

Literature for Competitive Exam
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Module – 04
Lecture – 16
New Criticism

Welcome back friends. So, as I mentioned in my last class, the focus today is on new criticism it is a literary theory, but I know some of you are interested in this. If you already know a lot of literary theory then you may skip to this; however, those who are interested may please watch it.

The focus will be on the new critics, primarily T S Eliot WinSAT and Beardsley and Cleanth Brooks and also others and we will be talking about tradition and the individual talent which is at the centre of new criticism. So, new criticism remember like formalism, focused on the text and argued that literally language is connotative, it evokes deep and secondary meanings. New criticism provides the reader and remember these words close study of text textual reading; however, they did not insist on separation of form and content, like predecessors. Literary text was seen as works unified by their devices, motives themes and patterns. Their emphasis on the text internal unity made them concentrate on individual text unlike the Russian formalist who were more interested in general literary devices or the genres.

Also it is important to notice that both the formalist and the new critics developed in different times and places and made different assumptions about literature. So, the question is what is new criticism. It is a literary movement a theory that is started in the late 1920s and 30s and originated in reaction to traditional criticism that new critics saw as largely concerned with matters which were not related to the text, extraneous to the text. Example the biography the psychology of the author or the works relationship to literary history, but they insisted on close reading of the text, they proposed that a work of literary art should be regarded as autonomous. And so should not be judged by references to considerations beyond itself, nothing extraneous.

A poem consists less of a series of referential and verifiable statement about the real world beyond it. Then of the presentation and sophistication, organisation of a set of complex experiences in a verbal form that is what they believed in. It was a reaction against biographical and traditional historical criticism, which focused on extra textual materials. New criticism claim that the text as a complex work or a complete work of art is adequate for interpretation and one should look at the text and only the text for it is new me or for it is real meaning.

New criticism therefore, 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. And so a new critic tries to examine the formal element of the text such as characterization setting of time and place point of view, plot, images, metaphors, symbols etcetera to interpret the texts and it is theme these formal as well as linguistic elements that is ambiguity, paradox, irony tension are the critics references to interpret and support the theme of a literary work.

New critics believe 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 a text. However, there have been critics, new criticism is accused of being too restrictive by denying the historical and biographical context, which could be true because you cannot separate the man from his work, and it the another allegation was that is too linguistic and not universally practical.

However new criticism had a far reaching influence. It was practised from 1920s to early 60s today it may not be very popular though some of it is features are still respected such as the notion of close reading. One should note that because new critics tried to provide verbal or textual evidences, for the claim they had a fairly objective approach to theory. For this reason, new criticism is also called objective criticism, it is also called intrinsic criticism, because again as I have been telling and at the cost of repeating myself it is concerned about the text in itself. The major works the major names include I A Richard, T S Eliot, Cleanth Brokes, David Douches, William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, F R Leavis, Robert Penn Warren, Vimsatt, that is W K Wimsatt, R P Blackmer Rene

Wellek, and of course, Beardsley Monroe Beardsley.

So, meaning recites in the text and not in the reader that is something that already was mentioned by or proposed by Wimsatt and Beardsley in the affective fallacy, we have done that. And then the intentional fallacy again by the same authors Wimsatt and Beardsley that says that said that the text is an object which can be appreciated and decoded without recourse to authorial intention. So, new criticism had an intrinsic approach, the reader will have to enter the text in order to unlock its meaning from the inside. In the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century biographical and traditional historical criticism dominated the literary theory, which was practised in academia and by critics. People tried to read meanings into Wordsworth's and Shelley's and all these great romantics' personal lives, and try to decode their works. It focused on the documents about related to the texts and the author, in its extreme form it would forget that original text itself.

So, the biographical historical tendency was so widely academically accepted that it would be a common assumption in poetry class for the students to expect a description of the poets' personal and intellectual life. Now T S Eliot we have already in our last class, we talked about him was among the first to claim that poetry stands for itself. And in his various essays based on literary criticism, he asks critics to pay attention to the poem rather than that the poet. The poet does not influence the poem with his or her personality and emotions that is what he said. He also said that a poet uses language in such a way as to incorporate within the poem, the impersonal feelings and emotions common to all humankind. I A Richards also tried to differentiate between the traditional reading of a poem, and the modern view of poem. He was less concerned about close reading, but he subscribed to classifying the numerous ways in which reading of poetry could go wrong and one was that historical biographical reading approach does not help in understanding a poem.

William Empson I A Richards' students also followed his teacher, and along with Richards and Eliot T S Eliot Empson contributed to a corpus of acceptable interpretive techniques. In 1941 another new critic John Crowe Ransom who is generally considered as the philosopher general of new criticism. He called the formula view of analysing a

text and new criticism and introduce it to American critics in his book new criticism. According to ransom and others even if whatever the author life is, there whatever is the author's intention is, it should be called an intentional fallacy and it should be discredited. Whatever an author says about his work is just an interpretation just like any other interpretation.

