

# Traditionalism v/s New Criticism

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the contrasting methods of traditional criticism and New Criticism in literary analysis. The new criticism is totally opposite to historical and moralistic approaches to writings but only focuses on texture of writings and form of writing. It includes close readings, particularly of poetry. It was first coined in nineteenth century by John Crowe Ransom. It is reacted against new American trends. Theories of new criticism played a role of criticism in academics criticism is crucial to help maintain poetry and language. New Criticism offers an objective method for analyzing texts. On the other hand, Traditionalism involves respecting and upholding the traditional norms, values. It also includes in active resistance to traditional values and morality. Traditionalism is broadly concentrated on past of one's own group. It is one of the basic personality traits on which all people have differ. It endures high moral standards, values, religious devotion and good reputation. Traditional criticism provides valuable insights into the cultural and historical contexts that create structure of literary works. This comparative analysis highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, ultimately improving our understanding of literature.*

**Keywords:** Literary Criticism, New Criticism, Traditional Criticism, Cultural Context Social Context

## 1. Literature Review

This paper International Journal of the Creative Research Thoughts quoted that "New criticism mainly focuses on the structure or format or language of the text. It gives main attention to close readings and always against to moralistic approaches." Whereas, Traditional criticism consider traditions, historical view, social contexts of literary works. Traditional criticism highly respect to values and norms. This comparison highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, ultimately improving our understanding of literature.

According to Jack L. in Traditional Literary Criticism vs. New Criticism "it's clear that, Traditional, Formalist, and New Criticism theories each offer valuable insights into the author, text, and context." This paper shows the significance topic for students of English in advanced stages is the understanding of literary theory. As it is vital to understand the importance of studying these ideas to make more informed decisions while interpreting literary works. By integrating these perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of a narrative. By examining the author's intent, the text's formal elements, and the historical, cultural, and social contexts. We can break down the elements that contribute to a work's meaning.

## 2. Introduction

Traditionalism emphasizes on the historical and cultural background. This approach seeks to understand the text's meaning by analyzing its formal properties and internal clarity. Traditional literary theory often relies on established literary understanding and historical context to interpret the text. The main goal is to understand the author's intention.

The main priority of new criticism is to focus only on the text not on the background of author or text. New Critics aimed to uncover the text's basic meaning and aesthetic value, often through close reading and textual analysis.

This paper will explore the differences between traditionalism and New Criticism within the area of literary theory.

Comparing these approaches is crucial to understand the literature work easily. It highlights the literary analysis and interpretations.

Traditionalism emphasizes author's historical and cultural background. New criticism believes on the words written on the paper not allowed to gain knowledge about the history of the author or text. Understanding these contrasting approaches helps readers to critically evaluate the interpretation and understanding of the texts differently.

## 3. Historical Contexts

### 3.1 Traditional criticism

To understand the historical context of these two approaches firstly deep delve into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traditionalism is a broader concept which is emerged after rapid changes by industrialization and urbanization. It highlights the values of heritage, culture and history. As it is used in literary context, critics who follow traditionalism, they focus on history and cultural context of the work as well as the author's biography. As Chinua Achebe noted, "A literary student should try to look at the geographical, political, and social-economic background of West Africa. And such a study goes deeper to the period the author lived." Different scholars have presented various approaches to literary interpretation. While the individual researchers may have different perspective, a common goal is to explore the questions of literature: What is literature? Why should one read it? And what does one read in it? Many scholars had their own perspective and own point of view of interpreting and presenting literature.

### 3.2 New criticism

For a long time, people mostly looked at the author's life to understand the history of the text. New criticism, a literary theory arose in mid-20<sup>th</sup> to move away from romanticism. New criticism, emerged against the rule of traditionalism. As it is only sufficient to understand the text, and there is no need to know about the text and author's background. It highlights the methods of close readings and formal analysis, focusses on text's language and meaning. As a result of formalist

influence, Prominent Russian Formalist critics such as Roman Jakobson and Victor Shklovsky were instrumental in structuring this new approach for literary criticism.

## 4. Core Principle

### 4.1 Traditionalism

To begin, it is important to understand the term "literary" in the context of literature. It often indicates sophistication, beauty, or clarity. From a literary perspective, literary is an adjective that describes works of art, especially written works, that are considered to have artistic or intellectual value. Literary theory serves as a critical lens through which we can examine and interpret literary texts. By applying literary theory, we can explore the different perspectives and interpretations that text may include.

#### 4.1.1 Author's biography

Author's biography plays an important role in understanding and interpreting their work, it connects to seeks the author's experiences, beliefs and cultural contrast of themes. The Traditional literary criticism often prioritizes the author's intended meaning as a first step to understand the text. The author is seen as the creator who showcases the text with specific meanings. Traditional criticism believes that the author's intentions are the main source of text's meaning.

