

Critical position cards

MORAL

For me, literature is nothing unless it teaches its reader something and helps them to become better people. All good literature is basically moral and uplifting. It is important to consider the themes in the text, to understand its moral purpose.

READER RESPONSE THEORY

The literature I prefer to read is often outside the white Anglo-Saxon tradition. I began by being interested in texts which explore the black struggle against injustice and oppression. I am aware of the negative portrayals of black people, and their absence generally, in white literature. I have become more interested in challenging the claims made by traditional critics that great literature has timeless and universal significance. I am aware when Eurocentric attitudes are taken for granted, and I look in the text for cultural, regional, social and national differences in outlook and experiences. I am interested in the way colonial countries and people are represented in texts by Western writers. I also explore the ways in which postcolonial writers write about their own identity and experiences.

GENRE THEORY

I believe that all literature can be classified into various types or forms, e.g. tragedy, comedy, romance, thriller, epic, lyric etc. I look for ways in which the text relates to the conventions of its genre. You can only really make sense of a text when you recognise the tradition to which it belongs.

FEMINIST

I believe that 'feminine' and 'masculine' are ideas constructed by our culture, and it is important to be aware of this when reading texts from periods and cultures different from our own. I prefer to read literature written by women, which explores women's experience of the world. I am interested in how women are represented in texts written by men, and how these texts display the power relations between the sexes.

PSYCHOANALYTIC

Because of my interest in the unconscious, I pay most attention to what is glossed over or 'repressed'. I want to look beyond the obvious surface meaning to what the text is 'really' about. I also look for representations of psychological states or phases in literature, and am more interested in the emotional conflicts between the characters or groups in a text than in its wider context.

HISTORICAL

I read historical and other relevant texts, alongside literary ones, in order to see more clearly the context in which the literature was produced, and to recover its history. I look at the ways these texts have been packaged and consumed in the present day. However, I also analyse the text closely, in order to question previous ways in which the text has been read. I consider all forms of culture, popular as well as high culture, to be relevant.

STRUCTURALIST/POST-STRUCTURALIST

I am not interested so much in when a text was written, or who it was written by, or even what it is about. I believe that we use language, not simply to describe the world, but to construct it. Therefore, in literature, I am most interested in how the text is constructed: its form, its overall structure and the patterns of language in it, especially pairs of opposites. Texts from popular culture, societies, belief systems are all structures which can be explored and analysed like a literary text. Some critics who, like me, were interested in patterns and structures became more interested in the gaps, silences and absences in texts. They became known as post-structuralists.

