VOLUME 3
1978
NUMBER 1

THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Edward H. Strauch

THE NEO-ARISTOTELIAN ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE AND THE LIMITS OF LOGIC

To some it may be perplexing that an ancient treatise, Aristotle's *Poetics*, should still be considered authoritative and useful. Others may wonder how a mind in antiquity could have been so thorough and comprehensive that contemporary innovations in literary criticism hardly mark an improvement on that venerable work. For this reason, the Chicago critics have vigorously championed Aristotle's aesthetic in our day. If their attack on the New Critics is sometimes unfair, nevertheless, the neo-Aristotelians are justified in so far as they do battle for a philosophy of literature which has proved viable and durable. They regard Aristotle's *Poetics* as a model of methodology which for the past 2,300 years has repeatedly inspired worthwhile criticism.

For Aristotle, reality was revealed through the essential and persisting forms in nature. Because he conceived nature as that force which shapes life into significant forms, he thought a story to contain an entelechy which shapes human events into meaning. If ideal beauty to the ancient Greeks was described in terms of balance, rhythm, symmetry, and proportion, for Aristotle that ideal expressed itself in literature through the integration of all parts into an organic whole. Thus Aristotle's aesthetic reflected his view that the universe was a living being with its significance manifest in its wholeness and in its metamorphoses.

It is well known that the *Poetics* represents Aristotle's effort to justify literature on the grounds that any true imitation of nature is a form of knowledge and that such knowledge can produce a morally enlightening effect. In literature, form describes the direction events take if permitted to realize

themselves, or put another way, form shows a character fulfilling his destiny in order to discover his ultimate identity. Since poetry imitates the nature of man, the main value of poetry is in its reflection of the universal truths in human experience.

With these preliminary understandings in mind, we may turn to the more technical concerns of the Chicago 'school' of criticism. In addition to giving the format of *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (1952), Ronald S. Crane introduces the reader to the underlying assumptions and aims of the so-called neo-Aristotelian movement in criticism. Among these assumtpions, he separates the attitudes ascribed to the 'school' from their actual, basic principles.

First, the Chicago scholars are not the proponents of a special system of criticism, but rather they wish to develop a general theory of literature. Second, they do not neglect to study the language of poetry nor do they adhere to a pseudo-formalism which reduces a poem to the architectural principles of a literary genre. Third, their attachment to Aristotle's *Poetics* is not a question of doctrinal conviction nor are they committed dogmatically to Aristotle's philosophy. In sum, they reject the charges of pedantry made against them.

Crane regards linguistics, history and the analysis of ideas of equal importance to literary and artistic criticism, and although he urges the investigation of methods employed in the other arts for their possible use in literary criticism, he is opposed to any poetics derived from psychoanalysis or anthropology. Similarly, he is impatient at the hollow rhetoric that characterizes so much critical writing and he belittles the foolish attempt of contemporaries to raise problems that had been solved long ago. What the contributors of *Critics and Criticism* want is to develop a reasoned discourse about literature.

Crane deplores the diversity of contemporary views regarding the aims, nature, form, structure, texture, and worth of poetry. Such marked differences among critics have led

to scepticism, dogmaticism, or a flabby eclectic approach which maintains that all critical positions are partially false and partially true. The only counter to such confusion is to get behind the finite system of terms in order to determine whether its conceptual scheme 'derives from principles that define poetry as a kind of philosophy, . . . as an effect on the audience' or the like. We must also find out what mode of reasoning the critic uses. Does he infer causes, move from parts to whole, or use 'dialectical division and resolution'.[1]

Crane and his associates acknowledge that many distinct critical methods are valid in their own spheres and that each critic has the right to choose his own approach. However, the neo-Aristotelians reserve the right to question the efficacy of such methods, for every system has characteristic potentials and limitations. In particular, the Chicago scholars object to approaches which emphasize the part but neglect the whole or study the likenesses among poems but ignore the differences. Some contemporaries use one method of analysis for all poems, while other critics juggle pairs of dualistic terms but leave unanalyzed more important aspects of a poem.

The aim of *Critics and Criticism* is to show the methodological limitations of those critics who display an indifference to the lessons of the history of criticism. Only by drawing on critical principles which have effectively resolved the perennial problems of literature can one make universal statements that transcend the aesthetic peculiarities fashionable at any given time. The Chicago critics feel Aristotle's *Poetics* provides them with the basis for a comprehensive critical method which will examine the way poetic wholes function together.