#### 4.1.2 Historical and culture context

It is also had complicated history, the period of renaissance challenges the power of tradition and emphasized the reasons and individualism. As well as in culture context, many religions such as slam, Hinduism uncover the importance of tradition. Indigenous culture also created a strong image in traditionalism. Traditional literary criticism primarily influences the establishment of official authors within specific historical and genre contexts. It believes that an author's biography and cultural background can provide valuable context for readers, developing their understanding of the text.

Example- Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" can be analyzed as a traditional lens, novel explored various social norms, gender roles, marriages, relationships by which that challenge faced by the characters.

### 4.2 New Criticism Theory

New criticism, a literary theory in mid-20th century places the significance on close readings. New criticism theory offers a completely different approach to literary analysis, extending beyond the text itself to enclose broader cultural, historical, and ideological contexts.

#### 4.2.1 Text as an autonomous entity

According to the New criticism, the text is sufficient in it, demanding close attention to the internal factors, it is not dependent on the external factors like author's biography and background of the text. New criticism delves into the complex details of a text, examining its motifs, symbols, imagery, and other literary devices. It neglects the historical and cultural background.

### 4.2.2 Close readings and Textual analysis

New Critics aim to uncover the text's basic meaning and aesthetic value, often through close reading and textual analysis. They emphasize the importance of literary form, style, and structure, examining elements such as plot, character, setting, and theme. However, the layer of thought emerged, challenging this biographically- focused approach and this movement, known as Formalism, shifted the focus from the author's intentions to the text itself. Formalist critics argue that a literary work should be analyzed entirely on its own terms, and its historical or biographical context.

T.S Elliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a complex exploration of vivid use of imagery, symbols, allusions.

## 5. Comparative Analysis

Comparing traditionalism and new criticism is crucial to understand the literature work in detail for research paper because it highlights the intentions and perception of the authors who follow these approaches in literature. Traditional literary theory and modern criticism theory represent two distinct approaches to literary analysis. While both theories aim to uncover the meaning and significance of literary texts, they differ significantly in their methodologies and underlying assumptions. By understanding the distinctions between these two approaches, readers can gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of literary analysis and the diverse ways in which texts can be interpreted.

### 5.1 Focus

Traditionalism rooted in classical and romantic thoughts who believes the values, culture, tradition. New criticism focuses on the text itself, treating it as a separate object.

### 5.2 Intention

Traditionalism examines the author's life, experiences and background that provides deep understanding of the work. On the other hand, new criticism influences the readers according to the author's mindset and meaning of the genre from where they belong to. It emphasizes on internal part such as structure, format, language and meaning of the text only.

### 5.3 Aim

The main goal of traditionalism is to understand and appreciate literature within its historical context by using the methods of cultural values, social and philosophical influences on the text. The main goal of new criticism is to understand the text as self-contained and autonomous work of art by the help of interrelations of the imagery, symbols, meaning, language of the text itself.

### 5.4 Perception

Traditionalism analyzes historical events, cultural context, values that influenced the author's work or text. New criticism only analyzing the text line by line, paying attention to the language, imagery, symbolism of the text only. New

criticism also examines the genre, style and narrative structure and it also highlights the themes and moral values.

### 5.5 Methods

The format of traditionalism provides a rich knowledge about the text within its culture and values and historical period. New criticism mainly revolves around close readings. Methods which are used by new criticism such as close readings, interpretations of the text and formal elements.

## 6. Example application in analyzing a literary work

- Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" can be analyzed as a traditional lens, novel explored various social norms, gender roles, marriages, relationships by which that challenge faced by the characters.
- T.S Elliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a complex exploration of vivid use of imagery, symbols, allusions.
- A traditionalist critic might analyze Shakespeare's "Hamlet" by considering author's life, moral lessons of play about revenge, indecision, and the human condition.
- Robert Frost's poem "The road not taken" a new critic focuses on poem's language, symbolism.
- Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" focus on stream of consciousness, use of symbolism and understand the novel's psychological depth and modernist themes.

## 7. Conclusion

While traditionalism and new criticism offers different understandings in literary context, these approaches had ultimately aim to enhance interpretations of author's work. Traditionalism provides boarder framework for interpreting a work with its emphasis on historical and cultural context. new criticism, on the other hand, delves into the intrinsic elements of the text in more formal ways and close reading techniques. The transition from the approach of traditionalism to the innovative methods of new criticism signifies a revolution in literary analysis. Comparison between them underscores the importance of critical thinking in literary context. By knowing the limitations and strengths of these two approaches readers can develop their skills and different perspective on literature. Understanding divergent perspectives of the meaning of the text, readers can enrich their literary experiences.

## References

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