Matthew Arnold: “The Study of Poetry” (1880): “More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.”

“The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1865) Criticism: “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.”

Lord George Gordon, 1922: "England is sick, and … English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State" -> canon formation (T.S. Eliot – tradition)

WHAT to study (canon) -> HOW to study English Lit.:

I.A.Richards (1893-1979) and F.R. Leavis (1895-1979) wanted to create a subject that would study English literature in its own right, not just a source of examples of how English was used in Shakespeare’s time, or as pale imitations of Greek and Latin works. As the intellectual inheritors of Arnold, they believed that literature would restore a sense of humanity to the world, in the face of modernity, the growth of dehumanising technology and the machine age.

I.A Richards (1893-1979): *Practical Criticism* (1924): literary analysis has to achieve the precision of *science* (self-legitimation of English as university discipline) + “practical”: morally elevating, has social utility + applied to specific works.

Influence of Matthew Arnold, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

<-S.T. Coleridge: discussion of Shakespeare’s poetry in *Biographia Literaria* (1817!).

"In the application of these principles to purposes of *practical criticism* as employed in the appraisal of works more or less imperfect, I have endeavoured to discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power." -> "power for reducing multitude into unity of effect ".

-> work of art: work of a genius -> organic unity: nothing can be added or withdrawn (each part contributes to the perfection of the whole), transcends historical time and geographical place

Poetry “reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order.” -> reconciliation of opposites in a harmonious, ideal order. even discordant qualities.

->I.A. Richards: the poem has an intrinsic artistic worth (independent from any context, incl. the author’s biography) –> “close-reading”: an “objective” way of reading literary texts.

experiment: R. withholds all extra-textual information, and ask his students to interpret the poems themselves -> paying attention only to the text’s language

F. R. Leavis

editor of *Scrutiny* (1932-1953): conservative journal of literary criticism, combines literature + morality

*The Great Tradition* (1948): "The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad." -> canon of “great writers”: they have "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity" (reaction to WWII, fascism, and communism)

*Education and the University* (1943); *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (1969): the university has to become a centre of consciousness for society and counter the "blind drive onward of material and mechanical development." His student, Boris Ford launches the *Pelican Guide to English Literature* (bearing strong marks of Leavis’s critical methods).

Key ideas:

1. The study of literature has a *civilising* mission to humanise people and provide values which, in the modern world, can’t be obtained elsewhere.
2. Criticism should make an *objective* judgement.
3. At the same time, the reader must demonstrate *sensibility* to the text, which happens *naturally*.
4. Close readinginvolves the intense scrutiny of a piece of prose or poetry, concentrating on the words on the page, and disregarding the work’s context. <- The literary text has an intrinsic artistic worth, transcending all particularities of time and space.
5. There is a canonof authoritative list of great works of literature that everyone with sensibility should study and admire.

Critical points:

1. “civilising”: a process of forcing people into a fixed, ideal pattern of “Englishness”

2. “objective”: no interpretation can be objective, because no interpretation happens in a vacuum. (we all have presuppositions coming from our own context + from the ways in which we were educated to read lit.) + the experiment, in order to be scientific, should be repeatable, yet, interpretations always differ from one another.

3. “sensibility”, “natural response”: there is no such thing (cf. above) – if it existed, then why was there a need to *teach* literature?

5.”canon”: judgements of worth cannot be neutral and disinterested (cf. how a piece becomes canonised as “great”? The process of canonisation is historical and geographical (i.e. not “natural”), it does not happen in a vacuum, there are always vested interests, cultural elite, reviewers, professors in power position, etc.)

6. “intrinsic value”: the judgement of intrinsic worth depends, in fact, on an external context, on the time- and space-specific criteria of those who make the value judgement.

American New Criticism

John Crowe Ransom *The New Criticism* (1941)

Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren: *Understanding Poetry* (four different editions between 1938 and 1976): becomes a textbook for undergraduate university students.

