A Great Debate in Poetic Theory: Brooks, Wheelwright, Crane & Olson

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A GREAT DEBATE IN POETIC THEORY:
BROOKS, WHEELWRIGHT, CRANE, AND OLSON

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Janice Carrell
May 1971
A GREAT DEBATE IN POETIC THEORY:
BROOKS, WHEELRIGHT, CRANE, AND OLSON

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. CLEANTH BROOKS: A FORMALISTIC CRITIC</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PHILIP WHEELRIGHT: A MYTH CRITIC</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. R. S. CRANE AND ELDER OLSON: CHICAGO CRITICS</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elder Olson has said that at the Biblical Tower of Babel the people did not begin to talk nonsense but only what seemed like nonsense. This paper concerns an intellectual tower where important debates are held, but unfortunately the language is not a universal one; therefore, because all too often terms have evolved without adequate definition, disagreement occurs where reconciliation appears impossible.

The very title of this thesis could be misleading to the reader if he considers debate in its formal sense. What is here intended is the controversy in the efforts of respected scholars to understand and establish the nature of poetry, and for me it is also a personal debate as I follow their assumptions in order to make some judgments in the concluding chapter about their successes and limitations. The informality of the structure of the debate does not diminish the seriousness of its dialectic. To the contrary, the debate is very serious not only to those involved but to any person who concerns himself with the state of the literary arts in the modern world.

The debate is among critics representing certain generally defined schools of criticism; however they are
not primarily spokesman for a school: they are among the mainstays. Each represents high scholarship, and each is deserving of praise solely as an isolated critic—or a critic without a collective classification. At the same time they each acknowledge themselves to be members of their respective schools of criticism.

The debate is not constructed on the basis of two teams, negative and affirmative, with two members for each side. Instead there will be three positions presented by four critics. The essence of the debate is their scholarly struggle to bring to the poetic arts the most responsible and valuable critical approach and their sincere disagreement among themselves as to what the nature of poetry is and how the critic should deal with its subject matter.

These scholars have provided questions which I had never pondered, and I do not pretend to have fully understood the entire work of each of these men; it is too vast, too intricate, and too rich in literary and critical tradition. However, what is important is the doors which they have opened, not only into particular poems but into general methods of thought. Having been warned by them of the futility of pursuing all directions and of accepting all proposals without constructing one's own, I have debated their positions and have chosen among them, hoping that my appraisals are fair and objective, and even that they may play some small role in the larger adjudication which scholarship in general must make about major theoretic disputes.
The critics involved are Cleanth Brooks, a New Critic; Philip Wheelwright, a Myth Critic; and R. S. Crane and Elder Olson, both Chicago Critics.

Brooks is associated with a group of theorists who first met during the 1920's at Vanderbilt University in Nashville and who are often referred to as the Nashville School. Generally speaking they tend to isolate poetry and to study it solely in terms of its structure, language, texture, tension, wit, etc., choosing to disregard the poet and poetic intent, and historical, psychological or sociological factors or literary genres, considering all of these irrelevant to the study of the poem as poetry.

Unlike the Nashville group, the myth critics are not associated with any geographic area; they build their poetic theories on their knowledge of archetype and myth and their belief in the relevance of myth not only to poetic creation but also to appreciation. Philip Wheelwright feels that the capability for the creation of poetry as well as its reception rests in the unconscious mind of the human race. This unifying and underlying element transcends historical periods and scientific analysis; it lives in myth. Myth, however, tends to be list in a poetically destitute Descartian world which can only conceive of rationality and the present.

1The New Criticism developed primarily under the leadership of John Crowe Ransom at Nashville in the publication The Fugitive.
Since the Chicago Critics are such a close group, each being associated with the University of Chicago and each being represented by an essay in their collective publication *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern*, I have combined the efforts of two of their most prolific scholars, R. S. Crane and Elder Olson. Crane presents most of their concepts through attacking other critical procedures, while Olson is valuable in seeking the more dispassionate but lucid framework of their poetic theory. The pluralistic concept which they propose is representative of the entire Chicago group. Pluralism, as its name implies, refuses to accept any one doctrine as the one true poetic theory. What concerns these men is the method by which any doctrine is evolved and presented.

I have not been concerned with what others have said about each of these critics, their theories, or their works. I have been interested in only what Brooks, Wheelwright, Crane, and Olson have had to say about poetry and criticism. Their attacks upon one another -- primarily Crane's denunciation of Brooks -- have been included when those attacks contained material which further explained a critical method. Aristotle and Coleridge are occasionally cited since they directly affect these critics, who have admittedly used parts of their established philosophies to build upon.

Since I have tried to capture the heart of each man's poetic theory and present as accurately as possible each respected critical method, I have frequently quoted directly from the source material.
I hope that the material chosen for this paper reflects the asset these gentlemen have been to modern critical thought as well as their concern for poetry's future in a society too heedless of man's soul. Theirs is a mission the seriousness of which, in my judgment, concerns the survival of an adequate humanism in the modern world.
CHAPTER II
CLEANTH BROOKS: A FORMALISTIC CRITIC

Cleanth Brooks refers to himself as a formalistic critic whose primary concern is with the poem itself rather than with its author or with the era in which it was created. In 1951 Brooks establishes his credo as a formalist in the Kenyon Review:

Here are some articles of faith I could subscribe to:
That literary criticism is a description and an evaluation of its object.
That the primary concern of criticism is with the problem of unity - the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of various parts to each other in building up this whole.
That the formal relations in a work of literature may include, but certainly exceed, those of logic.
That in a successful work, form and content cannot be separated.
That form is meaning.
That literature is ultimately metaphorical and symbolic.
That the general and the universal are not seized upon by abstraction, but got at through the concrete and the particular.
That literature is not a surrogate for religion.
That, as Allen Tate says, "specific moral problems" are the subject matter of literature, but that the purpose of literature is not to point a moral.
That the principles of criticism define the area relevant to literary criticism; they do not constitute a method for carrying out the criticism. ¹

From Modern Poetry & the Tradition (1934) through The Well Wrought Urn (1947) and his last major work The Hidden God (1963), Brooks has stressed as strongly as possible that the business of the critic is to concern himself with the poem and with what it says as it says it. In order to do this, he claims, the formalistic critic must make two basic assumptions:

(1) he assumes that the relevant part of the author's intention is what he got actually into his work; that is, he assumes that the author's intention as realized is the "intention" that counts, not necessarily what he was conscious of trying to do, or what he now remembers he was trying to do. And (2) the formalistic critic assumes an ideal reader: that is, instead of focusing on the varying spectrum of possible readings, he attempts to find a central point of reference from which he can focus upon the structure of the poem or novel.2

Since the structure of the poem is of such paramount importance to Brooks, it is not surprising that he attacks so vehemently those critics with the audacity to paraphrase a poem. He justifies his position on what he calls "the heresy of paraphrase" in his most famous work, The Well Wrought Urn:

The poem communicates so much and communicates it so richly and with such delicate qualifications that the thing communicated is mauled and distorted if we attempt to convey it by any vehicle less subtle than that of the poem itself.... It is ... the sole linguistic vehicle which conveys the things communicated accurately.3

2Ibid., p. 75.

The danger in paraphrase, Brooks believes, is the separation of form from content, which not only distorts but destroys the true meaning of the poem. Maintaining that the primary problem of the critic is the "question of form, of rhetorical structure," Brooks assumes that if content is divorced from the structure through paraphrase—or any other method—the unity of the work (the second item in his credo) is dissolved.

Brooks conceives of structure in his own way and tries to clarify what this basic concept means in his theory:

But though it is in terms of structure that we must describe poetry, the term "structure" is certainly not altogether satisfactory as a term. One means by it something far more internal than the metrical pattern, say, or than the sequence of images. The structure meant is certainly not "form" in the conventional sense in which we think of form as a kind of envelope which "contains" the "content." The structure obviously is everywhere conditioned by the nature of the material which goes into the poem. The nature of the material sets the problem to be solved, and the solution is the ordering of the material.

Indeed, Brooks maintains that the structure is so integral to the poem "that the way that a think is said determines what is said." He continues his explanation of the term:

The structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes,

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4 Ibid., p. 222.
5 Ibid., p. 194.
and meanings. But even here one needs to make important qualifications: the principle is not one which involves the arrangement of the various elements in homogeneous groupings, pairing like with like. It unites the like with the unlike. It does not unite them, however, by the simple process of allowing one connotation to cancel out another nor does it reduce the contradictory attitudes to harmony by a process of subtraction. The unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. It is a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue but an achieved harmony. 7

This concept of the poet bringing together the like with the unlike within the structure of his poem leads Brooks to his belief that "the language of poetry is the language of paradox" which is "the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry. It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox." 8 According to Brooks, the poet is dealing with truth or knowledge beyond the confines of science or logic, yet he must be as exact in his expression as the scientist or logician, if not more so, since he is bringing the concrete out of the abstract because poetry is a precise language creating through the juxtaposition of specific words a specific descriptive or emotional or informative situation. For example in three of Brook's favorite lines from Wordsworth,

8 Ibid., p. 3.
It is a beauteous evening, calm and free
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration,

Brooks feels that the poet has achieved through paradox
far more dimension than could be achieved through scientific
language stripped of ambiguity or conversational language
heedless of precision or parsimony. He agrees with Eliot:

T. S. Eliot has commented upon "that perpetual slight
alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed
in new and sudden combinations," which occur in poetry.
It is perpetual; it cannot be kept out of the poem;
it can only be directed and controlled. 9

Brooks elaborates further upon Eliot's statement,
illustrates it, and contrasts science and poetry:

The tendency of science is necessarily to stabilize
terms, to freeze them into strict denotations; the
poet's tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms
are continually modifying each other, and thus vio­
lating their dictionary meanings. To take a very
simple example consider the adjectives in the first
lines of Wordsworth's evening sonnet: beauteous,
calm, free, holy, quiet, breathless. The juxta­
positions are hardly startling; and yet notice this:
the evening is like a nun breathless with adoration.
The adjective "breathless" suggests tremendous ex­
citement; and yet the evening is not only quiet but
calm. There is no final contradiction, to be sure:
it is that kind of calm and that kind of excitement,
and the two states may well occur together. But the
poet has no one term. Even if he had a polysyllabic
technical term, the term would not provide the
solution for his problem. He must work by contra­
diction and qualification. 10

Closely associated with paradox is irony, which is
itself, according to Brooks, too often primarily connected
with satire or the metaphysicals; therefore, Brooks goes to

9 Ibid., p. 9.
10 Ibid.
great lengths to prove its necessity to all great poetry since it is his belief, as has been illustrated, that the poet must work with the language of paradox, even in such non-satiric poems as Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Tears Idle Tears," whose very title is ironic to Brooks. Tears, he points out, cannot be idle, because if there is no overt cause then they must be coming from a deeper source.  

