

**To Start UP!**

- a. What is the function of literature?
- b. Why do I read literature?
- c. What is the purpose of writing about literature?
- d. What is the function of literary criticism?
- e. How does one “do” literary criticism?
- f. What are the tools of the trade of the literary critic?

**Literary Theory and Criticism**

The terms “literary theory” and “critical theory” refer to essentially the same fields of study. They both address *ways of looking at literature* beyond the typical:-

- ☞ Plot
- ☞ Theme
- ☞ Character
- ☞ Setting studies.

Literary criticism is known as the study of literature done for the purpose of:-

- ✓ Defining
- ✓ Classifying
- ✓ Analyzing
- ✓ Interpreting, and
- ✓ Evaluating the works of literature.

It always deals with a particular work of literature, as opposed to literary theory which is concerned with the nature of literature and the methods by which we analyze it. So, when you read a particular book and seek to analyze its meaning and interpret it based on the historical context, or the author’s biographical information, you are engaged in literary criticism.

Literary criticism is fundamentally the estimation of the value of a particular work or body of work on such grounds as: the personal and/or cultural significance of the themes and the uses of language of a text; the insights and impact of a text; and the aesthetic production (or, performance) of the text; particularly as these areas are seen to be mutually dependent, supportive or inflective. The word 'criticism' has ordinary-use negative connotations, and to an extent that is right: for literary criticism is part of the disciplining of discourse generally and of what is considered literature in particular. One patrols the boundaries of good writing, admitting or excluding, determining what should be thought about a text, and why, what personal and cultural value should be placed on it.

### **Can a Literary Theory of one time be sustainably accepted?**

Literary theories vary according to the time span and the literary philosophy. For example let's look at Aristotle's assumptions to criticize a given literary genre, drama.

Aristotle's chief contributions to literary criticism include:

- a. A work of art is an imitation of nature that reflects a high form of art in exhibiting noble characters and noble deeds. The act of imitation gives the reader pleasure.
- b. Art possesses form: it has a beginning, middle and an end. Each part is related to the other parts. A tragedy is thus an organic whole.
- c. Tragedy must have an emotional effect on its audience and bring about "catharsis", i.e. through pity and fear a tragedy should purge, purify or clarify the audience's emotions.
- d. The universal rather than the particular should be stressed, for unlike history, which deals with events, poetry or tragedy deals with what could happen and is thus closer to perfection or truth.
- e. While the poet must pay attention to diction or language itself, it is the thoughts expressed through language that are of the utmost concern.

In part it can be accepted and in part it can be rejected because the fashion of some of the theories of criticism became outdated with the time and the literary tradition.

*Take for instance the parameters beauty contest judges used, are using and will use to select the beautiful.*

### ***Purposes of criticism***

The Three-fold Purpose of Criticism:

- To help us solve a problem in the reading.
- To help us sift between and resolve conflicting readings.
- To enable us craft interpretative, yet scholarly judgments about literature.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Critical Approaches to the Study of Literature**

**Critical Approaches** are different perspectives we consider when looking at a piece of literature. They seek to give us answers to these questions, in addition to aiding us in interpreting literature.

1. What do we read?
2. Why do we read?
3. How do we read?\_

#### **2.1 Historical / Biographical Approach:**

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Brain storming questions

- ❖ What is the relationship between a man and his/her deeds?
- ❖ Is it true to say that literary works are the result of their author's life experience?  
How?

Historical / Biographical critics see works as the reflection of an author's life and times (or of the characters' life and times). H/B approach deems it necessary to know about the author and the political, economical, and sociological context of his times in order to truly understand the work(s).

Next to formalist criticism, historical criticism is traditionally considered the most "objective" critical approach. The historical critic may be concerned with:-

- 1) the historical context, and thus be concerned about the effects of the writer's historical milieu (race, place, & time) upon the literary work at hand--e.g., the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the work of a particular English Romantic poet; or
- 2) the cultural/philosophical--"HISTORY OF IDEAS"--background of the writer's milieu--e.g., the impact of Einstein's theory of relativity on, say, the novels of James Joyce--or
- 3) the effects of previous works of literature (literary history) on the writer & his/her work--e.g., the influence of Whitman's free verse and mystical worldview on American Beat poetry of the 1950's & 60's.

Fascinating and dangerous in its attempt to apply details from an author's life to his/her works--and then drawing conclusions, perhaps, about the author's "inner mental workings." In any case, the author's personal biography becomes the focus.

**Advantages:** This approach works well for some works--like those of Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Milton--which are obviously political in nature. It also is necessary to take a historical approach in order to place allusions in their proper classical, political, or biblical background.

**Disadvantages:** New Critics refers to the historical / biographical critic's believe that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention as "the intentional fallacy." Thus, art is reduced to the level of biography rather than universal; it lacks universality.

**A Checklist of Historical Critical Questions:**

- ➡ When was the work written? When was it published? How was it received by the critics and public and why?
- ➡ What does the work's reception reveal about the standards of taste and value during the time it was published and reviewed?

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- What social attitudes and cultural practices related to the action of the word were prevalent during the time the work was written and published?
- What kinds of power relationships does the work describe, reflect, or embody?
- How do the power relationships reflected in the literary work manifest themselves in the cultural practices and social institutions prevalent during the time the work was written and published?
- To what extent can we understand the past as it is reflected in the literary work? To what extent does the work reflect differences from the ideas and values of its time?

**Checklist of Biographical Critical Questions:**

- What influences—people, ideas, movements, events—evident in the writer’s life does the work reflect?
- To what extent are the events described in the work a direct transfer of what happened in the writer’s actual life?
- What modifications of the actual events has the writer made in the literary work? For what possibly purposes?
- What are the effects of the differences between actual events and their literary transformation in the poem, story, play, or essay?
- What has the author revealed in the work about his/her characteristic modes of thought, perception, or emotion? What place does this work have in the artist’s literary development and career?

