New Criticism (Close Reading)

- **Interpret by using part of the text.**
  - **Denotation** – dictionary / lexical
  - **Connotation** – implied meaning (suggestions / associations / - or + feelings)
  - **Ambiguity** – Tension of conflicting meanings (more than one meaning)
  - **Etymology** – History of a word (origin)
  - **Ontological** – own being / unique object
  - **Organic unity** – all parts related / connected
  - **Goal** – the new critics wished to “clear up” ambiguities
New Crit. / Formalism

– Steps –

- Title (affect story?)
- Allusions – find roots
- Symbols / tropes (figurative language) – logical meanings?
- Structural patterns
- Tone, theme, dialogue
- Ambiguities?
- Resolve tensions
Sub categories

- Modernism / formalism
- Emphasize “poem” as an object
- T.S. Elliot – poem = emotions common to all humankind / not the poet’s emotions (stresses the poem – object)
- Reader must be knowledgeable / instructed in Literary technique
The reader must be an active participant in the creation of meaning.

Meaning = author’s intentions but the significance changes by readers (historical context).

The following influence interpretation / significance: the reader’s
  – Worldview
  – Background
  – Purpose for reading
  – World knowledge
  – Word knowledge

The meaning is derived from the readers’ responses.
Phenomenology

- emphasizes perceiver
  - Active consciousness notes (makes) existence
    - “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it exist?”
  - Reader’s imagination adds / creates meaning
  - You must be actively engaged with the book for it to exist (if it is dormant in your locker, it does not exist)
Levels of interpretations

- New critics see the text as its own object – contains meaning without reader

- Readers Response critics believe any of the following:
  - Since some people have more knowledge, their interpretations are more “valid.” (i.e., an English professor can add more insight than a student though both may offer important interpretations)
  - Sophistication / education = not important – all interpretations are equal since they all offer meaning and insight
  - The topics / ideas suggested add meaning (even if a student hasn’t read the story, he can add meaning by discussing the topic; i.e., “prejudice” he’s experienced in his own life).
Structuralism

(Linguistics) Science of Language --- Form and Structure over content

Structural codes rather than personal interpretation

Mimetic Theory --- Words = symbols for objects / things

Mythemes = recurrent themes in myths that transcend time and cultures (i.e., flood or creation stories)
Structuralism

- Morpheme = smallest meaningful unit of a word (i.e., “s” = plural or “sub” = under
- Phoneme = smallest meaningful sound (apprx. 45 in English)
- Syntax = word arrangement (sentence)
- Semantics = connotations/implications
  - purr = positive (alternative employment program)
  - snarl = negative (you’re fired)
Structuralism

- Structure of narrative affects meaning
- Binary oppositions (light/dark – good/evil)
- Equation (how reader maps out + how text is structure = meaning)
- Grammar = rules of language
- Metalanguage = words that describe language
Structuralism

- Example: “Young Goodman Brown”
  - Readers assume darkness of forest = evil
  - light = safety
  - Structuralism ponders “why” readers interpret this way

- Author’s intention does not make meaning
  - Meaning = system that governs the writer

- Scientific (objective) analysis of how readers interpret
Psychoanalytical Criticism

- (Applies psychology to author, and/or characters)
- **Freud** – Conflict theory
- **Conscious** (rational) = aware / external reality / reason
- **Unconscious** /subconscious (irrational) = unaware
  - Hidden desires
  - Ambitions
  - Fears
  - Passions
Conflict

- **Id** = instincts and urges (primitive)  
  “wants” --- Pleasure Principle

- **Libido** – psychic (sexual) energy released by the id

- **Superego** - conscience “should do” --- Morality Principle

- **Ego** - waking / rational mind “can do”  
  Reality Principle
Defense Mechanisms

- **Repress** = push down
- **Displace (transfer)** = shift or misplace feelings
- **Projection** = place unconscious thoughts onto others – i.e., projects self hate onto others
- **Denial** = refusal / will not admit truth or reality – i.e., when a loved one passes away
- **Regression** = return to an earlier stage of development – i.e., pout when you want something
Complexes

- **Oedipus** = unconscious attachment or desire for mother (males)
- **Electra** = starts with mom but switches to desire for father (females)
- **Neurosis** = abnormalities (unresolved conflicts – id vs. ego and / or complexes – stuck in a stage)
- **Dreams** = repressed desires, rage, guilt, images, and symbols (i.e., unhealthy anger towards boss named Mr. Appleby = dream of rotting apple – interpretation of subconscious symbols).
Jung

- Freud’s student but later broke away / moved on
- **Personal conscious** = waking state
- **Personal unconscious** = stored thoughts
- **Symbols** and images = mythological (dreams)
Collective unconscious

- cumulative knowledge of human race –beyond personal --like a collective soul or reservoir for all accumulated human symbols (scientists would say this has been passed on genetically / transcendentalist would say all life is of one living being)

- **Archetypes** = universal images and patterns (often nature images)

- **Mythological** = universal (cultural) patterns or images – common themes –i.e., if the protagonist must sacrifice his life in order to save the community, a mythological interpreter would make reference to Western religion (Christ sacrificing himself for humankind).
Feminism

- (Gender Criticism) - - - Gender roles and politics
- Want to change the degrading view of women
- **Beliefs:**
  - Women have been oppressed (socially and politically)
  - Opinions have been devoiced
  - Writings have been devoiced
  - Thought of as irrational and inferior
Feminist terms

- **Patriarchal** = controlled by males
- Religion – Bible (i.e., Eve brings sin into the world)
- Greek mythology (Pandora’s Box - releases evil into the world)
- **Misogyny** – male hatred (can be subconscious) of women – men conditioned this way
- **Cannon** (literature) – accepted major works - needs to consider more women
Virginia Woolf

- = key early feminist
- *A Room of one’s own* (1919)
- Establish own female identity *(women had been defined by men)*
Key elements (questions to address when using this approach)

- Is the Author male or female?
- Is the narrator male or female?
- What are the female roles?
- Are there female protagonists?
- Are females stereotyped?
- What is the Author or narrator’s view towards women?
- How do the characters treat women?
- Are there exploited female images?
- Can you psychoanalyze the female characters?
- Are there any cultural or social influences on the females?
Marxism (Sociological) Approach

- (Political) – Focused on (social) class conflict (Marxism/equality/eliminate class system)
- Society shapes or consciousness
- Ultimate reality is material not spiritual (our religions are dictated by our cultures: for example in 313 A.D. Constantine the Great made Christianity the main religion supplanting the Roman gods and goddesses)
- Social and economic conditions influence how and what we:
  - believe
  - value
Marxist theory

- Upper class (bourgeoisie) consciously and unconsciously forces its ideology (belief system) on working class (proletariat) “Wage Slaves” – the rich become richer and the poor become poorer (we value, buy, wear, etc. what the rich tell us to value, buy, wear, etc.)

- Author’s culture and class are important and influence writing

- Author expresses his or her ideology through fictional world
Key elements (questions):

– Is the fate of the character(s) linked to social caste (status or position)?
– Are social classes at conflict?
– What are the values of each class?
– Are characters oppressed?
– How do socioeconomic factors influence the plot, characters, etc.