



New Criticism

ROMAN A' CLEF

New Criticism

New Criticism emphasizes explication, or "close reading," of "the work itself." It rejects old historicism's attention to biographical and sociological matters. Instead, the objective determination as to "how a piece works" can be found through close focus and analysis, rather than through extraneous and erudite special knowledge. It has long been the pervasive and standard approach to literature in college and high school curricula. New Criticism was developed by Robert Penn-Warren and Cleanth Brooks when they were at LSU.

Characteristics of New Criticism

- examines the relationships between a text's ideas and its form, between what a text says and the way it says it.
- Works with patterns of sound, imagery, narrative structure, point of view, and other techniques discernible on close reading of the text, they seek to determine the function and appropriateness of these to the self-contained work
- The goal then is not the pursuit of sincerity or authenticity, but **subtlety, unity, and integrity--and these are properties of the text**, not the author.
- Movement of 1940's and 1950's

To do New Critical reading, ask yourself, "How does this piece work?" Look for complexities in the text: paradoxes, ironies, ambiguities. Find a unifying idea or theme which resolves these tensions.

Roman a' clef

Roman à clef, French for novel with a key, is a novel about real life events that is overlaid with a façade of fiction. The fictitious names in the novel represent real people, and the "key" is the relationship between the nonfiction and the fiction.