**Example**

ለምን ሞተ ቢሊ (ደበበ ሰይፉ)

ለምን ሞተ ቢሊ

ንገሩ ለሁሉ

ሳትደብቁ ከቶ

ከዘመን ተኳርፎ ከዘመን ተጣልቶ፡፡

Debebe Seyfu was the most pronounced professor of literature at Addis Ababa University. His limitless hatred for Feudalism and pro feudal classes agitated him to write satirical and commentary poems. He was a revolutionary and after the current ‘government’ took power and racism became the typical feature of the nation, he quit working and spent the rest of his life at home. The poem above can be criticized from the history of the author in part.

**Three Benefits:**

1. Facts about an author's experience can help a reader decide how to interpret a text.
2. A reader can better appreciate a text by knowing a writer's struggles or difficulties in creating that text.
3. A reader can understand a writer's preoccupation by studying the way they apply and modify their own life experiences in their works.

## 2.2 Moral /Humanistic/ Philosophical Approach:

Brain storming questions

1. What is the difference between Moral and Law?
2. Which one shapes the society more? Moral or Law? Why?

Moral / philosophical critics believes that the larger purpose of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues. Practitioners include Matthew Arnold (works must have "high seriousness"), Plato (literature must exhibit moralism and utilitarianism), and Horace (literature should be "delightful and instructive").

Here, the critic brings the cultural/religious assumptions of his or her own time to bear upon a literary work, judging the text according to how well it fits the critic's own ethical values system. At its best, this approach heaps praise on works of literature for their superlative expression of humankind's highest ideals & aspirations. (Thus are the writings of Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe often lauded.) However, the critic's subjective bias often leads to abuse; this method can easily evolve into dogmatic condemnation and censorship, and indeed, many works otherwise deemed as "aesthetically" great have been blacklisted, banned, or burned throughout the history of humankind by well-meaning "moral" critics.

**Advantages:** This approach is useful for such works as Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man," which presents an obvious moral philosophy. It is also useful when considering the themes of works (for example, man's inhumanity to man in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn). Finally, it does not view literature merely as "art" isolated from all moral implications; it recognizes that literature can affect readers, whether subtly or directly, and that the message of a work--and not just the decorous vehicle for that message--is important.

**Disadvantages:** Detractors argue that such an approach can be too "judgmental." Some believe literature should be judged primarily (if not solely) on its artistic merits, not its moral or philosophical content.

**Checklist of Moral/Didactic Critical Questions:**

- What enduring truth is revealed in the theme of this work?
- How are the actions of the protagonist rewarded and the actions of the antagonist punished?
- Does the subject matter in the work of literature fit with the culture and religious aspects you live in? if so, what fits and what is not? Is there any 'taboo'?
- Is the story convincing and alters the minds of the audience?
- What universal and regional issues have been raised to teach the moral?
- How the regional issues in the story be applicable to the audiences' context?

Example

Les Miserables/ The Miserables /Viktor Hugo/

The major character Jean Valjean is the most innocent and kind man. With him lived his sister's children. He was also illiterate. One day he stole a slice of bread to give to his sister's children; because of this he has been found to be guilty and sentenced for 25 years of imprisonment. When he came out of the prison, on him posted a badge saying **"Take care of this man for he is cruel and robber!"**

Because of the badge, people perceived him unfriendly. Due to the act of the society, he became fierce and against the law which he thinks is unjust and against the innocent.

One day, he went to the priest's house and requested the priest to spend the night there. The priest allowed him despite the badge. Jean Valjean stole precious candelabrum made of silver and went on the night after. Police arrested him and took him to the priest's home where he stole the candelabrum. "Don't arrest him because the properties belong to him and he didn't steal," The priest told the police.

Jean Valjean became surprised and changed his mind and convinced himself that there are good people like the priest as there are bad people who created the law against the innocent like the judicial body and the police.

He became good again.

From the synopsis of the story, one can deduce how moral is more powerful than law. Law is a recent agreement to make the will of the upper class functioned, while moral is the agreement of the society that descended from generation to generation.

### 2.3 Formalism / New Criticism:

- ➡ do you agree that a given literary text can be criticized only by taking the inner elements and ignoring any outside factor like history and biography of the author?
- ➡ If you agree, justify your argument with sound reason.

A formalistic approach to literature, once called New Criticism, involves a close reading of the text. Formalistic critics believe that all information essential to the interpretation of a work must be found within the work itself; there is no need to bring in outside information about the history, politics, or society of the time, or about the author's life.

**Formalism** is a school of [literary criticism](#) and [literary theory](#) having mainly to do with structural purposes of a particular text. It is the study of a text without taking into account any outside influence. Formalism rejects (or sometimes simply "brackets," *i.e.*, ignores for the purpose of analysis) notions of culture or societal influence, authorship, and content, and instead focuses on:-

- Modes
- Genres
- Discourse and
- Forms

Formalistic critics spend much time analyzing irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor. They are also interested in the work's setting, characters, symbols, and point of view.

For the formalist, the careful-thoughtful-and-well-informed reader judges the merits of the work as a finely-crafted aesthetic whole--considering, for instance, in a work of fiction, its use of plot, style, characterization, etc.; in a work of poetry, matters of prosody /pattern of rhyme and sound effects/, diction, figurative language, etc. At last, attentiveness to the purely formal aspects of literature is an antidote to the reader's propensity for straying too far from the text.

