Literary Criticism & Theory

Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism & Deconstruction

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Criticism...!!!

What is it...???

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Everyone's a Critic
RECAP

- Aristotle
- Dryden
- Wordsworth
- Coleridge
- Arnold
- Eliot
FORMALIST CRITICISM

Russian formalism

American New Criticism

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1915: The Moscow Linguistic Circle founded
1916: The Petrograd “Society for the Study of Poetic Language” (Opojaz) founded
1930s: The Prague Linguistic Circle (René Wellek, Roman Jakobson)
IN LITERARY CRITICISM, WHAT IS FORMALISM?
Literary criticism as a science
a heap of literary devices

“What is literature?”

“an organized violence committed on ordinary speech.”

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FORMALISM

- reduces the importance of a text’s historical, biographical, and cultural context.

- refers to critical approaches that analyze, interpret, or evaluate the inherent features of a text. These features include not only grammar and syntax but also literary devices such as meter and tropes.

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Major Figures:

Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984)

His essay “Art as Technique” (1917) was one of the central statements of formalist theory.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975)

Mikhail Bakhtin is best known for his radical philosophy of language, as well as his theory of the novel, underpinned by concepts such as “dialogism,” “polyphony,” and “carnival”.

Bakhtin’s major work is *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1930)
Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

The work of Roman Jakobson occupies a central and seminal place in the development of formalism and structuralism.

His famous work is “Linguistics and Poetics” (1958)

Jakobson urges that the poetic function of language must be situated among the other functions of language, which he schematizes as follows:
In any act of verbal communication, the “addressee” sends a message to the “addressee”; the message requires a “context” that is verbal or at least capable of being verbalized; a “contact” which is a physical channel or psychological connection between them; and a “code” that is shared by them.

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Why do authors use Formalist Criticism?
“Literariness” is what makes a given work a literary work; what distinguishes literary study from other disciplines, such as psychology, politics, and philosophy.

The Formalists read literary texts in order to discover their “literariness”—to highlight the devices and technical elements introduced by writers in order to make language literary.
Defamiliarization...
Defamiliarization

- Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984) introduced the concept of defamiliarization in “Art as Technique” (1916).
- Defamiliarization means “making it strange.”
- The perceptions of human beings become automized by repetition. The habitual nature of everyday experience makes perception stale and automatic. Art returns to us the awareness of things.
Defamiliarization of that which is or has become familiar - automatically perceived - is the basic use of literary language. Art and literature have the ability to make us see the world anew – to make that which has become familiar, because we have been overexposed to it, strange again. Instead of merely registering things in an almost subconscious process of recognition because we think we know them, we once again look at them.
Formalist critics use individual parts of the text, the characters, the settings, the tone, the point of view, the diction, and all other elements of the text to give meaning to the text in a more literal way.
- Makes a Science of Literary Criticism
- Viable Method enables a Professional Discipline
- Develops "Close-Reading" skills
- Basis for other language-centered theories
- Great for analyzing poetry
- Well-known approach
- Readily applied informally

Strengths of Formalism

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Limitations of Formalism

- Seen as incomplete now
- Ignores:
  - Historical Aspects
  - Moral Aspects
  - Production / Reception
  - Psychological Aspects
  - Gender Aspects
- Not applied easily to long forms
- Similarity of Conclusions
- Criticism always inferior to the object it studies
(American) New Criticism
New Criticism era (1940 – 1960)

It appeared as a reaction toward Biographical and Traditional Historical criticism, which was focused on extra-text materials, such as the biography of the author.

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“New Criticism”

- As a literary theory
- As a way to reading text

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IMPORTANT TEXTS:

T.S. Eliot's essays "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet and His Problems"
Ransom's essays "Criticism, Inc" and "The Ontological Critic"
Tate's essay "Miss Emily and the Bibliographer"
Wimsatt and Beardsley's essays "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy"
Warren's essay "Pure and Impure Poetry"
Wellek and Warren's book Theory of Literature

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Text

Complete work of art

Its example to validate our interpretation

source to analyze and get true meaning

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Intentional fallacy

term used in 20th-century literary criticism to describe the problem inherent in trying to judge a work of art by assuming the intent or purpose of the artist who created it.

