

NEW CRITICISM

New Criticism is the objective analysis of literature. It is common sense. It was new in the 1920s-30s because previously, literary study as distinct from rhetoric had always been *contextual*, focused on matters external to the work of art, primarily literary history and biography. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot initiated New Criticism. Later leaders of New Criticism included Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Yvor Winters, Austin Warren, Wayne Booth, R. S. Crane, and R. P. Blackmur. The first American New Critics were mainly young writers who wanted to study literature itself--the *text* as art--objectively. They wanted to help people appreciate their poems and literature in general, at a time when the worldwide Modernist movement was producing literature of challenging complexity. The textbooks *Understanding Poetry* (1938) edited by Brooks and Warren, *The House of Fiction* (1950) edited by Gordon assisted by Tate, and *How to Read a Novel* (1957) by Gordon were revolutionary and changed the way literature was taught throughout the United States.

During the 1940s-60s, New Criticism became orthodoxy in English departments and professors were judged on their ability to be objective analysts of literature. This period generated the greatest achievements of literary analysis in the history of American universities. After the 1960s, literary study got politicized by radicals in the Modern Language Association who trashed that scholarship. English departments began to serve the agendas of liberal professors rather than students. When their hiring criteria became political, as might be expected, merit was disregarded, group think replaced independent thought and faculty were hired because they "fit in" according to multicultural identity politics.

Objectivity was declared a myth. To accommodate Feminists and others incapable of objectivity, subjective reader response theory replaced objective New Criticism, political correctness replaced aesthetics and the canon of American literary classics was largely denied or ignored. Literary study regressed to a contextual focus again and to Theory, as professors with little or no knowledge of the classics shifted the spotlight from literature to themselves--to their political causes, their grievances, their bodies, their genitals. Generations of students were deprived of a literary education. Subjective young editors without appreciation of literary standards became gatekeepers of publishing. When the Internet democratized the marketplace, the personal biases of editors accelerated the entropic decline of the book publishing industry.

Today, overall, most literature faculty are limited by political correctness to perceptions that reduce, distort and falsify literature. Usurpation of literary study by politics has led to illiterate professors, declining enrollments in English departments, reduced legislative funding for higher education, fewer jobs for people with literary inclinations and a precipitous drop in the percentage of the general population who read literature, as reported by the National Endowment for the Arts in *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (2004). In response to the observation that English professors did great harm to the future of their academic field by replacing objectivity with ideology, the liberal professors claim that objectivity is an ideology.

For detailed examples of how since 1970 Politically Correct interpretations have falsified literature, see the review of *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild*; analysis of *The Blithedale Romance*; how Feminists revised *Little Women*; analysis of Cather's *The Professor's House*; analysis of Hemingway's "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife"; analysis of numerous fictions by Porter including "Holiday" and *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*; analysis of O'Connor's *The Violent Bear It Away*; how Feminists censored Hemingway's last novel; analysis of DeLillo's *White Noise*; and Feminist misreading of *White Noise* debunked.

Michael Hollister (2015)

MORE PERSPECTIVES

"The New Critics...tried to just read the words. This was hopelessly old-fashioned now. Worse, you couldn't find a reference in print these days to New Criticism without the term *ideology* hung about its neck like a dead chicken the dog brought home."

A. B. Paulson
"University Life" (1997)

"*Principles of Literary Criticism* and *Practical Criticism* by I. A. Richards started this movement in literary criticism in the 1920s [Pound and Eliot had more influence than Richards]. It was continued by F. R. Leavis, who said in *Revaluation*: "Work as much as possible in terms of particular analysis--analysis of poems or passages, and...say nothing that cannot be related immediately to...texts... This movement started in Cambridge, and is known as the Cambridge School of Criticism or Critics. 'New Criticism' in America owes much to Richards, Leavis, and Empson. There, the major critical figures are Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Yvor Winters, R. P. Blackmur, Austin Warren, Wayne Booth, R. S. Crane, Allen Tate [and Caroline Gordon]."

A. F. Scott (British)
Current Literary Terms (1965)

“The New Criticism is really a cluster of attitudes toward literature rather than an organized critical system. The primary concern of these critics has been to discover the intrinsic worth of literature.”

C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon
A Handbook to Literature (1936-1992)

“The hallmark of this practice is an emphasis on the purported autonomy of a literary work with an almost complete denial of the relevance of its historical context... Currently, the New Critics are out of favor. Whereas the New Critics insist on the autonomy of text, the newer critics insist...on the centrality of context [?].”
[Because they would rather advocate Leftist politics.]

M. M. Liberman & Edward E. Foster
A Modern Lexicon of Literary Terms (1968)

Michael Hollister (2018)