This fact Tennyson himself substantiates in the third line of his poem, as Brooks shows: "For the third line of the poem indicates that there is no doubt in the speaker's mind about the origin of the tears in some divine despair. They 'rise in the heart'--for all that they have been first announced as 'idle.'" Also in the third stanza where Tennyson "compares the strangeness and sadness of the past to the sadness of the birds' piping as it sounds to dying ears," Brooks praises the poet for "a rather brilliant ironic contrast involved in the comparison." Brooks explains the irony:

The speaker, a living man, in attempting to indicate how sad and strange to him are the days of the past, says that they are as sad and strange as is the natural activity of the awakening world to the man who is dying: the dead past seems to the living man as unfamiliar and fresh in its sadness as the

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11 Ibid., pp. 167-8.
12 Ibid., p. 168.
13 Ibid., p. 172.
14 Ibid.
living present seems to the dying man. There is more here, however, than a mere, ironic reversal of roles; in each case there is the sense of being irrevocably barred out from the known world.\footnote{Ibid.}

Despite Brook's care in \textit{The Well Wrought Urn} to illustrate and explain his concept of irony as well as to lift the limitations from the term, he tries to further defend his position a year later. He maintains that he had no intention of narrowing poetry to satire nor had he any intention of extending "wilfully and even whimsically"\footnote{Cleanth Brooks, "Irony and 'Ironic' Poetry," \textit{College English}, IX (February, 1948), 231.} the meaning of a term. He admits taking "irony" from its usual context and "specializing and broadening it,"\footnote{Ibid.} but even R. S. Crane supports his right to do so as long as he is scrupulous in his endeavor. Brooks refers his critics to \textit{Understanding Poetry}, which he wrote with a fellow New Critic Robert Penn Warren in 1938, and which he feels contains, completely, his definition and position concerning irony in great poetry.

In \textit{Understanding Poetry} the following definition of irony is established:

An ironical statement indicates a meaning contrary to the one it professes to give; an ironical event or situation is one in which there is a contrast between expectation and fulfillment or desert and reward. In the irony of both statement and event there is an element of contrast. Either form of irony or both, may appear in a poem.... But the irony of statement, and of tone and attitude, are
more important for poetry. The successful management of ironical effects is one of the most difficult problems of a poet.\textsuperscript{18}

The definition is extended to point out directly, as Brooks does laboriously in \textit{The Well Wrought Urn}, that "the term is not to be limited to an obvious and heavy sarcasm."\textsuperscript{19}

In fact Brooks feels that irony intensifies seriousness, and in \textit{Modern Poetry \& The Tradition} (1939) he offers his criticism of the critics who fail to acknowledge the extensive powers of irony:

Orthodox criticism hardly allows a place in serious poetry for ironical imagery. Most important of all, by rigorously segregating the approbative and satirical attitudes it has obscured the fact that very many, and, indeed, nearly all mature attitudes represent some sort of mingling of the approbative and the satirical. Frequently, the more complex attitudes are expressed, and necessarily expressed in varying degrees or irony: bitter, playful, whimsical, tragic, self-inclusive, etc.\textsuperscript{20}

Since Brooks spends much time in asserting the indispensable value of irony to the creation of good poetry, his explication of Yeat's "All Souls' Night" provides an illustration of his method of criticism as well as an example of his views on and defense of irony as a serious and complex device not limited to satire:


\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}

Brooks reflects on the following stanzas from Yeats's "All Souls' Night":

Horton's the first I call. He loved strange thought
And knew that sweet extremity of pride
That's called platonic love,
And that to such a pitch of passion wrought
Nothing could bring him, when his lady died,
Anodyne for his love.
Words were but wasted breath;
One dear hope had he:
The inclemency
Of that or the next winter would be death.

Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell
Whether of her or God he thought the most.
But think that his mind's eye,
When upward turned, on one sole image fell;
And that a slight companionable ghost
Wild with divinity,
Had so lit up the whole
Immense miraculous house,
The Bible promised us,
It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl. 21

Brooks begins his commentary:

The final comparison comes as a shock in this particular context. It is hardly a decorative image. But most readers who feel the shock will also sense the rightness of the figure in the total context of the poem. 22

Brooks explains what he means by rightness by referring directly to specific lines or phrases used by Yeats:

It may be difficult to give specific reasons for the rightness, but speculation on the matter may touch upon such observations as these: The poet has a deep respect for his friend and means to stress his friend's passionate belief. At the same time, he does not identify himself with the belief. Horton's platonic love is after all a "sweet extremity of pride," partaking of fantastic exaggeration, though magnificent in its exaggeration. The primary shock in the comparison rests in the clash between "Immense miraculous house,/ The Bible promised us" and the matter-of-fact

21 Ibid., p. 29.
22 Ibid., p. 30.
domesticity of the gold-fish bowl. But the comparison, shock and all, does justice to the various factors of the situation. If it is whimsical with a trace of irony, the whimsy grows legitimately out of what is, after all, only an accurate description of the friend's belief. The poet is aware of the element of magnificence in the belief, if at the same time aware of the fantastic element; and he has found means of letting the two elements work together in his picture of the crystal sphere of the heavens holding one golden and magnified image, "wild with divinity." 23

Brooks justifies his method of criticism of the poem:

If this attempt to indicate how the poet uses his figure to qualify, to make reservations, to notice by implication "the other side" of the matter, seems too crude—if we have distorted Yeats's irony into an attitude of satire which is not intended—the commentary has at least this virtue: It indicates by its literal crudity that figurative language is the indispensable tool of the poet. There are nuances of attitude that can be given in no other way than by the aid of the qualification which the metaphor or simile produces. 24

Brooks extends his discussion to include Keats as a representative of the Romantic poets who illustrates the power of metaphor and simile to carry the words of a poem beyond mere dictionary definitions. 25 Brooks finds Keats using "qualifying irony" in his "transition from the seventh to the eighth stanzas of "The Ode to a Nightingale": 26

The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self.

Brooks comments:

In the first instance, "forlorn" is being used primarily in its archaic sense of "utterly lost." The faery lands are those of a past which is remote and far away. But the meaning of "forlorn" definitely shifted as the poet repeats the word. In its meaning, "pitiable; left desolate," "forlorn describes the poet's own state, and applies, as he suddenly realized in the poem, to his own case. The very adjective which is used to describe the world of the imagination which the bird symbolized, ironically enough can be used to describe his own situation. The psychological effect is that of a man in a reverie suddenly stumbling, and being wrenched out of the reverie. The real world makes its demands; no matter how beautiful the realm of the imagination, one cannot free himself from actuality and live in the imagination permanently. Indeed, the general theme of the poem may be described as that of the following paradox: the world of the imagination offers a release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time it renders the world of actuality more painful by contrast. Keats' repetition of "forlorn" is thus a concentrated instance of the theme of the whole poem. Recognition of the irony makes the poem not less, but more, serious.27

All of these specific elements such as structure, irony, and paradox which Brooks discusses lead to one of his general basic theories of poetry: "Poetry gives us knowledge."28 It is upon this premise that Brooks and Warren base their book Understanding Poetry. Even though they acknowledge that there are other approaches to poetry, they explain why they have chosen this one:

27 Ibid.

28 Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry, p. xiii.
It [poetry] is a knowledge of ourselves in relation to the world of experience, and to that world considered not statistically, but in terms of human purposes and values. Experience considered in terms of human purpose and values is dramatic--dramatic in that it is concrete, in that it involves a process, and in that it embodies the human effort to arrive--through conflict--at meaning.29

As this passage continues it explains Brooks's distress when doctrine is imposed upon poetry by either critic or poet, because even though poetry is a proper vehicle for knowledge, knowledge should not be confused with salvation:

Because poetry involves this land of experiential knowledge, we miss the value of poetry if we think of its characteristic knowledge as consisting of "messages," statements, snippets of doctrine. The knowledge that poetry yields is available to us only if we submit ourselves to the massive, and subtle, impact of the poem as a whole.30

This position concerning the threat to poetry if it is relegated to "messages" is not necessarily anti-religious, Brooks believes. He considers this matter in The Sewanee Review in 1953:

In the first place, though poetry has a very important role in any culture, to ask that poetry save us is to impose a burden upon poetry that it cannot sustain. The danger is that we shall merely get an ersatz religion and an ersatz poetry. In the second place, I think it no accident that so many of the formalist critics either hold, or are sympathetic to, an orthodox Christian faith. In the third place, I think it significant that those critics who hold such a position have been precisely those critics who have been anxious to distinguish between aesthetic judgment and ethical judgment, and who have tried to find a role for poetry which would make it more than a handmaiden for religion or a substitute for religion.

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
It is precisely because I agree that "all our problems, from literature to politics, are ultimately religious" that I think that we should distinguish literature from religion: otherwise "the intellectual lion and the clerical lamb"—or is it the clerical lion and the intellectual lamb?—will lie down, not together, but perhaps with one inside the other.  

This special knowledge of which Brooks and Warren speak, if it need not be religious, is typically dramatic. Brooks states throughout his writings that poetry is drama. There is a speaker, either the poet himself or a narrator, and this drama which is created belongs to form, as he and Warren explain:

We have access to this special kind of knowledge only by participating in the drama of the poem, apprehending the form of the poem. What in this context do we mean by form? To create a form is to find a way to contemplate, and perhaps to comprehend, our human urgencies. Form is the recognition of fate made joyful, because made comprehensible.  

Brooks and Warren feel that when thinking of form which is not an abstraction there are three things which must be kept in mind:

1. Poems are written by human beings and the form of a poem is an individual's attempt to deal with a specific problem, poetic and personal.


32This does not imply that the poet and the poem are one and the same. If this fusion were made, it would contradict Brooks's strong belief that they are to be dissociated in critical evaluation just as the experience of the poem does not rely upon the reader's knowledge of the personal experience of the poet.

2. Poems come out of a historical moment, and since they are written in language, the form is tied to a whole cultural context.

