Literature – Critical Theory & Critical Perspectives

What is literary or critical theory? What is meant by "critical perspective"?

The terms "literary theory" and "critical theory" refer to essentially the same fields of study. They both address *ways of looking at literature* beyond the typical plot-theme-character- setting studies. Just as a PERSPECTIVE is a way of looking at something, a CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE is a way of criticizing or analyzing literature. Your CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE is the view you bring to the literature you read.

How and why did literary theories develop?
We all know that different people will experience the same event differently. It follows, then, that different people will approach the same literary text differently. One person may be offended by a character's actions, while another finds them comic. One reader is energized by a story's political implications, while another is awed by the same story's philosophical bent. Literary theories emerged as ways to explain different people's views and responses to literature. Rather than insisting that one view is the best or correct view, literary theory attempts to find value in all views that are based on a careful study of the literature.

What are the benefits of studying a work from more than one critical perspective?
There are several benefits:
- One of the views is likely to affirm your perspective and speak to what you see in the literature you are studying.
- Studying a view different from yours—not to disagree with it, but to understand it—helps you understand those who hold that view.
- Studying a work from more than one view gives you a deeper understanding of the author's work and a better appreciation for the richness of it.

What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives involve?
Essentially, all you have to do to study a work from more than one critical perspective is to put *your own* view on hold and entertain the other view. Although you may be a staunch *green-thinker*, you now ask yourself, "What would a *yellow-thinker* see in this work?"

What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives *not* involve?
First and foremost, studying a work from multiple critical perspectives does not require that you agree with any of the perspectives you study. You are not being asked to become a yellow-thinker, only to consider—without criticism and judgment—what a yellow-thinker would see in the text. Second, studying a work from multiple critical perspectives does not require that you blend or merge two or more perspectives into a single interpretation. Some of the points of some of the theories are actually mutually exclusive and cannot be reconciled. While examining a work from the feminist perspective, you do not need to take into account what a Marxist would find. You would examine each perspective independently.

What are the most common or popular critical theories?
This packet will introduce you to the following critical theories:
- Feminist
- Marxist
- Psychoanalytic or Freudian
- Archetypal or Mythological
- New Historicism

FEMINIST THEORY

The basis of the feminist movements, both in literature and politics, is that Western culture is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, controlled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and evaluated by men). The 1960s saw the rise of a new, feminist approach to literary criticism. Before the emergence of Feminist Theory, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men). With the development of Feminist Theory, old texts are reexamined, and the portrayal of women in literature is reevaluated. New writers create works that more accurately reflect the developing concept of the "modern woman." The feminist approach is only partly based on finding and exposing suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature. Feminists are interested in exposing the ways women in literature—both authors and characters—are undervalued. Some feminist scholars have even dissected individual words in Western languages, suggesting that the _languages themselves_ reflect a patriarchal worldview. Arguing that the past millennia in the West have been dominated by men— whether politicians in power or the historians recording it—feminist critics believe that Western literature reflects a masculine bias. As a result, Western literature presents an inaccurate and potentially harmful portrayal of women. In order to repair the potential harm done and achieve balance, feminist critics insist that works by and about women be added to the literary canon and read from a feminist perspective.

Three main areas of study and points of criticism exist in the Feminist Theory:
1. differences between men and women
2. women in positions of power and power dynamics between men and women
3. the female experience

1. **Differences between men and women**
   - One basic assumption of the feminist perspective is that gender determines everything, including values and the ways language is used.
   - The canon of literature printed, marketed, and taught in schools must be expanded to include the study of genres in which women "traditionally" write: journals, diaries, and personal letters.
   - The differences in the topics or issues about which men and women write and the differing viewpoints from which men and women write must be noted. All views must be respected as equally valid.

2. **Women in positions of power and power dynamics between men and women**
   - Any evidence of the social, economic, and political exploitation of women must be noted and confronted. The feminist critic checks the work to see whether female characters have power and of what type of power it might be.
   - A feminist critic views literature as a means by which inequities can be identified, protested, and possibly rectified.
   - A feminist critic will note the division of labor and economics between men and women in the work being studied.
   - A feminist critic will note how male and female characters in the work interact with one another in a variety of contexts. Does the woman act subservient? Does the man treat the woman like an adult? Are males and females politically and economically equal?