To these critics, Aristotle's treatise seizes 'the distinctive nature of poetic works' as concrete artistic wholes (*Critics and Criticism*, p. 17). Since definitions and devices utilized in the *Poetics* were derived from the examination of many

literary works, the neo-Aristotelian approach is comprehensive for the following reasons: 1.) it embraces all the elements which produce definite effects on the mind; 2.) it transcends linguistic analysis and poetic techniques to account for the union and interaction of wholes; and 3.) it uses a great number of principles of literary construction whereby a wide range of pertinent distinctions among poems may be made. In other words, the Chicago critics feel they study the representation of significant human actions whereas the New Critics miss these because of their narrow preoccupation with linguistic paradoxes.

Crane admits that Aristotle's method has been misused when applied to poems constructed on quite different principles from those of ancient epic and tragedy. He acknowledges the limitations of the Aristotelian approach and admits that other critical techniques are needed to supplement it. However, Crane is definitely against extrinsic studies of poetry as those arising from the poet's life or from the spirit of the time, although once a poem itself is analyzed, it may be situated in the history of poetry. Finally, he regards bibliography, textual criticism, philological exegesis, and the history of ideas as essential tools to the Aristotelian method.

In sum, Crane's main objection to other critical approaches is that they have only proliferated ineffectual methods, and the reason for this is that such approaches have neglected the real achievement of traditional poetics. If criticism is to develop a comprehensive system such as that of Aristotle, it must be based on sound inductive reasoning which takes into account a wide range of literary examples. Only by such thoroughness will the concepts and methods of any system become truly viable.

The Principles of the Neo-Aristotelian Approach

If one seeks the conceptual scheme behind the neo-Aristotelian polemic against the New Critics, one finds that the Chicago scholars have attempted to develop a logic of

literature only to discover the limits of any such logic. If the neo-Aristotelians themselves aimed at combating pluralism, relativism, scepticism, and sophistry, their effort to evolve an absolute methodology resolved itself into three or four extremely simple epistemological principles. Behind their sophisticated arguments stands no genuine organon of their own. Nevertheless, the principles they have used have value in themselves.

Parts-Whole

Crane's introductory article underlines the first principle embraced by a majority of the neo-Aristotelians. He states that the salient defect of other fashionable critical approaches is that they treat parts of a poem as if they were functional wholes. Such approaches are irresponsible because they fail to make 'distinctions of form and function' between different kinds of literary work (p. 23). Such critics would commit fewer errors if they examined poetic works as concrete wholes rather than offer poetic theories based on parts of literary works. Thus the Chicago critics draw on Aristotle's concept of organic unity to point up the New Critics' inadequate exploration of the parts-whole relationship in a literary work.

In another article, 'The Critical Monism of Cleanth Brooks', Crane regards Brooks's near total emphasis on irony and paradox as deplorable.[2] What criticism needs is an adequate hypothesis about the poetic whole, not about the parts of the poem. We cannot assume that ambiguity, irony, and paradox are common to all kinds of poetry. To test an entire poem according to a single part is to distort the importance of that fragment. One cannot elevate a particular into a universal. By the limited context Brooks has chosen, he has kept himself from developing an adequate critical apparatus. Crane, therefore, proposes that an adequate critical method must be supported by sufficient evidence as to its utilitity. The theory of poetry needs to be multidimens-

ional, not unidimensional as pursued by the single-minded New Critics.

Crane's 'I.A. Richards on the Art of Interpretation'[3] also criticizes Richards for the same error of studying parts instead of the whole. Moreover, Crane objects to Richards' belief in the duality of human nature as the basis of our equivocal use of words. Richards has oversimplified the whole problem of reading texts by reducing their complexity to the distinction between the referential and emotional uses of language. However, since Richards argues that meaning occurs when pairs of contraries mingle, he sees man as endowed with a natural skill of interpretation or with an instinct for dialectic.[4] Crane rejects Richards' way of framing the problems of literature in terms of organic processes. Biological analogies and linguistics do not substitute for traditional grammar, logic, and genuine criticism.

W.R. Keast's article 'The New Criticism and *King Lear*'[5] also deprecates exploring the part and ignoring the whole. Keast is scandalized by Heilman's remark that any literary work may be studied as a structure of meanings. Keast finds the New Critics tend to overread everything which means they are trying to force a part into being the whole. One needs to analyze character, situation and plot *before* undertaking any study of the play's imagery. Hence Heilman fails to connect the imagery of *King Lear* to the larger elements of the play which are far more important to understanding the drama.