Indeed, formalist criticism is supposedly unique among critical methods in being completely "intrinsic," dealing only with aesthetic techniques evident within the work per se. All other critical approaches are extrinsic, bringing to bear considerations outside the text. For the formalist, such intrinsic analyses should at least be an integral part of any well-rounded critical

discussion of literature, and the psychologically or politically based critic (for example) runs the danger of a distorted interpretation if formalistic matters are not also taken into consideration.

## Two Major Principles of Formalism

1. A literary text exists independent of any particular reader and, in a sense, has a fixed meaning.
2. The greatest literary texts are “timeless” and “universal.”

### Terms Used in New Criticism:

**Tension** - the integral unity of the poem which results from the resolution of opposites, often in irony or paradox

**Intentional fallacy** - the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention

**Affective fallacy** - the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by its affect on the reader

**External form** - rhyme scheme, meter, stanza form, etc.

**Objective correlative** - originated by T.S. Eliot, this term refers to a collection of objects, situations, or events that instantly evoke a particular emotion.

**Figures of speech**—various expressive devices used in vivid writing

**irony**—paradoxical events, ideas, or attitudes that are played off against each other

**satire**—synthesis of heavily developed ironies and sarcasms

**metaphor**—brief or extended comparison of something with something else

**symbolism**—using inanimate or imagined things to stand for real situations

**Imagery**—specific details used to describe characters, situations, things, ideas, or events

**Advantages:** This approach can be performed without much research, and it emphasizes the value of literature apart from its context (in effect makes literature timeless). Virtually all critical approaches must begin here.

**Disadvantages:** On the negative side, in dealing with specific literary "devices" in isolation (irony, point of view, etc.), this approach may actually tend to destroy a work's "organic unity": as Wordsworth says, "We murder to dissect."

The text is seen in isolation. Formalism ignores the context of the work. It cannot account for allusions. It tends to reduce literature to little more than a collection of rhetorical devices.

### A Checklist of Formalistic Critical Questions:



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- How is the work structured or organized? How does it begin? Where does it go next? How does it end? What is the work's plot? How is its plot related to its structure?
- What is the relationship of each part of the work to the work as a whole? How are the parts related to one another?
- Who is narrating or telling what happens in the work? How is the narrator, speaker, or character revealed to readers? How do we come to know and understand this figure?
- Who are the major and minor characters, what do they represent, and how do they relate to one another?
- What are the time and place of the work—it's setting? How is the setting related to what we know of the characters and their actions? To what extent is the setting symbolic?
- What kind of language does the author use to describe, narrate, explain, or otherwise create the world of the literary work? More specifically, what images, similes, metaphors, symbols appear in the work? What is their function? What meanings do they convey?

**Example**

***The Use of Symbol and imagery in Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"***

**"The Road Not Taken" (1915, 1916) Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could

**Imagery:-** the reader can have a clear image  
in mind.

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Frost's "[The Road Not Taken](#)," is one of the best-known poems in American literature. It is tempting to read Frost's final lines

*"I took the one less traveled by,/*

*And that has made all the difference,"* as suggesting that refusing to conform to the traditional path in life has given the speaker great satisfaction.

The path symbolizes the way of life travelled by the new and the old generation, the persona or speaker preferred the one less travelled by which is the traditional way thinking that the new path where the new generation travelled by is not good.

### 3 Psychological Approach/ Psychoanalytical Criticism/:

Deal with the following questions in group

- ☞ what is psychology?
- ☞ Psychologists say that we are the result of Nature-Nurture controversy. What does it mean? express your agreement with reasons.
- ☞ what is the relationship between symbols and the persons psychic?

Psychological critics view works through the lens of psychology. They look either at the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves, although the former is generally considered a more respectable approach. Most frequently, psychological critics apply Freudian and/or Jungian (archetypes) psychology to works.

Psychoanalytical critics interpret a literary work based on Freud, that is, in terms of unconscious fantasies & desires, fixations & complexes, displacement & repression. Early psychoanalytical critics assumed, with Freud, that even creative works of literature are at last products of the author's (sexual) libido.

#### (a) (Jungian) Mythic/Archetypal Criticism

"both fascinating and dangerous" approach which assumes that all of humankind's creative works--including **literature, myths, and religious rituals & symbols, and indeed, our very dreams**--emanate from another inner psychic source, the *collective unconscious*, as formulated

by Carl Jung. Therefore one may find in many works of literature archetypal (universal-to-our-species) symbols that represent the various emotions and aspirations of humankind's ancestral psychological heritage.

- **Three main points of study in archetypal approach:**

1. archetypal characters
2. archetypal images
3. archetypal situations

**Advantages:** Provides a universalistic approach to literature and identifies a reason why certain literature may survive the test of time. It works well with works that are highly symbolic.

**Disadvantages:** Literature may become little more than a vehicle for archetypes, and this approach may ignore the “art” of literature.

- 1) the Jungian critic is sometimes guilty of finding an "archetype" in every image, character, and twist of plot, thus weakening the impact of the critic's discoveries of the truly(?) archetypal;
- 2) this approach is not able to judge the greatness of an artistic work solely on the presence of archetypal symbols,
- 3) Jung's archetypes, as he presents them, are very much culturally and racially specific: e.g., to claim that dreaming of a "black man" is archetypal symbolic of the "shadow figure" applies, at best, to a quite white, Eurocentric psyche.

