



# UNIT V

**1. Formalism - Russian and French**

**2. New Criticism**

# Formalism - Definition

- In literary theory, formalism 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 figures of speech. The formalist approach reduces the importance of a text's historical, biographical, and cultural context.



# Historical Prospects

- **There is no one school of Formalism, and the term groups together a number of different approaches to literature, many of which seriously diverge from one another. Formalism was the dominant mode of academic literary study in the United States and United Kingdom from the end of the Second World War through the 1970s, and particularly the Formalism of the "New Critics," including I. A. Richards, John Crowe Ransom and T.S Eliot. On the European continent, Formalism emerged primarily and particularly out of the work of Roman Jakobson, Boris Eichenbaum, and Viktor Shklovsky. Although the theories of Roman Jakobson and New Criticism are similar in a number of respects, the two schools largely developed in isolation from one another, and should not be considered identical. In**

# Russian Formalism

- Formalism has advantage of forcing writers to evaluate a work on its own terms rather to rely on “accepted” notions of writer work.
- It focus on Form, organization, structure, Word choice, multiple language.
- 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 thus a shift away from the moral approach to literature towards a scientific approach.




# Basic Assumptions

- **Scientific approach focused on ‘literariness’ which can be found on the level of form rather than Content.**
- **Art as a device of Defamiliarization.**
- **A text is the sum total of its devices.**
- **Aesthetics of deviation.**
- **Literature has its own history, a history of innovation in formal structures, and is not determined by external, material history.**



# Practice Language and Poetic Language

- **Practical language is used for the act of communication**
  - **Poetic language or literary language has no practical function at all ,it is impractical.**
  - **Poetic language, a work of art, meaning of words are violated by the artist. They do not convey what they convey ordinarily in communication.**
  - **The poet exercises a controlled violence in poetic language. It refers to the violence which is constructive, having a definite goal. It is a process by which an artist transforms one thing into another to reach his goal.**
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# Defamiliarization

- Viktor Shklovsky's critical writing was the most prominent work of Russian Formalism. His aim was to define the techniques of art which writers employed to produce specific effects. One of his most attractive concepts was the notion of Defamiliarization.
- Defamiliarization is the artistic technique of presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar.
- Defamiliarization is to view an object and unravel its layers and uses'.
- For example, looking at the clouds as a playground for angels a bearer of tears or the heaven and earth divide opposed to a simple cloud to warn us that rain is on its way.
- Undoubtedly, the main reason for 'defamiliarizing' objects is



# Goals of Defamiliarization

Whether an object is rendered unfamiliar by

- the kind of language used,
- the unique portrayal of characters in the story,
- or how a particular event is illustrated.

The goal of Defamiliarization is to make the object strange and unfamiliar so that the piece is transformed from ordinary prose to extraordinary art.

An example of this is T.S. Eliot's use of Greek, Latin, German and other languages in *The Wasteland*, which forces the reader to become a more active participant in the process by having to make an extra effort to decode the strange and exotic words in order to understand the poem. One is never allowed to fall into a comfortable lull and be a passive listener/reader when dealing with T.S. Elliot.

Other examples,

- Gulliver's travels
- Wordsworthian poetry (Daffodils, The world is too much us, To the Cuckoo, etc)
- Keatsian Odes
- Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy'





# Defamiliarization and metaphors

- A Metaphor is a literary figure of speech for comparative, visual or associative purposes.
- The very nature of a metaphor (saying something is something else) is reflective of the 'Defamiliarization' approach. The two are uncannily similar in certain ways.

