

**Literary Theory and Literary Criticism**  
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**Lecture – 11**  
**Part – B**  
**New Criticism**

Good morning. So, today's lecture is new criticism, we have already done formalism in one of our earlier sessions. So, I would try to or I will be attempting to draw some connection between formalism and new criticism. So, like formalism new critics, the new critics were also focused on the text and argued that literary languages connotative. So, this is one term, you should understand connotativeness of language of literary language, and therefore it evokes it is deep and secondary meanings, then what appears on the surface.

So, it is not just the surface meanings we are concerned with, we are also looking at the deeper and secondary meanings of the literary language. Thus, new criticism the reader to a close study of text, however, they did not insist on the separation of form and content and they analyze the difference between the formalists and the new critics.

Instead literary texts were seen as works unified by the devices, motives, themes and patterns. For the more, there emphasis on the text internal unity made them to concentrate on individual text, whereas the Russian formalists were more interested in general literary devices or entire Jones. So, the difference is that the new critics emphasized on the text, internal unity and concentrated on individual text.

Whereas, on the other hand the Russian formalists were focused on general literary devices and it trying to draw out a general more general kind of a pattern. It is also important to notice that both schools, the formalists and the new criticism, they developed in different times and places and made different assumptions about literature. Russian formalism as we have already discussed, it originated in Russia, before the Bolshevik revolution and new criticism flourished in U.S.A by the late 1930's and subsequently it extended to England as well.

So, new criticism to elaborate is a literary movement that is started in the late 1920's and 1930's and originated in reaction to traditional criticism, that new critics saw as largely concerned with matters external to the text. For example, with the biography or psychology of the author or the works relationship to literary history, so they emphasize more on closer reading of the text, look at that text was the motto, rather than understanding the extraneous.

Whatever they considered as extraneous to the text, for example, the biography or the literal or the historical situation of the text. New criticism proposed that a work of literary art should be regarded as autonomous. So, autonomy of a text and so it should not be just by reference to considerations beyond itself. For them, a poem consists less of a series of referential and verifiable statements about the real world beyond it.

Then, of the presentation and sophisticated organization of a set of complex experiences in a verbal form that was more important. New criticism emerged as a reaction against biographical and traditional historical criticism, which focused on extra textual or extrinsic matters, such as the biography of the author, we have already talked about. So, new critics claimed that the text as a complete work of art is adequate for interpretation and one should look at the text and only the text in order to analyze and interpret, it is true meaning.

So, text is more important rather than the traditionally recognize historical or biographical elements. New criticism is closely associated with the idea of close reading, which implies the careful analysis of a text, while paying attention to it is structure, syntax, figures of speech, etcetera. Thus, a new critic tries to examine the formal elements of the text, such as characterization, setting of time and place, point of view, plot, images, metaphors and symbols to interpret the text and find the theme.

These formal as well as linguistic elements, that is ambiguity paradox irony and tension are the critic references to interpret and support the theme of a literary work. New critics believed that there is a unique and universal theme in great works of art, which is timeless and independent of the reader or even social and historical events. New critics also maintain that these elements are the only true means by which a critic can understand and should interpret the work.

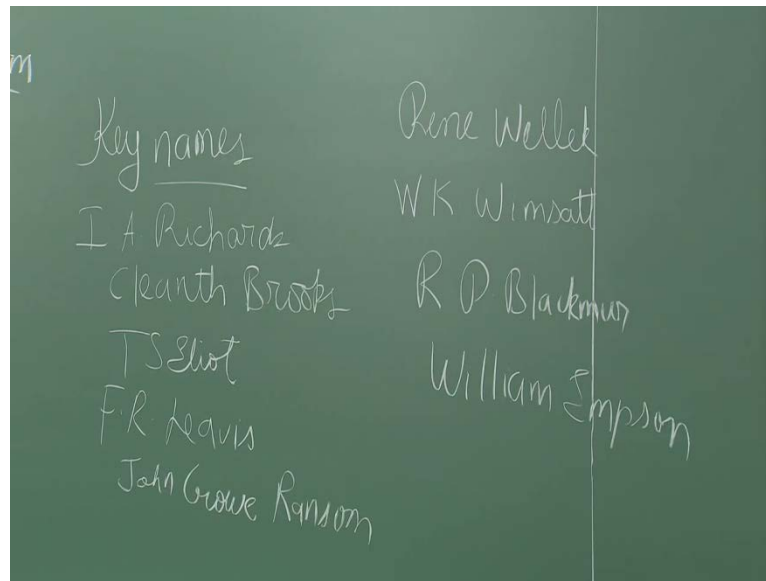
New criticism has often been accused of being too restrictive by denying the historical and biographical context, but being too linguistic and not universally practical. New criticism was practiced from 1920's to early 1960's and is not very popular these days, though some of the features are still in use, such as the notion of close reading. We should note that, because new critics tried to provide verbal and textual evidences for their claim, their approach was fairly objective.

