

ALLEN TATE

TENSION in POETRY

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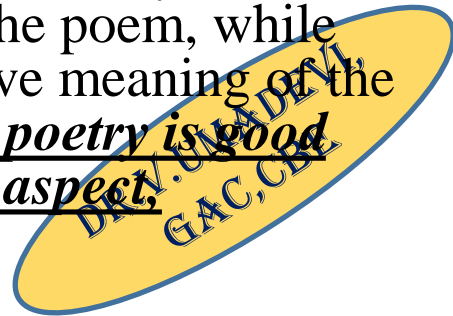
- Allen Tate (1899-) is one of the youngest new critics. He belongs to the Southern group of American critics. He is also a great poet. Tate opposes scienticism and distinguishes between scienticism and literary discourse. He gives importance to the formal qualities of a work of art. Reactionary Essays on Poetry, Ideas, and Reason in Madness are well known collections of Essays and reviews by Tate.

Allen Tate as a critic:-

- John Oley Allen Tate is an American poet, essayist and social commentator. He was the Poet Laureate Consultant in poetry in 1943-44. Tate is certainly more comprehensive than J. C. Ransom. However both belong to the group of American critic. John Paul says.. **“Allen Tate’s prominence among the New Critics sets him in a position next Ransom.”**

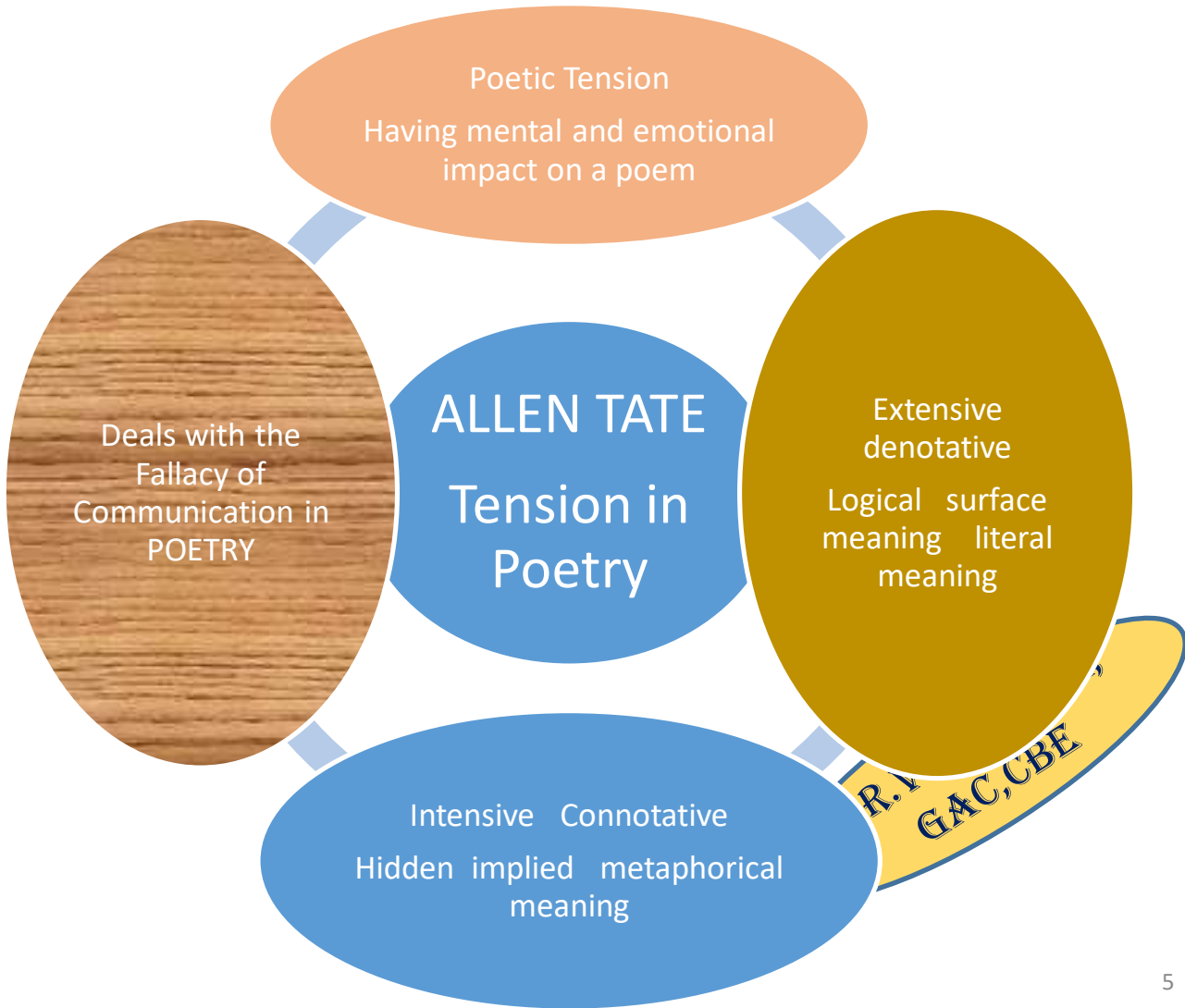
Two Types of Meaning

- Allen Tate states that every age has used different approaches to examine different works. According to him every age uses language differently. This he shows with example from different poems. He says that in most of the poems., we find two kinds of language.
- 1. Denotative (surface meaning) and (2) Connotative (hidden)
- The first one refers to ‘logical or superficial meaning of the poem’. The second one means ‘implied or metaphorical meaning of the poem.’ Many criticism emphasized on denotative aspect of the poem, while some concentrated only on connotative meaning of the poem. According to Tate. **“Only that poetry is good poetry which communicate both the aspect, connotative and denotative.”**



About the Essay

- **Tension in poetry** has been taken from Tate`s "The Man of Letters in the Modern World", Selected Essays. The essay deals with tension as the life of a poem. It reveals Tate`s view that a good poem is the one in which the extension and the intension are in a state of tension. In other words, a good poem has a combination of both extensive or denotative and intensive or connotative meanings.
- The essay is divided into **three** parts.
- Part 1 deals with the fallacy of communication in poetry. Tate explains his point with some examples.
- Part II, Tate defines tension in poetry and explains its importance in poetry with a few examples.
- In part III, he gives his final example of the significance of tension in poetry.



