

Handout 1

## Three Highly Influential Paradigms

These Influence all the Schools & Approaches that Follow Below

Each Successive Paradigm Complicates and Incorporates Elements of Previous Paradigms

Structuralism proper actually only comes the US in the late 70s. But it epitomizes the importance most theories of the time placed on a single deep structure to explain literature and culture. Jungian or myth-based criticism identified the structure as "archetypes." Second wave feminism looked to gender difference. Psychoanalysis to the Oedipus complex. Marxism to material conditions, etc.

c.1945<----->ca1965

### **Formalism**

Goals & Assumptions

Aims to explicate the formal properties of the artwork.

Politics, artist's life, etc. secondary.

There is a limited number of great works (the canon).

Great art expresses "universal" themes

c.1965<----->ca1980

### **Deep Structure Models** 1980<----->?

Goals & Assumptions

(Structuralism proper exemplifies these trends)

Aims to uncover the "deep structure" beneath the text.

Looks for parallels with other art (or myths, texts, etc) & for parallel structures in other cultures.

Relationship between parts of structure more

important than elements of the structure.

### **Post Structuralism**

Goals & Assumptions

Aims to demonstrate how oppositions that deep structures depend on break down (deconstruction).

Texts are infinitely interpretable in theory, though not in practice (politics).

# Feminism & African-American Criticism

Because Formalism downplayed a work's political content, feminist and African American criticism were some of the first and most powerful challenges to formalist assumptions.

Feminist and African American criticism have themselves been changed in response to post-structuralist notions of identity, but also as they have evolved and complicated their earlier assumptions and goals.

Both these kinds of criticism also laid the groundwork for other approaches to related subject matter.

## Feminism & Gender Studies

ca1960 <-----> late 70s

80s <----->?

### 2nd Wave Feminist Criticism

Maintains that "the personal is political" & views women's personal experience as a valuable source of political insight.

Highlights ways that traditional criticism ignored women readers & the way women were portrayed in literature from a male-centered viewpoint.

Seeks to recover neglected women authors of the past and value female experience.

Sometimes posited a "universal sisterhood" or uniquely female experience.

Works in concert with cultural feminism's effort to create, recover, and foster a distinctively women's culture.

### 3rd Wave Feminism & Other Approaches

#### "3rd Wave" Feminism

Complicates assumptions of 2nd wave feminism by examining differences between women, including issues of race, age, and sexuality.

Many recent approaches modify other interpretive traditions (materialist criticism, psychoanalysis, French theories about language).

#### Gender Studies

Draws on feminist scholarship but also discusses men and masculinity in historically specific ways

#### Queer Theory

Takes practices like drag and butch/femme as an occasion to theorize about how representation "consolidates" or "disrupts" identity and how political dilemmas are simultaneously representational dilemmas.

## African-American Criticism & Ethnic Studies

ca1960 <-----> late 70s

### African-American Criticism

Closely connected with Civil Rights & Black Art movements. Tried to define what was unique about Afro-American experience and art.

Initially some critics took black male experience and identity to be the most authentic form of resistance to oppression. Many other culturally marginalized groups model their criticism and activism on Afro-American efforts.

Sought to theorize about African-American art in a global context. Interested in identifying & recovering African roots of much Afro-American art & culture.

80s <----->?

### Recent African American Criticism

Shifts from discussing race as an identity to examining race as a cultural construct.

Maintains its political commitments, but moves toward coalition models (from "black is beautiful" to "people of color").

Incorporates feminist critiques of earlier work that stressed male experience.

### Ethnic Studies

Examines literature from groups traditionally seen as "marginal" to US culture (Native, Asian, & Latino/a Americans).

Also examines literature of groups that became provisionally accepted (Jewish, Italian) and/or moved from being perceived as "ethnic" to "white" (Irish, Scottish).

### Post-Colonial Theory

Examines literature from areas that were formally colonized and that is created in the language or art forms of the colonizers.

## Older Interpretive Traditions that Morph into Fresh Forms

Marxist, Psychoanalytic, and Historicist approaches to art were well-established traditions that challenged and/or supplemented Formalism's dominance in the middle parts of the century.

All of these traditions changed considerably once they came into dialogue with post-structuralism. In general, the trend was away from a deterministic emphasis and deep structures (economic systems, the Oedipus Complex) and toward greater flexibility and specificity.

### "Vulgar" Marxism

Art is wholly determined by economics.

1930s Marxist criticism is a Formalist whipping boy that helps Formalists define their position that art transcends politics

### Structuralist Trends in Marxist Criticism

Contends that material conditions are the deep structure (base) for literature and culture (superstructure).

But some Marxists argue that the superstructure can act independently of the base (example: racist ideology endures after the economic system of slavery ends).

### Materialist Criticisms

Draws on components of Marxist thought to examine the role that material conditions play in art's production and status. Rarely Marxist in the popular understanding of the term.

May even be "Post-Marxist"

## **Historicism**

"Old" Historicism was another Formalist whipping boy because it (reputedly) treated art as a footnote to history.

## **Historically Minded Criticism**

Many critics discuss art as epitomizing the central trends, ideals, and concerns of a particular period or nationality.

## **New Historicism**

Argues that the best, most plausible context for interpreting literature is the historical one when it was written. Influenced greatly by the ideas Michel Foucault.

To some extent, exists in competition with Marxist ideas. New Historicists tend to be more pessimistic about the pervasiveness of the marketplace and the possibilities for resistance and change.

## Psychoanalysis

Freud adopted by intellectuals who focused on "repression" and "liberating" sexual impulses.

Criticism tends to be cartoonish (every long object is a phallic symbol).

## Structuralist Trends in Psychoanalytic Criticism

The Oedipus complex is the deep structure.

Every character with problems has an unresolved or poorly resolved Oedipus Complex. (Hamlet's problem is that he wants to sleep with his mom).

Criticism tends to adhere rigidly to Freudian terms: the character or author as patient.

## Lacanian & Other Psychoanalytic Criticism

French Theorist Jacques Lacan draws on Saussure's work to think about Freud as a theorist of representation, and the ways humans create a sense of themselves by interacting with and within systems of representation.

Psychoanalysis seen as less of a package deal. Concepts used selectively.