

## GENDER/FEMINIST CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. The work doesn't have an objective status, an autonomy; instead, any reading of it is influenced by the reader's own status, which includes gender or attitudes toward gender.
2. In the production of literature and within stories themselves, men and women have not had equal access.
3. Men and women are different: They write differently, read differently, and write about their reading differently. These differences should be valued.

## SOCIAL CLASS/MARXIST CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. The German philosopher Karl Marx argued that the way people think and behave in any society is determined by basic economic factors.
2. In his view, those groups of people who owned and controlled major industries could exploit the rest of the population, through conditions of employment and by forcing their own values and beliefs onto other social groups.
3. Marxist criticism applies these arguments to the study of literary texts.

## GENDER/FEMINIST CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Consider the gender of the author and/or the characters: What role does gender or sexuality play in this work?
2. Specifically, observe how sexual stereotypes might be reinforced or undermined. Try to see how the work reflects, or distorts, or recuperates the place of women (and men) in society.
3. Look at the effects of power drawn from gender within the plot and/or form.

## SOCIAL CLASS/MARXIST CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Explore the way different groups of people are represented in texts. Evaluate the level of social realism in the text and how society is portrayed.
2. Consider how the text itself is a commodity that reproduces certain social beliefs and practices. Analyze the social effect of the literary work.
3. Look at the effects of power drawn from economic or social class.

## BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Because authors typically write about things they care deeply about and know well, the events and circumstances of their lives are often reflected in the literary works they create.
2. The context for a literary work includes information about the author; their historical moment; the systems of meaning available at the time of this writing.
3. Interpretation of the work should be based on an understanding of its context. That context can provide insight into themes, historical references, social oppositions or movements, and the creation of fictional characters.

## ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Meaning cannot exist solely on the page of a work, nor can that work be treated as an independent entity.
2. Humankind has a “collective unconscious,” a kind of universal psyche, that is manifested in dreams and myths and harbors themes and images that we all inherit.
3. These recurring myths, symbols, and character types appear and reappear in literary works.

## BIOGRAPHICAL CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Research the author’s life and relate that information to the work.
2. Research the author’s time (the political history, intellectual history, economic history, etc.), and relate that information to the work.
3. Research the systems of meaning available to the author and relate those systems to the work.

## ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Consider the *genre* of the work and how the genre affects the meaning; for example, comedy, romance, tragedy, irony.
2. Look for story patterns and symbolic associations from other texts you’ve read such as black hats, springtime settings, evil stepmothers, and so forth.
3. Consider your associations with these symbols as you construct meaning from the text.

**READER RESPONSE CRITICISM****FORMALIST/NEW CRITICISM****Assumptions**

1. An author's intentions are not reliably available to readers; all they have is the text.
2. Out of the text, readers actively and personally make meaning.
3. Responding to a text is a process, and descriptions of that process are valuable.

**Assumptions**

1. The critic's interest ultimately should be focused on the work itself (not the author's intention, or the reader's response).
2. The formalist perspective pays particular attention to these issues of form and convention.
3. The formalist perspective says that a literary work should be treated as an independent and self-sufficient object.

**READER RESPONSE CRITICISM****FORMALIST/NEW CRITICISM****Strategies**

1. Move through the text in super slow motion, describing the response of an informed reader at various points.
2. Or describe your own response moving through the text.
3. React to the text as a whole, embracing and expressing the subjective and personal response it engenders.

**Strategies**

1. Read closely. You can assume that every aspect is carefully calculated to contribute to the work's unity—figures of speech, point of view, diction, recurrent ideas or events, everything.
2. The methods used in this perspective are those of close reading: a detailed and subtle analysis of the formal components that make up the literary work, such as the meanings and interactions of words, figures of speech, and symbols.
3. Say how the work is unified, how the various elements work to unify it.