Something that was that they have in common with formalism also, for this reason, new criticism is sometimes also called objective criticism and also intrinsic criticism because it is just concerned about the text itself. Now, major names of new criticism they include people like I. A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, Allen Tate, I have not written the name, but Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Rene Wasset, W. K. Wimsatt, R. P. Blackmur, William Empson and also Robert Penn Warren. So, they were all the practitioners of new criticism.

Now, some of the assumptions of principles are that meaning resides in the text not in the reader. This is what Wimsatt and Beardsley talked about in the affective fallacy. They believed that the text is an object, which can be appreciated and decoded without recourse to authorial intention which Wimsatt and Beardsley again talked about in the intentional fallacy. These are the major essays, the affective fallacy and the intentional fallacy.

Some of the other principles and features of new criticism are that they believed in the intrinsic approach. The reader will have to enter the text in order to unlock, it is meaning from the inside, it is not necessary to consider external factors, the external factors being the biographical and the historical context. Formalistic approach which was the detailed analysis of literary form is a prerequisite for successful readings. But also it stresses the unity of content and form as is very evident in Cleanth Brooks, the name is written over there.

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The second name from the top Cleanth Brooks, work the heresy of paraphrase. A word about the historical background of criticism in the 19th century, in the 19th century and in the early decades of the 20th century, biographical and traditional historical criticism dominated literary theory, which was practiced in academia and by critics. It focused on documents about or related to the text and the author. In its extreme form, the biographical historical approach would go as far as to forget the original text itself.

And focus was entirely on the biography of the author, this tendency was very widely accepted in academia and it would be a common assumption in a poetry class for their students to expect a description of poet's personal and intellectual life his family friend's, enemies, habits, experiences without analyzing or even reading the poem. So, it was more important.

So, that was the traditional concept of literary criticism, where it was more important to understand the biography of the writer, the poet and also the historical context of the poem. Rather than or instead of looking at the text itself which was what a new critics, insisted on that look at the text close reading of the texts. Now, T. S. Eliot, who lived from 1888 to 1965 was among the first to claim that poetry stands for its own and in his essays asked critics to pay attention to the poem, rather than paying attention to the poet.

So, pay attention and close read or interpret the poem that is what he advised. Eliot believed that poet does not influence the poem with his or her personality and emotions,

but uses language in such a way as to incorporate within the poem, the impersonal feelings and emotions common to all humankind. He believed that, the study of poets personal life is not useful or helpful.

And I. A. Richards another critic who lived from 1893 to 1979 also tried to differentiate between the traditional reading of a poem, which was similar to paraphrasing the text and the modern view of poetry. He was less concerned about close readings, but classified the numerous ways in which reading of poetry could go wrong. And one of these ways in which reading of a poetry could poem could go wrong was to pay too much emphasis on understanding the personal details of the writer, the author, the poet.

I. A. Richards gave his students some untitled poems without any reference to the poet to analyze and this was the exercise that he gave to his students. And claim that, then contemporary ways of teaching poetry was unacceptable incomplete and improper, because their students were dependent or students depended too much on the poets name or hints about the poets biographical details.

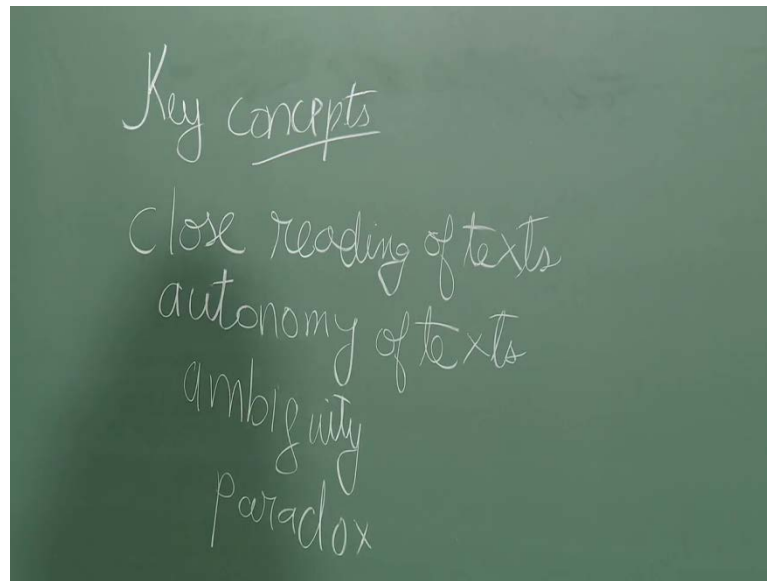
So, one good way of making students understand poetry or appreciate poetry was to give them a series of untitled poems and without letting them know the poets name. So, that they could avoid the fallacy of interpreting a poem, just by looking at the name of the poet. I. A. Richards student, William Empson also followed the exercise of this technique and along with I. A. Richards and Eliot, contributed to a corpus of acceptable interpretive techniques.

