

## Lecture 8: Modernism into Literary Studies

### 1) Modernism and Formalism: The New Criticism

### 2) Formalism into Structuralism

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<u>Romantic Authorship</u> (Shelley)	vs.	<u>Modern(ist) Authorship</u> (Eliot)
- inspiration through nature		- imitation through historical sense
- 'fading coal'-metaphor		- 'shred of platinum'-metaphor
- meaning based on 'genius' (subjectivity > innovation + order/continuity)		- meaning subject to tradition (objectivity > continuity + appropriation)
- pleasure		- significant emotion (obj. corr.)
➔ poetry as the highest form of subjectivity (God) vs. the materialist self (Mammon)		➔ impersonal theory of poetry

### Modernism as a key 'moment' in modern culture's overall movement towards

- non-representational cultural practices
- non-foundationalist epistemology
- all-pervading reflexivity

# 1) Modernism and Formalism: The New Criticism

## a) Background

- the emergence of literary studies as an academic discipline (= 'new' criticism!)
  - rejection of subjectivism/impressionism, positivism and aestheticism as modes of reading dominant in the 19th century (↔ Abrams' 'objective' theories)
  - non-literary factors (author, context, reality) are relegated to status as 'background' knowledge
  - development closely linked to the emergence of modernism
  - influence of WWI
  - the term 'New Criticism' was coined by J.E. Spingarn in 1910, but the theoretical outline was only formulated later

### GB ('practical criticism'):

I.A. Richards                      *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923)  
    *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924)  
    *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (1929)

William Empson                      *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)  
    *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951)

[F.R. Leavis                              *The Great Tradition* (1948)  
→ combination of moral and literary criteria as the basis  
of adequate aesthetic judgement]

### US:

#### 'Southern Agrarians' (critique of modernization):

Allen Tate  
John Crowe Ransom                      *The New Criticism* (1941)

W.K. Wimsatt/  
Robert Penn Warren                      *Understanding Poetry* (1938)

W.K. Wimsatt/  
Monroe C. Beardsley                      *The Verbal Icon* (1954)

Cleanth Brooks                      *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947)

[R.S. Crane, Elder Olson]

## b) Basic Assumptions

### Organic theory of literature and art:

- based on Romantic theory (esp. Coleridge)
- literature has its origins in natural processes of human consciousness
- decoding of meaning is possible for all readers  
(vs. difficulty of modernist art) → it can (and must) be taught!
- the text as an organic and self-sufficient unit  
(cf. emphatic understanding of the work of art in modernism)

### Method:

- close reading
  - intrinsic approach: the reader will have to 'enter' the text in order to unlock its meaning from the inside; it is not necessary to consider external factors
  - formalistic approach: detailed analysis of literary form is a prerequisite for successful readings, but: unity of content and form (Cleanth Brooks: "The Heresy of Paraphrase")

### 'Normal' vs. 'Poetic' Language:

- 'normal' language: reference, denotative meaning
  - truth of correspondence (to reality)  
(also: scientific language use!)
- 'poetic' language: reference/correspondence 'disturbed' by connotative and metaphorical levels of meaning brought about by emotional and intentional language use
  - truth of coherence/acceptability ('innere Stimmigkeit')

**Text:**

- structure ('prose core', logical content)  
+  
texture (connotative level)
- internal necessity ↔ irony (internal contradictions, tension, ambiguity, paradox)
- the text as an object which can (and must) be appreciated and decoded without recourse to authorial intention  
(Wimsatt/Beardsley: "The Intentional Fallacy")
- enactment of dramatic situations/social relationships:  
speaking voice/persona/narrator → ostensible/apparent addressee/narratee  
vs. implied author → implied reader  
vs. actual (empirical) author → actual (empirical) reader
- meaning resides in the text, not in the reader  
(Wimsatt/Beardsley: "The Affective Fallacy")
- reading = understanding from the inside!