## HISTORICAL CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. When reading a text, you have to place it within its historical context.
2. History refers to the social, political, economic, cultural, and/or intellectual climate of the time.
3. Specific historical information will be of key interest: about the time during which an author wrote, about the time in which the text is set, about the ways in which people of the period saw and thought about the world in which they lived.

## POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Colonialism is a powerful, often destructive historical force that shapes not only the political futures of the countries involved but also the identities of colonized and colonizing people.
2. Successful colonialism depends on a process of “othering” the people colonized. That is, the colonized people are seen as dramatically different from and lesser than the colonizers.
3. Because of this, literature written in colonizing cultures often distorts the experiences and realities of colonized people. Literature written by colonized people often includes attempts to articulate more empowered identities and reclaim cultures in the face of colonization.

## HISTORICAL CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Research the fundamental historical events of the period in which the author wrote.
2. Consider the fundamental historical events of the period in which the literary work is set, if it is different from the period in which the author wrote.
3. View the text as part of a larger context of historical movements and consider how it both contributes to and reflects certain fundamental aspects of human history.

## POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Search the text for references to colonization or current and formerly colonized people. In these references, how are the colonized people portrayed? How is the process of colonization portrayed?
2. Consider what images of “others” or processes of “othering” are present in the text. How are these others portrayed?
3. Analyze how the text deals with cultural conflicts between the colonizing culture and the colonized or traditional culture.

## STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Draws on linguistic theory.
2. There are structural relationships between concepts that are revealed in language.
3. Linguistic *signs* are composed of two parts—the *signifier* (sound patterns) and the *signified* (the concept or meaning of the word).
4. Through these relationships, meaning is produced, which frames and motivates the actions of individuals and groups.

## DECONSTRUCTIONIST CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Meaning is made by binary oppositions, *but* one item is unavoidably favored (or “privileged”) over the other.
2. This hierarchy is probably arbitrary and can be exposed and reversed.
3. Further, the text’s oppositions and hierarchy can be called into question because texts contain within themselves unavoidable contradictions, gaps, spaces, and absences that defeat closure and determinate meaning. All reading is misreading.

## STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Focus on the text alone, not external information.
2. Examine the underlying *system* or patterns of language. By examining the pattern of linguistic signs, we can establish the paradigm that will reveal meaning.
3. Identify and analyze contrasting elements (binary oppositions) to determine the important elements in the text.
4. Look at structural elements such as words, stanzas, chapters or parts, or characters, narrators, or speakers to see how they can reveal important contrasts and differences.
5. What system of relationships governs the work as a whole or links this work to others?

## DECONSTRUCTIONIST CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Identify the oppositions in the text. Determine which member appears to be favored and look for evidence that contradicts that favoring.
2. Identify what appears central to the text and what appears to be marginal and excluded.
3. Expose the text’s indeterminacy. Whereas formalism assumes that you should read a literary work closely as if it made sense, deconstruction assumes the opposite: that if you read closely enough, the text will fail to make sense—or at least will contradict itself.

## POLITICAL CRITICISM

### Assumptions

1. Literary texts do not have an objective meaning; instead, any reading of it is influenced by the reader's own status, which includes gender, or attitudes toward gender, and social class or attitudes toward social class.
2. Literary texts are commodities that reproduce certain social beliefs and practices. For example, historically the production and reception of literature have been controlled largely by men; it is important to insert a feminist viewpoint to bring to our attention neglected works as well as new approaches to old works.
3. Literary texts represent and are influenced by the particular ideological viewpoint of the author, whether it is their political perspective, gender, or social class.

## POLITICAL CRITICISM

### Strategies

1. Consider the gender and the social class of the author, the characters: What role does gender, sexuality, or social class play in this work?
2. Observe how social stereotypes might be reinforced or undermined. Try to see how the work reflects, or distorts, or interrupts our commonly held assumptions about others based on their gender or class.
3. Explore the way different groups of people are represented in texts. Evaluate the level of social realism in the text: How is society portrayed?
4. Determine the ideological stance of the text: What worldview does the text represent?