Defines Tension in Poetry
chopping of 'in' and 'ex'



Presence of Tension
is the Touch stone of
good poetry



Significance of
Tension

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Chapter Eight Victorian Criticism

General Characteristics

Romantic theory of literature and literary criticism undergoes a sea-change with the horrors of the French Revolution. Victoria comes to the throne in 1837 and the Victorians see a great transformation in economic, social, scientific and literary fields. Faith in religion, old ideals and values is shaken by the growth of evolutionary and biological science. Technological advancement leading to the Industrial Revolution results in a total crisis of culture. Critics like Mathew Arnold ponder over the rules of literary criticism of their age.

Main Features

The Victorians ardently desire a steady and ordered progress through discipline and obeying rules and regulations by respecting authority. In literary criticism, the excesses and extravagances of the lesser critics of Romantic school degenerate into licence and waywardness. The Victorians desire an orderly and well-balanced criticism with certain ideals and standards as guides. They are forced to discard the lawless and erratic Romantic Criticism and the slavish and artificial Neo-classicism and are in search of a compromise, a golden mean.

Literary criticism during this period falls into three stages. The first stage is represented by Macaulay, Carlyle and J.S.Mill. But their criticism is historical, social or philosophical and rarely literary.

To the second stage belong Arnold and Ruskin. Ruskin is more a critic of art than of literature. Arnold is the literary critic, who advocates that poetry should be a criticism of life and that criticism should propound the 'best that was ever thought or written. Arnold advocates Art for Life's sake.

Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde belong to the third stage and they strongly believe in Art for Art's sake.

The Victorians lay great stress on facts and the reality of the physical worlds. They undermine the romantic and idealistic forces of the previous ages. Importance is given to the biographical contexts for judging a work of art. Impressionistic and individualistic attitudes are thrown to the winds. The race, the milieu and the moment are thoroughly studied for the right understanding and appreciation of literature.