3. Poems are read by human beings, which means that the reader, unlike the robot, must be able to recognize the dramatic implications of the form.34

Brooks pursues the matter further in _The Well Wrought Urn_ nine years later, when he feels that it is by its drama that a poem may be adjudicated:

One could say that a poem does not state ideas but rather tests ideas. Or, to put the matter in other terms, a poem does not deal primarily with ideas and events but rather with the way in which a human being may come to terms with ideas and events. All poems, therefore, including the most objective poems, turn out on careful inspection to be poems really "about" man himself. A poem, then, to sum up, is to be judged, not by the truth or falsity as such, of the idea which it incorporates, but rather by its character as drama by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness, and tough-mindedness.35

Brooks's latest major work, _The Hidden God_, is not only a culmination of all he has said before on his poetic theory but an extension of his own deep personal beliefs about Christian values in poetry. His spiritual concepts of poetry have been primarily reserved for this section of the chapter in order to be integrated with a discussion of his last work as it extends or deepens his poetic theory. _The Hidden God_ is obviously the work of a more mature and less belligerent man, and perhaps it is the most cogent because it seems to be the most vital to its author. He writes _The Hidden God_ with despair and faith: despair for

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34 _Ibid._, p. xiv.

public demands; faith in the Christian values evidenced by the sincere, responsible artist. Brooks feels, however, that there is much reason for optimism and concern for the state of modern poetry from the Christian viewpoint. The poet, according to Brooks, leads his intuition and imagination to his observations, thereby setting forth a "vision of life ... which he has had the faith to explore and to test by attempting to objectify it for us."\(^{36}\) This quest of the true artist Brooks juxtaposes to the "assembly line" entertainment of the modern age which directs itself irresponsibly to the emotions of the audience alone, asking nothing but transitory appreciation and monetary gain.

Brooks says that "the tremendous chasm that exists between our best literature and our popular literature is itself one of the most significant phenomena of our present cultural situation,"\(^{37}\) and he feels that, although there have always been these chasms, they pale beside the contemporary dichotomy. Modern society's confusion in associating a William Faulkner with a Tennessee Williams and a Frank Yerby with a Robert Penn Warren because of their similarities in geographical, historical, violent, and sexual topics distresses Brooks. Failure to discriminate warns of a critical breakdown.

In reference to the contemporary demand for a message in art, he says:


\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 3.
We tend to confuse poetics with poietical rhetoric; we talk of literature as if it were a pure work of the will, not an effect of the imagination; and in our modern mythology the muse becomes not a willful and capricious goddess who bestows her favors unpredictably and as an act of grace but the neat and efficient rewrite girl in a high-powered advertising office.\(^{38}\)

The public and its administrators, he thinks, demand a utilitarian literature while they censor the Faulkners for writing negatively or decadently, but Brooks defends the true artist with his personal belief that "the only really negative literature ... is bad or defective literature" and that "any true work of the imagination" is "already affirmative in the only sense in which we can ask it to be."\(^{39}\)

These didactic attitudes of the modern reading public affect Christian literature since, as Brooks points out:

If we read such Christian writers as T. S. Eliot or W. H. Auden merely for the sake of overt preachments that their works may be felt to make, we shall probably miss their significance as Christian artists. For if we cannot apprehend their art, we have lost the element that makes their work significant to us; they might as well be journalists or pamphleteers.\(^{40}\)

Although Brooks discusses Hemingway and Faulkner as examples of the professed atheist or agnostic being of great value to the Christian through the integrity of work, his discussions of the poets Yeats and Eliot are closer to the purpose of this study. He subtitles his chapter on Yeats

\(^{38}\)Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{39}\)Ibid.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 5.
"Search for a New Myth." Brooks says of the poet that "his mature work is as tough as a whipcord and his protest against the modern tendencies that destroy man's personality and emasculate his soul are realistic and pointed and knowing." Since his earlier works, Brooks has become extremely troubled about not just criticism and his defense of the poetic theory of the New Critics but also about the denial of the spiritual needs of man and the loss of what historians so often call a sense of history, which is not solely knowledge but a sense of the reality of the human situation between the past and present. Consequently he is sympathetic with Yeats, who feels that he has been cheated out of his religion by "Huxley and Tyndall," and then decides to formulate a new religion, almost an infallible

church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.42

In this more mature work, Brooks appears even more concerned about science and its destructive forces as well as the destructive power of bad literature. The former can lead man into the one dimensional plane of believing only what can be proven scientifically, and the latter deludes man; therefore, as it leads him away from reality, it leads him away from the contemplation of his immortal soul. Poets

41 Ibid., p. 5.
42 Ibid., p. 46.
of the integrity and stature of Yeats try to re-establish the reality of the spiritual life of man; therefore when Yeats advises a group of young Dublin poets to found themselves "on the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, most bishops and all bad writers being obviously atheists," he expresses for Brooks part of his theory of the responsibility of the poet. Brooks adds this about the bishops and bad writers:

They deny the mystery always to be found in the human being. They miss the drama of the human soul. This Yeats never does, and if to avoid doing so is to avoid atheism, then Yeats admirably succeeded in avoiding it to the end of his life. I remind you of Tillich's description of the characteristic stance of the artist in our day as one of reaction against those forces in modern culture that would turn man into a mere thing.\(^\text{43}\)

With his deep concern about the serious corruption of the language, Brooks, along with Yeats, pronounces an indictment against "a subversion which has gone along with the scientific neutralization."\(^\text{44}\)

Yeats in his protest even against Christianity provides Brooks with examples of the spirituality so vital to poetry. In commenting on how the poet's later work touches the very core of being, Brooks says of Yeats:

Indeed, in his later work there is rarely a simple rejection of any thesis; there is rather a kind of poetic dialectic in which the antithesis is played hard over against the thesis in order to develop a dramatic comment in which the opposites shall both remain alive and valid in a higher synthesis.\(^\text{45}\)

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 49

\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 50.

\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 51.
And Brooks feels that with "Rihb Considers Christian Love Insufficient" Yeats has moved into the Christian conscience more deeply than lesser Christian poems which play upon the sentimental.

It is interesting that as Brooks discusses the spirituality of poetry, he moves away from such constant references to the critical works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Johnson, and Edmund Wilson, and leans more on Nietzsche, who affirms for Brooks his position on paradox as well as the depth reached by the good poet. Brooks says:

Nietzsche argued that in beauty "contrasts are overcome, the highest sign of power thus manifesting itself in the conquest of opposites." The artist, Nietzsche declared, creates out of joy and strength—not out of weakness—and the most convincing artists are precisely those "who make harmony ring out of every discord." The great artist is tested, Nietzsche felt, by the "extent to which he can acknowledge the terrible and questionable character of things," and still affirm the goodness of life. 46

Brooks, however, seems to deviate somewhat from his hard line of never integrating biographical material into poetic criticism when, in reference to Yeats's being as Christian as Virginia Moore tries to prove him to be in her book The Unicorn, he says:

What we can say with confidence is that Yeats found his imagination gripped by the great Christian symbols, that he found his mind constantly engaged by the historical and doctrinal problems of Christianity, and that through a lifetime he struggled against the thin and vapid oversimplifications of pseudoscience and popular scientism. Most important of all for our purposes, he sought to dramatize the perennial human problems as living, imaginative realities. He posed

46 Ibid., p. 52.
the great questions, and it is these posings, these dramatizations that are important for us—not Yeats's attempted solutions of these problems.47

Brooks here refers directly to the poet rather than strictly to the contents of a poem. Yet he adds that "One can refute the philosopher, but one cannot refute the truly well-made work of art. Yeats's own best poems are not subject to refutation. They embody truth even as the saint embodies truth";48 therefore Brooks does not divorce himself from his original stance, but he has added a more human element as he explores the artist himself in his own spiritual struggle. Brooks apparently becomes more concerned with the spiritual state of man and the inner life of the artist.

This concern is not surprising when a panoramic look is taken at the writers Brooks has favored. They have primarily included Donne, Milton, Wordsworth, Yeats, and Eliot, all of whom concern themselves with the soul of man. Brooks gives high praise to Yeats for "Under Ben Bulben":

I have no hesitation in saying what I believe we should think of it. It is mature poetry. It is brilliant and subtle poetry. Much of it is great poetry. It asserts the dignity and power of the human spirit against the spiritual and intellectual corruption of our time. That is much to claim for it; that is all that I think necessary to claim for it.49

47 Ibid., p. 60.
48 Ibid., p. 61.
49 Ibid., p. 67.
Eliot's poetry, from the very beginning is conceived in terms of the following problem: how is revealed truth to be mediated to the gentiles? How is that which is by definition ineffable to be translated into words, no direct transmission of the vision being possible. This problem engaged his attention simply as poet, long before he ever became a Christian poet. For the problem is that of the necessary indirection of poetry.50

Possibly Eliot's concept of the objective correlative, which partially coincides with Brooks theory of the poet and his audience, developed from this problem. Brooks says of the emotional response of the audience:

The genuine poet is of course always concerned with a specific and concrete and individual experience; the undifferentiated generalization, the cliche, the stereotype--these are symptoms of his failure--of the kind of falsification that pertains peculiarly to art. The poet must be indirect, and as a consequence he always has to say to his audience: he that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Even if he yearns for the largest audience possible--and what writer does not?--he still cannot supply the ears for his audience. He can do no more than to try by various devices--intimation, dramatic shock, change of tone, ironic confrontation, and all the other rhetorical and poetic devices--to wheedle or bludgeon his audience into attending to what he has to say....51

Now the problem facing the modern Christian poet, according to Brooks, is to find new symbols and revitalize old symbols in order to achieve the necessary dynamicism to make artistic indirection meaningful for expressing the Christian experience. For example, Brooks discusses how Eliot in the Cocktail Party and in Family Reunion is forced to avoid traditional Christian terms and symbols.

50 Ibid., p. 71.
51 Ibid., pp. 71-2.
because the modern audience with their loss of myth and
spiritual reality simply cannot comprehend what the poet
means when he speaks of—or deals with—a state of grace
or falling from grace—or, as Eliot says, "a sense of
sin."

It is strange that Brooks does not explore the poetry
of Wallace Stevens more than he does since both Stevens and
Eliot are so cognizant of the need for new vitality and new
symbols in poetry; however, when he finally does mention
Stevens in "A Concluding Note," the final section in The
Hidden God, he does praise him as a poet who by celebrating
changing nature directs the reader toward "changeless
immortality":

Even purer instances of such celebration would be
found in the poetry of Dylan Thomas or in that of
Wallace Stevens, who descants tirelessly and often
very beautifully on the endlessly shifting world
around us, which is an incitement to man's imagin­
ation, which provides the imagination with the
pigments by which, and the canvas upon which, it
paints its vision, and yet which constitutes the
very ground in which man and his imagination are
rooted.

