Lecture 6-7

Lecture 6

Humanist Criticism

Italy, France, Holland

❖Language as a Historical Phenomenon

❖ ❖ Renaissance humanists realised that the Latin they spoke and inherited from the Middle Ages was different from classical Latin. In this realisation, language was practically established as a historical phenomenon. This is obvious when comparing, for example, Dante's conception of language to that of Italian humanists of the fifteenth century, like Lorenzo Valla. For Dante, language was divinely instituted, and the connection of words and things and the rules of grammar were not arbitrary:

We assert that a certain form of speech was created by God together with the first soul. And I say, 'a form,' both in respect of the names of things and of the grammatical construction of these names, and of the utterances of this grammatical construction.

❖ By the 1440s, Italian humanists established the fact that meaning in language is created by humans and shaped by history, not given by God and nature. Lorenzo Valla could not be more specific:

Indeed, even if utterances are produced naturally, their meanings come from the institutions of men. Still, even these utterances men contrive by will as they impose names on perceived things… Unless perhaps we prefer to give credit for this to God who divided the languages of men at the

Tower of Babel. However, Adam too adapted words to things, and afterwards everywhere men devised other words. Wherefore noun, verb and the other parts of speech per se are so many sounds but have multiple meanings through the institutions of men.

Source: Sarah Stever Gravelle, "The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), p.

Neo-Latin Imitation

- ❖ ❖ The realisation of the difference between medieval and classical Latin created a short era of intense neo-Latin imitation. For ancient thought to be revived, for the lessons of Rome to be properly grasped, humanists advocated the revival of ancient Latin. It was felt among some humanists that Latin had to become, again, the natural and familiar mode of organising experience for that experience to equal that of the ancients.

- ❖ To that end, the imitation of Cicero in prose and Virgil in poetry was advocated. This textual practice of imitation reached its peak, as will be shown, in the controversy over whether Cicero should be the only model for imitation, or whether multiple models should be selected.

❖ The Rise of the Vernaculars

- ❖ The new conceptions of language led in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century to the undermining of Latin as the privileged language of learning. The central tactic in the attack on the monopoly of Latin was the production of grammar books for the vernacular. These demonstrated that vernaculars could be reduced to the same kind of rules as Latin.

❖ A sense of pride in the vernacular: "Let no one scorn this Tuscan language as plain and meagre," said Poliziano, "if its riches and ornaments are justly appraised, this language will be judged not poor, not rough, but copious and highly polished."

❖ Quoted in Sarah Stever Gravelle, "The Latin-Vernacular Question," p. 381.

❖ Cultural Decolonization

❖ The monopoly of classical reality as the sole subject of written knowledge came to be highlighted, and the exclusion of contemporary reality as a subject of knowledge began to be felt, acknowledged, and resisted.

❖ "What sort of nation are we, to speak perpetually with the mouth of another?" said Jacques Peletier (in R. Waswo)

❖ Joachim du Bellay says that the Romans' labelling of the French as barbarians "had neither right nor privilege to legitimate thus their nation and to bastardise others." (in Defense)

❖ A form of "cultural decolonisation." It was an attack, he says on what was conceived to be a foreign domination, and its implicit concept of culture that assumed it to be the property of the small minority of Latin speakers.

❖ To Speak With One's Mouth

❖ "To have learned to speak with one's own mouth means to value that speech as both an object of knowledge and the embodiment of a culture worth having. It is to declare that the materials and processes of daily life are as fully 'cultural' as the ruined monuments and dead languages of the

ancient world. It is to overthrow the internalised domination of a foreign community, to decolonise the mind."

❖ Richard Waswo, "The Rise of the Vernaculars," p. 416.

❖*Vernacular Imitation of Latin*

❖ ❖ The campaign to defend and promote the vernacular dislodged Latin's monopoly on all forms of written or printed enquiry by the early seventeenth century.

❖ But they developed the new European Language in imitation of Latin, by appropriating the vocabulary, grammar rules and stylistic features of Latin into the vernaculars.

❖ "Everyone understands," said Landino in 1481, "how the Latin tongue became abundant by deriving many words from the Greek." The Italian tongue would become richer, he deduced, "if everyday we transfer into it more new words taken from the Romans and make them commonplace among our own."

