

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

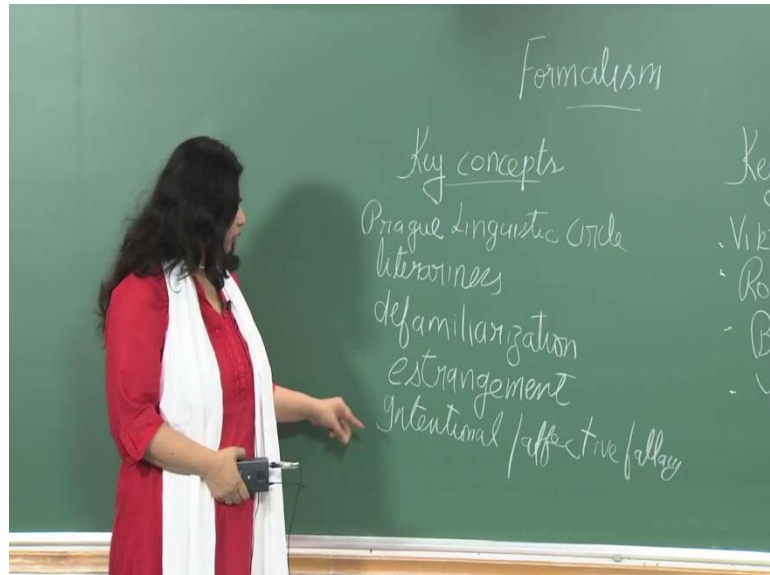
Lecture – 11

Part – A

Formalism

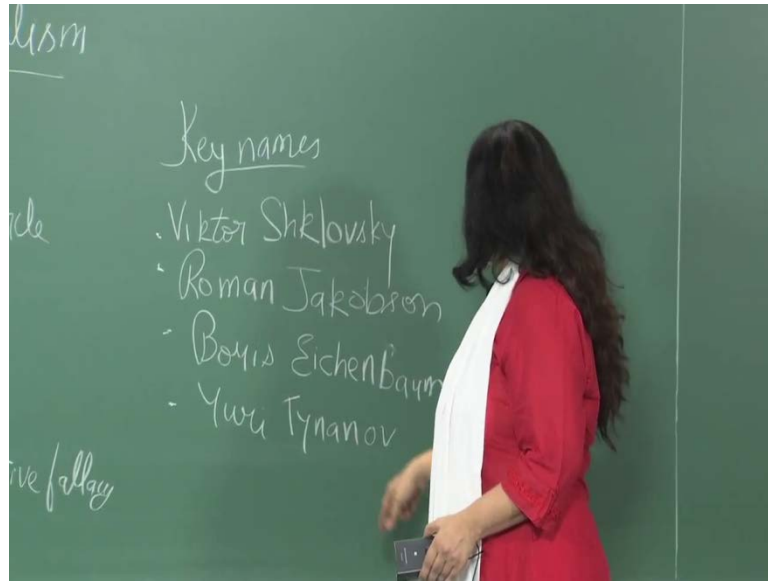
Good morning, today's topic is Formalism. So, these are the key concepts and soon we will be talking about the key names also in this area.

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Prague linguistic circle and the role, the critics from this organization played in developing the concept or the theory of formalism. Literariness, defamiliarization and an associated term is estrangement and intentional and affective fallacy.

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Key names associated with this theory are Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eichenbaum and Yuri Tynanov, so essentially the Russian formalists. Formalism is a general term covering several similar types of literary criticism that arose in the 19, 20's and 30's and flourished during 1940's and 50's. And interestingly, the theory is still quite relevant even today and it is also in evidence today.

As with many theories, formalism developed as a means of studying literary texts, it was an early attempt to theorize and draw attention to the way narratives are constructed. As the name suggest, the formalists were oriented towards the form of literature. So, this is one term that we should be focusing on the form, f o r m of literature. According to Viktor Shklovsky, literature has the ability to make us see the world a new, therefore, this term defamiliarization and estrangement, to make that, which has become familiar, because we have been over exposed to it.

So, it should be made strange again. So, something that is over familiar and make it appear a strange, therefore, the word estrangement. As we have been talking about it, it was initiated by a group of Russian critics, who wanted to develop a formal way to produce an objective method of analyzing and interpreting literature. Formalists seek to be objective in their analysis, focusing on the work itself and eschewing or jettisoning external considerations.

