is dangerous to try to analyse the inner workings of the artists mind by the evidence of his artistic work
- Arts can improve the quality of life by communicating valuable experiences.
- It is improper to consider value a transcendental idea. Metaphysical or ethical consideration should be kept out of literary criticism. He proposes a psychological theory of value. According to Richards, anything that satisfies the impulses is valuable. These desires may be conscious or they may operate at the subconscious level.
- The chief function of art is to organize impulses.

Richards’ psychological theories have become obsolete with the passage of time. Moreover, it is difficult to accept the role of art in ordering the impulses of the mind. Richards was one of the first to indicate the importance of the response of the audience. But he did not investigate the role of the audience further. The critics of Reception Theory and Reader Response schools like Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich and Stanley Fish have analysed the response of the reader and its value in criticism.

The Views of Coleridge and Richards

Richards is primarily a theoretical critic like Coleridge and he has indulged in literary analysis only as an illustration of a method. Coleridge is a poet who sacrificed every other interest out of obsessive love for poetry. Richards’ interest in poetry seems to convey the point that poetry is not an illustration of the aesthetic principles or data to provide experiments towards a theory of communication. Richards’ criticism is as abstract as Coleridge’s. While Coleridge’s critical pronouncements are filled with fervor and zeal, Richards’ critical stand is iconoclastic and anti-romantic.

Summary

Richards’ literary theory is quite original for his rejection of aesthetic, the resolute reduction of the work of art to a mental state, the denial of truth value to poetry and the defense of poetry as a power that orders the mind, and provides equilibrium and mental health. Richards is unusual in combining interest in the response of the reader with scientific aims, but he takes a simple psychological view of the reader. The Reader-response school of criticism recognises that the reader’s cultural and historical situation is a crucial factor in responding to the text.

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OBJECTIVES

- Introduce the critic I.A Richards and outline his important critical works.
- Comprehend the significant arguments in the book *Principles of Literary Criticism*.
- Comprehend the framework of *Principles of Literary Criticism*.
- Frame an assessment of the main arguments of the book.
- Outline the significance of the book *Principles of Literary Criticism*.

Frequently asked Questions (FAQ)

Answer the following questions in a sentence or two.

1. What does Richards mention in the Preface to *Principles of Literary Criticism*?
a. Richards mentions that criticism is the method to “discriminate between experiences and to evaluate them”. It would be impossible to distinguish between the experiences

and the procedures of evaluation without the knowledge of the nature of experience, the theories of valuation and communication.

2. What is the last chapter in the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism*?

a. The final chapter is on "The Poetry of T. S. Eliot," an appendix which was added to the second edition of the book in 1926.

3. What was Richards mainly concerned about in *Principles of Literary Criticism*?

a. The concern for the attainment of value from poetry forms the foundation of his principal critical and artistic pronouncements.

4. Mention one of the reasons for the poor quality of criticism as suggested by Richards.

a. Richards is of the view that one of the reasons for the poor quality of criticism is the critic's inability to decipher what he is evaluating.

5. Which are the principal areas under discussion in *Principles of Literary Criticism*?

a. The principal areas under discussion in *Principles of Literary Criticism* are experience, value, communication, poetry and the critic

Answer the questions in a paragraph of 100 words

1. The importance of value and communication, according to Richards.

a. **Hints:** Values- decide the quality of a poem.- art would be ineffective if communication is defective - Effective communication is the prerequisite if value in arts is to be perceived by the spectator - Art is the "supreme form" of communication, even though communication is not his primary objective - individual minds are able to relate to particular experiences, but the process of relation takes place under specific conditions- Communication - complicated process - mind of an individual acts upon another mind and effects a change similar to it - art recognised to be the ultimate form of communication - the challenge of transmitting his experiences to the reader effectively- artist normal enough to communicate it - responses that are initiated by stimuli and handled physically, are required - artist should be able to organise his responses otherwise it would be disastrous.

2. The views of Coleridge and Richards.

a. **Hints-** Richards is primarily a theoretical critic like Coleridge and he has indulged in literary analysis only as an illustration of a method. Coleridge is a poet who sacrificed every other interest out of obsessive love for poetry. Richards' interest in poetry seems to convey the point that poetry is not an illustration of the aesthetic principles or data to provide experiments towards a theory of communication. Richards' criticism is as abstract as Coleridge's. While Coleridge's critical pronouncements are filled with fervor and zeal, Richards' critical stand is iconoclastic and anti-romantic.

Answer the following questions in an essay of about 250 words

1. Attempt a summary of the arguments presented by Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism*

a. **Elaborate :** Richards attempts to establish a theoretical frame work for criticism which would free it from subjectivity and emotionalism - proposes a psychological theory of art - Art is valuable because it helps to order the impulses - He dismisses the concept of a special aesthetic taste. Aesthetic experience is similar to ordinary experiences- Art experience is complex and unified. Art experiences do not merely have intrinsic value.

It is possible to analyse art experience and examine its value in ordinary life - Value and communication are the “two pillars” upon which the theory of criticism rests - The arts are the absolute form of the communicative activity - Art is concerned with getting the work to embody the artist’s experience - The mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation. It is dangerous to try to analyse the inner workings of the artist’s mind by the evidence of his artistic works - Arts can improve the quality of life by communicating valuable experiences - It is improper to consider value a transcendental idea. Metaphysical or ethical consideration should be kept out of literary criticism. He proposes a psychological theory of value. According to Richards, anything that satisfies the impulses is valuable. These desires may be conscious or they may operate at the subconscious level - The chief function of art is to organize impulses.

Quiz

1. Who insists on beginning his book with a “discussion of New Criticism with Mr. Richards....”?

- a. Allen Tate **b. J.C. Ransom** c. Cleanth Brooks d. Joel Spingarn

2. Name the book written by Richards along with C.K.Ogden.

- a. Basic English** b. *Concepts of Criticism* c. *Contemporary Literary Theory*
d. *Principles of Literary Criticism*

3. What was added to the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism* in 1926?

- a. Preface to Lyric **b. Appendix B on T.S.Eliot** c. Epigraph d. A Note

4. What is Appendix A in *Principles of Literary Criticism* about?

- a. dramatic art **b. value** c. criticism d. Allen Tate

5. To who does Richards show allegiance with regard to the discussion of poetry and imagination?

- a. Allen Tate b. F.R.Leavis c. T.S.Eliot **d. Coleridge**

Glossary

fervour: passion

zeal: enthusiasm

iconoclastic: criticising valued beliefs or institutions

Assignment

I. Answer the following questions in a sentence or two.

1. What are the dual functions of the book *Principles of Literary Criticism*
2. Whose involvement is necessary for the completion of the poetic experience, according to Richards?
3. Name the critical works of I.A.Richards.
4. What is necessary for effective communication?
5. Why is it important to understand the nature of experience?

II. Answer the questions in a paragraph of 100 words

1. Preface to *Principles of Literary Criticism*

III. Answer the following questions in an essay of about 250 words

1. Contribution of I.A Richards to New Criticism.

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