**( b ) Freudian Approach:**

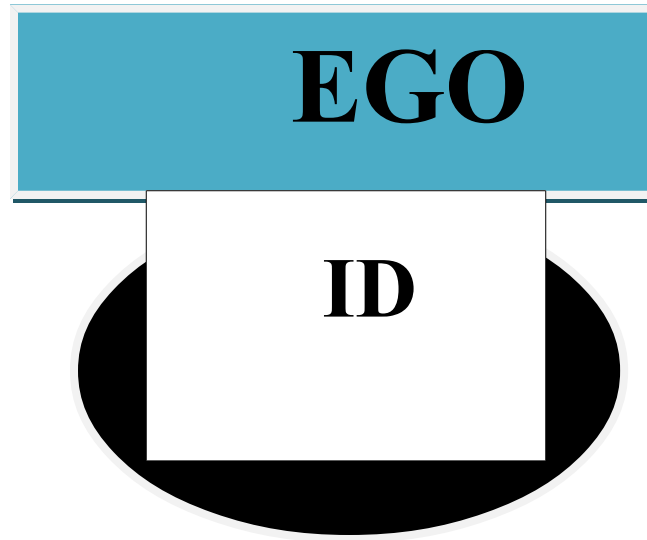
Literary critics sometimes analyze the actions of literary characters using the three personality structures that Freud identified. As critics explore the ego, superego, and id of characters in a work, they focus on the ways that these parts of the characters' personalities influence the work as a whole. This process is called psychoanalytic criticism.

A Freudian approach often includes pinpointing the influences of a character's psyche (Greek for “soul”), which consists of the:

- ☞ **Id** (reservoir of libido or pleasure principle in the unconscious)
- ☞ **Superego** (the moral censoring agency and repository of conscience/pride that protects society)
- ☞ **Ego** (the rational governing agent of the unconscious that protects the individual)



**SUER EGO**



Example:

- Consider Cinderella as a representative of the **Id**—expressing desire.
- Consider the stepmother and stepsisters as representatives of the **Superego**—preventing the id from fulfilling its desire.
- Consider the fairy godmother and the prince as representatives of the **Ego**—negotiating between the id and the superego and allowing the desires of the id to be fulfilled in a socially acceptable manner.

### Cinderella

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful girl named Cinderella. She lived with her wicked stepmother and two stepsisters. They treated Cinderella very badly. One day, they were invited for a grand ball in the king's palace. But Cinderella's stepmother would not let her go. Cinderella was made to sew new party gowns for her stepmother and stepsisters, and curl their hair. They then went to the ball, leaving Cinderella alone at home.

Cinderella felt very sad and began to cry. Suddenly, a fairy godmother appeared and said, "Don't cry, Cinderella! I will send you to the ball!" But Cinderella was sad. She said, "I don't have a gown to wear for the ball!" The fairy godmother waved her magic wand and changed Cinderella's old clothes into a beautiful new gown! The fairy godmother then touched Cinderella's feet with the magic wand. And lo! She had beautiful glass slippers! "How will I go to the grand ball?" asked Cinderella. The fairy godmother found six mice playing near a pumpkin, in the kitchen. She touched them with her magic wand and the mice became four shiny black horses and two coachmen and the pumpkin turned into a golden coach. Cinderella was overjoyed and set off for the ball in the coach drawn by the six black horses. Before leaving, the fairy godmother said, "Cinderella, this magic will only last until midnight! You must reach home by then!"

When Cinderella entered the palace, everybody was struck by her beauty. Nobody, not even Cinderella's stepmother or stepsisters, knew who she really was in her pretty clothes and shoes. The handsome prince also saw her and fell in love with Cinderella. He went to her and asked, "Do you want to dance?" And Cinderella said, "Yes!" The prince

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danced with her all night and nobody recognized the beautiful dancer. Cinderella was so happy dancing with the prince that she almost forgot what the fairy godmother had said. At the last moment, Cinderella remembered her fairy godmother's words and she rushed to go home. "Oh! I must go!" she cried and ran out of the palace. One of her glass slippers came off but Cinderella did not turn back for it. She reached home just as the clock struck twelve. Her coach turned back into a pumpkin, the horses into mice and her fine ball gown into rags. Her stepmother and stepsisters reached home shortly after that. They were talking about the beautiful lady who had been dancing with the prince.

The prince had fallen in love with Cinderella and wanted to find out who the beautiful girl was, but he did not even know her name. He found the glass slipper that had come off Cinderella's foot as she ran home. The prince said, "I will find her. The lady whose foot fits this slipper will be the one I marry!" The next day, the prince and his servants took the glass slipper and went to all the houses in the kingdom. They wanted to find the lady whose feet would fit in the slipper. All the women in the kingdom tried the slipper but it would not fit any of them. Cinderella's stepsisters also tried on the little glass slipper. They tried to squeeze their feet and push hard into the slipper, but the servant was afraid the slipper would break. Cinderella's stepmother would not let her try the slipper on, but the prince saw her and said, "Let her also try on the slipper!" The slipper fit her perfectly. The prince recognized her from the ball. He married Cinderella and together they lived happily ever after.

Freudian critics steer toward the sexual implications of symbols and imagery, since Freud theorized that all human behavior (drives) derive from libido/sexual energy.

**Concave Images**, such as ponds, flowers, cups, and caves = female symbols.

**Convex Images**, such as skyscrapers, submarines, obelisks, etc. = male symbols

**Actions**, such as dancing, riding, and flying = sexual pleasure.

**Water** = birth, the female principle, the maternal, the womb, and the death wish.

**Oedipus complex** = a boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother

**The Electra Complex** = a girl's unconscious rivalry with her mother for the love of her father.

**Advantages:** A useful tool for understanding some works, in which characters manifest clear psychological issues. Like the biographical approach, knowing something about a writer's psychological makeup can give us insight into his work.