But to reach most effectively the imagination of the
insensitive audience, Brooks advocates violence—shock treat­
ment—which he refers to as "poetic strategy" of the type
used by Yeats in "The Second Coming" where the "rough
beast.../Slouches toward Bethlehem," and by Eliot, whose
Thomas in Murder in the Cathedral, while addressing himself

52 Ibid., p. 74.
53 Ibid., p. 130.
directly to the modern audience, tells them that they "must all be punished."

Brooks also defends the necessity for the difficulty encountered in reading poets of the caliber of Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens:

The truth of the matter is that it [the difficulty] could not be avoided, that is, if the poet were to be true to his vision and true to the circumstances under which that vision was vouchsafed. For the very point about the modern world is that the old landmarks are gone—that we cannot afford to trust to stereotypes—that one and the same object changes meaning in being moved from one spiritual context to another. Our own society which tends to assign fixed meanings and to adhere to them mechanically—our society which dreads mystery and is fearful of paradoxes—our own society in particular has to be taught to look beneath surface appearances and to regard things from shifting points if it is to see anything to the purpose at all.54

Ironically the poet can only reach this audience, according to Brooks, through analogies, because he must not "bypass man's mortal imagination," since "Man cannot transcend the life of the senses by his own power."55 Brooks seems to recognize the genuine poet by his willingness and ability to assume this awesome burden of helping man to transcend his senses through his senses. Brooks supports his belief by quoting from Allen Tate's The Forlorn Demon, where, in comparing Poe to Dante, Tate writes:

The human intellect cannot reach God as essence; only God as analogy. Analogy to what? Plainly analogy to the natural world; for there is nothing

54 Ibid., pp. 81-2.
55 Ibid., p. 95.
in the intellect that has not previously reached
it through the senses.... Poe's center is that
place--to use Dante's great figure--"where the
sun is silent." Since he refuses to see nature,
he is doomed to see nothing. He has overleaped
and cheated the condition of man. The reach of
our imaginative enlargement is perhaps no longer
than the ladder of analogy, at the top of which
we may see all, if we still wish to see anything,
that we have brought up with us from the bottom,
where lies the sensible world. If we take nothing
with us to the top but our emptied, angelic intellects,
we shall see nothing when we get there. 56

Brooks feels very strongly that the poet must use the real
world to reach the divine, that he must never lose sight
of the physical limitations of man, and that God made this
world not to hide himself from man but to provide a key
with which man may open his soul to Him. Brooks concludes
his chapter with the final chorus in Murder in the Cathedral,
in which Eliot warns us that "all of us, even the professing
Christians, are gentiles. We cannot see directly and face
to face." 57 It is, therefore, the duty of the poet through
his poetry to lead the gentiles by the use of this world's
substance to what is beyond it.

Brooks, however, does not feel that "dedication to
his art, would ... necessarily bring the artist to Chris-
tianity," but it "may well protect the artist from some of
the deceptions endemic to our time." 58

56 Ibid., p. 96.
57 Ibid., p. 97
58 Ibid., p. 99.
Yet Brooks is quick to remind the public of its equal responsibility. Since the modern dilemma of man draws him into the web of the temporal world where the words of Dow Jones surplant the prophets, he is losing his ability to hear truth, therefore his ability to read the poets. Brooks finds man losing his belief, or conception, of myth, demanding formulas and test tube proof. Brooks warns:

The truth of a poem does not reside in a formula. It cannot be got at by mere logic. Poetry itself is incommensurable with charts and timetables. It is a piece of--perhaps I should say an "imitation" of--our fluid and multiform world.... Perhaps if we could read poetry we might understand our plight better: not merely because we could hear what our poets have to tell us about our world but because the very fact that we could read the poems would itself testify to an enlargement of our powers of apprehension--would testify to a transcendence of a world abstracted to formula and chart. A growing mobility to read poetry may conversely point to a narrowing of apprehension, to a hardening of the intellectual arteries which will leave us blind to all but that world of inflexible processes and arid formulas which may be our doom.\(^59\)

Brooks still maintains his optimism that the poets do have the power to give man the vision to see himself as he is and to awaken his imagination, without which Brooks says the spirit is dead.\(^60\)

As a critic Brooks believes in the unity and drama of a poem whose language is paradox and whose content can be placed in no other form without distortion to what the poem is and what it says. He believes that irony is indispensable

\(^{59}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 99.}\)

\(^{60}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 108.}\)
to all great poetry. He believes that all things are religious but that poetry, which imparts its own special knowledge, should be distinguished from religion. His purpose is to describe and evaluate, and his hope is for an awakened public turning once again to the great poets.

Most of the key items in the credo of Brooks are open to challenge, and, both directly and indirectly, challenges are delivered by Wheelwright and by the Chicago Critics. Wheelwright would probably launch his hypothetical debate with Brooks by questioning the pure autonomy of the poem, the idea of the isolated esthetic state that poems manifest. If, as Wheelwright assumes, archetypal contents in the reader are activated by the poem, then a large portion of the poem's value is in the psychological bridge with the reader, which would constitute a major qualification of any theory of poetic autonomy. The Chicago Critics have a greater respect for paraphrase than Brooks, and their challenge at this point will be seen as valid. Also, they cast serious doubt upon the single-mindedness with which Brooks asserts the doctrine of irony as the essential center of all major poems. Furthermore, it may be that Brooks's later interest in religious content implies some measure of departure from his earlier heavily esthetic center of interest.
CHAPTER III

PHILIP WHEELWRIGHT: A MYTH CRITIC

Philip Wheelwright shares Cleanth Brooks's despair over modern man's separation from poetry, which man now considers pretty pieces of frivolity rather than an integral part of his life. Taking a position similar to Brooks's analogy of the "efficient rewrite girl," Wheelwright sees modern poetry as having "no truth value that is distinctive to it as poetry. The poet is not in any sense a seer or prophet; he is simply, in the jargon of advertising, an effective lay out man." Since the time of Descartes, according to Wheelwright, western man has ceased to be able to conceive of the spiritual or of anything which transcends scientific or visual proof; therefore, as both critics have pointed out, since poetry is not written by formula but is dependent upon the imagination of the poet and the reader, it loses its potency when it is expected to deliver a message in steno-language or language stripped of ambiguity or elasticity. Wheelwright does, however, see a possible solution to man's present sterility of imagination: "The thing required of us, I believe, if we are to escape the blind alley of empirical positivism,

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is a proper understanding of myth and of mythical consciousness."² He explains how society has relegated myth to the genre of the fairy story or the allogry, "a kind of fiction that should be renounced as completely as possible by the serious truth seeker"³ since myth is a medium through which man embraces a higher reality, an ambition shared by neither fairy tale nor allegory.

Wheelwright defends myth thus:

What I want to stress is that this secular positivistic attitude toward myth appears to me quite inadequate to explain the facts—I mean, of course, the salient, the really interesting aspect of the facts. It ignores or deprecates that haunting awareness of transcendental forces peering through the cracks of the visible universe, that is the very essence of myth. It blandly overlooks the possibility, which to Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, and many others was an axiom of assured faith, that myth may have a nonexchangeable semantic function of its own—that myth may express visions of truth to which the procedures of the scientist are grossly irrelevant; that the mythical consciousness, in short ... may be a dimension of experience cutting across the empirical dimension as an independent variable.⁴

Wheelwright sees myth as a heritage from man's traditional past, his link not only with the spiritual or aesthetic but with other men, since "myths are the expression of a community mind which has enjoyed long natural growth, so that the sense of togetherness becomes patterned and semantically significant."⁵ If man tries to

²Ibid., p. 10.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 11.
⁵Ibid., p. 12.
substitute organizations such as labor unions or even social clubs, he is deluding himself, for he has only become a part of what Wheelwright calls a mass which "cannot create myths for it has no real history," and this critic warns that when man withdraws from "myth-consciousness, the dissociated consciousness becomes in time unoriented and sterile, fit for neither great poetry nor great wisdom nor great deeds."  

Wheelwright feels that it is through the rhythm of the spoken language that man achieves and passes on the community mind. Primitive speech, explains Wheelwright, possesses a naturally evocative quality: it is felt as having a tendency to endow the world with the qualities which it declares to be there. The metaphorical character of primitive language, on the other hand, consists in its tendency to be rather manifoldly allusive: it can be so, because of the varied associations with which communication within a closed society has gradually become charged; and it has a semantic necessity of being so, because only in language having multiple reference can the full manifold, and paradoxical character of the primordial Mystery find fit expression. Owing to such referential plenitude the language of primitives tends to employ paradox freely: it makes use of statements contradicting each other and of statements contradicting an experientially accepted situation; for the Mystery which it tries to express cannot be narrowed down to logical categories.

Primitive men united through ritual, which "connotes a way of doing," as a community to reach the deities or to follow the dead beyond the world of mortal man. A typical

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6 Ibid., p. 13.
7 Ibid., p. 15.
example used frequently by Wheelwright is the Fijians, who chanted the progress of the dead through their stages of breaking associations with this life and preparing for the new one. This ritualistic chanting, telling the story of the journey of the dead, offered the primitives not only communion with one another but also with the spiritual world, giving both a reality. Wheelwright feels that poetic language is the mediator; it brings forth the image and the idea and gives them a comprehensive concreteness. He agrees with Shelley, who believed that "in the infancy of society every author is a poet, because language itself is poetry." 9

Wheelwright believes that the greatest poets, those who have been able to communicate their wisdom and magic, which he defines as an "operation through a direct emotional congruence established between the operator and his object," 10 have employed myth. The extent to which the artist incorporates myth effectively or the method by which he employs it, Wheelwright feels, is determined by the attitude of the age toward myth. He pities the modern poet born into "the late afternoon of a culture" which has lost the rhythm of the time myth ("the working out of patterned destiny") employed, for instance, by the Greeks. His discussion of

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10 Ibid., pp. 26-7.
11 Ibid., pp. 22-7.
the decline of the culture is very reminiscent of Yeats's conception of the 2000 year cycle, not in the designated time span, but in man's moving away from his roots and deteriorating as he loses sight of his traditional beliefs. Both believe that myth can furnish man with a form of salvation, a medium through which to regain contact with his traditional roots.

