INTRO TO LITERARY CRITICISM

- Moving thru historical creation of each approach
  - starting in 20th C criticism
  - roots in other philosophers
    - Aristotle, Longinus, etc.
  - benefit = see how each movement builds (or rejects on previous)
- must know what each theoretical model represents
  - See Chp. 2 of Texts & Contexts for synopsis of each
    - gives reading from same text so can see difference
  - move from “new” to “post”

BACKGROUND TO FORMALISM

- Kant: Critique of Judgment (1790) (NTC 499)
  - focuses on spectator's response
    - not creation of art
  - Art (i.e., artificial) not better than nature (or vice versa)
    - both provide freedom
  - premise:
    - autonomy of art
    - universality of aesthetic judgment
      - statements of aesthetic beauty are based on visual
      - not having to do with individual's preferences
      - no physical appeal of aesthetics
        - formal properties of object influence judgments of beauty
        - not is physical & material properties
        - Ex: yellow flowers in field (personally distasteful b/c allergies) vs. painting of yellow flowers in field (formally beautiful)
          - sensual responses = subjective & unacceptable
          - form over matter – SEINFELD!! (a show about nothing)
    - therefore: all will agree
      - accepted definitions in human understanding
        - table vs. pretty table
        - definitive vs. subjective
  - beautiful object reveals purposiveness w/out purpose
    - no concrete purpose!!
    - therefore: aesthetic provides experience of freedom w/in physical world
    - but universal b/c all humans experience this freedom from & within physical world
    - beauty becomes a universal ideal perceived and not actually witnessed.
      - Ex: field of flowers painting = freedom from physical & mind's recognition of the object itself
        - “beauty” recognized by all but not defined
        - separates from the individual & makes experience communal

FORMALISM
Considered passé
- folded into New Criticism in U.S. (nxt week)
- differs from New Critics
  - Rus Form want to make generalizations about nature of literature

Definition:
- “An aesthetic tendency characterized by the separation of form and content in works of Art and literature in which the predominant significance is given to formal aspects.”
  (Payne Dictionary 200)
- read or view artist's/author's working w/out considering the social/cultural/historical surroundings

Origin:
- comes from world art & literature
  - art of painting as evolution of visual forms
  - art for art's sake
- mimics European & British decadent movements
  - Aestheticism & Decadence – reminders of Romanticism
    - Aestheticism: devotion to beauty (1860s & 70s)
    - celebrates beauty as independent of morality
    - praise form above content
    - art for art's sake
    - Influences:
      * influenced by the French
    - gender boundaries blurred
      * Byron = early Aesthete?
  - Decadence (1880s & 90s)
    - Pater: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end.”
    - fascinated with dark places of human mind
      * ex: Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde
      * ex: Kipling's fiction re urban decay & racial decline
    - amoral attitude
    - decadent pleasures
    - freed British authors of moral inhibition
    - art had sexual & elusive essence
    - Stoker's Dracula = Decadent (late 19th C)
      * new woman = sexualized desire
      * effeminate man & masculine woman
    - ends w/Wilde's trial
      * Arrested for sodomy 1895
      * open homosexuality
      * 2 yrs in jail
      * fled to Paris after & died
      * trials considered conclusion to decadence, aestheticism & post-Romanticism
- stems from Russian literary criticism
  - moved into defining art
  - autonomy of creative process
  - “it made the analysis of literary text the center of its critical investigations and emphasized the predominant significance of form and striving for the discovery of the immanent laws of language & literature” (Payne Dictionary 476)
  - i.e., makes the study of literature into a science
- everyone gets the same results
- no variances on interpretation
- b/c analysis relies solely on form & not external factors

  - form vs. content
    - form = “only expression of specificity of art” (477)
    - content = nonartistic

Eichenbaum (NTC 1060) (pub 1927)
- desire for a science or “poetics” of literature (1066B)
- linguistic basis of literature
- stress on literary devices
  - history of literature (1074) studied against previous forms
    - literary forms influence each other, not social
  - skaz & orality
    - Gogol’s “Overcoat” discussion (1076) – see synopsis
      - see Handout from Scrutiny2
- concept of “dominant”
  - Ex: poetic imagery only part of poetic devices & not dominant (1070)
- form & technique = part of content (1069A)
  - aural quality of poetry = independent significance (1068)
    - not just accompaniment
  - poetic form = content (1080)
    - move away from Symbolism
- nature of narrative (fabula & plot)
  - fabula = realistic events that happen in a logical & causal order (1076)
    - = material only
    - not creativity
  - plot = literary device not restricted by laws of reality (1072)
    - served by other literary devices
    - seen as “liberation” (1073)
      * from cultural/historical/social phenomenon & simple experience
    - creation of plot governed by internal, formal (fixed) laws
      * artistic arrangement of events
  - imagination reduced to a science or mechanics?
    - but Kant not originally believe study of art = science
      * wanted to free spectator's from that hard science
      * art = experience but w/universality
- defamiliarization (goal of art) (1069B & 1070B)
  - person's perception becomes automatic & only recognizes what is unfamiliar on familiar street
    - similar to unheimlich (Freud)
  - literary “artist” shows things out of ordinary
    - refreshes & renews reader's perceptions
    - make the familiar strange

combative prose = defense
- fetters, cops, battle
- fight against other methodologies (1066)
- want literariness

Introduction to New Criticism
● Definition
  ○ “close verbal analysis in which each text was treated as a self-contained or autotelic structure” (Payne Dictionary 366)
    - artificially isolates text from history

● Ransom's “Criticism, Inc.” (NTC 1108) (pub 1938)
  ○ vitriolic tone!
  ○ defines business of criticism
    - professionalization of literary studies
    - claims too much emphasis on historical/social/cultural
    - students don't understand “technical effects” literary works
      ■ TRUE???
  ○ scholars vs. critics
    - scholars = historians (1110)
      ■ focus on feelings (not object itself)
      ■ reduce texts to paraphrases w/a moral message
      ■ history takes center stage in teaching not poem
    - ideal critics
      ■ criticism must become “more scientific, or precise & systematic” (1109)
      ■ not distracted by nonliterary contexts and issues
      ■ do close readings
  ○ problems:
    - limiting theoretical model
      ■ left out diversity of U.S. audiences & literature
      ■ denounces “-isms”
        * identity politics removed
    - Harold Bloom & his Western Canon = New Crit

● Current Debates
  ○ aesthetic evaluation vs. historical/cultural significance
  ○ including all those “others” in anthologies & the canon
  ○ give Pound HO
    - composition, publication & reception
    - further meaning?