Elder Olson in 'William Empson, Contemporary Criticism, and Poetic Diction'[6] also lodges the same complaint against Empson, whose explanation of literature by its ambiguities stresses the part and neglects the total work.

Induction versus Deduction

In addition to pointing out the New Critics' failure to properly explore the parts-whole relationship intrinsic to any literary work, the neo-Aristotelians stress the need to evolve critical concepts and methodology out of an inductive study

of many literary works as Aristotle himself had done. Furthermore, the critic himself should proceed inductively when studying a particular text.

Elder Olson in the article on William Empson finds that the New Critics tend to turn a hasty guess into an entire method of criticism rather than to base their procedure on the example of many texts. For Olson, literary facts must substantiate critical hypotheses.

Keast, too, in the article on Heilman exhorts us to examine our hypotheses in order to make sure they are sufficiently founded on inductive evidence. Only in this way may one apply one's theory over a whole range of literary works. What Keast particularly disapproves of in Heilman's study is its deductive approach based on a narrow religious point of view. Thus Keast sees Heilman ascribing symbolic values to the play which derive solely from Heilman's peculiar theory of tragedy and morality and are not in the play itself.

What Keast appears not ready to admit is that the neo-Aristotelians themselves use Aristotle's *Poetics* deductively as a kind of philosopher's stone to test literary works and come to conclusions. Similarly, Crane's contention that critical problems have been resolved by Aristotle and that there is no need to solve the problems all over again proves the neo-Aristotelian approach itself to be largely deductive and not inductive.

Reductionism and Exaggeration

The neo-Aristotelians embrace a third principle. They refuse to reduce the significance of a whole to any of its compoenent parts, or conversely, they avoid singling out any trait in order to exaggerate its importance to the total meaning of a work.

Olson's article on Empson, for instance, finds Empson guilty of *reducing* all poetic considerations to diction and to problems of ambiguities. Indeed, Empson's

wilful reduction of the text of *Macbeth* to suit his narrow linguistic theory proves Empson's incapacity to handle a literary work. Olson denies that ambiguity is universal to all or even to the best poetry. It is not words which determine the meaning, but everything else in the poem which determines that meaning. What is needed is a discussion of the implications of human action and plot rather than Empson's reduction of the play to linguistic exercises as a universal method of literary interpretation. To counteract such reductionism, Olson would enlarge the scope of criticism to include a 'philosophy of arts and sciences, a discipline establishing and criticising . . . principles'.

R.S. Crane also objects to the reduction of the complexity of any text to elementary critical concepts such as irony, paradox, and the like. He sees Brooks as reducing all effects in a text to a single cause and censures Brooks's reduction of Coleridge's complex 'reconciliation of opposites' to a simplist formula. Ironically, then, although he is against the heresy of paraphrasing, Brooks himself is guilty of reducing complexity to unsophisticated statements. In short, Crane is against Brooks's monistic reduction of critical concepts. The multiplicity of Coleridge's approach collapses to Brooks's monism.

Keast makes clear his Olympian scorn for Heilman's reduction of *King Lear* to patterns of recurrent images, and he rejects Heilman's view that structure can be set forth *only* by means of patterns of imagery. Heilman finds what he wants to find in the play. Furthermore, Heilman's exegesis reduces the play to one key concept: salvation. Keast maintains that this leads Heilman to absurd readings which condense *King Lear* to a collection of platitudes. In other words, the complexity of the tragedy is impoverished to an abstract, optimistic philosophy. Rather than analyze *King Lear* as a profoundly Christian play, Keast implicitly wants it analyzed according to Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is modeled on ancient Greek tragedy.

Actually, Keast is guilty of what he is accusing Heilman of, for Keast is insisting that one should explore the play's literal meanings, not its symbolic ones. Keast himself wants to *reduce* the play to its concrete moral problems. If Keasts's recommendations were followed, the texture, complexity, and significance of *Lear* would truly be impoverished. By contrast, Heilman's analysis and interpretation is a model of orderly and inductive discussion whereas Keast's ex-cathedra judgments are based on casuistry. Nowhere in Keast's condemnation do we see Aristotle's scientific open-mindedness or his sound syllogistic reasoning.

Definition and Meaning

A fourth principle of neo-Aristotelian thinking is concerned with proper definition and adequate meaning.

To Elder Olson, Empson's discussion of the seven types of ambiguity typifies the vagueness of the definitions of the New Critics. In Empson's use of the key term *ambiguity*, he confuses potential significance (what a text might mean) with actual significance (what a text actually means). Indeed, Empson hardly seems aware of the distinctions among implication, inference and meaning. Furthermore, the classification into seven types of ambiguity is based on dubious distinctions.