William Empson: *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), Cleanth Brooks: *The Well-Wrought-Urn* (1949)

W.K. Wimsatt: *The Verbal Icon* (1954)

Poem: “an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation” -> organic unity -> more emphasis on form

1. Autonomy of the literary text, i.e. the text is a “verbal icon.”, the poem is a “well-wrought urn”. Clear-cut boundary between text and context, the reader needs to focus on the system of relationships that are operating within the text. Literature must be understood “in itself”
2. Literary artefact: primarily a system of language. In it language operates differently than it does elsewhere, it is governed by a different set of rules.
3. heresy of paraphrase: It is impossible to paraphrase a poem, “a poem should not mean but be”. It is never what a poem *says* which matters, but what it *is.*
4. Intentional fallacy: when readers evoke what the author “meant”. What the author intended is never relevant to the literary work, and it is also unavailable. : “Never trust the artist, trust the tale” (D.H. Lawrence) <- to invoke the intention of the author is to threaten the integrity of the literary text.
5. Affective fallacy: when readers convey their own emotional responses to the text. One has to concentrate solely on the work the way in which it brings the diversity of experience into unity. It is not the author that does this, but rather a principle inherent in any good artwork..

Practical Criticism and New Criticism: focus on the *meaning*, how *form* contributes to meaning. For them, meaning is always one, and one that can be deciphered. Literature offers a critique of the superficial, rationalised and commercialised world we live in. Belief in liberal humanism: the human subject is an autonomous individual, free from social and historical determinations, able to make autonomous choices, master of its own life and actions. Endowed with an agency (can act according to his or her own free will)

RUSSIAN FORMALISM: 1916 – 29: Moscow Linguistic Circle and OPOYAZ (the Society for the Study of Poetic Language) in St. Petersburg.

Roman Jakobson: “The subject of literary scholarship is not literature in its totality but literariness i.e. that which makes of a given work a work of literature.” Concerned with the *how* of literature rather than the *what.*

"literariness" for Russian Formalists:

Viktor Shklovsky: "defamiliarization" of automated perceptions, “defamiliarization” of objects, as if we saw them for the first time - it makes “the stone stony”.

Cf. again Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* on the plan of composing *Lyrical Ballads* with Wordsworth:

“Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the [lethargy of custom](http://ssad.bowdoin.edu:9780/snipsnap/eng242-s05/space/lethargy+of+custom), and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.” (1817)

Contrast between poetic and practical language

Practical language: used to accomplish a goal

Poetic language: foregrounds itself, draws attention to itself: foregrounding - defamiliarises language use as well, by laying bare the device (i.e. language). Poetic language emphasises itself as a medium over the message it contains, foregrounds itself as language.

“The distinctive feature of poetry lies in the fact that a word is perceived as a word and not merely a proxy for the denoted object or an outburst of an emotion, that words and their arrangement, their meaning, their outward and inward form acquire weight and value of their own” (Jakobson)

Poetic function of language: “The focus is on the message for its own sake”

Shklovski: *Theory of Prose* (1925, translated in 1990) – poetics of fiction

first one to distinguish between story (fabula): the chronological order of events, and plot (sjuzet): the way in which they are presented in the novel*. Plot prevents us from seeing things the way they really are (defamiliarisation): the story is made “strange” and draws attention to its own artificiality*. E.g. Sterne: Tristram Shandy - the first novel to speaks about its own construction, to draw attention to its own artificiality as a fictional construct.

Vladimir Propp: *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928)

Poetics of fiction. Focus on the characters possible *functions* in the *plot.*

Function: “an act of a character defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action” -> all fairy tales are structurally homogeneous.

the number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited (Propp enlists 32 functions)

These are distributed among 7 spheres of action:

* 1. the villain
  2. the donor (the provider)
  3. the helper
  4. the princess (the sought-for person) and her father
  5. the dispatcher
  6. the hero
  7. the false hero

Preoccupation of Russian formalists: *how* literature is put together - structure (do not care for meaning)

[End of 19th c: scepticism, questioning of human agency, of human free-will, and the tenets of liberal humanism:

Nietzsche (cf: above): truth constructed by language (truth is a “moving army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms...”) – language precedes and constructs “reality”, “truth” -> linguistic determinism. [later: -> Structuralism, Feminism, New-Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Postcolonialism]

