**Critical Literary Lenses**

Literary lenses (which are more formally called *Schools of Criticism*) focus on one basic principle: Different readers read the same text differently. Knowing how different groups of readers read a text can illuminate deeper meaning and new interpretations. Literary lenses also work for literally ANY TEXT, even one as simple as "Cinderella." Though there are many literary theories, what follows are the most common ones.

MARXISM – This first lens is a great example of separating real-world political agendas from literary tools. While Marxism in the political world is a social and economic philosophy pursuing the elimination of private possession as a way to eliminate class struggle, literary Marxism merely explores what conflicts in a story stem from money and social classes. Marxism is based on the writings of Karl Marx (duh), a historian who believed that all conflicts throughout history were caused by a struggle over finite resources like land, food, and other possessions (which they call dialectical materialism). Some get ahold of the resources (the privileged class called the bourgeoise) and prevent others from having the resources (The Other, called the proletariat). The privileged class limits sharing their resources (as their wealth ensures their continued survival), resulting in feelings of alienation for those in the proletariat who must fight for, beg for, work for, or forge for alternate resources to survive.

FEMINISM – Feminism explores the power relations and power struggles between men and women. As men have held power historically in Western society as part of a patriarchy, men define what it is to be human, thus casting women as the "other." Feminism explores not only the stereotypes and biases men and women use to define each other but women's own search for their own definition and perspective. While feminists reject essentialism, or the idea that one neat and tidy definition can apply to all women, all feminists agree that a woman is more than her body. Feminists instead examine gender, or how society defines what it mean to be a woman. Feminists focus on a woman's agency (her ability to make her own choices), the challenges she faces because of her sex, how she is treated and viewed by men, and how she views herself.

ARCHETYPAL (JUNGIAN) – Archetypal ﻿Archetypal analysis explores the collective unconscious--how all the stories ever written use interconnected images. This is also known as Jungian analysis after psychologist Carl Jung. In his study of dreams, Jung found the same types of images reoccurring in his patients. Inspired by the work of Northrop Frye, Jung named these images archetypes and pronounced that they were universally acknowledged symbols that are innate in all people--one is literally born knowing archetypes. Joseph Campbell built upon Jung's work, claiming all narratives use archetypes and that literature can be seen as a conversation of how to reuse these basic elements in new ways.

AUTHORIAL (BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL) – Authorial criticism focuses on how the text is a reflection of its author: who the author was, what the author believed, the author's personal history, and the socioeconomic culture around the author at the time of the writing. By pairing textual events and content (internal evidence) with research on the author's life by other scholars (intermediate evidence) and authorial commentary by the author on his or her own work (external evidence), the authorial scholar connects plot events in the story to events in the author's own life, pairs characters and their motivations in a text to actual people in the author's life, and reflects on the author's purpose for writing a text. The authorial critique also crosses with some psychoanalysis, as it often assumes an author's subconscious is also revealed in the text and that a close reading can reveal the id desires and repression of the author at the time of the writing.

NEW HISTORICISM -While New Historicism also explores a work through its historical context, it ignores the author's intention and instead focuses on how the text reflects or goes against the popular ideology of its period. Spearheaded by the work of Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicists see all conflict as resulting from the conflict between conservatism (wanting life to remain constant to recent history) and progressivism (wanting life to appreciably change). This applies to both political history as well as personal histories of characters (think Romeo and Juliet as progressives vs. their parents as conservatives). As this conflict drives history, New Historicists examine different discourses in a text and how they reflect the historical context around the text. This critique also examines the nature of language during the time and how popular fads influenced the construction and reception of the text, meaning that many New Historicists incorporate linguistics and literary movements.

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