

Timeline of Major Critical Theories in US

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Four 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.

ca 1945←→ca 1965

Formalism

- 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

ca 1965←→ca 1980

Deep Structure Models

- (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 the structure more important than elements of the structure.

ca 1980←→?

Post Structuralism

- Aims to demonstrate how oppositions that deep structures depend on break down (deconstruction).
- Texts are infinitely interpretable in theory, though not in practice (politics).

ca late 90s←→?

Cultural Studies

- Applies post-structuralist tools to analyze politically charged representations.
- Key words here might be relevance, history, and utility: What makes these representations significant? What historical & political legacies are behind them? How can we contest things we don't like with our cool interpretive tool

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

ca 1960←→late 70s

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.

80s←→?

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

ca 1960←→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

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).

Postcolonial 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.

Historicism

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

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 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).

Historically Minded Criticism

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

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.

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"

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.

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.