Affective fallacy

according to the followers of New Criticism, the misconception that arises from judging a poem by the emotional effect that it produces in the reader. The concept of affective fallacy is a direct attack on impressionistic criticism, which argues that the reader’s response to a poem is the ultimate indication of its value.

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For NC, the complexity of a text is created by the multiple and often conflicting meaning in it. These meaning are a product primarily of four kinds of linguistic devices: paradox - ambiguity - irony - tension.
Ambiguity

It occurs when a word, image, or event generates two or more different meaning.

e.g. :
“The passerby helps dog bite victims.”

Paradox

A statement that appears to be self contradictory or silly but may include a latent truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement contrary to accepted traditional ideas.

e.g. :
"Someday you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again."
Tension

A state of mental or emotional strain or suspense or when there is suspense in the story

**Irony**

a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words.

# e.g. :

I posted a video on Facebook about how boring, useless and time wasting Facebooking is.

Oh great! Now you have broken my new camera.
By following these (simple formula), we discover or unlock that meaning...

- Who is speaking in the text? (not the author, not the poet, whoever/whatever created the text but it is created by the text itself.)
- Who is being spoken to? or
- Who is the addressee? or
- Who is the implied reader of the text?
- Where is the setting? When it is?
- What is the central metaphors of the text?

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A text is not only what it seems to be talking about, it is always something else.

There is always something other than the literal meaning of the text.

Metaphors is what makes literary language different from the ordinary language.

Formal Elements of a Text:
Image, symbols, metaphors, rhyme, meter, point of view, setting, characterization & plot
Sometimes New Critics did believe that the text warranted a discussion of its psychological, sociological, or philosophical elements because those elements were obviously integral to the work’s characterization or plot.

Although most words can be found to have more than one dictionary definition, a word’s ambiguity is determined not by the dictionary but by the context of the poem as a whole, in terms of which alone the word’s meaning or meanings must be judged.
STRUCTURALISM
Mouse...
Language as system of signs

the evolution of sound patterns in the Indo-European languages

to find out the prototype (or mother) languages

some languages evolved from the same ancient language

set his sights on the system of language itself

Ferdinand de Saussure

(A Swiss Linguist)
A sign functions like a coin with two sides. The first side consists of the form of the sign. The concept of the sign, on the other hand, refers to a mental image which registers in the mind.
Langue-Parole

Langue: *Langue* is the whole system of language that precedes and makes speech possible. A sign is a basic unit of langue. Learning a language, we master the system of grammar, spelling, syntax and punctuation. These are all elements of langue.

Parole: *Parole* is the concrete use of the language, the actual utterances. It is an external manifestation of langue. It is the usage of the system, but not the system.
Langue vs. Parole

**Langue is Social**
- A set of conventions & rules
  - Shared by all the speakers of a language

**Parole is Individual**
- Individual performance of language
  - In speech or writing
Diachronic v/s synchronic

- Diachronic linguistics is the study of the changes in language over time.
- Diachronic analysis can be the general evolution of all languages or the evolution of a particular language or dialect.

- Synchronic linguistics is the study of the linguistic elements and usage of a language at a particular moment.
- Synchronic approach only takes into account one sole aspect of the examined language.
diachronic v/s synchronic
syntagmatic and paradigmatic

- signs relate to each other in a syntagmatic way - that is according to their positions in a given sentence or utterance.
- signs relate to each other in a paradigmatic way - that is, according to the membership in particular types or classes of signs.

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Structuralism

European
1920’s

North American
1930’s – 1960’s

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Linguistics is a descriptive science. Describe what people say, not what people should say.

The primary form of language is the spoken one. Not every language has a written form. Everybody learns an oral language. The spoken form comes first than the written one.
Every language is a system on its own right. Language should not be described in terms of another language, but rather, it should be described on its own terms.

Language is a system in which smaller units arrange systematically to form larger ones. These linguists proposed a procedure in which they began analyzing the smallest units and classifying them, and describing the patterns into which they combined to form larger units.