Marx: social, historical, geographical and economic factors determine who we are and what we think (ideology). Our thinking, our life, our history is driven by factors (economy, class struggle) that are beyond our control. -> historical, economic determinism [later: -> Feminism, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Postcolonialism]

Freud: “discovery” of the unconscious -> the subject is not free, we are determined by unconscious drives that are beyond our control -> psychological determinism [later: ->Psychoanalytic Criticism, Feminism, Postcolonialism]]

Russian Formalism -> Structuralism

Linguistic determinism :

Ferdinand de Saussure: *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916, *Course in General Linguistics,* 1959)

1. distinction between *langue* (competence) and *parole* (performance)

2. arbitraryrelationship between signifier and signified: “cat”, “macska” refer to the same concept 🡪 1. it is not reality that determines the sign, but a *convention*. Each language divides up the world in a particular way and differently, constructing different meaningful categories and concepts

before Saussure: reality/referent -> language

Saussure: signifier -> signified => sign i.e. language does not touch the real world, but is constitutive of reality, it does not mirror reality, but structures it and makes it meaningful. cf. The colour spectrum (“in reality” colours form a continuum, yet, the concept of specific colours in language divide and constitute the world arbitrarily.) -> Language is inherently performative, rather than constative. Signs have no referent, only a referential function.

3. Language is a system of signs, which is itself a *system of differences*: no item has significance in itself, but derives its significance entirely from its *relationship* with other signs. Every item is defined by what it is not. (On the phonetic as well as on the semantic level. E.g. phonetics - “cat” is cat, because it is not “rat” -> the difference between c and r is significant, and significant only because this difference is able to generate meaning. Semantics – “hot” is “hot” because it is not “cold”) -> None of the elements in language has a meaning in itself: “Language is a system of inter-dependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others” “The most precise characteristic [of each term] is in being what the others are not” (Saussure)-> our thinking is determined by *hierarchical binary oppositions*: presence (+) / absence (-); male (+) / female(-); light (+) / darkness (-); white (+) / black ( -); etc. -> one term is always *privileged* (+). Yet, this privilege (value attribution) is not based on actual facts -> ideology.

4. “It is [. . .] possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. [. . .] We shall call it semiology. [. . .] Linguistics is only one branch of this general science. The laws which semiology will discover will be laws applicable in linguistics, and linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge.”→Just as there is a grammar of language, a grammar of other sign systems (culture, myth, literature) is also possible.

* we are all structuralists, in some sense: e.g. when we analyse a poem, we always start with the *binary oppositions* that *structure* the poem (and then!! look at the ways in which the poem complicates or overwrites these oppositions):

William Wordsworth: A Slumber did my Spirit Seal  
  
A slumber did my spirit seal;  
I had no human fears:  
She seemed a thing that could not feel  
The touch of early years.  
  
No motion has she now, no force:  
She neither hears nor sees:  
Rolled round in earth´s diurnal course  
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

What binary oppositions structure this poem? How does the poem complicate the binary oppositions that it set out?

(cf: life/death; past/present; sleeping/being conscious; “thing” as a young girl/”thing” as an object; temporality/ eternity; mind/nature, etc.)

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 - 2009): structuralist anthropologist : analogy between language systems and social systems: *Tristes tropiques* (1955), *Anthropologie structurale* (1958, *Structural Anthropology*), *La Pensée sauvage* (1962, *The Savage Mind*, 1966), *Mythologiques I–IVIntroduction to the Science of Mythology* (1964-81)

“the error of traditional anthropology, like that of traditional linguistics, was to consider the terms and not the relations between the terms”

the anthropologist must deal not with objectively observed facts of “nature” but with those structures that the human mind (“culture”) imposed on it.

“Of course, the biological family is ubiquitous in human society. But what confers upon kinship its socio-cultural character is not what it retains from nature, but, rather the essential way it differs from nature. … Kinship systems, marriage rules, and descent groups constitute a co-ordinated whole, the function of which is to insure the permanency of the social group … They may be considered as the blueprint of mechanisms which ‘pumps’ women out of their consanguineous families to redistribute them in affinal groups, the result of this process being to create new consanguineous groups, and so on.”