The critic is not allowed to assess a work in an off-hand manner. He is expected to study and take pains to know the writer and the environment in which he has created his work. He need not follow any rigid rules. Lawlessness and caprice are discouraged without any impingement of individual liberty.

THE STUDY OF POETRY

By
Mathew Arnold

Mathew Arnold is a staunch romantic whose romanticism is set aside by the classicism of his father. The degenerate and decadent romanticism of his age disgusts him and he, naturally, switches over to classical criticism. Moreover, Arnold drinks deep at the fountains of Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Aristotle and Horace. He makes it his mission to Hellenise English thought and English criticism. He adopts the biographical - critical method advocated by Sainte - Beuve.

Critical Synopsis

Arnold hopes that the future of poetry is immense. Poetry must be studied more and more because it would interpret life for us, console us, and sustain us. Science without poetry is incomplete and very soon religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.

Arnold defines poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for that criticism by the laws of poetic beauty".

Arnold asks the readers to choose the best in poetry, which reflects the criticism of life. The readers are warned against two kinds of fallacious judgements; the historic estimate involving the ancient poets, and the personal estimate involving the contemporary poets. Readers must insist on the real estimate

which involves recognition of the very best poetry making them "feel and enjoy as deeply as" they can.

Arnold advocates the 'touchstone' test to assess the worth of the poems. Short passages and single lines from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and others may be used as 'touchstone' pieces.

Arnold says that excellence of poetry lies both in its matter or substance and in its manner or style. But the mark or accent of "high beauty, worth and power" must be infused into the matter and style. The manner and diction would acquire the accent of superiority depending on the high seriousness of the matter.

Arnold, then, presents a brief survey of English poetry from Chaucer to Burns to demonstrate the practical application of the general principles laid down above. Chaucer's poetry, depicting his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness and benignity. Chaucer surveys the world from a truly human point of view. But his poetry lacks high seriousness. Comparison of a passage from Chaucer with one from Dante would reveal that the former does not belong to the classic.

Shakespeare and Milton are our great poetical classics but Dryden and Pope are not. Pope and Dryden are not classics of English poetry but are classics of English Prose.

Gray is a poetic classic, but he is the scantiest of classics. He is the unique poet of the age of Pope and Dryden. The poetry of Dryden, Pope and other poets of their school is that their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits; whereas genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul.

Arnold says that the real merit of Burns is to be found in his Scotch poems. In Burns's poetry, we find a powerful application of ideas to life. He has truth of substance. Burns is by far the greater force than Chaucer, though he has less charm. But in Burns there is no accent of high seriousness, which is generated of absolute sincerity. The poetry of Burns has truth of matter and manner, but there is no accent of the poetic virtue of greatest masters.

One would easily be misguided by the personal bias in the case of Burns. This danger becomes greater in the case of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth. So Arnold does not take them up for consideration.

After explaining his touchstone method in practical terms, Arnold asserts that good literature would never lose its currency. Good literature is ensured by "the instinct of self-preservation in humanity".

Aechu

Cleanth Brooks' Irony as a Principle of StructureIntroduction

To understand Brooks' Irony as a Principle of Structure, a knowledge of the basic tenets of the New Criticism is essential.

To the New Critics, a poem or a work of art is the thing in itself and the critic must concentrate all attention on it and illuminate it. The function of a critic is to analyze, to interpret and evaluate a work of art. A poem is distinct from the poet; it is a definite entity in itself and must be studied as such. The critic must devote himself to close textual study.

A poem has both form and content and both should be closely studied, and analyzed for a true understanding of its meaning. Words, images, rhythm, metre constitute the form of poetry and are to be closely studied. These different parts of a poem are inter-connected and these interconnections, the reaction of one upon the other, are to be examined.

In his essay, Irony as a Principle of Structure (1947) Brooks considers Irony, Paradox and Metaphor as constituting the matrix of poetry. Close textual study and verbal analysis are necessary to understand the metaphors used by a poet, and to reveal the irony and paradox which have been built into the poem. This technique of verbal analysis is applied by Brooks rigorously to a number of poems concerning the whole range of English poetry from Donne to the modern age, and it is shown that irony and paradox are the qualities common to the structure of all great poetry.