**William K. Wimsatt/Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946, revised version in: *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954): 3-18.**

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- 1) A poem does not come into existence by accident [...] Yet to insist on the designing intellect as a *cause* of a poem is not to grant the design or intention as a *standard* by which the critic is to judge the worth of the poet's performance.
- 2) [...] How is [the critic] to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem [...]
- 3) Judging a poem is like judging a pudding or a machine. One demands that it works. It is only because an artefact works that we infer the intention of the artificer. "A poem should not mean but be." A poem can *be* only through its *meaning* – since its medium is words – yet it *is*, simply *is*, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant. [...] Poetry succeeds because all or most of what is said or implied is relevant; what is irrelevant has been excluded, like lumps from pudding and 'bugs' from machinery. In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention. They are more abstract than poetry.

- 4) The meaning of a poem may certainly be a personal one, in the sense that a poem expresses a personality or state of soul rather than a physical object like an apple. But even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized). We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by an act of biographical inference.
- 5) There is a sense in which an author, by revision, may better achieve his original intention. But it is a very abstract sense. He intended to write a better work, or a better work of a certain kind, and now he has done it. But it follows that his former concrete intention was not his intention. [...]  
The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology.

## II

It is not so much a historical statement as a definition to say that the intentional fallacy is a romantic one. [...]

## III

[...] It would be convenient if the passwords of the intentional school, 'sincerity', 'fidelity', 'spontaneity', 'authenticity', 'genuineness', 'originality', could be equated with terms such as 'integrity', 'relevance', 'unity', 'function', 'maturity', 'subtlety', 'adequacy', and other more precise terms of evaluation – in short, if 'expression' always meant aesthetic achievement. But this is not so. [...] The evaluation of the work of art remains public; the work is measured against something outside the author.

## IV.

There is criticism of poetry and there is author psychology. [...] There is a difference between internal and external evidence for the meaning of a poem. And the paradox is only verbal and superficial that what is (1) internal is also public: it is discovered through the semantics and syntax of the poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and culture; while what is (2) external is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact. It consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem – to what lady, while

sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother. There is (3) an intermediate kind of evidence about the character of the author [...] The use of biographical evidence need not involve intentionalism, because while it may be evidence of what the author intended, it may also be evidence of the meaning of his words and the dramatic character of his utterance. [...]

## V.

[...] There is (1) the way of poetic analysis and exegesis [...] [W]e submit that this is the true and objective way of criticism, as contrasted to what the very uncertainty of exegesis might tempt second kind of critic to undertake: (2) the way of biographical or genetic inquiry [...] Our point is that [...] such an inquiry would have nothing to do with the poem [...]; it would not be a critical inquiry. Critical inquiries, unlike bets, are not settled in this way. Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle.

## c) Problems

- internal contradictions: emulation of natural sciences methodology *and* rejection of natural sciences which are seen as a main cause for the fragmentation of modern life against which the organic understanding of the work of art is pitted
- ahistorical understanding of art, literature and language which insists on the importance of literature as the most valuable form of human knowledge but fails to acknowledge the historical conditions which frame writing and reading
- epistemological naivety which clings to traditional notions of an objectively 'given' reality which is imitated by language (and literature, cf. Abrams' mimetic theories)
- the approach encourages an emphasis on innovative readings which illustrate the inexhaustable 'richness' of literary texts

### importance:

- the approach encourages an intimate engagement with textual features
- literature is taken seriously on its own terms for the first time