**Disadvantages:** Psychological criticism can turn a work into little more than a psychological case study, neglecting to view it as a piece of art. Critics sometimes attempt to diagnose long dead authors based on their works, which is perhaps not the best evidence of their psychology. Critics tend to see sex in everything, exaggerating this aspect of literature. Finally, some works do not lend themselves readily to this approach.

### Checklist of Psychological Critical Questions

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- What connections can you make between your knowledge of an author's life and the behavior and motivations of characters in his or her work?
- How does your understanding of the characters, their relationships, their actions, and their motivations in a literary work help you better understand the mental world and imaginative life, or the actions and motivations of the author?
- How does a particular literary work—its images, metaphors, and other linguistic elements—reveal the psychological motivations of its characters or the psychological mindset of its author?
- To what extent can you employ the concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis to understand the motivations of literary characters?
- What kinds of literary works and what types of literary characters seem best suited to a critical approach that employs a psychological or psychoanalytical perspective? Why?
- How can a psychological or psychoanalytical approach to a particular work be combined with an approach from another critical perspective—for example, biographical, formalist, or feminist criticism?

### Checklist of Mythological Critical Questions

- What incidents in the work seem common or familiar enough as actions that they might be considered symbolic or archetypal? Are there any journeys, battles, falls, reversals of fortune, etc.?
- What kinds of character types appear in the work? How might they be classified?
- What creatures, elements of nature, or man-made objects playing a role in the work might be considered symbolic?
- What changes do the characters undergo? How can those changes be characterized or named? To what might they be related or compared?
- What religious or quasi-religious traditions might the work's story, characters, elements, or objects be compared to or affiliated with? Why?

### Example

On a moonlight night it would be different. The happy voices of children playing in open fields would then be heard. And perhaps those not so young would be playing in pairs in less open places, and old men and women would remember their youth. As the Ibo say: "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk." (Things Fall Apart Chinua Achebe)

From the above excerpt taken from Things Fall Apart, the moonlight and the happy voices of the children can be taken as symbols of good spirit. From the saying of the Ibo "**When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.**" the moonlight is the symbol of hope and good fortune.

## 4 The Sociological Approach

Sociological criticism argues that social contexts (the social environment) must be considered when analyzing a text.

- Core Belief: Literature is a reflection of its society.
- Focuses on the values of a society and how those views are reflected in a text
- Emphasizes the economic, political, and cultural issues within literary texts

### 5.1 Feminist Approach:

Brain storming questions

- What is the difference between gender and sex?
- Feminist activists argue that “all gender differences are imposed by society, and gender determines nothing.” Do you agree with this ideology? If ‘yes’, reason out. If ‘No’ present your argument.
- Do you agree that a woman is created to complement the man? Why and why not?

Feminist criticism is concerned with the impact of gender on writing and reading. It usually begins with a critique of patriarchal culture. It is concerned with the place of female writers in the canon. Finally, it includes a search for a feminine theory or approach to texts. Feminist criticism is political and often revisionist. Feminists often argue that male fears are portrayed through female characters. They may argue that gender determines everything, or just the opposite: that all gender differences are imposed by society, and gender determines nothing.

Feminist criticism tries to correct predominantly male-dominated critical perspective with a feminist consciousness. This form of criticism places literature in a social context and employs a broad range of disciplines, such as history, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, to create a perspective that considers feminist issues. Feminist theories also attempt to understand representation from a woman’s point of view and analyze women’s writing strategies in the context of their social conditions.

Feminist criticism (very simply put) champions the downtrodden of the "war of the sexes," critiquing *patriarchal* texts and championing neglected (and recent) "pro-woman" literary works. Like Marxism, feminism quite often teams up with post-structuralism in its critique of the dominant male culture. One might conveniently divide feminism into two "camps":

- 1) Those who posit an innate (and culturally repressed) "female" way of writing, reading, even thinking (essentialist); and

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2) Those who see sex or gender as socially conditioned and linguistically constructed (constructivist).

Either way, patriarchal dominance/oppression has been--and continues to be, the focus of such criticism.

*Example from Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen*

*As Charlotte goes on to say to Elizabeth in regard to her marriage with Mr Collins, ‘...I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic you know. I ever was. I ask only for comfortable home; and considering Mr Collins character, connections, and situations in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state’. (Austen 93)*

This further demonstrates the point that Charlotte in a male dominant society, felt compelled to marry in order to secure her own future.

**Elaine Showalter's Theory:**

In “A Literature of Their Own”, Elaine Showalter argued that literary subcultures all go through three major phases of development. For literature by or about women, she labels these stages the Feminine, Feminist, and Female:

**Feminine Stage** -- involves “imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition” and “internalization of its standards.” /accepting the domination/

**Feminist Stage** -- involves “protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights....”

**Female Stage** -- this is the “phase of self-discovery, a turning inwards freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.”

**Advantages:** Women have been underrepresented in the traditional cannon, and a feminist approach to literature attempts to redress this problem.

**Disadvantages:** Feminists turn literary criticism into a political battlefield and overlook the merits of works they consider “patriarchal.” When arguing for a distinct feminine writing style, they tend to relegate women’s literature to a ghetto status; this in turn prevents female literature from being naturally included in the literary cannon. The feminist approach is often too theoretical.

**Checklist of Feminist Critical Questions**



- To what extent does the representation of women (and men) in the work reflect the place and time in which the work was written?
- How are the relationships between men and women or those between members of the same sex presented in the work? What roles do men and women assume and perform and with what consequences?
- Does the author present the work from within a predominantly male or female sensibility? Why might this have been done, and with what effects?
- How do the facts of the author's life relate to the presentation of men and women in the work? To their relative degrees of power?
- How do other works by the author correspond to this one in their depiction of the power relationships between men and women?

