

Forms of Ruin (1981); Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830* (1982); Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (1983); Marilyn Gault, *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (1988); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (trans., 1988); Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (1990). Hugh Honour, in his book on *Neo-classicism* (1969) and on *Romanticism* (1979), stresses the visual arts. A collection of essays that define or discuss romanticism is Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enesco, eds., *Romanticism: Points of View* (rev., 1975). In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986), Stuart Curran stresses the relationship of innovative Romantic forms to the traditional poetic genres.

New Criticism. This term, set current by the publication of John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* in 1941, came to be applied to a theory and practice that was prominent in American literary criticism until late in the 1960s. The movement derived in considerable part from elements in I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929) and from the critical essays of T. S. Eliot. It opposed the prevailing interest of scholars, critics, and teachers of that era in the biographies of authors, the social context of literature, and literary history by insisting that the proper concern of literary criticism is not with the external circumstances or effects or historical position of a work, but with a detailed consideration of the work itself as an independent entity. Notable critics in this mode were the southerners Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, whose textbooks *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) did much to make the New Criticism the predominant method of teaching literature in American colleges, and even in high schools, for the next two or three decades. Other prominent writers of that time—in addition to Ransom, Brooks, and Warren—who are often identified as New Critics are Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, and William K. Wimsatt.

A very influential English critic, F. R. Leavis, in turning his attention from background, sources, and biography to the detailed analysis of "literary texts themselves," shared some of the concepts of the New Critics and their analytic focus on what he called "the words on the page." He differed from his American counterparts, however, in his emphasis on the great literary works as a concrete and life-affirming enactment of moral and cultural values. He stressed also the essential role in education of what he called "the Great Tradition" of English literature in advancing the values of culture and "civilization" against the antagonistic forces in modern life. See F. R. Leavis, *Revelation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936); *Education and the University* (1943, 2d ed. 1948); *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); also Anne Sampson, *F. R. Leavis* (1992).

The New Critics differ from one another in many ways, but the following points of view and procedures are common to many of them.

- (1) A poem, it is held, should be treated as such—in Eliot's words, "primarily as poetry and not another thing"—and should therefore be regarded as an independent and self-sufficient verbal object. The first law of criticism, John Crowe Ransom said, "is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object" and shall recognize "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake." (See *objective criticism*.) New Critics warn the reader against critical practices which divert attention from the poem itself (see *intentional fallacy* and *affective fallacy*). In analyzing and evaluating a particular work, they eschew reference to the biography and temperament of the author, to the social conditions at the time of its production, or to its psychological and moral effects on the reader; they also tend to minimize recourse to the place of the work in the history of literary forms and subject matter. Because of this critical focus on the literary work in isolation from its attendant circumstances and effects, the New Criticism is often classified as a type of critical *formalism*.
- (2) The principles of the New Criticism are basically verbal. That is, literature is conceived to be a special kind of language whose attributes are defined by systematic opposition to the language of science and of practical and logical discourse, and the explicative procedure is to analyze the meanings and interactions of words, *figures of speech*, and *symbols*. The emphasis is on the "organic unity," in a successful literary work, of overall structure and verbal meanings; and we are warned against separating the two by what Cleanth Brooks has called "the heresy of paraphrase."
- (3) The distinctive procedure of a New Critic is explication, or close reading: the detailed analysis of the complex interrelations and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work. "Explication de texte" (stressing all kinds of information relevant to the full understanding of a word or passage) has long been a formal procedure for teaching literature in French schools, but the kind of explicative analyses of verbal interactions characteristic of the New Criticism derives from such books as I. A. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929) and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930).
- (4) The distinction between literary genres, although acknowledged, does not play an essential role in the New Criticism. The essential components of any work of literature, whether lyric, narrative, or dramatic, are conceived to be words, images, and symbols rather than character, thought, and plot. These linguistic elements, whatever the genre, are often said to be organized around a central and humanly significant theme, and to manifest high literary value to the degree that they manifest "tension," "irony," and "paradox" in achieving a "reconciliation of diverse impulses" or an "equilibrium of opposed forces." The form of a work, whether or not it has characters and plot, is said to be primarily a "structure of meanings," which evolve into an integral

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and freestanding unity mainly through a play and counterplay of "thematic imagery" and "symbolic action."