What is dangerous in such vagueness of definition is that it leads to parallel indefinite understandings of the true aim and scope of literary criticism. What is worse is that the New Critics use their definitions as proofs of what they intend to prove rather than as tentative bases for further inquiry. In sum, Olson disapproves of definitions as deductive proofs to illustrate the meaning of a text. Rather, a definition should be used as a hypothesis for the inductive investigation of a literary work.

Elder Olson provides a deeper insight into the way language functions to effect meaning. With ancient tragedy in mind, Olson points out that language is used both to conceal and half conceal the significance of events. Clarity

of language is in proportion to reader expectation, and any increase in implication increases the clarity of the text. Conversely, suspense occurs with every delay of meaning, and suspense is maintained until meaning is found.

Elsewhere Olson states that metaphor contains a dialectic, and this observation makes us realize that language itself may be used dialectically. Indeed, the suspense Olson describes may be regarded as a dialectic between the known and the unknown (and apparently threatening). Meaning then is derived from the resolution of the dialectic between the understood and the not yet understood. This leads us to infer that definition, like metaphor, is the result of a dialectic.

Dialectic

Thus far we have seen how the neo-Aristotelians have been preoccupied with the parts-whole relationship in the organic unity of a literary work, with the use of induction and deduction as a general critical method, with avoiding the reduction of a total work to a few simple elements or the exaggeration of a few traits into a total interpretation. Similarly they have been concerned with concision of definition and meaning. However, Elder Olson's view that dialectic is the very essence of literary composition points out the awakening of the neo- Aristotelians to the limits of logic.[7] In other words, a literary work and its language cannot be completely discussed by using logic alone, for metaphor, definition and literary composition itself manifest dialectical processes.

In fact, Crane's objection to Brooks's monistic reduction of Coleridge's complex concept 'the reconciliation of opposites' may be regarded as a criticism of Brooks's forced syntheses. Put in a larger context, Crane finds the new Critics' exploration of partial antitheses, such as 'irony' and 'paradox', to be an insufficient investigation of the overall dialectic inherent in a poem or play. This means that Crane is *for* an adequate dialectical study of literature.

The neo-Aristotelians thus show a distinct awareness of the relations between philosophy and literary criticism. Not only are they generally concerned with the limitations of systems of thought; they are also conscious of the limits of logic. Their increasing preoccupation with dialectical reasoning is evidence of this.

Elder Olson's article 'An Outline of Poetic Theory'[8] confronts the linguistic and methodological Tower of Babel which characterizes literary criticism of the past few dacades. Olson maintains that the differences among critical approaches should not be regarded as outright contradictions due to mutual incompatibilities. One must distinguish the truth and falsity of viewpoints from the methods of formulating those viewpoints.

He sums up the four basic philosophical positions behind the diversity of critical approaches. The *dogmatic* position believes in one truth and discredits other points of view as false in part. The *syncretic* position considers all positions partially false and attempts to 'synthesize' whatever is true in them. Such a forced reconciliation tends to distort whatever significance the original positions contained. The *sceptical* view dwells on the difference among systems of thought and tends to regard them all as false. Dogmaticism, syncretism, and scepticism are concerned with doctrine alone. On the other hand, the *pluralistic* position attempts to account for doctrine and method because it considers it possible to embrace a plurality of truths and philosophical directions. All discussions of technique, form and process are largely determined by both the subject matter and the philosophical view held by the critic.

The discussion of any subject ensues from its manner of formulation. The diversity of critical approaches is a consequence of the general tendency to concentrate on four areas of interest: (1) the art object as product; (2) the artist's activity; (3) the artist's mind or character as source of art; and (4) the effect of art on an audience.

If anything is to resolve this diversity and its consequent multiplicity of method, it is the dialectical method. However, dialectical reasoning is an exceedingly complex matter. It requires Olson to distinguish between two basic kinds of dialectic. One kind is the *integral* or *likeness dialectic* which proceeds by combining like with like. When criticism centres on the art medium, integral dialectic tries to establish universal criteria for all aspects of literature, showing which properties poetry holds in common. Thus integral criticism tends to draw the analogy between artist and artistic process, nature and natural processes, God and the continuous creativity evident in the universe. If it concerns itself with the end of art, its goal, like those of man, is linked to the teleological purpose of the divinity.