❖ Like Cicero, Horace, Quintilian and Seneca, European writers also insisted that imitation should lead to originality, at least in principle. The European imitation debate (at least in terms of its dialectics) was almost a replica of the Latin debate.

❖ **Petrarch** was the champion of Latin imitation. He advised his contemporaries to heed Seneca's advice and "imitate the bees which through an astonishing process produce wax and honey from the flowers they leave behind." There is nothing shameful about imitating the ancients and borrowing from them, said Petrarch. On the contrary, he added, "it is a sign of greater elegance and skill for us, in imitation of the bees, to produce in our own words thoughts borrowed from others." Like Seneca

and Latin authors, Petrarch insisted that imitation should not reproduce its model:

Imitation Vs. Originality

- ❖ ❖**Petrarch**: "To repeat, let us write neither in the style of one or another writer, but in a style uniquely ours although gathered from a variety of sources. (Rerum familiarium libri I-XIII)

- ❖ **Pietro Bembo** (1512) said that first "we should imitate the one who is best of all." Then he added "we should imitate in such a way that we strive to overtake him." Once the model is overtaken, "all our efforts should be devoted to surpassing him."

- ❖ **Landino** stressed that the imitative product should not be "the same as the ones we imitate, but to be similar to them in such a way that the similarity is scarcely recognised except by the learned."

Italian Humanism

- ❖ ❖ **Hieronimo Muzio** started his *Arte Poetica* (1551) with the command: "direct your eyes, with mind intent, upon the famous examples of the ancient times." From them, he says, "one learns to say anything." He advised writers to read and even "memorise entire books" of "good" authors, and noted that a slight variation of expression and meaning "is necessary to make one a poet." On a slight variation from Seneca's transformative metaphor, Muzio wanted the models to be assimilated by the imitator so that "writing shall exhale their previously absorbed odour, like a garment preserved among roses." (in Harold Ogden White, 1965)

❖ **Giraldi Cinthio**: said in his Discorsi (1554) that after patient study of "good" authors, the writer would find that "imitation [would] change into nature", that his work would resemble the model not as a copy but "as father is to son." The writer, added Cinthio, would not be happy by merely equalling the model; he should "try to surpass him…as Virgil did in his imitation of Homer." (in White)

❖ **Antonio Minturno**: Also using Seneca's metaphor, said in his Arte Poetica (1563) that the writer should make his borrowed flowers "appear to have grown in his own garden, not to have been transplanted from elsewhere." The writer, he said, must transform his material "as the bees convert the juice of the flowers into honey." (in White)

French Humanism

❖ If the terms of the imitation discussions in Italy were almost a carbon copy of Roman discussions, the terms of the French debate, with minor variations, were also almost a carbon copy of the Italian debate.

❖ Joachim du Bellay: echoed Vida's celebration of theft and plunder from the classics and called on his contemporaries to "despoil" Rome and "pillage" Greece "without conscience." Using Quintilian's passage (without acknowledgement), du Bellay argued:

There is no doubt that the greatest part of invention lies in imitation: and just as it was most praiseworthy for the ancients to invent well, so is it most useful [for the moderns] to imitate well, even for those whose tongue is still not well copious and rich.

❖ du Bellay's *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française* (1549) also echoes Pietro Bembo's *Prose della vulgar lingua* (1525).

❖ Like Bembo, du Bellay also wanted to invent a language and a poetic tradition in his vernacular to vie with Latin as a language of culture and civilisation.

❖ Like Petrarch, he enjoined the reader not to be "ashamed" to write in his native tongue in imitation of the ancients. The Romans themselves, he impressed on his contemporaries, enriched their language by the imitation of the Greek masterpieces they inherited. And using Seneca's transformative metaphor (again without acknowledgement), du Bellay described the process through which the Romans enriched their language as consisting in:

Imitating the best Greek authors, transforming into them, devouring them; and after well digesting them, converting them into blood and nourishment.