3. **The Female Experience**
   - On the most basic levels, a woman's experience of life is different from a man's. Reading or viewing from a feminist perspective includes examining what aspects of feminine life are included in the work. Is the narrative point of view male or female?
   - How does the narrator—male or female—treat plot events and other characters?

- The feminist critic rejects any application of male standards to the female personality. The female personality must be judged independently from the male personality and vice versa.
- Feminist critics examine and celebrate all portrayals of the creative, life-giving role of femininity. Women have traditionally been portrayed as dependent on men, but feminists point out that men are dependent on women for humanity's most basic need—birthing children. All evidence of feminine nurture, healing, life giving and restoring are examined.
- Feminist theory is not fundamentally chauvinistic. Feminist critics explore literature for portrayals of the concept that men and women are each incomplete without the other. They do, however, reject suggestions of studying only feminine "incompleteness."

Essential questions for a feminist reading:
- What stereotypes of women are depicted in the text?
- Are female characters oversimplified? Weak? Foolish? Excessively naive?
- Do the female characters play major or minor roles in the action of the work?
- Are they supportive or independent? Powerless or strong? Subservient or in control?
- If the female characters have any power, what kind is it? Political? Economic? Social? Psychological?
- Are the female characters and situations in which they are placed oversimplified or presented fully and in detail?
- How do the male characters talk about the female characters?
- How do the male characters treat the female characters?
- How do the female characters act toward the male characters?
- Are the female characters and situations in which they are placed oversimplified or presented fully and in detail?
- How do the male characters talk about the female characters?
- How do the male characters treat the female characters?
- How do the female characters act toward the male characters?
- How do the female characters act toward each other?
- Is the work, in general, sympathetic to female characters? Too sympathetic?
- Do any of the work's themes touch upon any idea that could be seen as a feminist issue? Is the theme supportive or disparaging of women?
- Overall, do you think that the female characters are believable? For that matter, do you think that the male characters are believable?

Examining "Cinderella" from a Feminist Perspective
- Consider the potentially misogynist theme of abused-girl-waiting-to-be-rescued-by-prince.
- Consider the values conveyed in the portrayal of the "good girl" as physically beautiful and the "wicked girls" as physically ugly.

Examine the potentially misogynist theme of the courtship ritual of the prince's ball:
- By what standard (other than physical beauty) will he choose whom to marry?
- Will the chosen woman have a choice in whether or not to marry the prince?
- What is the basis of the prince's "love at first sight" with Cinderella?

Consider the feminist implication of
- the fact that the "good girl" is passive, weak, and submissive and can do nothing (and does do nothing) to improve her own condition;
- the fact that the powerful woman is portrayed as wicked (and probably ugly).

MARXIST THEORY

The Marxist approach to literature is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. His major argument was that whoever controlled the means of production (the factories) in a society controlled the society. Marx noted a disparity in the economic and political power enjoyed by the factory owners and that allowed to the factory laborers. He believed that the means of production (i.e., the basis of power in society) should be placed in the hands those who actually operated them. He wrote that economic and political revolutions around the world would eventually place power in the hands of the masses, the laborers. To read a work from a Marxist perspective, one must understand that Marxism asserts that literature is a reflection of culture, and that culture can be influenced by literature. Marxists believe literature can instigate revolution.

Four main areas of study:
1. economic power
2. materialism versus spirituality
3. class conflict
4. art, literature, and ideologies

1. **Economic Power**
   - A society is shaped by its forces of production. Those who own the means of production dictate what type of society it is.
   - The two main classes of society are the bourgeoisie (who control the means of production and wealth) and the proletariat (who operate the means of production and are controlled by the bourgeoisie).
   - Since the bourgeoisie own the means of production—and, therefore, control the money— they can manipulate politics, government, education, art, and media.
   - Capitalism is flawed in that it creates commodification (a desire for possessions, not for their innate usefulness, but for their social value). Display of material objects is the most common way of showing off one's wealth.
   - Commodification is one way the bourgeoisie keep the proletariat oppressed. Whenever the proletariat manages to acquire some sort of status symbol, the bourgeoisie concocts a new one; thus, the proletariat continues to struggle, never able to "catch up."

