

SCHOOL OF FORMALISTS

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Abstract: This article provides a theoretical overview of Formalism as a school of twentieth-century literary criticism focused on the analysis of the internal structure of the literary text. It examines the key principles of Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism, including the understanding of literature as an autonomous system, the priority of formal linguistic elements, and the concept of literariness. Special attention is given to V. Shklovsky's idea of "defamiliarization" and the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, as well as R. Jakobson's contribution to the development of Structuralism through his theory of metaphor and metonymy and the concept of the poetic function of language.

Annotatsiya (lotin yozuvida, ilmiy uslub): Ushbu maqola XX asr adabiy tanqidiy tafakkurida shakllangan formalizm yo'nalishini nazariy-metodologik jihatdan tahlil qiladi hamda uni badiiy matnning ichki strukturasi va formal xususiyatlari asosida o'rganishga qaratilgan ilmiy paradigma sifatida talqin etadi. Tadqiqot doirasida rus formalizmi va anglo-amerika yangi tanqid maktabining asosiy konseptual tamoyillari — adabiyotni mustaqil tizim sifatida qarash, tilning formal-struktural jihatlarini ustuvor deb baholash hamda "adabiylik" tushunchasini markaziy kategoriya sifatida o'rganish — tizimli ravishda ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, V. Shklovskiy tomonidan ilgari surilgan "ostranenie" konsepsiyasi va fabula hamda syujet o'rtasidagi nazariy farq, R. Yakobsonning metafora va metonimiya haqidagi qarashlari hamda tilning poetik funksiyasi orqali strukturalistik yondashuvlarning shakllanishiga qo'shgan hissasi ilmiy tahlil etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Formalizm; adabiy tanqid; adabiylik; ostranenie; fabula; syujet; strukturalizm; Roman Yakobson; metafora va metonimiya; Mixail Baxtin.

Keywords: Formalism, literary criticism, literariness, defamiliarization, fabula, syuzhet, Structuralism, Roman Jakobson, metaphor and metonymy, Mikhail Bakhtin.

Аннотация: Данная статья представляет собой теоретический обзор школы формализма как направления литературной критики XX века, ориентированного на анализ внутренней структуры художественного текста. Рассматриваются ключевые положения русского формализма и англо-американской «новой критики», включая понимание литературы как автономной

системы, приоритет формальных элементов языка и концепцию литературности. Особое внимание уделяется идеям В. Шкловского о «остранении» и различию между фабулой и сюжетом, а также вкладу Р. Якобсона в развитие структурализма через теорию метафоры и метонимии и понятие поэтической функции языка.

Ключевые слова: Формализм. литературная критика, литературность, остранение, фабула, сюжет, структурализм, Роман Якобсон, метафора и метонимия, Михаил Бахтин.

Formalism is a theoretical approach in literary criticism that prioritizes the internal structure of a literary text, rather than external contexts such as historical background, cultural environment, authorial biography, or ideological content. It advocates the analysis of literary works as self-contained systems, focusing on formal elements including genre conventions, discourse organization, stylistic devices, and compositional techniques. Within this framework, attention is directed toward intrinsic linguistic and aesthetic features such as syntax, grammar, meter, imagery, and rhetorical figures, while extrinsic contextual factors are deliberately minimized.

Emerging in the early twentieth century, Formalism developed as a reaction against Romantic approaches to literature, which emphasized individual creativity and authorial subjectivity. In contrast, Formalist critics redirected analytical focus toward the literary text itself and the formal conventions shaping it, often highlighting the continuity of literary forms across historical periods. The movement subsequently developed into two major branches: Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism. In the United States, Formalist methodology was particularly influential in academic literary studies from the post–World War II period through the 1970s, notably through the work of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature*.

From the late 1970s onward, Formalism gradually declined in prominence as alternative critical approaches emerged that emphasized the importance of social, political, and historical contexts in literary interpretation. During this period, Formalism was sometimes criticized for its perceived detachment from ideological and cultural concerns. Nevertheless, certain contemporary developments in literary studies suggest a renewed interest in Formalist methodologies.

Russian Formalism originated in the early twentieth century, particularly with the establishment of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language in 1916 in St. Petersburg, founded by Boris Eichenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, and Yury Tynyanov, as well as the Moscow Linguistic Circle associated with Roman Jakobson. A key articulation of its principles was provided by Eichenbaum in his essay *The Theory of the “Formal Method”*, in which he systematized the fundamental ideas of the movement.