Main Tenets of Structuralism

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Structuralist Notions on Units and Rules

- Structuralists believe that the underlying structures which organize units and rules into meaningful systems are generated by the human mind itself, and not by sense perception.

- As such, the mind is itself a structuring mechanism which looks through units and files them according to rules.

- So structuralism sees itself as a science of humankind, and works to uncover all the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel.
Post Structuralism & Deconstruction
POST-STRUCTURALISM

Emerged in France during the year 1960s.
Designates a broad variety of critical perspectives and procedures in the 1970s, displaced structuralism from its prominence as the radically innovative way of dealing with language and other signifying system.

Some Post Structuralists:
- Julia Kristeva
- Jean Baudrillard
- Jacques Lacan
- Judith Butler
- Gilles Daeuze
- Michel Foucault
- Jacques Derrida

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The general assumptions of post-structuralism derive from critique of structuralist premises.

Specifically, post structuralism holds that the study of underlying, structures is itself culturally conditioned and therefore subject to myriad biases and misinterpretations.

To understand an object, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge which were coordinated to produce the object.

This way, post structuralism positions itself as a study of how knowledge is produce.

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A conspicuous announcement to American Scholars of the Post Structural point of view was Jacques Derrida’s paper on “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”, delivered in 1966 to an international colloquium at John Hopkins University.

- A major theme of Post Structuralism is instability in the human sciences.

- Derrida deleted the structural linguistic center, thereby also eliminated the possibility of controlling agency in language leaving the use of language an unregulatable and undecidable play of purely relational elements.
The only way to properly understand these meanings is to deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge system which produce the illusion of singular meaning.

Decentering or deletion of the author leaves the reader, or interpreter, as the focal figure in poststructural accounts of signifying practices. This figure, however, like the author, is stripped of the traditional attributes of purposiveness and initiative and converted into an impersonal process called reading.
Différance

This word is said the same as the standard French word différence - difference - but is written differently, différançe with an 'a'. There are multiple reasons, but Derrida is interested in the way that the sense can both be 'to differ' and 'to defer'.

‘there is nothing outside the text’

Derrida’s point is not that there are only words, but that texts continue and repeat. Contexts and texts are tangled up together. Example of a dictionary definition and continual referral or deferral of final, fixed, meaning.
The Derridaean Sign

Signification

Signifier (sound-image) → ? → Signifier (concept)

Reference

Object

“Sign”
Binary Opposition

If we consider one superior then it means we have already considered one inferior. Superiority of one thing and inferiority of that thing always come together and questions of ethics, morality too. It always goes on changing. We do not have general view. There are differences. Majority and Minority always come together.

Majority has power position and controls others and minority suffers, Faces many problems. Their desires and ambitions have been suppressed. The way people use words becomes more important. Deconstruction helps us understand silent voices and ignored things which are left out. Deconstruction changes our way of looking towards different things and our perspectives.

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Binary Opposition

The thing which arrives after the first thing redefines the previous and the first thing. Idea becomes ideology. Meaning are given in the context. The idea of signifier and signified comes. Words have different meanings. In written words meaning dies. The spoken words are more contextualized. Written things are judged and examined by readers.

Typically, a deconstructive reading sets out to show the conflicting forces within the text itself to dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meaning into indefinite array of incompatibility and undividable possibilities.

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Binarisms in Western Metaphysics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privileged</th>
<th>Suppressed/Devalued</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>Human</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model/Origin</td>
<td>Copy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Margin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Truth</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real thing/Real being</td>
<td>Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soul</td>
<td>Body</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mind</td>
<td>Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logos (inner meaning)</td>
<td>Logoi (words, speech acts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner thought (Intention)</td>
<td>External <strong>speech</strong> (expression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
<td>Absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech</strong></td>
<td>Writing</td>
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</table>

*Note how speech itself appears in oppositional positions and how speech and writing can occupy the same side of the binary.*
विश्व में आदमी ही एक मात्र ऐसा प्राणी हैं जो पेड़ काटता हैं, उसका कागज बनाता हैं और उस पर लिखता हैं “पेड़ बचाओ”