❖ Since there was no shame in imitation, and since the Romans themselves enriched their tongue through imitation, du Bellay called on his French compatriots to practise it. It is "no vicious thing, but praiseworthy, to borrow from a foreign tongue sentences and words to appropriate them to our own." du Bellay wished that his tongue "were so rich in domestic models that it were not necessary to have recourse to foreign ones," but that was not the case. He believed that French poetry "is capable of a higher and better form" which "must be sought in the Greek and Roman" poets.

❖ Like Roman and Italian authors, du Bellay also stressed that imitation should produce some sort of originality. Only the "rarest and most exquisite virtues" are to be imitated, and he impressed on aspirant

imitators to "penetrate the most hidden and interior part of the [model] author."

❖ Dutch Humanism

❖ Naturally, Europeans could not just imitate the Romans freely. After all, the latter were pagans, and Renaissance Europe was fervently Christian. European authors frequently stressed that imitation should not undermine the Christian character of their world.

❖ This issue was settled early on by Erasmus's dramatic intervention into the Ciceronian controversy through his dialogue Ciceronianus (1528). The controversy raged in the early sixteenth century among Italian humanists between those who advocated the exclusive imitation of Cicero, and others who advocated the imitation of multiple models.

Erasmus and Ciceronians

❖ Erasmus's intervention established once and for all Christian interests and sensibilities as the ultimate limit of imitation. The "weapon," to use G. W. Pigman's word, that Erasmus used to establish what amounts to a red line in the practice of imitation, was the Horatian concept of decorum.

❖ Erasmus: started with two propositions in the *Ciceronianus*: the one who speaks most like Cicero speaks best, and good speaking depends on decorum. From here, Erasmus argued that since decorum is important, one should not speak as Cicero spoke in the past, but as he would speak now, were he alive. This means "in a Christian manner about Christian matters."

To stress the point, Erasmus openly branded the Ciceronians as a pagan sect:

❖ "I hear that a new sect, as it were, of Ciceronians has risen among the Italians. I think, that if Cicero were now living and speaking about our religion, he would not say, 'May almighty God do this,' but 'May best and greatest Jupiter do this'; nor would he say, 'May the grace of Jesus Christ assist you,' but 'May the son of best and greatest Jupiter make what you do succeed'; nor would he say, 'Peter, help the Roman church,' but 'Romulus, make the Roman senate and people prosper.' Since the principal virtue of the speaker is to speak with decorum, what praise do they deserve who, when they speak about the mysteries of our religion, use words as if they were writing in the times of Virgil and Ovid?"

❖ Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum des Errasmi Roterdami*, eds. P. S. Allen , H. M. Allen, H. W. Garrod (Oxford: 1906-58), VII, 16, quoted in Pigman, "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past," p. 160.

❖ Obviously, Erasmus saw some dangers in the practice of imitation. With the rediscovery of pagan written documents and their unprecedented diffusion through printing, the strong admiration developing among Europeans for classical virtues could not but ring alarm bells for those who, like Erasmus, saw themselves as guardians of Christian virtue.

❖ While Erasmus's primary concern in writing the *Ciceronianus* was to expose renascent paganism disguising itself as Ciceronian classicism, he did not rely, as Pigman notes, "on religious appeal." Erasmus, according to Pigman, historicized decorum and developed a "historical argument" and "historical reasoning."

❖ Conclusion

❖ du Bellay ideas on imitation, as well as their imitative poetry merely rehearse the arguments of Italian humanists. And both the Italians and the French merely repeat the major precepts of the Roman imitatio discussion.

❖ Aristotle's mimesis, as illustrated earlier, was simply made synonymous with *imitatio*, and the *Poetics* was assimilated to a Horatian and essentially Roman conception of creative writing.

❖ The humanists were not philosophers. They were a class of professional teachers, chancellors and secretaries, who were connected to European courts through a patronage system. They composed documents, letters and orations, and they included princes, politicians, businessmen, artists, jurists, theologians, and physicians.

❖ European humanists recuperated Roman Latin theories of imitation and Roman pedagogies of composition and style. They were clearly not familiar with Greek discussions and analyses of poetry, especially Plato's and Aristotle.

Lecture 7
Russian Formalism

The Russian Formalist Movement: Definition

❖ A school of literary scholarship that originated and flourished in Russia in the second decade of the 20th century, flourished in the 1920's and was suppressed in the 30s.