- Literature should be studied as a “science of literature” (or poetics) that is factual and independent.
- Since literature is constructed from language, linguistics is foundational to its study.
- Literary language is distinct from everyday language and not entirely communicative, making literature autonomous from external conditions.
- Literature has its own history, based on innovations in form, rather than being determined solely by social or material conditions.
- The form of a literary work is inseparable from its content; how something is expressed is as important as what is expressed.

Within Russian Formalist theory, Viktor Tsiolkovsky is regarded as one of the most influential critics. He introduced the key concept of *defamiliarization* (*ostranenie*) and elaborated the distinction between *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot). Defamiliarization refers to the artistic strategy by which literature presents familiar objects and experiences in an unfamiliar or striking manner, thereby renewing perceptual awareness. According to Tsiolkovsky, literary innovation is largely driven by the creation of new techniques that disrupt habitual perception. The distinction between story and plot further emphasizes that narrative meaning is shaped not only by what is told but also by how events are arranged and presented. For the Formalists, formal structure constitutes the defining feature of literariness, distinguishing art from ordinary communicative language.

Roman Jakobson occupies a central position in both Russian Formalism and later Structuralist theory. A linguist associated with the Moscow intellectual milieu, he co-founded the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915 and participated in the Society for the Study of Poetic Language in 1916 alongside Shklovsky and Boris Eichenbaum. He later contributed to the formation of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926 and co-established the Linguistic Circle of New York in 1943, thereby extending Formalist and structural linguistic approaches internationally.

Jakobson advanced the Formalist project of establishing literary studies as a scientific discipline through his concept of *literariness*, defined as the set of linguistic features that transform ordinary verbal communication into aesthetic discourse. He argued that literariness is embedded in the formal organization of language and distinguishes literary texts from utilitarian speech. By foregrounding linguistic form, literature produces a distinct mode of perception. Tsiolkovsky’s theory of defamiliarization similarly explains how literary language disrupts automatized perception, as illustrated in poetic works such as Gerard Manley Hopkins’ *The Windhover*. Comparable ideas can be found in Romantic aesthetics, particularly in Wordsworth and Coleridge’s emphasis on renewed perception, as well as in Bertolt

Brecht's theory of Epic Theatre and his concept, which encourages critical audience engagement. Jakobson's formalist linguistics also contributed to the emergence of stylistics in the mid-twentieth century, which sought to analyze literary language systematically.

In his later theoretical work, Jakobson formulated the distinction between metaphor and metonymy as two fundamental principles structuring discourse. He argued that linguistic expression operates along paradigmatic (selection-based) and syntagmatic (combination-based) axes, with metaphor and metonymy corresponding to these respective dimensions. In *Linguistics and Poetics*, he further integrated semiotic theory, proposing that poetic language projects equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination. Within this framework, poetic discourse is primarily associated with metaphorical organization, whereas prose is more closely aligned with metonymic structures.

Jakobson's conceptualization of metaphor and metonymy provided a foundational model for later Structuralist poetics and significantly influenced subsequent theoretical developments. His emphasis on binary oppositions informed the work of thinkers such as Claude Levi-Strauss in structural anthropology, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalytic theory, and Mikhail Bakhtin in dialogic theory, all of whom adapted linguistic structures to broader cultural and psychological domains.

Mikhail Bakhtin is widely recognized as a major twentieth-century theorist of literature and language. His work is distinguished by a theory of dialogism and a philosophy of language that emphasizes heteroglossia, polyphony, and carnivalistic discourse. Writing in the context of profound political and social upheaval in early Soviet Russia, Bakhtin developed a theoretical framework that, while sometimes associated with Marxist thought, also functions as a critique of Formalist abstraction. His intellectual legacy has been variously interpreted as structuralist, post-structuralist, and philosophical-religious in orientation.

Due to political repression and censorship, many of Bakhtin's works were published under the names of colleagues or appeared only decades after their composition. Interest in his scholarship was revived in the mid-twentieth century in the Soviet Union and later expanded internationally, particularly in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Bakhtin's major English-translated works include *Art and Answerability*, *Rabelais and His World*, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *The Dialogic Imagination*, and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*). His early writings, such as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, develop a phenomenological account of ethical subjectivity and intersubjective communication influenced by Kantian philosophy.

Central to Bakhtin's theory is his analysis of the novel as a dialogic and multi-voiced genre. In *Discourse in the Novel*, he argues that the novel integrates

heterogeneous stylistic elements into a unified yet internally diverse artistic system. These include authorial narration, stylized everyday speech, semi-literary forms such as letters and diaries, various non-literary discourses, and individualized character speech. The defining feature of the novel, according to Bakhtin, lies in its capacity to organize these diverse speech types into a structured artistic whole, thereby reflecting the plurality of social voices and ideological perspectives within language.

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