

**LECTURE NOTES:**  
**Intro to Literary Criticism & Formalism**

**Intro to Literary Criticism**

- Moving thru historical creation of each approach
  - starting in 20<sup>th</sup> C criticism
  - roots in other philosophers
    - Aristotle, Longinus, etc.
  - benefit = see how each movement builds (or rejects on previous)
- must know what each theoretical model represents
  - See Chp. 2 of *Texts & Contexts* for synopsis of each
    - gives reading from same text so can see difference
  - move from “new” to “post”

**Background to Formalism**

- Kant: *Critique of Judgment* (1790) (NTC 499)
  - focuses on spectator's response
    - not creation of art
  - Art (i.e., artificial) not better than nature (or vice versa)
    - both provide freedom
  - premise:
    - autonomy of art
    - universality of aesthetic judgment
      - statements of aesthetic beauty are based on visual
      - not having to do w/individual's preferences
      - no physical appeal of aesthetics
        - \* formal properties of object influence judgments of beauty
        - \* not is physical & material properties
        - \* Ex: yellow flowers in field (personally distasteful b/c allergies) vs. painting of yellow flowers in field (formally beautiful)
          - + sensual responses = subjective & unacceptable
          - \* **form over matter – SEINFELD!! (a show about nothing)**
      - therefore: all will agree
    - accepted definitions in human understanding
      - table vs. pretty table
      - definitive vs. subjective
  - **beautiful object reveals purposiveness w/out purpose**
    - no concrete purpose!!
    - therefore: aesthetic provides experience of **freedom w/in physical world**
    - but universal b/c all humans experience this freedom from & within physical world
    - beauty becomes a universal ideal perceived and not actually witnessed.
      - Ex: field of flowers painting = freedom from physical & mind's recognition of the object itself
        - \* “beauty” recognized by all but not defined
        - \* **separates from the individual & makes experience communal**

**Formalism**

- Considered passé
  - folded into **New Criticism** in U.S. (nxt week)
  - differs from New Critics
    - Rus Form want to make generalizations about nature of literature
- Definition:
  - “An aesthetic tendency characterized by the separation of form and content in works of Art and literature in which the predominant significance is given to formal aspects.” (Payne *Dictionary* 200)
  - read or view artist's/author's working w/out considering the social/cultural/historical surroundings
- Origin:
  - comes from world art & literature
    - art of painting as evolution of visual forms
    - art for art's sake
  - mimics European & British decadent movements
    - **Aestheticism & Decadence** – reminders of Romanticism
      - Aestheticism: devotion to beauty (1860s & 70s)
      - celebrates beauty as independent of morality
      - praise form above content
      - art for art's sake
      - Influences:
        - \* influenced by the French
      - gender boundaries blurred
        - \* Byron = early Aesthete?
    - Decadence (1880s & 90s)
      - Pater: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end.”
      - fascinated with dark places of human mind
        - \* ex: *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*
        - \* ex: Kipling's fiction re urban decay & racial decline
      - amoral attitude
      - decadent pleasures
      - freed British authors of moral inhibition
      - art had sexual & elusive essence
      - Stoker's *Dracula* = Decadent (late 19<sup>th</sup> C)
        - \* new woman = sexualized desire
        - \* effeminate man & masculine woman
      - ends w/Wilde's trial
        - \* Arrested for sodomy 1895
        - \* open homosexuality
        - \* 2 yrs in jail
        - \* fled to Paris after & died
        - \* trials considered conclusion to decadence, aestheticism & post-Romanticism
  - stems from **Russian literary criticism**
    - moved into defining art
    - autonomy of creative process
    - “it made the analysis of literary text the center of its critical investigations and emphasized the predominant significance of form and striving for the discovery of the immanent laws of language & literature” (Payne *Dictionary* 476)
      - i.e., makes the study of literature into a **science**

- everyone gets the same results
  - no variances on interpretation
  - b/c analysis relies solely on form & not external factors
- form vs. content
  - form = “only expression of specificity of art” (477)
  - content = nonartistic
- **Eichenbaum** (NTC 1060) (pub 1927)
  - desire for a science or “poetics” of literature (1066B)
  - linguistic basis of literature
  - stress on literary devices
    - history of literature (1074) studied against previous forms
      - literary forms influence each other, not social
    - skaz & orality
      - Gogol's “Overcoat” discussion (1076) – see synopsis
      - **see Handout from *Scrutiny*2**
  - concept of “dominant”
    - Ex: poetic imagery only part of poetic devices & not dominant (1070)
  - form & technique = part of content (1069A)
    - aural quality of poetry = independent significance (1068)
      - not just accompaniment
    - poetic form = content (1080)
      - move away from Symbolism
  - nature of narrative (fabula & plot)
    - fabula = realistic events that happen in a logical & causal order (1076)
      - = material only
      - not creativity
    - plot = literary device not restricted by laws of reality (1072)
      - served by other literary devices
      - seen as “liberation” (1073)
        - \* from cultural/historical/social phenomenon & simple experience
      - creation of plot governed by internal, formal (fixed) laws
        - \* artistic arrangement of events
    - **imagination reduced to a science or mechanics?**
      - but Kant not originally believe study of art = science
        - \* wanted to free spectator's from that hard science
        - \* art = experience but w/universality
  - defamiliarization (goal of art) (1069B & 1070B)
    - person's perception becomes automatic & only recognizes what is unfamiliar on familiar street
      - similar to *unheimlich* (Freud)
    - literary “artist” shows things out of ordinary
      - refreshes & renews reader's perceptions
      - make the familiar strange
  - **combative prose** = defense
    - fetters, cops, battle
    - fight against other methodologies (1066)
      - want literariness

## Introduction to New Criticism

- Definition
  - “close verbal analysis in which each text was treated as a self-contained or autotelic structure” (Payne *Dictionary* 366)
    - artificially isolates text from history
  
- Ransom's “Criticism, Inc.” (NTC 1108) (pub 1938)
  - vitriolic tone!
  - defines business of criticism
    - professionalization of literary studies
    - claims too much emphasis on historical/social/cultural
    - **students don't understand “technical effects” literary works**
      - TRUE???
  - scholars vs. critics
    - scholars = historians (1110)
      - focus on feelings (not object itself)
      - reduce texts to paraphrases w/a moral message
      - history takes center stage in teaching not poem
    - ideal critics
      - criticism must become “more scientific, or precise & systematic” (1109)
      - not distracted by nonliterary contexts and issues
      - do close readings
  - problems:
    - limiting theoretical model
      - left out diversity of U.S. audiences & literature
      - denounces “-isms”
        - \* identity politics removed
    - Harold Bloom & his *Western Canon* = New Critic
  
- Current Debates
  - aesthetic evaluation vs. historical/cultural significance
  - including all those “others” in anthologies & the canon
  - **give Pound HO**
    - composition, publication & reception
    - further meaning?