

Fourth Class

Literary Criticism /Code:rnms4eqb

New Criticism

Lecture: I

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What is New Criticism?

The term “**New Criticism**” was first used by John Crowe Ransom when he published a book with the same title in 1941. In this book, he laid down of the foundations and beliefs of this critical school. Ransom states that “ a poem can be analyzed to discover its true or correct meaning independent of its author or its reader.” In other words, one can study the **linguistic aspects of the text** analyzed without mentioning any the author's life and his/her society. Anything related to the author is totally ignored. What is important to focus on is the words on the page; **the language of the text** being analyzed.

Meanings of New Criticism

There are two meanings associated with the term “New Criticism.” The first is a general one which refers to any new approach or school of criticism. In this sense, most criticism is “new.” In the course of time, it is clear that the critics usually bring and discuss “new” ideas which are different from those preceded them.

The second meaning of “New Criticism” is technical. It refers to a “school” or an approach to poetry that flourished in the United States and England in 1930s and 1940s. It appeared as a result of “English becoming an academic discipline.”¹

1. Adnan Abdulla, *History of Literary Criticism :an Introductory Reader*. Mosul: Mosul UP, 1989

Who are the founders of this School?

Two British critics, T.S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, contributed in founding the principles of New Criticism. Eliot strongly believes that the criticism should be focused on the poem, not **the poet**. In his famous essay, “ Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot explains that the poet “ does not infuse the poem with his or her personality or emotions, but uses language in such a way as to incorporate within the poem the **impersonal feelings** and emotions common to all humankind.” The poet should not talk about his/her personal experiences; rather, they should tackle universal issues. However, Eliot contradicted himself when he wrote his own poetry. He always tackled his own personal experiences and emotions. For example, in his poem

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Who are the founders of this School? (Continued)

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot tackles personal issues such as his psychological suffering and his sense of failure. Prufrock is Eliot himself.

I.A. Richards’s contribution to the establishment of New Criticism can be seen in his two books *Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism*. As a university professor, Richards asked his students to **analyze certain poems without giving them any information** about the author, his life, his age, and his society. The students were required to explain the poem through **the language** of the poems only.

The Steps of doing a New Critical Approach

To adopt a New Critical Approach to any literary text, the following steps should be should be observed:

1. Examine the text's diction(the words). Consider the denotation and connotation and the origins of the words in the text.
2. Examine all allusions in the text. Allusions are certain references to history, religion, geography...etc.,
3. Analyze images, symbols, and figures of speech like irony, alliteration, paradox, ambiguity and, so on and so forth.
4. Examine the various structural patterns related to prosody, rhythm, metre, rhyme scheme,.etc.

The Steps of doing a New Critical Approach (Continued 2)

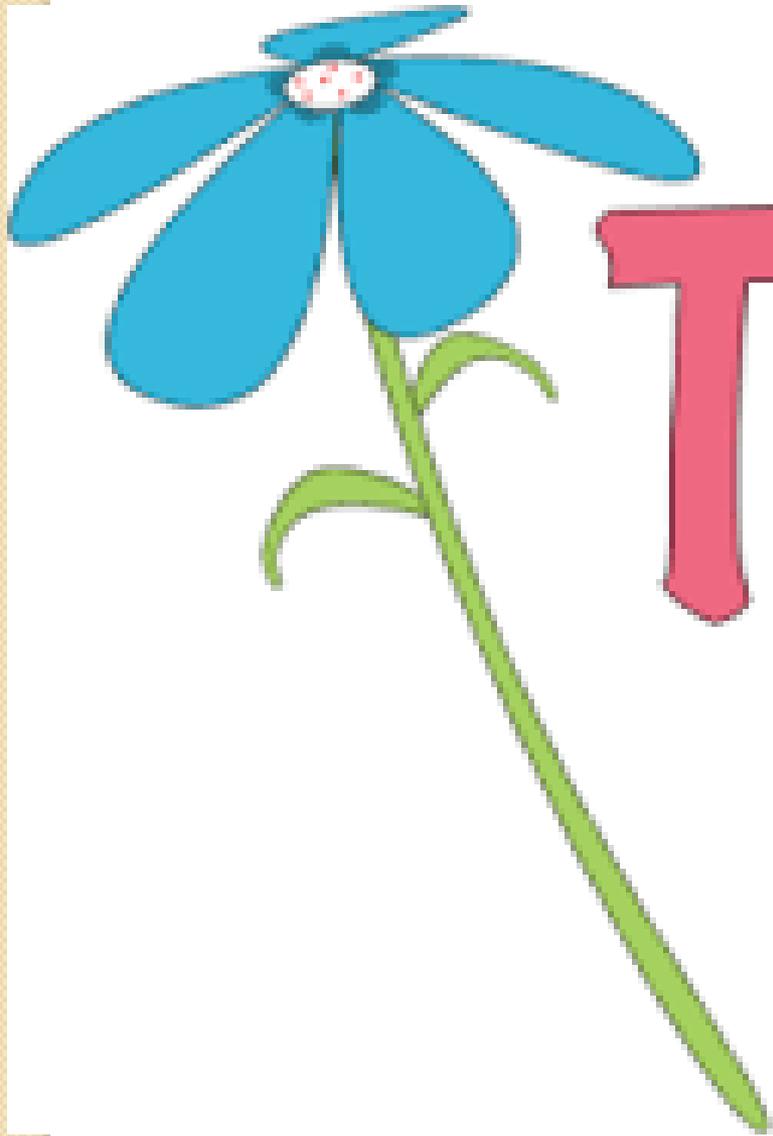
5. Consider such elements as tone, theme, point of view ...etc. These elements have much to do with the linguistic aspects of the text under study.
6. Look for the interrelationships of the elements mentioned in the steps 1-5, because they show how and when tensions, ambiguities or paradoxes appear in the text.
7. After examining all the foresaid steps, state the poem's chief tension and explain how the poem achieves its effect.

Concluding Remarks

- **1.** New Criticism focuses mainly on the language of the literary text under consideration. The words on the page are the critic's chief concern.

- 2.** Personal experiences and emotions on the part of the reader and the poet should be ignored.

- 3.** New Criticism aims at demonstrating and explaining experiences and feelings shared by all human beings.



Thank
You!