Myth, however, must rely upon language, especially poetic language, which Wheelwright explains, is not limited to the confines of logical language, but neither is it completely divorced from it. The basic difference is this:

whereas strictly logical language is content to designate the general characteristics of an object--those which give it membership in a class concept--expressive language--which, when controlled by deliberate art, may be called poetic language--draws the hearer's attention to what is most concrete, particular, and distinctive about some actual or proposed experience taken in its wholeness.¹²

The poetic language, therefore, must remain fluid as it fluctuates from one experience to another, governed by the context; but logical language, once a word is defined, must remain static. Wheelwright says that "one aim of expressive language is to do fullest possible justice to the ever-changing character of experience as actually lived and concretely imagined" since it must reflect "the fluctuations of life itself."¹³


¹³ Ibid., p. 370.
Wheelwright is very close to Brooks' theory of the indirection of poetic language when the myth critic paraphrases the Tao Teh Ching: "The Tao that can be spoken is not the real Tao." The point he wishes to make is that part of the poet's problem is his being "constrained to let some element of language do proxy for what he is trying to reach out to and know." Wheelwright makes two divisions in language: fluid language and steno-language. The former is the living language of the poet; the latter has lost its ambiguity or elasticity. In The Burning Fountain he uses steno-language as a synonym for literal language, which he calls "the language of science, and in general of precise logical denotation." However, as Wheelwright explains, the poet requires language that can adequately, or almost adequately speak forth the living truths of human experience ... and since those truths are always somewhat dark, kaleidoscopic and elusive, an appropriate language will to some extent, and with chosen controls, reflect those qualities. Wallace Stevens writes:

The imperfect is our paradise.
Note that, in this bitterness, delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot in us,
Lies in flawed words and stubborn sounds.

One of the controls which the poet must exert over these "flawed words and stubborn sounds" is the combining

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16 Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, p. 43.
of them into a context which creates a subtle unity in
which they are interdependent. As Wheelwright explains it:

One aim of expressive language is to do fullest
possible justice to the everchanging character of
experience as actually lived and concretely imagined;
it's meanings will reflect to some degree, although
never adequately, the fluctuations of life itself.
Hence a word or phrase functioning poetically,
although never entirely out of relation to its
prose-and-dictionary meaning, acquires fresh con-
notations, fresh overtones of suggestiveness, from
each new context into which it enters. The result
is that there are likely to be tensions of meaning-
semantic tensions--between what I. A. Richards has
called the "scenario meaning" of an expressive passage
and the connotations which the context calls into
being, or even between one such set of connotations
and another.... It would be roughly true to say
that whereas logical-literal meanings are character-
istically stipulative, expressive-poetic meanings
are characteristically contextual.17

Language in its broadest sense Wheelwright defines as
"any intelligibly related system of symbols," and he re-
stricts it to "two complimentary uses: To designate
clearly as a means to efficient communication and to
express maximum fullness."18 Wheelwright points out
that Biblically man's first act was to name the beasts
and that it is significant that man, not God, did the
naming because "man's primordial act, as a contemplative
being, is the act of symbolization." He defines a symbol
as "that which means," and what it means can be as various
"as the ways in which one thing can stand for and lead
the mind to something else."19 All symbols share a common

18 Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain, p. 25.
19 Ibid., pp. 18-19
property: "being more in intention than they are in existence." A symbol, he says, also "invites consideration rather then overt action and characteristically ... involves intention to communicate." While Brooks stresses paradox, irony, and analogy, Wheelwright prefers metaphor, whose very name ("phora" implying motion and "meta" implying change) expresses "the life principal of poetry." Wheelwright says that ... since we cannot always be dealing with tensive language as a whole, it is desirable to look for a unit, or quasi-unit, of such language and one that shall be sufficiently representative. Three words have been put forward for the purpose in critical writings: image, symbol, and metaphor. Wheelwright knows that each of the terms is of value to the critic, but he feels that if John Middleton Murry is right when he says, "metaphor is as ultimate as speech itself and speech as ultimate as thought," then "a Fortiori metaphor is essential to the living speech and thought that are poetry." Wheelwright divides metaphor into epiphor and diaphor. Epiphor relates or compares two elements, one lesser known than the other, to achieve an understanding of the greater reality which cannot be expressed. He gives such examples as "God the Father" and "the milk of human kindness" to

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. 25.
22 Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, pp. 66-7.
23 Ibid., p. 69.
exemplify how we must use the metaphoric temporal element, like father, to approach an understanding of the more important but unexplainable term, like God. He explains that

since the essential mark of epiphor—which is to say metaphor in the conventional Aristotelian sense—is to express a similarity between something relatively well known or concretely known (the semantic vehicle) and something which, although of greater worth or importance, is less known or more obscurely known (the semantic tenor), and since it must make its point by means of words, it follows that an epiphor presupposes a vehicular image or notion that can readily be understood when indicated by a suitable word or phrase.\(^{24}\)

Diaphor, on the other hand, Wheelwright sees as combining elements which by juxtaposition create a new meaning which neither of them possesses separately. Diaphor and epiphor often intermingle, but diaphor is more closely associated with music, which is non imitative, or, as Wheelwright says, with abstract painting, in which the artist moves away from the "mimetic factor." Epiphor moves toward it. For example he explains Wallace Steven's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" as an example of diaphoric relationships. Wheelwright says that the thirteen verses "are related diaphorically, by pure juxtaposition, and the presence of the blackbird in each of them gives a sort of unity that is purely presentational, quite without any apparent epiphoric significance."\(^{25}\) He contrasts the diaphoric blackbird to the epiphoric rose garden in

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 73.

\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 84.
Four Quartets or to Eliot's still point of the turning wheel. Wheelwright compares diaphor to the creation of the very earth itself when hydrogen and oxygen combined under the necessary conditions, creating the previously non-existent water, and he reminds us that "such diaphoric synthesis is indispensable to poetry."\(^{26}\)

Wheelwright sees, as does Brooks, the greater dimensions of irony, and part of his emphasis upon metaphor is as one of the strongest devices for the ironic fusions of the paradoxes of man's existence. He explains this bringing together of opposites as one of the primary responsibilities of the poet:

In every instance of real as opposed to nominal knowledge we are partly insiders and partly outsiders looking in. The dual role, the in-and-out movement of the mind seeking to penetrate its object, frames every experience with the irony of its own finitude. In the distractions of practical life and in the security of theorizing alike we may lose sight of that irony, and not the least of the poet's important tasks is to bring us back to ourselves, and to it, by an evocative image or cadence, or by the jolt of an unexpected metaphor.\(^{27}\)

As a means for transcending the literal world to reach truths which can never find full expression and for finding the spiritual through the physical, Wheelwright has discussed metaphor and symbol, but closely related to both of these poetic devices, as well as to myth, is a third term--

\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 86.

archetype. When discussing Goethe's theory that each phenomenon contains within it the universal, Wheelwright, in his essay "Philosophy on the Threshold," says:

All nature in Goethe's view is variously and changingly interrelated; and the phenomena which manifest themselves on the surface not only inter-penetrate one another but variously reveal the perduing universals which they express and symbolize. Such symbolism is intrinsic; which is to say that every quality, character, happening is at once concrete event ... and archetype.28

To explain this intricate relationship between symbol and archetype, Wheelwright, in The Burning Fountain, discusses the Egyptian uraeus:

Aristotle's triadic way of envisioning all natural process ["the subject of any change is numerically one, but with a duality of form"] is a kind of skeletal reflection of a religious archetype of fundamental importance: The triad of Destruction, Creation, Preservation. In many of the sacraments connected with seasonal worship it is the first two terms that are stressed--dying and resurrected God. But the third term is usually implicit, for it is the same Tammuz or Attis or Osiris who is born to new life in the new year. The sacred uraeus of Egypt, consisting of winged globe and serpent, is a symbol of this triadic relationship.29

Wheelwright explains each of the parts of the sacred uraeus as they function as both symbol and archetype:

The dark disc represents the unknown God as the creative source of all things. The wings represent "the brooding and flying and protecting care and goodness of the Spirit." The serpent is symbolically ambivalent. To complete the triad neatly we would have to suppose that the serpent, by reason of its lurking deadliness, symbolizes death. Actually, however, all three archetypal elements are recapitualted in the serpent itself.

28 Ibid., p. 68.
Death it signifies, for familiar reasons. But stretched out straight, the serpent becomes a phallus symbolizing the reproductive power of Godhead—an idea which is reinforced by the serpent's periodic shedding of its skin and thus being born, as it were, to new life. Finally, when coiled into a circle, it symbolizes the self-sufficiency and oneness which are associated with God's preservative power. Thus both the serpent figure itself and the winged figure which includes it represent the divine triad of Creation—Destruction—Preservation.

Wheelwright proposes that the greatest achievements in poetry, however, have been created through the fusion of "the metaphoric and archetypal modes of envisagement—where what I may call the Melting-pot and the Threshold activities of imagination are in a serene but quickening state of tension." He illustrates his theory with Shakespeare's lines from Cymbeline: Golden lads and girls all must,/ As chimney-sweepers, come to dust." Wheelwright states:

The way of the Melting Pot is to create a fresh relationship between two or more images (with attendant ideas or adumbrations of idea) which outside of just that poetic context would be somewhat disparate and irrelevant, but from who present unexpected combination a nuance emerges which has not hitherto existed. The way of the Threshold is to see a general idea in and through the particular images drawn from the real world, heightened but not radically distorted by the poet's creative imagination. To combine these two ways in a single living act of being, through, and utterance is to accept the challenge of Wannemunne and sing the full human song.

\[30\] Ibid., p. 134.
\[31\] Ibid., p. 149.
\[32\] Ibid., p. 154.
The full human song to which Wheelwright alludes is part of the Estonian myth of the god of song Wannemunne, who descended once to the earth where the wind and trees as well as the birds and fish imitated, each in his own way, a part of the ethereal music. Only man was able to capture it all; "therefore his song pierces into the depths of the heart, and mounts upwards to the dwellings of the gods." 33

One poet who Wheelwright evidently feels has accepted the challenge of Wannemunne and has not lost the rhythm of the time myth nor myth-consciousness is T. S. Eliot. Wheelwright calls Eliot's Four Quartets "perhaps the most fully pertinent single poem of our moment in history." 34 The poem interests him not so much from the standpoint of the philosophical propositions that can be screened out of the poem, still less with those that can be imposed upon it as an ideological test; but mainly with the ideas which emerge, or half emerge, from the poetic song and movement and imagery themselves. 35

Before he begins his critical exploration of Four Quartets, Wheelwright constructs a framework by which he intends to progress. He feels that "in poetic art the power of the idea should be fused with the rhythmic and imagistic actuality of the poem," and that "Eliot's much quoted testimony 'that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend

33 Ibid., p. 3.
34 Ibid., p. 330.
to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image, 'needs to be remembered in any discussion of a poet's philosophy.' Wheelwright makes a significant statement in connection with Eliot's theory: "Rhythm and ideation, song and vision, collaborate in the poetic act; and their tension motivates--perhaps even is--the poem."36