2. **Materialism versus Spirituality**
   - Regardless of what some might claim, social values reflect material goals, not abstract ideals.
   - The material world is the only non-subjective element in a society. Money and material possessions are the same by every measure within a society, whereas spirituality is completely subjective.
   - The quality of a person's life is not destroyed by spiritual failure but by material failure.

3. **Class Conflict**
   - A Capitalist society will inevitability experience conflict between its social classes.
   - The owners and the workers will have different ideas about the division of the wealth generated, and the owners will ultimately make the decision.
   - This constant conflict, or dialectical materialism, is what instigates change.
   - The bourgeoisie present their political, economic, and social structures as the only reasonable ones.
   - The proletariat, indoctrinated from birth to have pride in their station, are prevented from wanting to overthrow their oppressors (ironically, the smaller and actually less-powerful group).

- The only real social division is class. Divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion are artificial, devised by the bourgeoisie to distract the proletariat from realizing their unity and rebelling against their oppressors.
- Marx called on the proletariat to reject the social structure of the bourgeoisie, the rules that would keep them subservient forever, and form their own values. Such a course would be the only way
- to escape the oppression, for the proletariat could never defeat the bourgeoisie on its own terms. For the workers to win, they must establish new terms.

4. Art, Literature, and Ideologies

- Art and literature are among the vehicles by which the bourgeoisie impose their value system on the proletariat. The arts can make the current system seem attractive and logical, thus lulling the workers into an acceptance of it.
- Works of art and literature are enjoyable, so the audience is unaware of being manipulated.
- The bourgeoisie control most artistic output because, whether through patronage or sponsorship, they are the entity that funds the arts and entertainment. Since the bourgeoisie materially support the writers and the painters— owning the means of production as well as serving as primary consumers—the artist must be careful not to offend bourgeois values. Anything offensive or challenging to the bourgeoisie will simply not be published or sold.
- Any artist who wishes to criticize the bourgeoisie must do so in a subtle way (satire, irony, etc.).

Essential questions for a Marxist reading:

- Who are the powerful people in the text? Who are the powerless? Who receives the most attention?
- Why do the powerful have the power? Why are the powerless without power?
- Is there class conflict and struggle?
- Is there alienation and/or fragmentation evident in any of the characters? If so, in whom? The powerful? The powerless?
- Do the powerful in the text suppress the powerless? How? News? Media? Religion? Literature?
- What can you infer from the setting about the distribution of wealth?
- What does the society value? Are possessions acquired for their usefulness or their social value?
- Is the text itself a product of the society in which it was created? How do you know?
- Is the work consistent in its ideologies, or is there an inner conflict?
- After reading this text, do you notice any system of oppression that you have accepted? If so, what system, and how do you think you came to accept it?

Examining "Cinderella" from a Marxist Perspective

Consider Cinderella as a representative of the proletariat:

- oppressed by her bourgeoisie stepmother and stepsisters, who have stolen her rightful inheritance and turned her into a servant in her own home;
- desiring to join the ranks of the bourgeoisie by marrying the prince.

Consider the ball gown, glass slippers, and golden coach as evidence of commodification; without these possessions, Cinderella cannot hope to rise out of the proletariat and join the bourgeoisie.

PSYCHOANALYTIC OR FREUDIAN THEORY

The Psychoanalytic or Freudian Theory encompasses two almost contradictory critical theories. The first focuses on the text itself, with no regard to outside influences; the second focuses on the author of the text. According to the first view, reading and interpretation are limited to the work itself. One will understand the work by examining conflicts, characters, dream sequences, and symbols. One will further understand that a character's outward behavior might conflict with inner desires or might reflect as-yet-undiscovered inner desires.

Main areas of study/points of criticism of the first view are:
There are strong Oedipal connotations in Freudian theory:
- the son's desire for his mother
- the father's envy of the son and rivalry for the mother's attention
- the daughter's desire for her father
- the mother's envy of the daughter and rivalry for the father's attention.
Of course, these all operate on a subconscious level to avoid violating serious social mores.

There is an emphasis on the meaning of dreams.
- It is in dreams that a person's subconscious desires are revealed.
- What a person cannot express or do because of social rules will be expressed and accomplished in dreams, where there are no social rules.
- Most of the time, people are not even aware what they secretly desire until their subconscious goes unchecked in sleep.

