

LECTURE NOTES:
Intro to Literary Criticism & Formalism

Intro to Literary Criticism

- Moving thru historical creation of each approach
 - starting in 20th 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 19th 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?