We are going to look at it like, what are these external considerations or extrinsic considerations in more detail, when we will go on to do new criticism. So, the idea is formalists, seek sought to be objective in their analysis; they still do that, focusing on the work itself. They pay particular attention to literary devices used in the work and to the pattern, these devices establish.

Formalism developed largely in reaction to the practice of interpreting literary texts by relating them to external issues, such as the historical circumstances and politics of the era in which the work was written. It is philosophical or theological environment Emilio or the experience and frame of mind of it is author. Formalists have generally suggested that everyday language, we serve simply to communicate information is steal and unimaginative.

From the beginning, the formalists are focused on what Roman Jakobson considers the literariness of language or of literature, something that makes a literary text difference from a newspaper report. You see, what you read in India today or the economic times or any other newspaper, it is a report, it is journalism, literature should be different. So, therefore, the literariness of a text is more important.

In other words although they always worked with individual texts, what they are interested in is what all literary text have in common and they were interested in other words, in a common literary denominator. The formalists saw the study of literature as a science and concentrated like true scientist on general rules. While, the new criticism that we are going to soon discuss or later discussed, focused on the individual meaning of individual text, formalism tried to discover general laws.

So, formalists argued that literariness has the capacity to overturn common and expected pattern, let us say of grammar, of a plot, of a story line and thereby, revisiting language or renovative language. So, the idea, the concept is that, the theorists should have the capacity to renegotiate the expected patterns through vocabulary, through grammar, through plot.

So, such normal uses of language supposedly enable readers to experience not only language, but also the world in an entirely new way. A number of schools of literary criticism have adopted a formalist orientation or at least make use of formalist concepts.

The new criticism which was an American approach to literature that reached its height in the 40's and 50's is a famous type of formalism that we are going to discuss later.

Now, Russian formalism was the first major formalist movement after this Stalinist regime suppressed it in the early 1930's. The Prague linguistic circle adopted it as an analytical method. So, Russian formalism and it gave or a part of the way of the Prague linguistic circle. The Chicago school too has also been classified as formalist in so far as the Chicago critics examine and then analyze works on an individual basis. Their interest in historical material on the other hand was clearly not formalist.

Now, Russian formalism refers primarily to the work of the society for the study of poetic language founded in 1916 in Saint Petersburg. Key theorists as we have already seen are Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eichenbaum, Yuri Tynyanov and secondarily to the Moscow linguistic circle founded in 1914 by Roman Jakobson. Now, Russian formalists were interested in the analysis of the text, but their main concern was with method as the scientific basis for literary theory.

There was therefore, a shift away from the moral approach to literature that was so evident in the early 19th century also and the shift from the moral approach to literature towards some more scientific and objective approach. So, these are the two words that you should remember, the two terms scientific and objective study of literature.

Basic assumptions of formalist theory, they emphasize on scientific approach and focused on literariness, which can be found on the level of form, rather than content. They also saw art as an act of defamiliarization and believe a text is the sum total of its devices, form and content Fabula; that is a story and Syuzhet. We must understand that a text has a two-tier mode of existence that Russian formalists are fond of referring to as Fabula and Syuzhet.

Fabula is the raw material or the basic story and Syuzhet is a transformation of the Fabula into a narrative discourse of esthetic form, so Fabula and Syuzhet. Now, what a work of literature says cannot be separated from how the literary work says it. And therefore, the form and its structure of a work, far from being merely the decorative wrapping of the content is in fact, an integral part of the content of the work.

Viktor Shklovsky's critical writing was one of the most prominent work of Russian formalism, one of his most attractive concepts was the idea of defamiliarization. Now, formalism is concerned with the meaningfulness of artistic devices. The code of the text is not the theme, but it is devices. The emphasis on the actual processes of the presentation of a literary text is known as laying bare, it is own devices according to Shklovsky.

The most essential literary thing a novel can achieve is to draw attention to itself and the literary devices it employs, rather than going to something familiar. And instead of going into the familiar terrain, the idea is to say the same thing or a similar thing, but with a novel way, how a story is told and draw, attention to the literary devices, a text employs. And it is not just about the novel, it was also applicable to other Jones of literature as well.

Roman Jakobson described literature as organized violence committed on ordinary speech; this is interesting organized violence on ordinary speech. This was not your day to day language you are looking at, but it is something very organized and planned and by violence we mean, a sought of renegotiation, revisiting. So, that is important that they question or they interrogated the everydayness of text or literature.