The basic orientation and modes of analysis in the New Criticism were adapted to the contextual criticism of Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger. Krieger defined contextualism as "the claim that the poem is a tight, compelling, finally closed context," which prevents "our escape to the world of reference and action beyond," and requires that we "judge the work's efficacy as an aesthetic object." (See Krieger, *The New Apologists for Poetry*, 1956, and *Theory of Criticism*, 1976.) The revolutionary thrust of the mode had lost much of its force by the 1960s, when it gave way to various newer theories of criticism, but it has left a deep and enduring mark on the criticism and teaching of literature, in its primary emphasis on the individual work and in the variety and subtlety of the devices that it made available for analyzing its internal relations. *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chavira Hošek and Patricia Parker (1985), is a collection of *structuralist, poststructuralist*, and other essays which—often in express opposition to the New Criticism—exemplify the diverse newer modes of "close reading"; some of these essays emphasize that competing forces within the language of a lyric poem preclude the possibility of a unified meaning.

Central instances of the theory and practice of New Criticism are Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), and W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (1954). The enterprises of New Criticism are privileged over alternative approaches to literature in René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3d ed., 1964), which became a standard reference book in the graduate study of literature. Robert W. Stallman's *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920-1948* (1949) is a convenient collection of essays in this critical mode; the literary journal *The Explicator* (1942 ff.), devoted to close reading, is a characteristic product of its approach to literary texts, as are the items listed in *Poetry Explanation: A Checklist of Interpretation Since 1924 of British and American Poems Past and Present*, ed. Joseph M. Kuntz (3d ed., 1980). See also W. K. Wimsatt, ed., *Explication as Criticism* (1963); the review of the movement by René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, Vol. 6 (1986); and the spirited retrospective defense of New Criticism by its chief exponent, Cleanth Brooks, "In Search of the New Criticism" (1983), reprinted in Brooks, *Community, Religion, and Literature*, 1995). For critiques of the theory and methods of the New Criticism, see R. S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern* (1952), and *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (1953); Gerald Graff, *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (1970); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1993); Susan Wolfson, *Formal Changes* (1997).

New Historicism, since the early 1980s, has been the accepted name for a mode of literary study that its proponents oppose to the *formalism* they attribute both to the *New Criticism* and to the critical *deconstruction* that followed it. In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of

its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations. This is not simply a return to an earlier kind of literary scholarship, for the views and practices of the new historicists differ markedly from those of former scholars who had adverted to social and intellectual history as a "background" against which to set a work of literature as an independent entity, or had viewed literature as a "reflection" of the worldview characteristic of a period. Instead, new historicists conceive of a literary text as "situated" within the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the overall culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes.

What is most distinctive in the new mode of historical study is mainly the result of concepts and practices of literary analysis and interpretation that have been assimilated from various recent poststructural theorists (see *poststructuralism*). Especially prominent are (1) The views of the revisionist Marxist thinker Louis Althusser, that ideology manifests itself in different ways in the discourse of each of the semi-autonomous institutions of an era, including literature, and also that ideology operates covertly to form and position the users of language as the "subjects" in a discourse, in a way that in fact "subjects" them—that is, subordinates them—to the interests of the ruling classes; see *ideology* under *Marxist criticism*. (2) Michel Foucault's view that the *discourse* of an era, instead of reflecting preexisting entities and orders, brings into being the concepts, oppositions, and hierarchies of which it speaks; that these elements are both products and propagators of "power," or social forces; and that as a result, the particular discursive formations of an era determine what is at the time accounted "knowledge" and "truth," as well as what is considered to be humanly normal as against what is considered to be criminal, or insane, or sexually deviant. (3) The central concept in *deconstructive criticism* that all texts involve modes of signification that war against each other, merged with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic nature of many literary texts, in the sense that they incorporate a number of conflicting voices that represent diverse social classes; see *dialogic criticism*. (4) Recent developments in cultural anthropology, especially Clifford Geertz' view that a culture is constituted by distinctive sets of signifying systems, and his use of what he calls *thick descriptions*—the close analysis, or "reading," of a particular social production or event so as to recover the meanings it has for the people involved in it, as well as to discover, within the cultural system, the general patterns of conventions, codes, and modes of thinking that invest the item with those meanings.

In an oft-quoted phrase, Louis Montrose described the new historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history." That is, history is conceived not to be a set of fixed, objective facts but, like the literature with which it interacts, a text which itself needs to be interpreted. Any text, on the other hand, is conceived as a discourse which, although it may seem to present, or reflect, an external reality, in fact consists of what are called *representations*—that is, verbal formations which are the