**Study materials for 6th sem English Major Paper 6.2**

**NEW CRITICISM**

**New Criticism** was a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. It was formulated by a group of American critics, most of who taught at American southern universities. The New Critics were opposed to impressionistic criticism and social/ historical approaches. It emphasized close reading, particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. The movement derived its name from John Crowe Ransom’s 1941 book *The New Criticism.* Like [Formalism](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/formalism-russian)[,](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/learning/glossary-term.html?term=Formalism%20(Russian)) it tended to consider texts as autonomous and “closed,” meaning that everything that is needed to understand a work is present within it. The reader does not need outside sources, such as the author’s biography, to fully understand a text.. Like Formalist critics, New Critics focused their attention on the stylistic and linguistic qualities of a text, specifically [metaphor](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/metaphor)[,](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/learning/glossary-term.html?term=Metaphor) [irony,](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/irony) tension, and [paradox.](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/paradox) The New Critics emphasized “close reading” as a way to engage with a text, and paid close attention to the interactions between form and meaning. Important New Critics included [Allen Tate](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/allen-tate)[,](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=6750) [Robert Penn Warren](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-penn-warren), [John Crowe Ransom](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-crowe-ransom), Cleanth Brooks, William Empson, F.R. Leavis, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley.

New Criticism developed as a reaction to the older philological and literary history schools of northern US, which, focused on the biographical circumstances of the authors. These approaches, it was felt, neglected the aesthetic qualities of a text in favour of external factors. On the other hand, they rejected impressionistic criticism as too subjective and emotional. Condemning this as a version of Romanticism, they aimed for newer, systematic and objective method. New Critics believed the structure and meaning of the text were intimately connected and should not be analyzed separately. In order to bring the focus of literary studies back to analysis of the texts, they aimed to exclude the reader's response, the author's intention, historical and cultural contexts, and moralistic bias from their analysis. These goals were articulated in Ransom's "Criticism, Inc." and [Allen Tate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allen_Tate)'s "Miss Emily and the Bibliographers".

. In 1946, [William K. Wimsatt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._K._Wimsatt) and [Monroe Beardsley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monroe_Beardsley) published a classic and controversial New Critical essay entitled "[The Intentional Fallacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intentional_Fallacy)", in which they argued strongly against the relevance of an [author's intention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Authorial_intentionality), or "intended meaning" in the analysis of a literary work In another essay, "[The Affective Fallacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affective_fallacy)", which served as a kind of sister essay to "The Intentional Fallacy", Wimsatt and Beardsley also discounted the reader's personal/emotional reaction to a literary work as a valid means of analyzing a text. As a result of this fallacy, criticism ends in impressionism and relativism and objective criticism becomes almost impossible.

Thus, studying a passage of prose or poetry in New Critical style required careful, exacting scrutiny of the passage itself. Formal elements such as [rhyme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhyme), meter, [setting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Setting_%28fiction%29), [characterization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Characterization), and [plot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot_%28narrative%29) were used to identify the [theme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_%28literature%29) of the text. In addition to the theme, the New Critics also looked for [paradox](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradox), [ambiguity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambiguity), [irony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony), and [tension](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspense) to help establish the single best and most unified interpretation of the text. While Empson talked of Irony and Ambiguity, Allen Tate discussed Tension and Cleanth Brooks endorsed Paradox as a method of critical interpretation.

Although no longer a dominant theoretical model in American universities, New Criticism remains a major school of criticism and some of its methods (like [close reading](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Close_reading)) are still fundamental tools of literary criticism.

**References**

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Criticism>