Literary analysis is a critical response to a literary text in the form of a critical essay or an oral commentary. It includes a thorough interpretation of the work. Such analysis may be based from a variety of critical approaches or movements, e.g. archetypal criticism, cultural criticism, feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, Marxist Criticism, New Criticism (formalism/structuralism), New Historicism, post-structuralism, and reader-response criticism. Students in this course will write a critical essay based upon four literary texts for their ISU.

**Archetypal Criticism**

Archetypal criticism is a critical approach to literature that seeks to find and understand the purpose of archetypes within literature. These archetypes may be themes, such as love, characterizations, such as the hero; or patterns, such as death and rebirth. Archetypal criticism draws on the works of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, literary critic Northrop Frye, and others. Unlike psychoanalytic critics, archetypal critics such as Frye do not attempt to explain why the archetypes exist.

Archetype: something that represents the essential elements of its category or class of things; the word is Greek for “original pattern” from which all copies are made, a prototype. Certain themes of human life (e.g. love, loss) character types (e.g. the rebel, the wise elder), animals (e.g. snake) and patterns (e.g. the quest, the descent into the underworld) are considered to be archetypal, forming a part of the collective unconscious (the sum of society’s inherited mental images). For example, a character in a TV series who continuously changes careers might be said to be the archetypal “seeker”.

**Cultural Criticism**

Cultural criticism is a recent movement in criticism that is interdisciplinary by extending the range of examined texts beyond just the literary works themselves to objects or practices that can be interpreted as representative of a culture’s beliefs, values, laws, for example. Practitioners of cultural criticism view a text in relation to the dominant or competing ideologies (belief systems) of the time and place in which the text was written. Works are therefore considered in light of their historical and cultural contexts. For example, Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness may be read in terms of practices of European imperialists, race relations in Africa, or the economic history of ivory and other raw products in the continent.

**Feminist Criticism**

Feminist Criticism is literary criticism based on feminist theories. It considers texts with the knowledge that societies treat men and women inequitably. Feminist criticism will analyze texts in light of patriarchal (male dominated) cultural institutions, phallocentric (male centred) language, masculine and feminine stereotypes, and the unequal treatment of male and female writers. Feminist criticism developed primarily in the 1960’s and 1970’s, although it is evident in earlier works as well, for example in the works of Virginia Woolf and Mary Wollstonecraft. More recent feminist and gender studies investigate social constructions related to gender as they appear in literature.

**Marxist Criticism**

Based on the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883) this school of thought contends that history and culture is largely a struggle between economic classes, and literature is often a reflection of the attitudes and interests of the dominant class. An often-repeated statement from Marx expresses a basic idea specific to this form of criticism. “It’s not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”.

**New Criticism**

New Criticism is a movement in literary criticism that proposes close reading and textual analysis of the text itself. It is referred to as “New” because it operates contrary to the previously favoured focus on the author’s biography, the historical context, and the perceived parallels between these and the text. Practitioners focus on both the “external form” (e.g. ballad, ode) and the “internal forms” (e.g. structure, repetition, patterns of figurative language, plot/content, syntax/diction, tone, mood, context/setting, style, literary devices, theme). These practitioners reject consideration of the author’s intention and the affect on the reader as illegitimate. The movement is also referred to as formalism or structuralism.

**New Historicism**

New Historicism is a range of critical practices that examine works in their cultural and historical contexts. Practitioners of the critical movement developed it by examining a wide range of texts such as newspapers, advertisements, popular music, historical accounts, poetry, novels, and diaries. Practitioners believe that works cannot be viewed in isolation from history and culture. A reading of a work must take into account its intention, genre, and historical situation.

**Post-structuralism**

Post-structuralism refers to a critical approach to language, literature, and culture that questions or criticizes structuralism. Like structuralists, post-structuralists rely on close readings of texts; however, post-structuralists believe that language is inherently unstable in meaning and the meaning of the texts is ultimately indecipherable. The best known post-structuralist approach is deconstructionism.

**Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Psychoanalytic criticism is literary criticism grounded in psychoanalytic theory of the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Practitioners attempt to psychoanalyze the author’s unconscious desires, the reader’s responses, and the characters in the work. The last approach involves examining the text for symbols and psychological complexes. In addition to Freud, key figures are psychiatrist Carl Jung and, most recently, Jacques Lacan.

**Reader-Response Criticism**

Reader-response criticism is a critical approach that shifts the emphasis to the reader from the text or the work’s author and context. This approach focuses on the individual reader’s evolving response to the text. The readers, through their own values and experiences, “create” the meaning of the text and therefore there is no one correct meaning.

When analyzing a text, from which a student will write a major paper, it is advised that the student should first focus on the elements of a story: plot, setting, atmosphere, mood, character, theme and title.  The next logical approach is to look at the language (devices and patterns) and form of the text (structure). Then the student might consider any of the following approaches such as New Historicism, New Criticism, Archetypal Criticism or Cultural Criticism.

**New Criticism/ Formalism**

traditional approach to understanding literature. analyze literary works as complete entities within themselves. meaning can be found by only analyzing the text. (plot, structure, characterization, tone, mood, etc.)

**Archetypical or Mythic**

approach that looks at the traditional meanings of in literature. uses clues such as symbolism and imagery. relies on archetypes.

**Empowerment**

concerns the protrayal of social biases toward specific groups. forces readers to understand thematic content since many biases deal with issues such as independence, self-discovery, etc. zeroes in on biases and stereotypes.

**Marxist**

concers the representation of social classes, socioeconomic distinctions and disparities, and the material conditions in which characters function.

**Didactic or Moral**

looks at the noble attempts literature makes to elevate readers above physical existence into the realm of moral goodness. asserts that good literature should strenghten us by teaching us what having integrity and values means for socitey as well as the individual

**Auto/Biographical**

attempts to understand literary works through the author's life ( including perceptions and beliefs)

**Psychological**

attempts to explain how the author's emotional history may have impacted a work.

**Historical or New Historical**

examines events surrounding the setting of a work and analyzes it within that context. emphasizes the age during which the author lived and wrote to construct meaning within a literary work

**Reader Response**

focuses on the intellectual and emotional connections readers make with a work. relies on the reader's reaction to the literature.

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