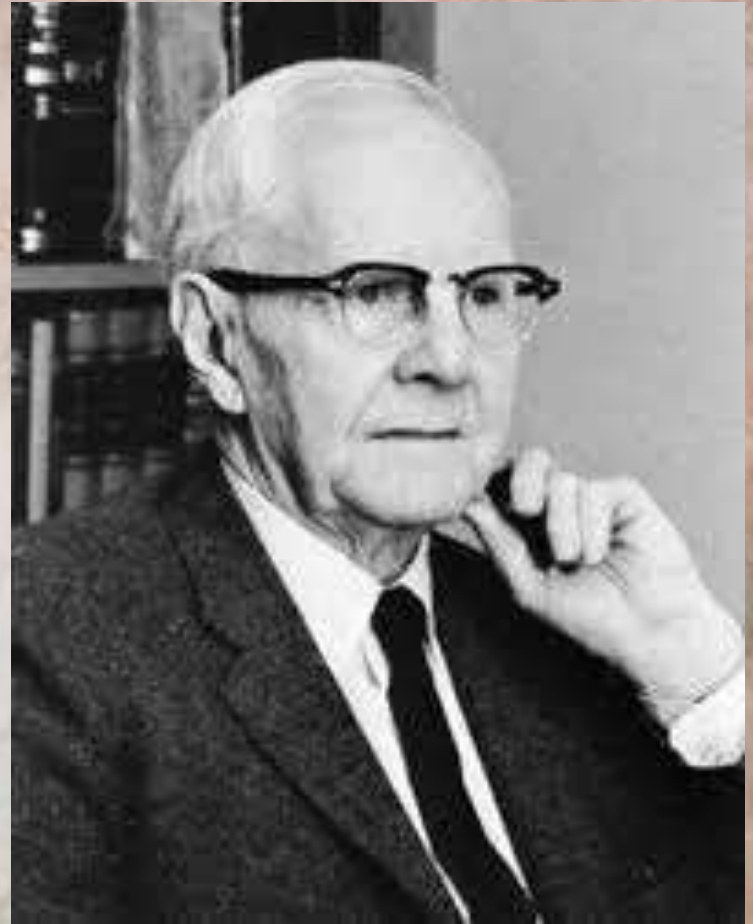


# New Criticism (Formalism)

- **New Criticism is a very different literary theory.**
- **First introduced in the early 20th Century in America by John Crowe Ransom, New Criticism was created out of the formalist movement.**
- **It focuses on the importance of close reading a piece of literature, mainly, poetry to understand how it functions as a “self-contained” object.**
- **It was created to show an alternative form of literary analysis, with most generally focusing on this history of the author, the relation of the words used to foreign on ancient languages, as well as comparative sources, ignoring the aesthetics of the work altogether.**
- **(Often initial capital letters) an approach to the critical study of literature that concentrates on textual explication and rejects historical and biographical study as irrelevant to an understanding of the total formal organization of a work.**
- **It was frequently alleged that the New Criticism treated literary texts as autonomous and divorced from historical context, and that its practitioners were “uninterested in the human meaning, the social function and effect of literature.”**
- **Post-World War I school of Anglo-American literary critical theory that insisted on the intrinsic value of a work of art and focused attention on the individual**

# John Crowe Ransom

- **April 30, 1888 – July 3, 1974**
- **Faculty member at Kenyon College**
- **He was the first editor of the widely regarded Kenyon Review.**
- **Highly respected as a teacher and mentor to a generation of accomplished students, he also was a prize-winning poet and essayist.**
- **He was an American educator, scholar, literary critic, poet, essayist and editor. He is considered to be a founder of the New Criticism school of literary criticism.**





# Formalist Beliefs about Literature

- Literature is a special kind of language.
- Literature is primarily symbolic and metaphoric; cannot paraphrase literature.
- Irony, paradox, and ambiguity are the measuring sticks of great art.
- Criticism can be objective and the "true" meaning of a text can be known objectively — an attempt to be scientific.
- The Text: Not interpreted based on a reader's response to it (a.k.a. affective fallacy), author's stated or inferred intention (intentional fallacy), or parallels between the text and historical contexts (such as author's life—biographical fallacy—sociopolitical climate, etc.); these are subjective biases
- Literary work is a finished product, set off from history, biography, and the reading process
- Form and content cannot be separated; form, in effect, is meaning