## 5.2 Marxist Criticism:

### FAQ

1. What is Marxism?
2. Do literature and politics have relationship? How and why?
3. How do you observe the use of language and social stratum?

**Marxist criticism** is a strongly politically-oriented criticism, deriving from the theories of the social philosopher Karl Marx. Marxist critics insist that all use of language is influenced by social class and economics. It directs attention to the idea that all language makes ideological statements about things like class, economics, race, and power, and *the function of literary output is to either support or criticize the political and economic structures in place*. Some Marxist critics use literature to describe the competing socioeconomic interests that advance capitalistic interests such as money and power over socialist interests such as morality and justice. Because of this focus, *Marxist criticism focuses on content and theme rather than form*.

When Marxist theories are applied to literature, they provide a means for assessing the social significance of a text. Marxist criticism believes that literature is one form of cultural production of a complex society and, as such, reflects the forces shaping the society's culture. This is to say that literature is not only a mirror which reflects society. But it is also a dynamic participant in the shaping of a culture.

Core Marxist Principles & Basic Terms:

**Proletariat:** that class of society, which does not have ownership of the means of production.

**Bourgeoisie:** wealthy class that rules society.

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**Power of the Base:** Marx believed that the economic means of production in a society (the base) both creates and controls all human institutions and ideologies (the superstructure).

This superstructure includes:-

- *all social and legal institutions,*
- *all political and educational systems,*
- *all religions, and all art.*

**Alienation** -- Marx believed that capitalist society created three forms of alienation:

**First**, the worker is alienated from what he produces.

**Second**, the worker is alienated from himself; only when he is not working does he feel truly himself.

**Finally**, in capitalist society people are alienated from each other; that is, in a competitive society people are set against other people.

Marx believed that the solution was communism, which would allow the development of our full “potentialities as a human.”

**Example:-**

- Consider Cinderella as a representative of the proletariat: oppressed by her bourgeoisie stepmother and stepsisters, who have stolen her rightful inheritance and turned her into a servant in her own home;
- desiring to join the ranks of the bourgeoisie by marrying the prince.

**Advantages:** Like Archetypal criticism, this theory encourages a careful reading of a text. It also does not limit a reader to view the text in isolation, but allows the reader to think about the text in its social, historical, and current contexts.

**Disadvantages:** The main concern some readers may have about this theory is that it only examines a limited aspect of the text. Some people feel threatened by the focus on “ideology.” It dismisses the beauty of writing and does not allow the reader to simply enjoy the text.

**Checklist of Marxist/Cultural Criticism:**

- What is the economic status of the characters?
- What happens to them as a result of this status?
- How do they fare against economic and political odds?
- What other conditions stemming from their class does the writer emphasize? (e.g., poor education, poor nutrition, poor health care, inadequate opportunity)

- What or whose ideological values structure the text? How are these evident?
- Who has power (and of what sorts) in the texts? How does this power operate and change as the text progresses?
- What “master” or dominant social narratives are perpetuated or critiqued and disrupted in the text? (eg. the American Dream, whereby, with hard work and individual effort, a poor person can achieve success)
- In what other ways does economic determinism affect the work? How should readers consider the story in today’s modern economic setting (nationally, globally, etc.)?
- How is social objectification evident and how does it operate in the text?
- What are the social forces that affect the author’s writing or the text’s marketing and reception?

## 7. Practical Criticism or Applied Criticism

### Brain storming questions

1. Have you ever shared a symposium of literature? if ‘yes’ how was it? If ‘No’ what do you think it will be about?
2. How do you perceive a literary work after reading it?

Concerns itself with the discussion of particular works and writers; in applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the mode of the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation are often left implicit. Practical Criticism is sometimes distinguished into impressionistic criticism and judicial criticism.

### 7.1 Impressionistic Criticism and reader-response criticism:-

Attempts to represent in words the felt qualities of a particular passage or work, and to express the responses that the work directly evokes from the critic.

"Gut-level" response to a literary work; immediate & intuitive judgment of its worth, determined to a great extent by the reader's personality type and past experiences (including his/her past experiences with other works of literature). Also: the literary "critiques" of many pre-20th-century (especially 19th-century Romantic) critics, whose criticism was as much self-expression as anything else. Valuable--and perhaps inevitable--starting-point to any response of literature, but dangerously subjective ("oh, no!"), and best combined with one or more of the following, more "intellectually reputable," types of literary criticism.

Reader-Response criticism attempts a **psycho-philosophical** analysis of how a reader encounters & interprets a text. Some of the more radical permutations lead to an almost complete reader subjectivism (the text is what the individual reader *thinks* it means, however absurd), while other versions analyze the means by which various readers arrive at a consensus regarding the

"meaning"--which can then be assumed to be a pretty much "correct" interpretation by the "ideal reader."

## Rules of Reader response criticism

**Rule #1:** Do not ADD anything to the text.

- Let's say that you like happy endings. You want every story to end harmoniously, and you feel that one can make a happy ending out of any situation.
- If you interpret the ending of every story to be a positive one, are you breaking one of the reader response rules? Or is your interpretation valid?

Sorry, but not all endings can be happy ones.

- Yes, you are breaking one of the reader response rules by making everything end happily.
- Your interpretations is NOT valid.

Regardless of how much you want to see the positive, **you cannot ADD WHAT IS NOT THERE to the text in order to make the ending a happy one.**

**Rule #2:** Do not IGNORE parts of the text.

- You are reading a story in which the main character makes his living by defrauding the elderly and stealing their money.
- He lies to his elderly clients who trust him and shows little remorse for his crimes.
- However, he demonstrates an amazing ability to empathize with disabled people and often volunteers his time and resources to help the disabled.
- When writing an essay about the story, you paint the character as a cold-hearted predator and never mention his concern for the disabled.
- If you present only the character's crime, are you breaking one of the reader response rules? Or is your interpretation valid?
- Yes, you are breaking one of the reader response rules by ignoring the character's attributes.
- Your interpretation is NOT valid.
- Regardless of how much you dislike a character, you cannot ignore all of the attributes of a character (even if you want to).