❖ It was championed by unorthodox philologists and literary historians, e.g., Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Yuri Tynyanov.

❖ Its centers were the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1915 and the Petrograd Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz) formed in 1916.

❖ Their project was stated in *Poetics: Studies in the Theory of Poetic Language* (1919), and in *Modern Russian Poetry* (1921) by Roman Jakobson.

❖ A Product of the Russian Revolution

❖ 1917 – The Bolshevik Revolution

❖ Prior to 1917, Russia romanticized literature and viewed literature from a religious perspective.

❖ After 1917, literature began to be observed and analyzed. The formalist perspective encouraged the study of literature from an objective and scientific lens.

❖ The "formalist" label was given to the Opoyaz group by its opponents rather than chosen by its adherents.

❖ The latter favored such self-definitions as the "morphological" approach or "specifiers."

❖ Most Important Formalist Critics

❖ Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynianov, Vladimir Propp, Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Boris Tomashevsky, Grigory Gukovsky.

❖ These names revolutionized literary criticism between 1914 and the 1930s by establishing the specificity and autonomy of poetic language and literature.

❖ Russian formalism exerted a major influence on thinkers like Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, and on structuralism as a whole.

❖Formalist Project

Two Objectives:

❖ The emphasis on the literary work and its component parts

❖ The autonomy of literary scholarship

Formalism wanted to solve the methodological confusion which prevailed in traditional literary studies, and establish literary scholarship as a distinct and autonomous field of study.

Formalist Principles

Formalists are not interested in:

❖ The psychology and biography of the author.

❖ The religious, moral, or political value of literature.

❖ The symbolism in literature.

❖ Formalism strives to force literary or artwork to stand on its own

❖ people (i.e., author, reader) are not important

❖ the Formalists rejected traditional definitions of literature. They had a deep-seated distrust of psychology.

❖ They rejected the theories that locate literary meaning in the poet rather than the poem – the theories that invoke a "faculty of mind" conducive to poetic creation.

❖ They had little use for all the talk about "intuition," "imagination," "genius," and the like.

❖The Subject of Literature

To the Formalists, it was necessary to narrow down the definition of literature:

❖ Roman Jakobson (Prague, 1921):

"The subject of literary scholarship is not literature in its totality but **literariness** (literaturnost'), i.e., that which makes of a given work a work of literature."

❖ Eichenbaum (Leningrad, 1927):

"The literary scholar ought to be concerned solely with the inquiry into the distinguishing features of the literary materials."

Poetic vs. Ordinary Language

❖ Russian Formalists argued that Literature was a specialized mode of language

and proposed a fundamental opposition between the literary (or poetic) use of language and the ordinary (practical) use of language.

❖ Ordinary language aims at communicating a message by reference to the world

outside the message

❖ Literature was a specialized mode of language. It does not aim at communicating

a message and its reference is not to the world but to itself.

Literariness

❖ Literariness, according to Jan Mukarovsky, consists in "the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance," that is the foregrounding of "the act of expression, the act of speech itself." To foreground is to bring into high prominence.

❖ By backgrounding the referential aspect of language, poetry makes the words themselves palpable as phonic sounds.

❖ By foreground its linguistic medium, the primary aim of literature, as Victor Shklovsky famously put it, is to **estrange** or **defamiliarize** or **make strange**

Defamiliarization – Making Strange

❖ Literature **"makes strange"** ordinary perception and ordinary language and invites the reader to explore new forms of perceptions and sensations, and new ways of relating to language.

❖ Shklovsky's key terms, "making strange," "dis-automatization," received wide currency in the writings of the Russian Formalists.

❖ Jakobson claimed that in poetry "the communicative function is reduced to a minimum."

❖ Shklovsky spoke of poetry as a "dance of articulatory organs."

Form vs. Content

❖ Formalism also rejected the traditional dichotomy of form vs. content which, as Wellek and Warren have put it, "cuts a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form."