In 1941 John Crowe Ransom, who is considered as the philosopher general of the new criticism, he called this new formalist view of analyzing a text and he gave the name new criticism and introduced it to American critics in his book new criticism. So, that is how the word came about through the efforts of John Crowe Ransom, who wrote the book the new criticism.

So, now a traditional readers and critics maintained that there was always an idea or intention behind every literary work, which it is author had in his mind this was the reason why the authors biography life and time are taken up for the for study. New critics rejected the authorial intention by pointing out the intentional fallacy, they undermine the notion of authorial, pointing out how the great authors of past are dead. And cannot dictate how the books are supposed to be read.

Also, according to new criticism, even if there was such a claim or it could be attributed to intentional fallacy and thereby be discredited. Whatever an author says about his work is just an interpretation of it, just like any other interpretation by his or her readers. When, a particular meaning or reading is not supported by the text it need not be valued. So, it is important to read the text carefully.

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So, we insist you know one of the key terms would be close reading of texts and autonomy of text. This is what we have been, these are the two tenets, major tenets of new criticism, close reading of texts and autonomy of text. This is what all of us should bear in mind. New critics also rejected any personal interpretation by referring it to the affective fallacy, which is an understanding or interpretation of a text, based on personal feelings, understanding or experiences which cannot be supported by the text.

Such a reading would contrast with the universal themes within the texts. Now, coming to what the new critics do, new criticism searches for a meaning within the structure of the text. So, this is a key concept that you should remember, new critics search for meaning within the structure of the text and defined it by examining the texts through the close reading and analyzing the formal elements, elements that form the text within the text.

So, look at the text again was the chief guiding feature or chief principle of new criticism. This is where new criticism seems to be a kind of new formalism although the

purpose is different here. In new criticism one may examine all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself it is images, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, motives, point of views, setting, characterization, plot, etcetera. To find their relationship with the theme in a way that confirms the single best interpretation of the text.

So, all the interpretation all the features which are given in the text itself, the language itself, the images, the motives, the symbols, characterization and the metaphors and the guiding principle was look at these, rather than the biographical details of the poet, his or her personal life in order to interpret the text. This is because new criticism believes that there is such a single complete interpretation which is timeless and is not related to individual readers or social events.

So, therefore, intentional and affective fallacy the concept of, according to the new critics, the critics job is to ascertain the structure of the poem. We are repeating, we have know the form of the poem, the way a poem is formed is more important and to see, how it operates to achieve it is unity and to discover, how meaning evolve directly from the poem itself. This process of analyzing the text is more suited for reading short texts like poems rather than lengthy novels.

One example is that, let us assume a 15th century poet, using a word like nice or sometimes even a word like gay. So, the new critics would investigate the meaning of the words in the 15th century and attempt to discover, what those words meant at that point. For example, the word nice meant foolish at a particular historical period, but it is not so anymore.

So, that was the entire idea to look at what the word meant in a particular context in a particular era that was more important than trying to investigate the personal life of the poet, who lived in that period. So, the new critics looked carefully at the words and would find both connotations and denotation for each word. Different literal and implied meanings create ambiguity and therefore, the word ambiguity is so important, when we talk about the new critics.

Different literal and implied meanings create certain kinds of ambiguity and we are interested in understanding, because after all we are doing close reading. Ambiguity's language is capacity to sustain multiple meanings which intensifies the complexity of the

language, this complexity which is made by organic unity of the text is a positive characteristic of a text, but should be resolved by the critics.

According to new critics multiple meaning of the text is the result of four linguistic elements and these four linguistic elements are paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. Paradox means rather a statement which seems to be self contradictory, at first sight, it contradicts or conflicts itself, but when analyze deep, it intensifies the meaning by suggesting broader areas to their statement.