Literature constitutes a deviation from average speech that intensifies invigorates, these are the key words and estranges the mundane speak patterns. In other words, for the formalist literature is set a part, because it is just that, set a part. The use of devices such as imagery, rhythm and meter is what separates a poetic utterance from every day's speech. So, these are the terms that separate a piece of poem, a work of poem from your ordinary newspaper, the rhythm, the meter, the verse. And therefore, these are the devices that should call attention to themselves according to the formalist.

Now, coming to the term estrangement, estrangement serves literature by forcing the reader to think about, what might have been an ordinary piece of writing, about a common life experience in a more thoughtful way, to make the familiar, unfamiliar, you by using certain kind of language or certain devices, so to make the familiar strange. In a routines of every days are perceptions of and responses to reality becomes tale, blunted and as the formalists would say automatized. So, therefore, it is the work of literature or litterateurs to reinvent language and to represent thoughts in a novel way.

By forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, literature refreshes these habitual responses and renders objects more perceptible and here, I am quoting Terry Gilton in his famous essay, what is literature. Now, coming to Russian formalism and Prague linguistic circle is linguistic movement began in the 1920's and they were suppressed by the Russians in the 30's. They moved to Czechoslovakia and were continued by the members of the Prague linguistic circle, which included people like did people like Roman Jakobson and John or Ian Komorowski and Rene Wellek.

So, these are the members of the Prague linguistic circle. The Prague linguistic circle viewed literature as a special class of language and rested on the assumption. That there is a fundamental opposition between literary or poetical language and ordinary language; that is what we have been talking about all along. That there is an inherent difference between literary language and common everyday language, so there is violence a tension between these two. And these critics the formalists were interested in understanding that those tensions.

Literature is held to be subject to critical analysis by the sciences of linguistics, but also by a type of linguistics, different from that adapted to ordinary discourse, because it is loss produced the distinctive features of literariness. Now, the key terms, we have already been talking about used in formalisms. So, tension is the integral unity of the work and often, involves irony of paradox. This is something we will look into greater detail at a later stage.

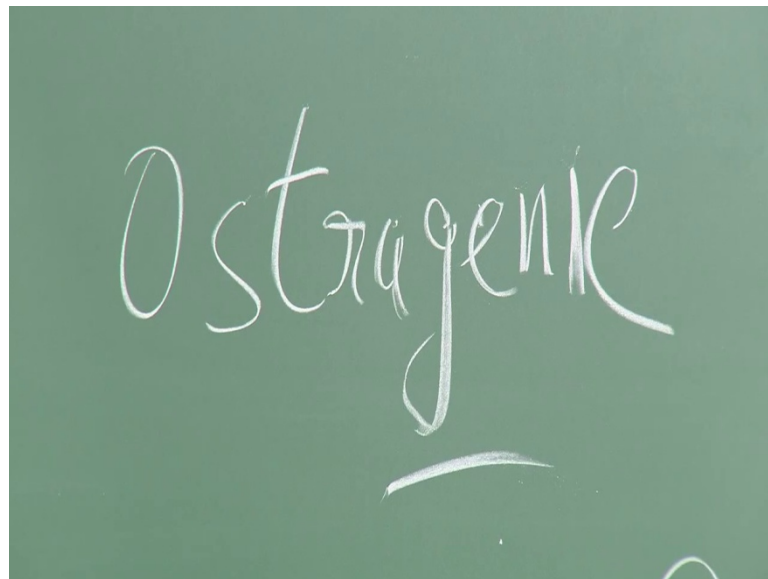
Another interesting term, intentional fallacy and affective fallacy, two terms and formalist critics referred to the belief that the meaning of a work may be determined by the authors intention as the intentional fallacy. Affective fallacy in the new criticism, the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by it is affect on the reader.

Another interesting term is objective correlative and some of us maybe familiar with that, it was first introduced by or coined by T. S. Eliot and this term refers to a collection of objects situations or events, that immediately evoke a specific emotions. So, therefore, objective correlative. There is another term which we should be familiar with that is external form, which is the outer trappings of a work.

For example, in a poem, the external form would include the rhyme scheme, meter and stanza form, whether it is a blank verse or a sonnet or a ballet. So, those are the external trappings of a work. Now, Viktor Shklovsky in his book *Art as Technique*, which was published in 1917 suggested that there are two distinct ways of communicating information to an audience.

Poetic forms appeal to the readers emotions by using metaphorical devices to reveal something in a new light. Alternatively, information can be given in a matter of fact way that is grounded in straight forward ideas and can be perceived as factual. Shklovsky argued that poetic forms make see ordinary things in a different way to make the familiar strange or *ostragenie*. So, this is one word that you should know *ostragenie*.

