

# FORMALISMS

(1) RUSSIAN FORMALISM

(2) NEW CRITICISM



# Formalisms

## ◎ (1) Russian Formalism

- Definition
- Main Characteristics
- Main Figures
  - **Victor Shklovsky**
  - **Mikhail M. Bakhtin**
  - **Roman Jakobson**

## (2) New Criticism

Definition

Main Characteristics

Main Figures

- **I. A. Richards**
- **John Crowe Ransom**

- **Difference between Formalism and New Criticism**

Russian Formalism

# Definitions

## Definition of Russian Formalism:

- The Russian Formalists were a group of writers who flourished during the period of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Russian Formalism

# **Main Characteristics:**

# Main Characteristics:

- A new notion of form not as an envelope but viewed as “a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained”
- A fundamental formalist distinction between poetic and practical language.
- The Formalists sought to isolate the study of literature from “secondary, incidental features” that might belong to philosophy, psychology, or history.

Russian Formalism

**Main Figures:**

# Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984)

- His essay “Art as Technique” (1917) was one of the central statements of formalist theory.

# Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975)

- Mikhail Bakhtin is best known for his radical philosophy of language, as well as his theory of the novel, underpinned by concepts such as “dialogism,” “polyphony,” and “carnival”.
- Bakhtin’s major work is *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1930)

# Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

- The work of Roman Jakobson occupies a central and seminal place in the development of formalism and structuralism.
- His famous work is “Linguistics and Poetics” (1958)

# Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

- Jakobson urges that the poetic function of language must be situated among the other functions of language, which he schematizes as follows:



# Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

- In any act of verbal communication, the “addresser” sends a message to the “addressee”; the message requires a “context” that is verbal or at least capable of being verbalized; a “contact” which is a physical channel or psychological connection between them; and a “code” that is shared by them.

# Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

- Jakobson explains that each of these factors determines a different function of language, and that the verbal structure of any given message depends on the predominant function. In poetry itself, diverse genres employ the other verbal functions along with the poetic function. For example, epic poetry involves the referential function; lyric, the emotive.

# Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)

- Here is how Jakobson schematizes the various functions

	REFERENTIAL	
EMOTIVE	POETIC	CONATIVE
	PHATIC	
	METALINGUAL	

New Criticism

# Definitions

## Definition of Russian New Criticism:

- This formalist disposition became intensified in both the New Criticism and the Chicago School.
- The New Criticism originated in England during the 1920s in the work of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, as well as in seminal studies by I. A. Richards and William Empson.

New Criticism

# **Main Characteristics:**

# Main Characteristics:

- New Critics advocated a creative and imaginative criticism which gave primacy to the aesthetic qualities of literature over historical, psychological, and moral considerations.
- The real aim of criticism is “to define and enjoy the aesthetic or characteristic values of literature.”

# Main Characteristics:

- Criticism's proper province includes technical studies of poetry, metrics, tropes, and fictiveness.
- Literature and literary criticism should enjoy autonomy.
- Focusing on “the text itself ” or “the words on the page.”

New Criticism

**Main Figures:**

# I. A. Richards

- Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) advanced literary critical notions such as irony, tension, and balance, as well as distinguishing between poetic and other uses of language.
- His *Practical Criticism* (1929) emphasized the importance of “objective” and balanced close reading which was sensitive to the figurative language of literature.

# John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974)

- The seminal manifestos of the New Criticism had been proclaimed by Ransom, who published a series of essays entitled *The New Criticism* (1941)
- His arguments have often been abbreviated as focusing on “the text itself ” or “the words on the page.”

# **Difference between Formalism and New Criticism**

## Difference between Formalism and New Criticism

- It should be said that the Russian Formalists' emphasis on form and technique was different in nature from that of the later New Critics.
- The Formalists' analyses were far more theoretical, seeking to understand the general nature of literature and literary devices, as well as the historical evolution of literary techniques; the New Critics were more concerned with the practice (rather than the theory) of close reading of individual texts.