Irony is also a statement or an event which seems to be contrary to it is literal sense and ironic statement most of the time presents a meaning, which is opposite of the intended meaning. And tension in new criticism means, the conflicts within the text, new critics define it as the conflicts between a words denotation and it is connotation between a literal detail and a figurative one and between an abstract and a concrete detail. So, these are the words that we should remember ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension.

So, these four linguistic devices together along with other figurative devices, such as images, symbols, similes and metaphors, control, any poems structure and that is what we should be interested in according to the new critics. For a close reading of a text, whether the aim of the exercise is to point out rhetorical features, structural elements or cultural references. One should observe particular details and facts within the text carefully.

New criticism seeks to reveal how the text works as a unified whole by showing, how it is main theme is established by the text formal or a stylistic elements like point of view, imagery, setting or symbolism. Thus for instance, we can see the intimate relationship between the discussions of structure and irony in many important literary works of the period.

For example, in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* which was published in 1922 in Ezra Pound *Cantos* they were written between 1925 and 1960. Virginia Woolf *To the Lighthouse* published in 1927, James Joyce *Ulysses* 1922 and William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* published in 1929. Coming to the drawbacks of this approach, so the two major controversial drawbacks of new criticism were it is full dependence on the text and it is complete rejection of extra textual materials, which went to extreme.



They went to a great extreme to avoid anything that was extrinsic to the text and the entire energy was focused only on a close reading of the text. Critics of the entire approach, they believe that new critics had trivialized literature and literary study by turning critical interpretation into an over intellectualized game. Whose object was the solution or solution of interpretive puzzles by looking at words became sought of clues and puzzles.

So, this way of viewing literature tended to ignore or destroy the moral political and personal impact that literature might possess. The new critics discarded external influences that need to be considered, for example, gender race or social class, they also ignored abstracts like subjectivity and emotions in short. They attempted to establish a scientific method of interpretation and evaluation of literary texts. So, these were the major criticism leveled against the new critics.

According to Rene Wellek, the first name from the top, new criticism is considered not only suspended obsolete and dead, but somehow mistaken and wrong. And Wellek also rejects the theory of new criticism and believes, that it is uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature. A historical, because it ignores the historical context of the text, influences of past or it is influences even on the future.

It was frequently that, the new criticism treated literary text as autonomous and diverse from historical context and that its practitioners were uninterested in being human meaning, the social function and effect of literature. And other objection to the new criticism is that it, it is thought to aim at making criticism scientific or at least bringing literary story to a condition rivaling that of science.

So, John Crowe Ransom in his essay criticism incorporated advocated that criticism must become more scientific or precise and systematic and this is something that critics tended to disagree with. Some of the important texts of new criticism include T. S. Eliot's essays, tradition and the individual talent and Hamlet and his problems, John Crowe Ransom's essays, criticism incorporated and the Ontological critic.

Wimsatt and Beardsley's essays, the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy and Cleanth Brooks book, the Well Wrought urn studies in the structure of poetry. Cleanth Brooks the language of paradox from the well wrought urn 1947 and he was an active member of the new critical movement. The book outlines the use of reading poems

through paradox as a method of critical interpretation. So, it is one of the seminal works of new criticism.

A word about what is paradox, in literature the paradox is a literary device consisting of the anomalous just position of in congress ideas for the sake of striking exposition or unexpected insight. It functions as a method of literary composition and analysis, which involves examining apparently contradictory statements and drawing conclusion, either to reconcile them or to explain their presence.

Now, what is the legacy of new criticism, there is no direct historical relationship between new criticism and Russian formalism, because each was developed at around the same time, but independently of the other. However, despite this, there are some similarities, for example, both movements showed an interest in considering literature on it is own terms. Instead of focusing on it is relationship to political cultural or historical externalities a focus on the literary devices and the craft of the author and a critical focus on poetry. So, new criticism still remains popular and these are the main features of it ambiguity paradox. We have also seen irony and tension, the main idea is close reading of text.

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## New Criticism

- <http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/new.crit.html>
- [http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary\\_Criticism/new\\_criticism/](http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/new_criticism/)
- [http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/critical\\_define/crit\\_newcrit.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_newcrit.html)
- <http://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-300/lecture-6>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csd19bv4h1k>

And here are a few links to some important websites and references.

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- <http://web.calstatela.edu/faculty/jgarret/441/handout-newcriticism.pdf>
- <http://paul-littcritic.blogspot.in/2010/01/four-kinds-of-meaning-ia-richards.html>
- <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/12/11032/>
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- Litz, A. Walton, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey, eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Vol VII: Modernism and the New Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
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Thank you very much, we will start a new topic in our next session.