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So, to make familiar strange, the way to make familiarly strange was to make ideas and objects appear unusual or new to the reader and Shklovsky referred to this as the process of the defamiliarization. The idea of defamiliarization works well in the case of poetry, especially in the difficult and experimental modernist poetry. And we will also talk about Vladimir prop, who is a strictly speaking he not a formalists.

However, is book *morphology of the folktale* forms an important link between the formalist and the French so called structuralists of the 1960's. So, therefore, the relevance of Vladimir prop. So, Vladimir prop's, the morphology of the folktale was published in 1928, where he examined over 100 Russian folktales in order to discern

some common structures and elements, which could then be broadened and applied to other Jones.

He gave a set of archetypes, which were as the hero and the hero is the one, who goes off for a journey and the journey could be a moral physical or spiritual journey. But he is on a quest, there is a villain, who opposes this quest and there is a donor, a person with magical properties, who can help or who aide the hero in his quest. There is a dispatcher, who sends or who encourages the hero on his quest, there is a false hero for who for some time would claim the heroes success by making or by claiming them as their own, but these are flower false claims.

There is a helper, who assists the hero, there is the princess, the heroine acts as a reward for the hero and is also occasionally the object of the villain's plots and the princess father, who looks or who gives the reward to the hero for his efforts. Prop also notes similarities in plots, he describes 31 key moments that occur in the majority of tales and calls these components functions.

So, what are these functions? Each function represents a different stage in the heroes or the protagonist journey. So, in spite of all these, there is there are certain limitations in props work, although it is a very significant work, it does not provide a complete understanding of narrative, but instead shows, that there are underlying structures of patterns in narratives.

So, one example of formalism, so a formalist approach to the short story by Rodolfo Anaya and the title of the story is Silence of the Llano. Words are positively contrasted to silence as is winter to spring and growth to death. So, the key terms here are words spring and growth. So, these words, the primary symbols words spring and growth, they are the primary symbols, which are positively contrasted to death winter and silence and they are all combined in the end as the story comes to a closure.

But, this formalistic approach does not allow us to account for most readers natural responses to disgust to the incestuous relationship or to examine, how that affects the ability of the author to communicate his story. So, this is a limitation a shortfall. Now, the mechanism of defamiliarization cannot say anything about the nature of devices that are employed. All it tells us is that change is inevitable and it does not tell us which new course that change will take.

So, these are the key concepts in formalistic approach. As we have been talking about the concepts are ostragenie, defamiliarization and estrangement. Intentional and affective fallacy is something that we will look at in detail later. And then how Prague linguistic circle came to develop the idea of formalism. Key names associated Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eichenbaum and Yuri Tynyanov. Apart from the or in addition to these names, you can also look at Vladimir props, the morphology of the folktale although we believed that it is not strictly a part of formalism.

While, talking about estrangement and ostragenie; we should also remember another concept by another writer not exactly a formalist, but still the ideas come through nd the idea of Alienation.

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Alienation given by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, Brecht did something similar to the world of stage as these writers did to poetry or to the novel. So, the idea of alienation is how to alienate the audience from what is happening on the stage. So, earlier the Greek theatre they believed in giving us the concept of catharsis, to make the audience one with the happenings on the stage, to make the audience emotionally relate or they get them involved emotionally to what is happening on the stage.

So, they could get involved with the lives and with the plot, happening in the story what Bertolt Brecht did was to break this by introducing the concept of Alienation and he did this with by using various theatrical devices. So, again we are talking about the

literariness of devices, where he focused on creating a sort of estrangement between the characters on stage and the audience. Thus, forcing the audience to think, rather than get emotionally involved with the happenings on stage. So, this was a result of the Russian formalism though strictly speaking we do not call Bertolt Brecht a formalist.

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Formalism

- <http://www.write.armstrong.edu/handouts/Formalism.pdf>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11_oVlwfv2M
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAUGBHgPji0>
- <http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/artshum/materials/engl/silano/fall2005/101lsb/formalistlitanalyassgn.htm>
- <http://literarism.blogspot.in/2012/04/russian-formalism.html>

And here are a few links to some important websites.

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- Bakhtin, MM. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Michael Holquist (ed). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Eichenbaum, Boris. "The Theory of the 'Formal Method.'" In *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.
- Jakobson, Roman. *Language in Literature*. Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1987.

And references, we will continue with a newer topic in our next class.

Thank you very much.