

## Literary Movements in Literature

### **Russian Formalism and New Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. How does the work's form contribute to its meaning?
2. How do the work's devices (e.g. rhythm, imagery, language, structure, sound, paradox, denotation, connotation and allusion) enhance meaning?
3. Does the work contain any paradoxes? If so, how do they complicate, create and enhance meaning?
4. What is the tone of the work? What formal elements reveal the tone? How does tone contribute to meaning?

### **Structuralist Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. What is a sign and what is a referent?
2. Define binary opposition.
3. What is Saussurean Linguistics?

### **Biographical Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. What veritable aspects of the author's biography show up in his or her work?
2. Do places where the author grew up appear in his / her work?
3. How does the author weave aspects of his / her familial life into the world of the literary text? Does the author address relations with parents, siblings, or significant others? How do these relationships create meaning in the text?
4. What distinguishes the author from his / her persona in the text? Is there a distinction? How can you tell?

### **Deconstructive and Post-Structuralist Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. What binary oppositions or tensions (e.g. light/dark, good/evils, old/young, poor/rich, masculine/ feminine) operate in the text?
2. How do other details and aspects of the text (e.g. dialogue, denotation, connotation, allusion and imagery) undermine or subvert tension in the text?
3. How does the text uphold or resolve contradictory meanings?
4. How does the text explore the free play between two polarities?

### **Reader-Response Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. Who is the reader? Who is the implied reader?
2. Does the text overtly or subtly ask the reader to sympathize or empathize in any way?
3. What experiences, thoughts or knowledge does the text evoke?
4. What aspects or characters of the text do you identify or misidentify with, and how does this process of identification affect your response to the text?
5. What is the difference between your general reaction to (e.g. like or dislike) and reader-oriented interpretation of the text?

### **Psychological Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. What motivates the speaker or protagonist? Does the speaker or protagonist appear to be consciously or unconsciously motivated?
2. How do desires and wishes manifest in the text? Do they remain largely fulfilled or unfulfilled? How does their fulfillment or lack thereof, affect the character's development?
3. Does the text chart the emotional development of a character? How?
4. What archetypal narrative patterns do you observe in the text? Are there archetypal characters in the text? What purpose do these narrative patterns or characters serve?
5. Do principle characters resolve their psychological conflicts? Do they successfully recognize their unconscious complexes, desires, sense of lack, or previously unrecognized or unintegrated aspects of their personality?
6. How do the characters in the text evoke archetypal figures such as the Great or Nurturing Mother, the Wounded Child, the Whore, the Crone, the Lover, or the Destroying Angel?

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### **Feminist (Gender Studies) Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. Are men or women noticeably present in the text? If so, how?
2. Consider stereotypical representations of women as the beloved, mothers, virgins, whores and goddesses. Does the text refer to, uphold or resist any of these stereotypes? How?
3. What roles have been assigned to the men and women in the text? Are the roles stereotypical? Do gender roles conflict with personal desires?
4. Does the text paint a picture of gender relations? If so, how would you describe gender relations in the text? On what are they based? What sustains them? What causes conflict between men and women?
5. Are gender relations in the text celebrated? Denigrated? Mocked? Mystified? If so, how?

### **New Historical and Cultural Materialist Criticism**

1. Does the text address the political or social concerns of its time period? If so, what issues does the text examine?
2. What historical events or controversies does the text overtly address or allude to? Does the text comment on those events?
3. What political figures does the text allude to or criticize? Does the text overtly or subversively critique these figures?
4. What types of historical documents (e.g. wills, laws, religious tracts, narratives, art, etc.) might illuminate the meaning and the purpose of the literary text?
5. How does the text relate to other literary texts from the same time period?

### **Marxist Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. What classes or socioeconomic statuses are represented in the text?
2. Are all the segments of society accounted for, or does the text exclude a particular class?
3. How do the socioeconomic statuses of various characters affect their choices and actions?
4. Does class restrict or empower the characters in the text?
5. How does the text depict a struggle between classes, or how does class contribute to the conflict of the text?
6. How does the text depict the relationship between the individual and the state? Does the state view individuals as means for production, or as ends in themselves?

### **Ethical Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. Does the text present concepts such as good, bad, evil, moral or immoral? If so, how are these concepts presented - as empirical truths, as rationalized mental phenomena, or as something else? Does the text explore shades of gray?
2. What ethical principles does the text present, challenge, question, probe, confirm or deny?
3. What are the sources of ethical principles in the text? Are the sources intrinsic (e.g. from beliefs and values) or extrinsic (e.g. from family, social customs or religious institutions)?
4. Does the text espouse a set or system of values?
5. What characters provide opportunities to conduct case studies? Does the text offer verdicts for its cases?

### **Post-Colonial Criticism Questions to Ask:**

1. Where and when is the work set - in a colony, a former colony, or a country that has gained its independence from Great Britain, Spain, France, or another political power?
2. How does the text depict relations between the colonizer and the colonized?
3. What principles of colonialism operate in the text? Do colonial powers usurp land, exploit the economy or environment, or enslave the indigenous population?
4. How do the colonial conflicts and politics of the text affect its meaning?