❖ To the Formalist, verse is not merely a matter of external embellishment such as meter, rhyme, alliteration, superimposed upon ordinary speech. It is an integrated type of discourse, qualitatively different from prose, with a hierarchy of elements and internal laws of its own

Plot vs. Story

❖ plot/story is a Formalist concept that distinguishes between:

✓ The events the work relates (the story) from

✓ the sequence in which those events are presented in the work (the plot).

❖ Both concepts help describe the significance of the form of a literary work in order to define its "literariness." For the Russian Formalists as a whole, form is what makes something art to begin with, so in order to understand a work of art as a work of art (rather than as an ornamented communicative act) one must focus on its form.

V. Propp: The Morphology of the Folktale

❖ One of the most influential Formalist contributions to the theory of fiction was the study in comparative folklore, especially Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*

❖ Propp studied fairy-tale stories and established character types and events associated with them. He called the events **Functions** and their **numbers were limited to 31**.

❖ He developed a theory of character and established **7 broad character types**, which he thought could be applied to other narratives.

Propp (cont): The 31 Functions

1. Absentation: One of the members of a family absents himself from home (or is dead).

2. An interdiction is addressed to the hero.

3. Violation: The interdiction is violated.

4. Reconnaissance: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.

5. Delivery: The villain receives information about his victim.

6. Trickery: The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.

7. Complicity: The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.

8. Villainy or Lack: The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family ("villainy) or one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something ("lack").

9. Mediation: Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or a command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.

10: Counteraction: The seeker agrees or decides upon counteraction.

11. Departure: The hero leaves home

12. First Function of the Donor: The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper.

13. Hero's Reaction: The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.

14. Receipts of Magical Agent: The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.

15. Guidance: The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of   search.

16. Struggle: The hero and the villain join in direct combat.

17. Branding: The hero is branded.

18. Victory: The villain is defeated.

19. Liquidation: The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.

20. Return: The hero returns.

21. Pursuit: The hero is pursued.

22. Rescue: The rescue of the hero from pursuit.

23: Unrecognized Arrival: The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.

24. Unfounded Claims: A false hero presents unfounded claims.

25. Difficult Task: A difficult task is proposed to the hero.

26. Solution: The task is resolved.

27. Recognition: The hero is recognized.

28. Exposure: The false hero or villain is exposed.

29. Transfiguration: The hero is given a new appearance.

30. Punishment: The villain is punished.

31. Wedding: The hero is married and ascends the throne.

V. Propp: Character Types

❖ He also concluded that all the characters could be resolved into 8 broad character types in the 100 tales he analyzed:

1. The villain — struggles against the hero.

2. The dispatcher — character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.

3. The (magical) helper — helps the hero in their quest.

4. The princess or prize — the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfair evil, usually because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, thereby beating the villain.

5. Her father — gives the task to the hero, identifies the false hero, marries the hero, often sought for during the narrative. Propp noted that functionally, the princess and the father cannot be clearly distinguished.

6. The donor — prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.

7. The hero or victim/seeker hero — reacts to the donor, weds the princess.

8. False hero — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess

Legacy of Russian Formalism

Formalist School is credited even by its adversaries such as Russian critic Yefimov:

"The contribution of our literary scholarship lies in the fact that it has focused sharply on the basic problems of literary criticism and literary study, first of all on the specificity of its object, that it modified our conception of the literary work and broke it down into its component parts, that it opened up new areas of inquiry, vastly enriched our knowledge of literary technology, raised the standards of our literary research and of our theorizing about literature effected, in a sense, a Europeanization of our literary scholarship…. Poetics became an object of scientific analysis, a concrete problem of literary scholarship"

Quoted in Erlich, "Russian Formalism: In Perspective" 225.

❖ Russian formalism gave rise to the Prague school of structuralism in the mid-1920s and provided a model for the literary wing of French structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s.

❖ The literary-theoretical paradigms that Russian Formalism inaugurated are still with us and has a vital presence in the theoretical discourse of our day.

❖ All contemporary schools of criticism owe a debt to Russian Formalism

Sources

- ❖ Victor Erlich, "Russian Formalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 34, No. 4 (1973)

- ❖ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, University of Texas, 1990.

- ❖ *Jerry Everard's Introduction to Vladimir Propp…*

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best of luck

Mrs.Engli$h