**Rule #3:** Do not CHANGE parts of the text.

- This one seems obvious—you cannot change the text. Most of the time, text-changing occurs in error. Be sure you have a solid understanding of the text before interpreting it.

As long as readers do not manipulate the text to “fit” a contrived interpretation, and as long as readers can provide textual evidence, then any interpretation can be “valid” or “correct.”

**Advantage:-**

- ❖ It doesn't need too much research like historical and biographical criticism.

**Disadvantage**

- ❖ It is a 'gut-level' response to a literary work.
- ❖ Too subjective
- ❖ Immediate and intuitive judgment

**Checklists for Impressionistic criticism**

- What is your first impression after reading a given literary work?
- What general standards of literary excellence you use to judge a given literary work?
- How do you compare your past experience of reading other literary works and the current work?

**7.2 Judicial Criticism**, attempts not merely to communicate, but to analyze and explain the effects of a work by reference to its subject, organization, techniques, and style, and to base the critic's individual judgments or general standards of literary excellence.

**Advantage of judicial criticism**

- Best for analysis and explanation
- Uses to see the organization of the different effects of a literary work.
- Draws the standards of literary excellence.

**Disadvantage of judicial criticism**

- Too personal
- Doesn't give room for communication with the literary piece
- May be biased in judging on the literary excellence

**Check list for judicial criticism**

- How are the different aspects of the literary elements work together towards the theme?
- What are the effects of the different parts and aspects on the excellence of the literary work?
- What literary standards does the work deserve?

**8. Classical criticism and mimesis**

Pre reading questions

1. What is Classicism?
2. What is miming?
3. When saying classical literature, do we mean literatures accompanied by music?

It means those qualities which are most characteristic of the best literature of Greece & Rome. Consider the works of the ancient Greek and Roman literatures; the works of Sophocles. According to Aristotle art should be an imitation of the real life and this in turn leads to the artist, in this case the author, poet and playwright is restricted from producing literary arts from his/her own imagination. In the poetics of Aristotle for example, the major characters of a drama should be from the elite or higher class of the society. The good character should be awarded for the good deeds and the villain should be punished for the evil action.

In classical criticism there are already pre defined criterion for a literary work to be called literature. So based on these criterion, one can criticize and judge a given literary work objectively.

**The following are some of the pre defined parameters:-**

- ✦ In a classic tragedy, the hero (female or male) is a person of great significance in society, often a member of the royal family.
- ✦ The action of the drama shows the changing fortunes of the protagonist, who at the beginning of the play enjoys high status, but by the end has lost everything of value.
- ✦ The tragic hero usually meets her or his downfall because of an error in judgment, because of a character flaw, or because of the effects of fate or circumstances beyond the control of the individual.

***Example***

In Oedipus Rex, the title character fits Aristotle's definition: He is a high-born man who enjoys "great reputation and prosperity." Oedipus, for example, has earned the gratitude of his people by freeing them from the Sphinx, a monster who had been holding Thebes in her evil power and forcing the citizens to pay tribute. When Oedipus answers her riddle correctly, she is forced to kill herself, thus freeing Thebes. As the action of the play unfolds, however, the audience sees Oedipus losing everything he values. Not only he, but also his wife and children are devastated when Oedipus is forced, in one of the most powerful recognition scenes in the history of drama, to see that Jocasta is not only his wife, she is also his mother. As if this revelation were not enough, Oedipus learns that in spite of his attempts to escape the Oracle's predictions that he would kill his father, he has, in fact, murdered King Laios, Jocasta's first husband and Oedipus's birth father.

By the end of the play, Jocasta has killed herself, Oedipus has put out his own eyes and been sent into exile, and his children are now forced to live under the stigma of having been conceived

incestuously. As is typical of Greek tragedy, the action of the play has led not only to the downfall of the hero, but also to the physical or emotional destruction of his entire family.

**Mimetic Criticism** views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is that of the “truth” of its representation to the subject matter that it represents, or should represent.

**Advantage:-**

- ❖ It looks the entire life of the real world.

**Disadvantage:-**

- ❖ Doesn't give room for Scientific and fantasy literary works.
- ❖ Too conservative in principle. Example in character selection, the major character should be from the high status of the royal family.

**Checklist for mimetic criticism**

- Does the literary work reveal the phenomenon of the real world?
- How are the characters elected by the writer, poet, or playwright?
- Who is the major character? Where is this character from?
- What happened at the end? Are the good rewarded and the evil punished?

## 9. What is Romanticism?

- A. “Love stories, love movies, love songs...” Do you like it?
- B. What can we relate love with?
- C. What do we mean by the shift from human substance to the beauty of nature?
- D. Have you read Words Worth's poem “Tintern Abbey”? If ‘Yes’, who are the characters?

Romantic is one of the theme that we always thinking of. I believe people enjoy romantic stories, drama, and songs, especially the people who are in love. They have strong feeling with it. Why do we have “Romantic”? I think it began in history. People tend to change their life by introducing principles. The revolutions in France during the late 1700's were influenced by Romantic ideas. Romanticism is an abstract and the coolest reaction in 18th-century.

**Romanticism gives room for/emphasizes on:-**

- ❖ The fervor but not the rationale;
- ❖ The imagination and perception but not common sense;
- ❖ Emotion expression but not self-discipline (not to control one's feelings).