Wheelwright is quite specific concerning his method of critical approach, which is "not expository but perspectival," since, as he explains in his introduction to Metaphor and Reality, all writing must be "perspectival in the most general sense," for

to speak forth honestly is to report the world as it is beheld ... in one's own perspective. Things have contexts, but only a person has perspective. The essential excuse for writing, then, is to unveil as best one can some perspective that has not already become ordered into a public map.37

Wheelwright, reflecting his myth orientation, discovers what he believes to be the archetype of the Vanishing Garden in the Four Quartets and The Waste Land. The Vanishing Garden, he explains, is not only the Christian belief in the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, but also the psychological effect of man's expulsion from the maternal womb; however, there is also a Navaho myth of which he believes Eliot is aware. Two Navaho boys, one blind and one crippled,

36 Ibid.

37 Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, pp. 15-6.
enter the sacred lodge to a sweat bath which forces out
the body's evil through the pores of the skin and where
silence is imperative; they break the silence, and the
lodge with its healing power vanishes forever from the
Indians. 38

Wheelwright, explaining this archetype as "a major
idea underlying" both poems, says:

In the one poem the hyacinth garden passage followed
by the sombre emptiness of "Oed' und leer das Meer,"39
in the other the rose garden scene followed by "Then
a cloud passed and the pool was empty," are among
the more explicit representations of it. The closing
lines of "Burnt Norton"--

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after

might express a state of consciousness parallel to
that of the bereft Navaho brothers left sitting on
the open ground.40

Wheelwright apparently enjoys digressing and theorizing
upon the origin and historical implications of symbols;
it could be his method of familiarizing his readers with
their lost myths, which by his reasoning would be valuable,
since he feels that a conception of and familiarity with
myth is indigenous to the appreciation--or experience--of
poetry. For example he extensively explores the scholarship


39In Modern Poetry & The Tradition Brooks interprets
the line as forming an "Ironic contrast" to the Hyacinth
Garden. He points out that the line originates from Act III
of Tristan und Isolde and that it "reminds us that even
love cannot exist in the waste land."

on the myth of the Fisher King as he links his "mysterious wound" with Eliot's "wounded surgeon" in "East Coker." Wheelwright's method of criticism is indeed rich; it informs the reader, thereby enabling him to more deeply appreciate the poet's art. Yet when he speaks directly of that art as a whole, his conception of it is akin to that of Cleanth Brooks. According to Wheelwright:

An artist, to be of any interest, must "have something to say." What he has to say is uniquely related to the language and context of his art; it cannot be said in any other way than he has said it.... His quick perception detects some quality in a scene or event that he wishes to commemorate by his art and so immortalize by withdrawing it from the stream of time.42

The purpose of the critic, Wheelwright states, "is not to set limits to the powers and discoveries of the creative mind, but to observe and not too assertively comment upon their results."43

Mythical consciousness, Wheelwright believes, can salvage man's creative imagination from a too scientific environment by enabling him to believe in more than he can see or concretely prove. Man, therefore, is free to oblige the spirit, to seek it out in himself, in other men, and in tradition; and by so doing he finds an intangible reality. Poetic language, according to Wheelwright, is the link with myth, which is the medium wherein man regains what he has lost. The poet's language is fluid, it is metaphorical,

41 Ibid., p. 354.
43 Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality, p. 75.
utilizing irony and archetype. By Wheelwright's definition the critic is primarily a perspectival writer who observes and comments.

It seems apparent that, as a strong vector in the lines of the poetic debate, Wheelwright succeeds in making a case for mythic content which would cause many readers to raise it at least as high in poetic theory as Brooksian irony. Irony obviously pertains chiefly to local content in the poem, and myth content obviously pertains to historical phenomena outside the poem. The fact that both critics make effective claims for their categories is itself suggestive that an improper polemical narrowness attaches to both positions. The Chicago Critics, as the next chapter attempts to suggest, formulate an impressive theoretic basis for a plurality of modes of criticism, and make possible a poetic theory which can accept the value of the insights of Brooks and Wheelwright, yet also avoid the narrowness that they seem to display.
CHAPTER IV

R. S. CRANE AND ELDER OLSON: CHICAGO CRITICS

Ronald S. Crane, chief spokesman for a group of critics referred to as the Chicago Critics or the neo-Aristotelians or the Pluralists, professes the belief that there is no one total approach to criticism, such as structure or myth. To him what is most important is a logical system to be set up by each responsible critic which explains his poetic theory just as Aristotle and Coleridge set up their methods. This demands definition of terms used by the critic. For example, Crane says of criticism:

It is natural for me to think of criticism in the context not of literary journalism or of general cultural discussion but of humanistic learning--as a form of inquiry to be cultivated in the same questioning spirit, for the sake of a disinterested understanding and appreciation of its objects in their own natures, as is proper to the study of history, language, and ideas, and with an approach to the same rigour of analysis and statement.¹

He explains that his preference for considering criticism as a learning is a prejudice derived from his background as a scholar and university teacher--a prejudice in that what "criticism in general is or should be" has not been "authoritatively settled."²

²Ibid.
In his famous introduction to Critics and Criticism, which is the compilation of the critical approaches and poetic theories of the Chicago Critics, and in reference to the shared beliefs exemplified by these writers, Crane says:

In the first place, for all of them from the beginning, the problem of literary criticism, upon which they have concentrated here, has been inseparable from the much larger problem of how the humanities in general might be brought to play a more influential role in the culture and action of the contemporary world; and their conception both of the relations between criticism and other human studies and of the terms in which, at the present time, criticism may be most fruitfully discussed springs directly from their views on this more inclusive issue. The humanities... are distinguishable from the natural and the social sciences by their special concern with those aspects of man's achievements in sciences, in institutions, and in arts which are most distinctively human in the sense that their causes are not completely reducible either to natural processes common to men and animals or to super-personal conditions and forces affecting all the members of a given society. The humanities are therefore coextensive with the arts or methods that enable us to isolate these aspects for our appreciation and use. And they are necessarily multi-dimensional, inasmuch as the humanistic properties of human achievements vary independently according to the character of the symbolic medium in which the achievements are embodied or through which they affect us; the quality of the philosophic, scientific, moral, or religious ideas which they express or imply; the nature of the literary or artistic structures into which they are built; and the peculiarities of the historical situations in the midst of which they emerge.4

Crane's dissatisfaction is not with the public but with the literary critic. When the arts fall into a corrupt state, he thinks it is the business and the responsibility

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of the critic to purify and to elevate them. Poetic theory is so interrelated not only with the other humanities but with its own tradition that Crane feels the critic should be a serious student of the history of criticism and of philosophy, as well as of the arts.

As one of the primary reasons for criticism having fallen into such an undisciplined state, Crane cites the fact that the critic, unlike the scientist, need not worry about any reproach more serious than scholarly scorn when he publishes his most recent theory. Under such circumstances it is primarily left up to the integrity of the individual critic that he attain a scientific accuracy, since there is virtually no one else to gage it for the public. Crane says:

We lack, in short, most of the compelling motives to re-examination of our basic premises and procedures which have played so conspicuous a part in keeping the sciences alive and promoting their growth. What, therefore, the humanities fail to provide naturally we must endeavor to supply by taking thought; and the most efficacious means would appear to be a combination of efforts directed (1) to subjecting the principles currently employed in the various humanistic arts to a systematic critique of their powers and limitations and (2) to investigating the possibilities of particular methods in the different arts which either have not been developed in the past or have been neglected in modern times because the questions to which they are suitable, though as pertinent as ever humanistically, have been allowed to disappear from view.6

The term neo-Aristotelian derives from the Chicago school's acknowledged respect for the logical method employed by Aristotle in his exploration of art. According

6 Ibid., p. 4.
to Crane, Aristotle bases his poetic theory on the assumption that

while everything in the world, including poetry, is inextricably connected with everything else, the essential condition of knowledge is a strict division of labour among the various sciences and arts and the constitution of any science or art as a distinct line of inquiry differing from other inquiries by having some specific and limited kind of knowledge as its end.7

Now Aristotle's concept of knowledge, as Crane sees it, relates to the primary aim of poetics, which Aristotle says is "the discovery and statement of the principles which govern poets when they make good poems."8 According to the Greek philosopher, these same principles should be used to form judgments of particular poems. The knowledge obtained from this process "is not knowledge for its own sake but knowledge for the sake of a certain kind of human activity, the purpose or good which determines the character of the data with which it is concerned and the method to be employed in dealing with them."9

Aristotle, according to Crane, gives poetry the status of a productive science ... of which the end is the making of products that have beauty of some sort as their distinguishing characteristics, being things to which we attribute value for the intrinsic excellence of their making rather than for any further utility they may be made to serve."10

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7 Crane, The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry, p. 40.
8 Ibid., p. 43.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 44.
Crane, however, is not advocating the limitation of the actual theory of such classic critics as Aristotle; he is stressing the necessity to emulate their carefully constructed systems. Crane sounds very like Aristotle when in The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry he gives his basis for the criticism of any given literary work:

We shall have to assume that any poetic work, like any other production of human art, has, or rather is, a definite structure of some kind which is determined immediately by its writer's intuition of a form to be achieved in its materials by the right use of his medium, and furthermore, that we can arrive at some understanding of what this form actually is and use our understanding as a principle in the analysis and criticism of the work. We shall have to come to some agreement, moreover, as to what we will mean by "poetic works"; but here again the fewer specifications we impose on ourselves in advance the better. It will be sufficient for all our purposes if we begin, simply, by taking as "poems" or "works of literary art" all those kinds of productions which have been commonly called such at different times, but without any supposition that, because these have the same name, they are all "poems" or "works of literary art" in the same fundamental structural sense—that the art necessary to write The Divine Comedy or The Faerie Queene is the same art, when viewed in terms of its peculiar principles of form, as the art which enabled Shakespeare to write King Lear and Othello. And for such productions we shall need to assume, in addition, only one common characteristic: That they are all works which, in one degree or another, justify critical consideration primarily for their own sake, as artistic structures, rather than merely for the sake of knowledge or wisdom they express or the practical utility we may derive from them, though either or both of these other values may be importantly involved in any particular case.\textsuperscript{11}

Crane then describes what the task as critic should be:

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., pp. 165-6.
Our task ... is not to explain the writer's activity but the result thereof; our problem is not psychological but artistic; and hence the causes that centrally concern us are the internal causes of which the only sufficient evidence is the work itself as a completed product.... We propose to consider poems as unique existent things the structural principles of which are to be discovered, rather than as embodiments of general truths about the structure of poetry already adequately known.12

He continues with remarks directed against the New and Myth critics:

Our task is not to show the reflection in poems of complex or "ironical" attitudes, interactions of prose and poetry or of logical structure and irrelevant texture, patterns of ritual drama, or basic mythical themes, on the assumption that if the poem is a good poem it will inevitably have whichever of these or other similarly derived general structures we happen to be interested in finding examples of; it is rather the task of making formal sense out of any poetic work before us on the assumption that it may in fact be a work for whose peculiar principles of structure there are nowhere any usable parallels either in literary theory or in our experience of other works.13

Crane feels that both the Myth and the New Critics in their approaches leave out the distinctive element of each good poem which makes it unique. He does not deny that paradox, irony, and archetype may be within the being of the poem; but he does feel that to approach every poem the same way is a mistake. Crane feels strongly that the poem itself will probably indicate the critical approach and that the critic may discover something within it which is completely new. If, however, the approach is a monistic one rather than pluralistic, the critic can jeopardize his

12 Ibid., pp. 166-7.
13 Ibid., pp. 167-8.
evaluation by his limited approach, and may well miss the true greatness of the poem. Crane also resents the lumping together of all poetic works without respect for literary genres. He says that one does not critically approach a lyric as he would an epic and expect to find what sets it apart for greatness or poetic beauty.