On the other hand, *differential* or *difference dialectic* proceeds by separating dissimilars. When criticism centres on the art medium, differential dialectic seeks to discriminate appropriate criteria for each kind of diction and to discover which properties are characteristics of poetry alone.[9] The defect of both integral and differential dialectics is that each rests on a part, instead of a whole, so that each attributes everything to a single cause.

Olsons finds that Plato and Aristotle illustrate these two basic kinds of dialectic (*Critics and Criticism*, pp. 552-3). Whereas each embraces likeness and differences, Plato's approach is primarily integral and Aristotle's is differential. Plato's dialectic subsumes everything to a single cause whereas Aristotle differentiates causes. However, Aristotle aims at the differentiation and analysis of poetic forms with the purpose of studying how causes converge to effect specific emotional responses. Put another way, Aristotle's method differentiates in order systematically to resolve composites into their simplest parts.

Olson stresses the importance of the *adequacy* of any critical approach. A partial system as that of the critic Scaliger is inadequate in comparison to a comprehensive system as

that of Aristotle. To be sure, partial systems may be used to supplement each other, but a comprehensive system inter-translates elements to form total knowledge (ibid., p. 559).

Olson is concerned with the kind of poetics which regards poetry as a system of actions. As such, he is mainly interested in dramatic form because it best exemplifies the problems inherent in general poetics. Anticipation and expectation play a vital role in the emotional effect a literary work will produce. Wherever we anticipate, the unexpected may well occur (ibid., pp. 561-2). In other words, a tragedy must not only be integrated; its plot should effect a catharsis through reversal and recognition. Hence when anticipation meets the unexpected, there we have a dialectical confrontation. Thus, according to Olson, the dialectical interaction in tragedy calls for a dialectical study of poetic form.

In Richard McKeon's article 'Literary Criticism and the Concept of imitation in Antiquity', he not only traces the early history of 'imitation' but also clarifies how Aristotle and Plato used different dialectical approaches to define the concept of imitation.

As is characteristic of many critical terms, the word has assumed a variety of meanings in history. In Plato's dialogues the term is left universal in scope and indeterminate in application. The dialectical method is used to determine its meaning in particular contexts, and Plato applies the term to human activities as well as to 'natural, cosmic and divine processes' (*Critics and Criticism*, p. 149). Although the word *imitation* is defined, it 'receives no fixed meanings.' Furthermore, through images and associations, the word 'suffers extensions and limitations' (ibid, p. 150) so that its meaning 'may expand and contract' when applied to poetry or philosophy (ibid., p. 152). Beyond describing human institutions, the term may even depict how things change. Since the 'universe itself is a copy of the intelligible' (ibid., p.156) what is imitated may mirror what is happening to the universe itself (ibid., p, 153).

Plato is concerned with the correspondence between being (as eternal Form or Idea) and appearance, between truth and falsity, between knowledge and opinion. He expbres the profess o imitation dialectically by dividing the visible from the intelligible and by dividing each part into two classes which in turn are divided. Hence one phase of Platonic dialectic is reasoning by division, and distinctions.

In the respect that limitation deals in likenesses, so does all discourse. When 'used with knowledge' imitation need not lead to falsehood, but it must be borne in mind that imitation may 'be of lesser things or of greater' just as dialectic 'may move in either direction ... to clarify the lesser by the greater or the greater by the less.' In this way, *The Republic* itself 'is one long dialectical poem written for the elucidation of justice' (ibid., p. 158).

Thus Plato's 'imitation' goes through infinite gradations of meaning. 'The set of significances employed in the dialogues may indeed be conceived as a huge matrix composed of all words of a language, each possessed of an indefinite number of shades of meaning ... 'The particular meaning of a word at any given time [is] determined by the meaning of other words drawn from that matrix' (ibid., p 158).

By contrast, Aristotle uses a different method for defining his terms, employs them in a distinct manner, and consequently, arrives at a different definition of 'imitation.' If Plato's concept undergoes (via analogies) 'an infinite series of gradations of meaning,' Aristotle's 'term is restricted definitely to a single literal meaning' (ibid., p. 160). Plato's examination of the implications of imitation reach outward over the whole domain of philosophy whereas Aristotle restricts his discussion to a limited sphere of philosophy. Although for Plato the dialectical process may aim at defining words, 'any word may have many definitions.' For Aristotle, on the other hand, the definition of terms begins as a scientific undertaking. Thus out of the many

meanings a word may have, Aristotle formulates an unequivocal meaning for each key word. The term becomes a constant. Apparently Aristotle reduces its connotations to its single denotation whereas Plato evidently expands a term out of an abstraction to explore all the possible connotations of that original term.