# Assumptions and Practices

- You can't know for sure what an author intended, and an individual's response is unstable and subjective: The work itself should be your focus.
- The purpose of this focus is to explain the work's organic unity – how every feature, large and small, contributes to its meaning.
- Great literary works are marked by some kind of complexity, as levels of
- Read closely. You can assume that everything is carefully calculated to contribute to the work's unity – figures of speech, point of view, diction, recurrent ideas or events, etc.
- Determine what oppositions, tensions, ambiguities, and ironies are present in the work.
- Say how these various elements are unified –



# Examples:

## Green Eggs and Ham and New Criticism

- Let's take Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham as an example and evaluate it as New Critics. Although it may be a bit silly, it's a good place to start.
- The story revolves around the conflict between an unnamed protagonist and Sam. The plot occurs in two main acts. In the first act, Sam tries to convince the protagonist to eat green eggs and ham in a variety of circumstances, despite the protagonist's constant refusal. In the second act, the protagonist declares his love of green eggs and ham and says he would eat them in any and all of the circumstances Sam has previously proposed.
- The first act takes up the majority of the book. It's not until almost the book's end that the protagonist finally tries green eggs and ham and discovers that he likes them. The book, therefore, is mainly a story of pursuit and persuasion.
- Sam's stanzas are shorter than the protagonist's. The difference in the length of their speech emphasizes the protagonist's refusal to try something new and makes Sam almost a fleeting, mysterious character.
- While the stanzas are of different lengths, the rhyme scheme also changes often. For example, the protagonist's early lines in the book follow an 'abab' rhyme scheme, but he later switches to 'aabb.' So, Dr. Seuss uses rhyme schemes for variety rather than to differentiate the two characters.
- New Criticism would disregard what the story's moral may be or that it may have been written to encourage children to try new things. New Critics would also avoid comparing Green Eggs and Ham to any of Dr. Seuss's other books. Such intertextual examinations would take away from our examination of this text.

# Romeo and Juliet and New Criticism

Now that we've gotten our feet wet, let's look at a selection from a more grown-up text. Who hasn't heard lines from Romeo and Juliet's famous balcony scene?

**Juliet:** O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy name; Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

**Romeo:** Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

**Juliet:** Tis but thy name that is my enemy: Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

**What's Montague?** It is nor hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a man. O, be some other name.

**What's in a name?** That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet...

If we took a New Critic's look at this passage, the first element we'd probably notice would be its verse form. Although it doesn't follow a simple rhyme scheme, the majority of its lines are in iambic pentameter, meaning they contain ten syllables of alternating stresses. This structure gives the text a natural rhythm, which makes sense since Romeo and Juliet is meant to be performed.



## New Critical reading of "There is a Girl Inside"

### There Is a Girl Inside

There is a girl inside. she is randy as a wolf. she will not walk away and leave these bones to an old woman. she is a green tree in a forest of kindling. she is a green girl in a used poet. she has waited patient as nun for the second coming, when she can break through gray hairs into blossom and her lovers will harvest honey and thyme and the woods will be wild with the damn wonder of it. The poem's title "There Is a Girl Inside" tells us that the speaker is an old woman who still feels young and vital inside. So we know that the central tension in the poem is probably the tension between youth and age, between what the speaker feels like on the inside and what she looks like on the outside. We can see that this tension structures the poem as a whole through the alternation of the language of youthful vitality with the language of aging and decay. In the poem, the words "girl", "randy" means sexually free or assertive. The narrative dimension of the poem reveals an old woman dreaming about the miraculous transformation, the "second coming" of youth, despite her "bones" and "gray hairs". Thus we might hypothesize that the theme of the poem probably involves the paradox of timeless youth. To discover the specific nature of the theme, and to understand how the poem

**Thank you!!!**