Irony as a Principle of Structure

At the outset Brooks contends that every work of art has various parts. Each is related to the other and each contributes to the total effect produced by the work of art. A poem for example has many parts like images, irony, metaphors etc., They are related to each other just as flowers are related to the other parts of a growing plant. So Brooks claims that irony being a vital part in a poem has a significant role to play.

Before proceeding to establish the importance of irony, Brooks tries to emphasize the role it plays in shaping irony.

The Importance of the Context

We call some verses memorable. To Brooks they are memorable not only because they are poetic, they contain sublime thought, but mainly because of the context in which they appear. It is the context which makes them memorable. In one breath King Lear repeats the word "Never" five times. It becomes most poignant, because of the context. Taken out of the context the word loses its significance. Similar is the case with the statement "Ripeness is all". So, it is the context which determines the meaning of a statement.

Definition of Irony

"Warping of a statement by the context" is what Brooks calls irony. Meaning of a statement varies according to the context. Brooks calls this irony. For example the statement, "This is a fine state of affairs" allows different interpretations. It can be taken either literally or it can be taken to imply sarcasm. Precisely, the meaning of a statement is determined by the context in which it appears.

Irony in Poetry

To illustrate his contention that meaning varies according to the context or to give examples for irony in poetry, Brooks quotes from Gray's Elegy and Arnold's Dover Beach. In both the poems, only the context determines the meaning though there is scope for different interpretations. Irony as Brooks finds is common in poetry and it has a wide variety like tragic irony, self irony, playful irony, gentle irony etc.,

Irony in Shakespeare

One of the songs of Shakespeare illustrates playful irony. The song praises the virtues of a girl Silvia. The adjectives "holy", "fair", "wise", "Heaven's darling" attributed to her raise her to the level of a divine creature. But the description of her eyes, where cupid lives, brings her down to the earth. The poem offers religious or theological meaning if we take Silvia to be a divine being. It also offers secular or untheological meaning if we take her to be an earthly creature. What did Shakespeare intend? One has to conclude that playfully he might have used the device of irony.

Irony in Wordsworth

Brooks finds irony as a Principle of structure in Wordsworth too. He cites one of the Lucy poems to illustrate his point. The shy, modest, Lucy is at once compared to a violet flower which remains unnoticed and to a single star in the sky which is so conspicuous. The comparisons which appear to be

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contradictory are apt when we look at them from two different view points. From the view point of the world Lucy is simple and unassuming as a violet flower but from the view point of her lover she dominates the world like a single star in the sky. There are two similes, two different comparisons, each can be interpreted from two different view points, from two different contexts. This is irony. This kind of ironic potential is found in Wordsworth's lyrics.

Irony in Modern Poetry

Irony which is the outcome of the context is to be found in the poetry of every period. This feature is very striking in modern poetry. To illustrate his point, Brooks quotes a passage from Randall Jarrell's poem The Eighth Air Force. Taking the lines " - shall I say that man/is not as men have said: a wolf to man? Brooks proves how the poet has successfully handled the device of irony in the phrase " a wolf to man ". Viewing this comment against the background of a few airmen in a hutment obviously in a casual and carefree mood, one has to conclude that man cannot be a wolf to another man. i.e., man cannot kill another man. But the presence of the dog in the hutment reminds one that a dog is but a domesticated wolf and this symbolises that the airmen at home just hide their killing urge which would find an outlet in the warfront.

Thus employing the technique of verbal analysis Brooks shows that irony is a principle common to all great poetry. But the approach of Brooks has its own limitations.

The approach of Brooks: its limitations

Critics like Yvor Winters and Ronald S. Crane have pointed out that the approach of Brooks is monistic. No doubt, irony is an element in the structure of a poem but there are other elements also. By stressing only one element, by concentrating all his attention on irony, Brooks ignores the other elements.

Secondly when Brooks breaks a poem into pieces for textual and verbal analysis, the sense of the wholeness of the poem is lost.

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