Mckeon makes some final comments related to Plato's mode of reasoning about literature. If each dialogue of Plato is itself a dialectic, there also seems a dialectical development among dialogues, and the context of Plato's statements shifts from dialogue to dialogue. For this reason no coherent doctrine of Plato can result from collecting quotations of what he has said poetry means. Because a definition may vary according to the kind of reasoning employed, we need to discover the larger method or system of reasoning behind any definition. As applied to literary criticism, we must learn to detect the critic's underlying philosophical attitude if we are to uncover the logical or dialectical devices he utilizes to formulate meaning (ibid, p. 175).

The aim of Richard McKeon's other article 'The Philosophical Bases of Arts and Criticism' is to trace out 'the dialectical consequences of philosophical and critical principles (ibid., p. 463). Since 'persistent differences [are] the outstanding fact of intellectual history', it is improbable that such differences may be resolved simply. Indeed, agreement may conceal vital distinctions. 'The general patterns . . . in philosophic discussions' show that the status of facts varies according to the different principles used to intrepret them (ibid., pp. 464-5). The variety and opposition of views on art and philosophy cannot simply be reduced to undeniable facts or to indisputable theories. What is needed, then, is to examine 'the meanings of various explanations and their relations to one another' in order to ascertain 'criteria for the truth and utility... [of] such theories' (ibid., p. 466). If we do so, we discover that critical terms such as 'form', 'content' and 'expression' are deceptively similar concepts, for as they are

analyzed and interpreted differently, they acquire different meanings. On the other hand, the philosophical principles supporting such analyses and interpretations may be viewed 'analogically in a dialectic of being and becoming' (ibid., p. 470). Consequently, Mckeon believes the apparent distinctions and differences in critical approaches may eventually be resolved by some pervasive dialectic.

Literary works are thought to reveal some correspondence to 'aspects of the universe' or to 'the common experience or aspirations of mankind' (ibid., p. 472). Hence traditionally there have been two distinct modes of conceiving a poem: (1) as cause and effect, and (2) 'in terms of structure and form. These conceptions lend themselves to two distinct interpretations: (1) the 'literal and causal', and (2) the analogical and organistic (ibid., p. 473).

Mckeon illustrates these modes as follows. 'Plato and Aristotle . . . seek general philosophic principles in the nature of things', as expressed in their theory of *imitation.* 'Bacon and Kant seek [these principles] in human understanding' as expressed in their view of *imagination.* 'Horace and Tolstoy seek them in *operations*' (ibid., p. 481). Although both Plato and Aristotle discuss 'imitation', each has a different conception of it. Horace thinks of the poetic processes as external and causal whereas Tolstoy sees them as internal and organic to mankind as a whole whereby the poet's feelings unite and improve mankind. The fact is that 'what is essential in the one [critical] approach may be accidental in the other' (ibid., p. 482).

Fundamental differences among modes of criticism go 'back to fundamental differences of philosophical principles' (ibid, p. 486). Each critic finds 'different points of excellence in an artist's work. What appears a merit to one critic is a fault to another' (ibid., p. 490). The same philosophical principles may be used methodologically in a broad or limited way, which may result in marked differences of interpretation. Put another way, methods and meanings are determined by

the way we apply our principles,

Since Mckeon regards the problems of criticism and philosophy to be parallel, he considers the function of critic and philosopher to be similar. Each must be prepared to reason beyond methodological diversity and philosophical positions to their epistemological consequences.

In part III of the article, Mckeon points out how 'the vocabulary of criticism . . . applies now to entities' (as in Aristotle's discussion of unity and structure, parts and whole, means and ends), 'now to states of mind (ibid., p. 513) (as in Longinus' discussion of genius and the effects upon an audience), or applies to the effect of styles (as in Theophrastus' study). Such shifts in emphasis also account for the ambiguity of critical terms.

Mckeon next discusses the dialectic of semantics. The significance of terms derives from 'a dialectical doubling in which a word takes on two differentiated meanings, one good and one bad', or from 'a dialectical reduction in which a word retains only the minimal or slightest of its dialectical meanings' (ibid., p. 523). As an example of how this semantic may influence the reinterpretation of words, he retraces how the term 'imitation' underwent 'a typical series of literal shifts of meaning from Aristotle's application of it. . .to the Hellenistic and Renaissance application . . . to the modern,' in which the term degenerated into signifying mere amateur copying (ibid., p. 524).