In the light of this feeling against monism in Criticism, Crane explains the hypotheses made by the Chicago Critics. He says that they will not be fixed approaches such as scientists use when they are not searching to discover but merely demonstrating what is already known.14

Crane explains that they will be the tentative kind—to be modified or rejected altogether at the dictation of the facts—which are the proper means to any serious inductive inquiry. They will be particular working hypotheses for the investigation of the structures of individual poems, not general hypotheses about such things as poetry or "poetic drama" in which the specific nature of the individual structures to be examined is already assumed.15

Crane sees an urgent need for a greater depth of scholarship for each aspiring critic, but he knows that merely being a scholar does not automatically prepare anyone to be a critic. Without the true quest of scholarship, which should not be content with partial answers, criticism has fallen, Crane believes, into an acceptance of unjustified theories. He feels that if the critics

14 Ibid., p. 168.
15 Ibid.
were true scholars with a knowledge of the critical tradition, they would realize that many of the supposed new theories were really restatements of a part of Coleridge's philosophy or of some other historically imposing person. He does not accuse his fellows of plagiarization but of ignorance of what has preceded the twentieth century. Just as bad, however, is the scholar who, being aware of tradition but having himself no training as a critic, relies too heavily upon what has been done. As Crane says:

We must also distinguish between critical hypotheses in the strict sense and interpretative hypotheses concerning the details of literary works in their material aspects. It is not one of our presuppositions that "form" in poetry is "meaning"; we should hold, rather, that meaning is something involved in poems as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of the existence in them of poetic form, and hence that the recovery of meaning is an essential prerequisite to the discovery of form though not in itself such a discovery. Before we can understand a poem as an artistic structure we must understand it as a grammatical structure made up of successive words, sentences, paragraphs, and speeches which give us both meanings in the ordinary sense of that term and signs from which we may infer what the speakers, whether characters or narrators, are like and what they are thinking, feeling, or doing. The great temptation for critics who are not trained and practising scholars is to take this understanding for granted or to think that they can see, without training in criticism, all the problems which their distinctive methods are fitted to solve.16

In his essay "The Critical Monism of Cleanth Brooks"17 Crane directly attacks what he believes to be one of the

16 Ibid.

17 This essay first appeared in Modern Philology, May, 1948, under the title "Cleanth Brooks; or, the Bankruptcy of Critical Monism."
most harmful practices of many modern critics in general and of Brooks in particular--being more captivated by rhetoric than by logic. Crane's criticism of Brooks relates specifically to the contents of The Well Wrought Urn (1947) and a defensive essay by Brooks in College English (February, 1948) entitled "Irony and 'Ironic Poetry.'" Although Crane is in partial sympathy with Brooks, who he feels has provided worthy insight into the structural principles of poetry, he is disturbed at Brooks's willingness to present his monistic theory as a revelation virtually standing alone in the annals of critical history, leaving little to be added--if anything.

Crane respects Brooks's contribution. He even defends it:

On the immediate issues of his polemic against those who object to his enlargement of the term "irony" I think he is right. There is no reason why a critic who has chosen to make a common word like "irony" or "paradox" the central term of his system should not enjoy the privilege "of wrenching the work from its usual context--of at once specializing and broadening it...." I do not question either, that "irony," in Brooks's sense of the term, is a constant trait of all good poems, and I should have no quarrel with him had he been content to say so and to offer his analyses of texts as illustrations of one point among others, in poetic theory.18

Crane's quarrel does begin, however, when Brooks stops cold with irony, making it the whole of this theory, to which all parts are subordinate. To Brooks, says Crane, "irony, or paradox is poetry, tout simplement, its form no less than its matter; or rather, in the critical system

which he has constructed there is no principle save that
denoted by the words 'irony' or 'paradox' from which
significant propositions concerning poems can be derived."\(^{19}\)

In all fairness to Brooks, Crane does acknowledge the
New Critic's admission that he is partially indebted for
his particular theory of poetic structure and the language
of paradox to the following famous passage about higher
imagination from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*:

> This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, countroul ... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.\(^{20}\)

While Coleridge differentiates between poetry as
"architectonic thought" and a poem "or 'poetry' in its
limited meaning," as "a composition in words of a special kind," and creates a multidimensional poetic theory centered
upon the imagination, Brooks, Crane feels, fuses the definitions of a poem and of poetry and basically tries to explain this fusion only in terms of its not being science, without ever clearly stating what he believes a poem or

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 84.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., pp. 85-6.
poetry to be or ever satisfactorily distinguishing between them. Defining what something is in terms of what it is not is a logically sound approach to some unknown factors, but Crane will not accept Brooks's failure to prove that paradox and irony are the sole property of poetry. Brooks does not to Crane's satisfaction distinguish between the irony and paradox of poetry and the irony and paradox of other types of literature; therefore Brooks, to Crane's way of thinking, has not completed the proof of this theory concerning the language of poetry.21

Coleridge, as Crane says, differentiates between poems and other works as well as between types of poems; but Brooks, to Crane's continued dismay, appears to be mesmerized by the homogeneous grouping of all poems within a common structure. Crane feels that Brooks flagrantly oversimplifies. In comparison to Coleridge, for whom "at least three sciences are necessary to criticism--grammar, logic, and psychology,"22 Crane points out that

Brooks finds it possible to get along with only one, namely grammar; and with only one part of that, namely, its doctrine of qualification. His whole effort can be described not unfairly as an attempt to erect a theory of poetry by extending and analogizing from the simple proposition of grammar that the meaning of one word or group of words is modified by its juxtaposition in discourse with another word or group of words.23

21 Ibid., pp. 87-9.
22 Ibid., p. 93.
23 Ibid.
In that Brooks has not even proven that there is a type of irony and paradox that does not appear in prose but does in poetry, Crane submits that since Einstein's $E = mc^2$ brings "together in a single unified equation the hitherto 'discordant' qualities of mass and energy," then "judging it solely by Brooks's criterion for poetic 'structure,'" it is "the greatest 'ironical' poem written so far in the twentieth century."\(^{24}\)

In Crane's judgment, Brooks has ideas worth qualification and pursuit, yet he needs to take the time to test and validate each concept within his chosen framework. Because Brooks begins and ends with the linguistic matter of poetry, Crane sees Brooks's argument as circular, committing the fallacy of *petitio principii*, begging the question. Crane feels that it would have been much better had Brooks started "with concrete poetic wholes of various kinds, the parts of which, with their possible interrelationships, can be inferred as consequences from inductively established principles."\(^{25}\) The linguistic matter of poetry, Crane says, is, after all, its most common factor with all other literary forms.

In contrast to the ideas of Brooks which have been attacked by the Chicago Critics is the poetic theory of one of their most respected poets and critics, Elder Olson.

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 105.

\(^{25}\)Ibid.
Olson welcomes differences of opinion in literary criticism, since these differences bring with them new ideas. Differences, he warns, do not necessarily imply contradiction. Olson approaches his critical theory as a philosophy because, he says, "criticism ... is also philosophy." As a philosophy, it "is limited by the problems which it raises" and by the language which its inquiry demands; however the problems or inquiries are practically limitless and "there are many senses of the terms 'truth' and 'falsity.'" He reminds us that there are many diverse yet valid philosophies which "we should ... be wise enough to consider ... only as instruments, all with various powers and limitations, and valuable relatively to the kinds of question to which they are directed."

Olson advises us not to concern ourselves with trying to reconcile seemingly opposite points of view in an effort to arrive at the true interpretation of any poetic work. In his essay "An Outline of Poetic Theory" he says:

true interpretation is impossible when one system is examined in terms of another, as is true refutation when the refutative arguments are systematically different from those against which they are directed. To propose such a critique is, in effect, to state the possibility of a fourth philosophic attitude: that of pluralism.

Olson defines the pluralistic approach:


pluralism, taking both doctrine and method into account, holds the possibility of a plurality of formulations of truth and of philosophic procedures—in short, of a plurality of valid philosophies.\(^{28}\)

Olson reminds us that the comparison of criticism to philosophy is a logical one since criticism should be based on a philosophic system. The critic, feels Olson, should be interested in method since he is more in the position of a scientist than a creative artist; it is not up to him to create but to explore, examine and to provide a well-ordered framework for the knowledge he has obtained. Criticism must be ordered; it must be logical, or else, warns Olson, it falls into the hands of the irresponsible, who too often confuse opinion with fact. Noting that ancient and great philosophers (like Plato, Aristotle, Hume, and Kant) developed a theory of art, Olson makes this proposition:

that the number of possible critical positions is relative to the number of possible philosophic positions and that the latter is determined by two principal considerations: (1) the number of aspects of a subject which can be brought into discussion, as constituting its subject matter; (2) the kinds of basic dialectic which may be exerted upon that subject matter.\(^{29}\)

He says that the critic and the philosopher cannot discuss the subject: they discuss only the subject matter. The distinction between the two is, according to Olson, that "the subject is what is talked about; the subject

\(^{28}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{29}\text{Ibid.}\)
matter is that subject in so far as it is represented or implied in the discussion."\textsuperscript{30} 

The critic, believes Olson, may choose any subject matter he desires from a poem, whether it be the poet himself,\textsuperscript{31} the effect upon the audience, or other items. The critic, after making his selection, hopefully upon the basis of his own workable theory of poetry, should not be accused of having views that conflict with those of other critics who have accepted totally different viewpoints. For example, Olson uses the theories of "audience participation (the active view) or art as Experience (the passive view)"\textsuperscript{32} as seemingly contradictory positions. He agrees that they are different; however to interpret difference as contradiction or inconsistency he finds ridiculous, since the doctrines have different references. To imply contradiction is to imply that one view is true and one is false, warns Olson. Instead of this being the case, he says:

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid. Crane in his introduction to Critics and Criticism (p. 7) calls criticism "reasoned discourse." He maintains that the subject matter of any critical discussion "is accordingly identical with its formulation in the necessarily finite system of general terms the critic uses in framing his problems and stating his conclusions; and it follows that, before we can judge fairly of either the meaning or the validity of any critical statement, we must first reconstruct the underlying and often only partly explicit conceptual scheme in which the statement appears." 