The German poet Friedrich Schlegel, defined it as “**literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form**”, emphasized the term romantic in describing literature. Victor Hugo's phrase "liberalism in literature" is likely.

**From the above ideas,, Romanticism can be defined as freedom from rules, love of nature, and a style of art and literature.** It is clear that the term “Romanticism” has been used in varying contexts and has come to mean different things to different people. Romanticism can be classified into four categories--literature, politics, culture, and arts.

**Advantage:-**

- ❖ It diverts the idea of Aristotle as art should be imitation of the reality.
- ❖ Since authors are multiple eyed, they can see beyond what the ordinary can see in their imagination.
- ❖ It gives room for imagination and style of authors.
- ❖ Scientific and fantasy literary works can be given attention

**Disadvantage:-**

- ❖ May neglect aside human experience.
- ❖ Doesn't imitate the real life or the other way round with emotion.

### **As a Conclusion**

Still now we have been discussing about the general idea of criticism in relation with the different literary theories and principles of various times, but specifically, there can be some unique points to be raised when dealing with the various genres of literature. Having this in mind, following are a few distinctions to bear in mind. You are encouraged to consult other secondary sources when considering the special qualities of the various genres.

#### **Poetry**

Poetry employs its own special diction, i.e. words, phrases, sentence structure and imaginative/metaphorical language. These are not part of the ordinary discourse of the time and sometimes serve to distinguish a poet from others of the same period. By the eighteenth century, poetic diction came to mean poetic language written for the educated classes. Elevated genres such as the epic, ode and tragedy required a refined diction in order to match style with content. A special diction was required for descriptive poems and pastorals in order to elevate their “lowly” content to the level of elegance required in poetry. The romantics, and particularly William Wordsworth, challenged the idea that there is an essential difference between the languages of prose and poetry. As already pointed out, Wordsworth believed that ordinary, everyday language can also be the language of poetry. The debate continues to this day. The literary critic, particularly if s/he is a New Critic or a deconstructionist, must pay special attention to poetic diction; even its absence is of significance.

#### **Drama**



The literary critic needs to pay attention to the structure of the play, e.g. division into acts, structure of the plot, how atmosphere is created, how stage directions function, and what kind of information they provide. The critic also focuses on the depiction and possible development of the different characters, differences in language between the various characters, dialect, abstract vs. concrete language, and the use of rhetorical devices such as repetition, questions, irony, sarcasm, persuasive words or expressions etc.

Some critics argue that reading is a poor substitute for watching a play. This is not completely true. Charles Lamb, the nineteenth-century critic, believed that actors got in the way of a true appreciation of a play, arguing that Shakespeare's plays in particular suffered by being staged as there is much that does not come under the heading of acting. While we may regard Lamb's views as extreme, it is nevertheless true that there are certain advantages to reading as opposed to viewing a play. These include: freedom to form one's own interpretation, access to additional information that may not appear as part of the performance, e.g. prefaces, notes, stage directions, and the possibility to re-read and focus on important passages. This is particularly important with older plays that use unfamiliar language.

### **The short story**

The short story is a piece of prose with a plot, characters and setting. It may have a theme and employs similar rhetorical devices to those used in the novel. It is different from the latter, however, in that it has a limited amount of space, just a few pages, to organize characters and actions into a plot. It resembles the flash of a camera: it captures a day or an incident. The short story cannot build up to the latter, and may not provide a resolution. There is no space for leisurely analysis of character or event.

The novel is more committed to realism than the short story or, to put it another way, the short story gives a heightened sense of realism for a limited period and in a limited context. It normally starts immediately before the climax. The central event reveals considerable detail about the protagonist's character and life. Edgar Allan Poe, one of the earliest short-story writers and the creator of both the horror and detective story, claimed that the short story has the ability to control the reader's soul because its short length allows no interruption or distraction. There is an uninterrupted communion between writer and reader. The short story is also characterized by a singleness of focus which is not present in the novel. Every detail counts in a short story, and for this reason, the artistic ability of the writer is usually more obvious in a story than in a novel. A short story critic must pay special attention to detail, focus and structure.

## **THE NOVEL**

In criticizing novel, you can use the following as a torch to guide your way to criticize.

- Read the novel thoroughly and taking notes while reading

- Write down the plot summary of the novel
- Refer different approaches of criticism and decide which approach may fit with the novel you read.
- Don't forget that there sometimes comes the incidence that you may be required to use more than a single approach /eclectic approach/ because sometimes a book may not only be criticized using single approach
- Begin writing the criticism, but don't forget that criticizing means devaluing the book, but to see the book in an objective and unbiased manner.
- Give textual evidences for each of your arguments because textual evidences are your evidences to assert your argument.

### Reading Assignment

**Having the following short ideas as a spring board, read about each of them in detail and write down your own detail note.**

**Pragmatic Criticism** views the work as something which is constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the audience (effects such as aesthetic pleasure, instruction, or kinds of emotion), and it tends to judge the value of the work according to its success in achieving that aim.

**Expressive Criticism** treats a literary work primarily in relation to its author. It defines poetry as an expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet's imagination operating on his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, or its adequacy to the poet's individual vision or state of mind; and it often looks in the work for evidences of the particular temperament and experiences of the author who, consciously or unconsciously, has revealed himself in it.

**Objective Criticism** approaches a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called "extrinsic" reference to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be analyzed and judged solely by "intrinsic" criteria such as complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements.

**Think of the following questions after the lecture delivered**

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- ☞ What are the benefits of each form of criticism?
- ☞ What are potential problems with each form?
- ☞ Is there a “right” or a “wrong” form?
- ☞ Can the mode of criticism alter the entire meaning of a text?