Mckeon brings in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, chapter xviii to introduce an important aspect of dialectical reasoning in literary criticism: 'imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same' (ibid., p. 525). To be sure, this view of imitation sounds very much like Coleridge's concept of the primary imagination, which has the power to reconcile opposites, and such reconciliation is the key dialectical idea behind romantic criticism.

If terms like 'imitation' and 'imagination' alter their meanings, 'as they move from context to context, we can 'trace the pattern of individual change in such terms.' Furthermore, we may delineate 'the analytical schemes which determine... [the] stages of change . . . and subsequenfly fix meanings (ibid., p. 530).

Mckeon discusses six modes of criticism used in aesthetic analysis. There are five 'literal' modes and one 'dialectical'. The literal modes are attempts at exact definition so that each mode is more or less distinct from one another and from the dialectical. The latter is characterized by two constant features: 1.) its aim is to differentiate terms, and 2.) it reduces terms to common denominators in order to solve critical problems (ibid., p. 531). What distinguishes dialectical from literal criticism is that the former works out differences dialectically 'from basic similarities, or similarities are found among things whose differences have been stated' (ibid., p. 511).

As counterbalance to Plato's dialectic, Aristotle's 'scientific' criticism is the second mode of criticism (the first literal mode). Rather than using dialectic or rhetoric to analyze tragedy, Aristotle used the scientific method to examine tragedy in terms of construction and parts, finding in plot the chief criterion for unity and structure. As second literal form of criticism, the 'poetic' mode, deriving from Longinus and Arnold, employs lofty ideas and poetic utterances of great authors as touchstones of universal beauty and greatness.

As third literal form of criticism, the 'scholarly' mode, attempts to reconstruct the individual significance of an author by the careful study of the author's entire work. This mode includes historical documentation to illuminate particular textual meanings. As fourth literal form of criticism. the 'technical' mode, used by Horace and Boileau, focuses on the devices which produce effects, and it may include the study of the structure and unity of a literary work.

As fifth literal form of criticism, the 'formal' mode, as used

by I.A. Richards et al., classifies styles and uses of language with the purpose of analyzing the effectiveness of parts to evaluating their appropriateness. This mode pursues a parts-whole procedure, beginning with words and syntax to finally analyzing the composition as a whole. As keystone to the five literal modes of criticism, the dialectical approach comprises 'a vast . . . series of forms which merge or move from one emphasis to another.' This dialectical criticism opposes each of the forms of 'literal' criticism in appropriate terms (ibid., p. 511).

Whereas the literal modes are concerned with clear-cut boundaries between their respective modes and aim at literal definitions, the dialectical approach broadens their distinctions into more reasonable definitions and sensible applications; or the dialectical approach proves that such distinctions fail to correspond to anything real or essential in art.

McKeon finds the dialectical approach used by a number of philosophical-critical thinkers. Plato's analysis of the three possible stages of truth seems to imply that imitation is a 'dialectic of things'. Similarly, Aristotle's view of plot as the principle which integrates incidents seems to interpret plot as dialectically bringing about organic unity. Kant's 'dialectic of knowledge . . . depends on whether knowledge is conceived in terms of human faculties or in terms of branches of learning' (ibid., p. 532). Thus his dialectical criticism reduces itself to human faculties or thoughts, the characteristics of which are found in taste or genius. Finally, the aesthetic of Tolstoy and Dewey embraces a 'dialectic of process and relation', the characteristics of which are expressed through the artist or in audience response (ibid., p. 533).

In general, the advantage of dialectical criticism is that it broadens the context of a literary work by situating it among other aesthetic and cultural phenomena. The danger of this method is the possibility of freezing prematurely into

a dogmatic stance. Although McKeon does not overtly advocate any single mode of criticism, his own essay uses the dialectical reasoning in emulation of Plato's use of the dialectic. Without prejudice or distortion, McKeon has sought to account for the literal modes as well as the dialectical. Dispassionately and dialectically he has shown the virtues, failures and perversities of each mode. Indeed, by being a dialectician in the manner of Plato, McKeon reveals not only the limits of literal criticism but the limits of logic as well. If anything, his essays prove how inappropriate it is to consider the Chicago critics as slavishly bound to Aristotle's *Poetics*. By precept and example Mckeon has shown the need to surpass any aesthetic based on logic alone, and he has superbly demonstrated the scope and potential of a dialectical approach to literary criticism.