## Offshoots/Consequences:

### Wolfgang Kayser, “Wer erzählt den Roman?” (1957)

Ein Erzähler ist in allen Werken der Erzählkunst da, im Epos wie im Märchen, in der Novelle wie in der Anekdote. Jeder Vater und jede Mutter weiß, daß sie sich verwandeln müssen, wenn sie ihren Kindern ein Märchen erzählen. Die müssen die aufgeklärte Haltung des Erwachsenen aufgeben und sich in ein Wesen verwandeln, für das die dichterische Welt mit ihren Wunderbarkeiten Wirklichkeit ist [...] Das heißt also, daß der Erzähler in aller Erzählkunst niemals der bekannte oder noch unbekannte Autor ist, sondern eine Rolle, die der Autor erfindet und einnimmt. [...] Wir haben ein negatives Ergebnis gewonnen: der Erzähler eines Romans ist nicht der Autor. Und wir scheinen ein positives Ergebnis gewonnen zu haben. Der Erzähler ist eine gedichtete Person, in die sich der Autor verwandelt hat. [...] Der Erzähler des Romans – das ist nicht der Autor, das ist aber auch nicht die gedichtete Gestalt, die uns oft so vertraut entgegentritt. Hinter dieser Maske steht der Roman, der sich selber erzählt, steht der Geist dieses Romans, der allwissende, überall gegenwärtige und schaffende Geist dieser Welt. Die neue, einmalige Welt entsteht, indem er Gestalt annimmt und zu sprechen beginnt, indem er sie mit seinem schöpferischen Wort selber hervorruft. Er selber schafft sie, und in ihr kann er allwissend und überall gegenwärtig sein. Der Erzähler des Romans, in einer Analogie verdeutlicht, ist der mythische Weltschöpfer. [...]

### Wayne C. Booth, ‘The Implied Author’, in: *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961)

As [an author] writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal ‘man in general’ but an implied version of ‘himself’ that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men’s works. [...] [I]t is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author’s most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner – and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work. [...]

A great work establishes the ‘sincerity’ of its implied author, regardless of how grossly the man who created that author may belie in his *other* forms of conduct the values embodies in his work. For all we know, the only sincere moments of his life may have been lived as he wrote his novel. [...]

## 2) Russian Formalism

### Founding Moments:

- 1915 Moscow Linguistic Circle (Roman Jakobson et al.)
- 1916 Petrograd: 'OPOIAZ' = Society for the Study of Poetic Language  
(Viktor Shklovskii, Boris Eikhenbaum et al.)

### Two Phases:

- 1) 1915-1920 in Russia ('pure' formalism)
- 2) 1921-1930 movement towards Czechoslovakia and Poland under pressure from Marxism/Stalinism  
→ emergence of structuralism

### Basic Assumptions:

- close ties with avantgardistic poetry of the day
- rejection of unsystematic, subjective and impressionistic ways of dealing with literature inherited from the 19th century
- scientific approach focused on 'literariness' which can be found on the level of form rather than content (strong influence of the emerging discipline of modern linguistics)
- not 'what', but 'how' a text means

### Viktor Shklovskii, 'Art as Device' (1916)

- normal language:  
habitual, automatic response, mechanical recognition, reference to reality  
vs.  
poetic language:  
a new perception and awareness of things, self-referentiality
  - art as a device of *ostranenie*/defamiliarization
  - a text is the sum total of its devices, form and content,  
*fabula* (story) and *siuzhet* (plot) cannot be separated
  - aesthetics of deviation
  - defamiliarization forces the reader to slow down and effects a more strenuous,  
but also  
more rewarding engagement with the text and, by implication, with the world
- art/literature as a dynamic process, defamiliarization implies the level of reception and a historical dimension marked by the evolution of literary forms

### **Iurii Tynianov, *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924)**

- a text is a dynamic system of mutually defining elements with a characteristic hierarchy of dominating and subordinated features
- the literary tension between foregrounding and automatization must be maintained by constant innovation/evolution
- forms and genres can never be static
- 'the tradition of breaking with tradition' as a literary principle, which is, however, increasingly viewed in larger contexts (the literary system ↔ extra-literary systems)
- moves away from Shklovskii by seeing literary evolution as part of or interrelated with the evolution of society ('On Literary Evolution' 1927)

### **Tynianov/Jakobson, 'Problems of the Study of Literature and Language' (1928)**

- 'structuralist manifesto': end point of Russian formalism
- literature as part of a complex network of systems all correlated with one another
- each system is governed by its own immanent laws and correlated to other systems through a set of specific structural laws
- literary history can only be investigated by addressing these correlations
- 'structure' replaces 'form' as focus of attention
- literature as a self-determining but nevertheless social phenomenon

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