So, author's interpretation should not be taken literally. When a particular reading is not supported by the text it need not be valued. 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. So, the approach was to search meanings within the structure of the text. And find it by examining the text through close reading and analysing the formal elements within the text. This is where new criticism seem to be a kind of new formalism. A new criticism one may examine all the evidence provided by the language of the text itself. And this is because new criticism believes that there is such a single complete interpretation which is timeless and not related to individual readers or social events.

The critic's job is to ascertain the structure of the poem, to see how it operates to achieve it is unity and to discover how meaning evolves directly from the poem itself that is what they believed in. For example, if a fifteenth century poet called someone a nice person the new critics would in investigate the meaning of the word nice in the fifteenth century, discovering that at that time nice meant foolish. So, semantics syntax imagery metre they were important. Looking carefully at the word's new critics would find both connotations and denotations for each one and different literal and implied meanings they believed create ambiguity. Ambiguity is languages 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 critics multiple meaning of text of texts is the result of 4 linguistic elements - Paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension. Now remember paradox is an important term. Cleanth Brook has done a lot of work on paradox it means a statement which seems to be self contradictory. Irony is also a statement or an event which seems to be contrary to it

is literal sense. And ironic is statement presents a meaning which is opposite of the intended meaning and tension in new criticism means the conflict within the text.

These 4 linguistic devices as well as other figurative devices such as images symbols similes and metaphors control the poems structure. For a close reading of a text whether the aim of the exercise is to point out rhetorical features, structural elements, cultural references one should observe particular details and facts within the text carefully. Thus we can see the intimate relationship between the discussions of structure and irony in many important literary works of the period. For example, Alice Wasteland, Ezra Pounds Cantos, Virginia Woolfs to the lighthouse, James Joyces Ulysses, William Faulkners the sound and the fury. One of the criticism against new critics was that subjectivity and emotions were ignored, and it was too much objective and scientific.

Now, according to Rene Wellek new criticism is considered not only superseded obsolete and dead, but somehow mistaken and wrong. He sort of rejects the theory of new criticism and believes that it is uninterested in the human meaning the social function and effects of literature. So, that is Rene Wellek and critic or sorry critic of new criticism it was also elegy that the new criticism treat a literary texts much too autonomous and divorce from the social political historical context. And John Crowe Ransom in his essay criticism INC incorporated, advocated that criticism become scientific precise and systematic, various schools of thoughts.

Some of the important text include Eliots tradition and the individual talent and of course, hamlet and his problems and ransoms essays criticism INC and the ontological critic Wimsett. Wimsett and Beardsleys essays the intentional fallacy the affective fallacy. And Cleanth Brooks the well wrought urn studies in the structure of poetry. Cleanth Brooks who wrote the language of paradox and also the well wrought urn, which you know the language of paradox, the idea occurs in the well wrought urn. He was an active member of the new critic moment and he outline the uses of reading poems through paradox as a method of critical interpretation. According to him in literature the paradox is a literary device consisting of the anomalous juxtaposition of incongruous ideas for the sake of striking exposition or unexpected inside. Paradox for Cleanth Brooks functions as a method of literary composition and analysis, which involves

examining apparently contradictory statements and drawing conclusions either to reconcile them or explain their poems.

So, Cleanth Brooks advocates the centrality of paradoxes or way of understanding in interpreting poetry. So, you should remember these things, the language of paradox the well wrought urn modern poetry and the tradition these are a are his important works. Brooks also illustrates the working of paradox by analysing compose upon Westminster's bridge, Wordsworth's poem in which the speaker is able to appreciate the beauty of industrialized London. Just as he would appreciate any natural phenomenon, as he views London as a part of nature having been built by a man who himself is a part of nature and who attributes is part of life to the city.

So, Brooks and his essay with the reading of John Donne's poem the canonization which uses paradox as it is underlying metaphor. In the poem the speaker's physical love is described as saintly and the 2 lovers as appropriate candidates for canonization. So, according to Brooks, Donne seems to parody both love and religion, but. In fact, combines in a complex conceit. Brooks also points to secondary paradoxes in the poem, the simultaneous duality and singleness of love. There is no direct historical relationship between new criticism and Russian formalism. Each having developed at around a same time, but they independently exist of each other; however, despite this there are several similarities.

For example, both movement showed an interest in considering literature on it is own terms instead of focusing on it is relationship to political cultural or historical externalities. So, that is all for today I would urge you to go through tradition and the individual talent and look at it. And also Hamlet and his problems and look at both these essays as seminal works of new criticism.

Thank you very much.