In order to appreciate more fully the achievement of the neo-Aristotelians, we need to visualize the parallel between the intellectual problems of antiquity and those of modern criticism. As Socrates had to reject the paradoxes of Zeno and the Sophists, so the neo-Aristotelians felt the need to reject the ironies and paradoxes of the New Critics, no matter what other merits their intrinsic approach brought to modern criticism. Similarly, as Socrates had to turn away from the inadequacy of the rhetoric and 'logic' of his time to work out a dialetic of his own, neo-Aristotelians like Olson and McKeon became aware that logic alone cannot come to terms with the dynamic nature of the literary work.

It is, therefore, important to recall briefly the situation in antiquity. Plato sought to resolve the paradoxical opposition between the Heraclitan view of the universe as in a state of constant flux and Parmenides' belief that the universe was permanent. Inspired by Pythagorus and Euclid Plato sought a dialectical solution to the starkly different views of physical reality. The answer was in Socratic irony which discarded false, sensory appearances to reach upward to the ultimate realm of pure Forms and true Ideas. Put

another way, Plato's dialectic used spatial reasoning when he distinguished between absolute ideas and truths.

By contrast, Aristotle's dialectic concerns itself with biological and spiritual being and becoming; hence the profound significance of his discussion of drama which concentrates on the actions of men. As seen in Aristotle's description of complex plot, which effects transformations through reversal and recognition, Aristotle evidently regards plot as a dialectic between man's being and becoming, between a deceptively stable identity and the individual's true, dynamic destiny.

Thus when Aristotle discusses tragedy in the light of parts organically united into a whole, he is basically using a combination of inductive and deductive logic. In other words, one part of his *Poetics* provides a spatial definition of tragedy. On the other hand, when Aristotle describes the entelechy inherent in human actions and when he distinguishes between simple and complex plot, he is using dialectical reasoning. In short, he then gives a temporal definition of tragedy. Because men are motivated to move from being through becoming to a final being, tragedy represents a dialectic and can obviously be interpreted as such.

Conclusion

We may summarize the contribution of neo-Aristotelian thinking as follows. The main objection to other critical ventures is that they mistake the part for the whole and tend either to reduce the entire literary work to that part, in order to explicate the work, or they tend to use that part (e.g., ironies, paradoxes) as a universal key to all literature. In essence, the neo-Aristotelians are saying that the New Critics and those who employ extrinsic methods of studying literature have failed to use the logic proper to a whole literary work. Furthermore, where methods of literal criticism are logical, they tend to use deductive logic as if they have already found the truth, or, worse, such methods rhetorically use a limited logic to give quite inadequate interpretations. In emulation of Aristotle and modern science, the neo-

Aristotelians advocate the use of inductive logic so that sufficient evidence may be gathered to substantiate critical reasoning.

In contrast to the vague semantics and ambiguities of the New Critics, McKeon urges the use of a combined approach to the definition of critical terms. If Plato's dialectic shows us that a concept should be examined for its possible multiple meanings, Aristotle's reasoning guides us to aim at the concision of concepts.

Thus if we regard a literary work as a definition of human experience, that work must not only be defined as a logical system (organic unity) but also as a dialectic. Put another way, a literary work requires both spatial analysis and temporal interpretation. The limits of logic may be overcome by the use of a dialectic which can both reconcile opposite systems of logic, as the inductive and deductive, and arrive at the concise definition of a particular literary work. Such a dialectic will not only establish a hierarchy from partial to complete truth and from inferior to superior values; it will also serve to remind the interpreter that truth itself gradually transforms in time.

Department of Anglo-Saxon Studies
Mohammad V University
Rabat

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Ronald S. Crane, et al., *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*, (Chicago, 1952), pp. 7-8.

[2] *Op. cit.*, pp. 83-107.

[3] *Op. cit.*, pp. 27-44.

[4] Richards' view of language seems to have evolved from the emotive-referential stance of his earlier writings to a view that meaning arises out of the cooperation and rivalry of contexts, which is essentially a dialectical interpretation.

[5] *Op. cit.*, pp. 108-37

[6] *Op. cit.*, pp. 45-82

[7] It is noteworthy that W R. Keast's article 'The New Criticism and *King Lear*' rejects dialectical reasoning as a valid approach to literature. Keast analyzes how Heilman's method evolves a dualistic beginning, which explores simple dichotomies, to a full-scale dialectical interpretation of the play. Heilman reasons from simple to complex, particular to universal, from one level of paradox and complexity to another until all dialectical oppositions are resolved in transcendental truth and in a religious pattern. Keast's denunciation of the dialectical approach stands in clear opposition to what other neo-Aristotelians advocate.

[8] *Op. cit.*, pp 546-66.

[9] The latter is the effort pursued by such New Critics as I. A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks. Olson, p. 55.