\textsuperscript{31}In his book The Poetry of Dylan Thomas, Olson does use the poet as subject matter to illuminate this possibility--and does so with distinction.

\textsuperscript{32}Olson, Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern, p. 548.
all these views are perfectly true in their proper senses, for all are founded upon perfectly obvious aspects of art, poetic or otherwise. Nor, if they are not contradictory, are they inconsistent, in the sense that they proceed from, or result in, contradiction; for, asserting the existence of certain aspects of art as they do, they are all true in some sense, and it is impossible for true propositions to be inconsistent. Indeed, nothing prevents certain philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, from investigating all these aspects of art.33

Critics may differ not only in their selection of subject matter, but, as Olson points out, in their dialectic--integral or differential. He explains:

Subject matter criticism of the integral kind resolves the subject matter of the arts into something not peculiar to the arts, on the basis of likeness; and the principles of art, when so found, are always the principles of things other than art as well. Thus Plotinus finds the beautiful in art to consist in the imitation of the beautiful; but inquiry into that characteristic, for him, shows it to be common also to natural objects, and to actions, and so upward to the Beauty which is almost indistinguishable from the Good; and the ultimate solution of artistic as well as of all other problems lies, for him, in the contemplation of God. Differential criticism of this order, on the other hand, separates the kinds of subject matter and argues on the basis of such separation, either to distinguish the arts from other faculties or activities or to distinguish them inter se.34

Assuming that the subject is poetry, the critic must select his subject matter since, according to Olson, he will not be discussing subject but subject matter, as has been explained. For example the subject matter of Longinus would be transport and, as Olson sees it, his view would be active since the audience participates. Aristotle, on

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34 Ibid., p. 550.
the other hand, who actually discusses various subject matters, assumes a passive view when he expresses the concept of the audience experiencing tragedy by purgation of emotion. The important point at this juncture is that there is no contradiction between Longinus's view and Aristotle's. Since they have based their theories on different propositions neither of which is a direct negation of the other, both theories can be true. Judging from Olson's theory a critic may choose to study Wordsworth's poetry as it acts as a medium for the criteria proposed by Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* or, as Brooks does, as the poetic whole removed from poet, poetic intention, or time. Conversely, a historical critic may select a study of Wordsworth's poetry as it affects or reflects the Romantic movement as appropriate subject matter for his poetic theory. None of these can be judged one against the other to determine truth or falsity.

Olson is not opposed to what Brooks has done when he seeks to separate poetic language from any other literary language.

Olson is opposed to what he calls partial criticism, in which the critic has bothered neither to consider the whole of a work nor to set up the ground rules for his critical method. He shares Crane's distress over the lack of knowledge on the part of many critics of the history of criticism. Olson strongly feels that many modern theories would have been stopped during their first stages of
evolution if their creators had spent a little more time thinking about what they were saying and testing what they had said. What method a critic chooses does not concern Olson; however great thought should go into such a choice.

He says:

Choice is determined by the questions one wishes to ask and the form of answer one requires and by the relative adequacy of given systems. The discovery of properties peculiar to a given kind of poetry demands a differential method, as that of properties peculiar to a given kind of poetry demands a differential method, as that of properties which poetry holds in common with other things requires an integral method. If one wishes to know the nature of a given kind of poetry, as a certain synolon or composite, a whole and its parts specified with the maximum differentiation possible without the destruction of the universals upon which science depends, an Aristotelian criticism is requisite; if one proposes to view poetry in terms of principles of maximum community, a platonic criticism is demanded. Every philosophy is addressed only to certain questions and can answer them only in certain forms.35

The knowledge required to select or conceive the questions to be asked as well the strict discipline necessary for the development of a critical theory justifies Crane's position that ideally all critics should be scholars, and also philosophers.

To Crane and Olson criticism is a form of inquiry to be pursued in a logical or philosophical manner, and it is the duty of the critic to abate the corruption of the arts. He is not the artist: he is the examiner and the caretaker of the arts. It is imperative, therefore, that he be as methodical as Aristotle and as knowledgeable of the critical

35 Ibid., p. 552.
tradition as possible. Guided by this responsibility, the Chicago Critics reject monism, which they see as an inhibition to full examination. They propose to be guided by individual nature of the work being criticised. Since the nature of poems varies, they assume that the critical method must adapt not only to the poem under examination but to the questions being asked. Their concept of pluralism is neither dogmatic nor static: it allows for the co-existence of divergent philosophies and encourages the development of new ones. To them new ideas are exciting and healthy for the further development of literary criticism.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Brooks's theory of the structure of poetry as the "Well Wrought Urn," which stresses the poem as being what it is only in its unmolested entirety, is a valuable critical approach. His concept of irony deepens the reader's appreciation of poetic language, and his studies of the Christian poets and of the relationship between poetry and Christianity are certainly indicative of his genuine concern for man's spiritual state.

It is unfortunate, however, that his doctrinaire attitude apparently blinds him to how limited criticism would become if all other methods of exploration into the nature of poetry were forfeited and if all critics were formalistic. As Crane has pointed out, if critics were only to use a monistic approach, they would be denying the possibility that there is a poem—or will be a poem—which is totally unique and for which no known critical method is suitable.

Brooks's judgment at various specific points becomes questionable, as in The Hidden God when he says Yeats's importance rests in questions posed rather than solutions. Yeats of course offered may firm and positive positions: that we must return to the reading of Irish mythology,
that we are (by his theory of the 2000 year cycle) to expect some leader to appear who will destroy the old and begin a new cycle, and that essential truths can be explained by the gyre within symbolic interlocking cones. And no poet has been more positive than Yeats about the desiderated harmony between body, soul, and intellect.

And again Eliot—who believed so strongly that the people, since they cannot think idealistically about every problem that confronts them, need a church to do their thinking for them—would hardly approve of being used by Brooks as an example of the critic's belief that modern man must search for himself in some tentative fashion by regarding the nature of things "from shifting points."1 Brooks has no right to present his own rhetoric in such a manner as to brush aside Eliot's concern for permanence and the fixed center of reality.

Brooks spends too much time in his criticism trying to defend or exemplify his concept of irony. This becomes somewhat laborious as does his too frequent defense of formalism. Formalism is fine. But it fails to pose all the critical questions, and cannot provide all the poetic answers; therefore to a serious degree it inhibits investigation. For example, Brooks declares that poetry has a special knowledge, but his logic is too vague to be helpful. Crane, on the other hand, does not restrict a poem to imparting any special knowledge in order to justify its

value. He feels that it may or may not express knowledge. What must always be considered, according to Crane, is the uniqueness of any given poetic work. Brooks's method of prohibiting the separation of form from content does not always allow for other methods of investigation, and would often keep a certain kind of poem from getting a proper reading, especially those poems unusually rich in content.

Studying Wheelwright's theory of the role of myth in poetry is like studying man himself. The insights which he gives into human nature encourage a deep appreciation for the value of myth. Brooks assumes our modern state of spiritual deprivation, but Wheelwright more adequately explains it. Brooks tells us of our loss of myth and the seriousness of that loss; Wheelwright tells us what myth is and the relationship of language to it. He integrates myth, language, metaphor, and poetry and explains their necessity for spiritual consciousness. Wheelwright offers poetry as being essential for man's spiritual survival, rather than only a supplement to his cultural existence. He is more lucid than Brooks in his differentiation between logical and expressive (or steno and fluid) languages. His critical approach provides a deeper knowledge of the poetic imagination, and his definitions are more explicit (as with epiphor and diaphor—even though the concept of diaphor is rather difficult). His ideas are exciting, stressing the fusion of archetype, metaphor, and poetry.
as perspectual rather than expository. Wheelwright gives the poem an importance in its song, its rhythm, beyond any special knowledge which Brooks believes it to contain. Wheelwright's belief in the critic's responsibility as observer and commentator seems proper and constructive. Yet with all that he contributes to poetic theory, he does not exhaust all the facets of the nature of poetry or the methods of criticism, and ought perhaps to show more awareness of what he is leaving out.

The Chicago Critics are the most explicit of the three groups concerning the responsibilities of a critic. They view criticism as an area which is tied not only to the humanities but to all parts of our culture, and which necessitates the sound logical structure used by philosophers. They are interested in integrating criticism into the modern world as a valued tool for man's further humanistic progression, and to serve this purpose it must be a discipline.

Such a role, these pluralists claim, cannot be carelessly constructed; it bears too great a responsibility. The critic is morally obligated to propose more than a theory supported by generalities or selected specifics; he must offer a theory by which his avenues have been tested and defined as carefully as Aristotle did. Then the critic should be willing to see his theory debated and tested by other scholars.
Wheelwright and Brooks present two critical approaches—formalistic and mythic. The point that Olson and Crane make as pluralists is that there are other equally valid approaches to poetry. As Crane has pointed out, the role of the critic has not yet been completely defined; therefore the critics act as their own guardians of the health of critical theory. In their sincerity, disagreement occurs, which Olson says is good because it brings about new points of view.

If criticism is to fulfill its serious role in the humanistic development of man, other critics must heed what the Chicago Critics are saying, and accept the self-imposed discipline of a philosopher. After all, the majority of the reading public is in no position to judge the validity of the critic's work. The critic must realize that he is making a contribution to poetic theory, but not providing the sole method of investigation. Pluralism stimulates discovery since it does not rule out any critical possibilities and it applauds sound thinking and new ideas. Where myth critics and formalistic critics address themselves to the development of one theory, the Chicago Critics have assumed a larger task: they have prepared the groundwork for the future development of poetic theory. If other critics are willing to listen to them, there will be a sounder basis formulated for man's further understanding of poetry and of his own poetic nature.
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