According to psychoanalytic theory, there are three parts to the subconscious, which is the largest part of the human personality:
1. The id—the basic desire.
   - The id has no sense of conscience, thus making it everyone's "inner child." Children, before they are taught social skills, operate entirely through the id. They cry in public, perform bodily functions with no sense of shame, and demand immediate gratification of their needs and desires.
2. The superego—the opposite of the id.
   - The superego is the repository of all socially imposed behavior and sense of guilt. While the id is innate, the superego is learned. Humans develop a superego by having parents scold them and other members of society teach them.
   - How one is socialized—by punishment and shame—will have a lifelong impact on the functioning of his or her subconscious.
3. The ego—reality.
   - The ego struggles to achieve a balance between the id and the superego. The ego takes the desires of the id, filters them through the superego, and devises an action that satisfies both. The ego realizes that the id must be satisfied but that there are certain socially acceptable ways to achieve satisfaction.
   - Freudian theory asserts that psychological problems are all the result of imbalances between the id, superego, and ego.

Main areas of study/points of criticism of the second view:
- An essential relationship exists between the author of the work and the work itself. In order to understand a work, one must fully understand the author's life and values.
- Although a work might not be blatantly autobiographical, psychoanalysts argue that there is always something of the author in the work, whether it be a character, character trait, theme, or motif.
- Often, authors will satirize characters they dislike or will be overtly sympathetic to those they do like.

- This author's bias often has an effect on the reader, which is exactly what the author wants. When reading, people are extremely vulnerable to the author's chosen point of view (the only way they hear the story is through the author's narrator).

This type of psychoanalytic reading includes the following:
- Reference to what is known or surmised about the author's personality is used to explain and interpret a literary work. For example, Charles Dickens grew up poor and later wrote books sympathetic to boys growing up poor.
- Reference to a literary work is made in order to establish an understanding of the mind of the author. For example, judging by Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, one might reasonably conclude that Harper Lee herself was sympathetic to the plight of black Americans.
- Studying the literary work of an author is a means of knowing the author as a person. The more novels by Charles Dickens one reads, the more one can infer about the author's beliefs, values, hopes, fears, etc.
- An artist may put his or her repressed desires on the page in the form of actions performed by characters. For example, an author who consistently writes stories in which his female characters are weak, dependent, or unintelligent might be expressing latent misogynist tendencies. Likewise, a female author might express her latent misandry through weak, blatantly evil, or thoroughly inconsequential male characters.

Essential questions for a psychoanalytic reading are:
- What are the traits of the main character?
- How does the author reveal those traits?
- What do you learn about the character through the narrator?
- What do you learn about the character from the way other characters relate to him or her?
- What do you infer about the character from his or her thoughts, actions, and speech?
- What discrepancies exist between the author's portrayal of the character and how other characters react to him or her?
- What discrepancies exist between the author's portrayal of the character and the reader's inferences?
- Is the main character a dynamic character (does he or she change throughout the course of the story)? If so, how and why?
- How does the character view him or herself?
- What discrepancies exist between a character's view of him or herself and other characters' reactions, the author's portrayal, and/or reader inference?
- How do the characters view one another?
- Is there any discrepancy between a character's personal opinion of him or herself and how others think about him or her?
- What types of relationships exist in the work?
- What types of images are used in conjunction with the character? What do they symbolize?
- What symbols are used in the course of the story? What do they symbolize?
- Do any characters have dreams or inner monologues? What is revealed about a character through dreams that would not otherwise be revealed?
- Are there any inner conflicts within the character? How are these conflicts revealed? How are they dealt with? Are they ever resolved? How?
- Do any characters perform uncharacteristic actions? If so, what? What could these actions mean?

Examining "Cinderella" from a Psychoanalytic Perspective

- Consider Cinderella as a representative of the id —expressing desire.
- Consider the stepmother and stepsisters as representatives of the superego—preventing the id from fulfilling its desire.
- Consider the fairy godmother and the prince as representatives of the ego—negotiating between the id and the superego and allowing the desires of the id to be fulfilled in a socially acceptable manner.
- Examine the discrepancy between the narrator's depiction of the stepmother and stepsisters and their views of themselves.
- Examine the text for evidence of latent misogyny or misandry on the part of Charles Perrault (or the Grimm brothers).

ARCHETYPAL OR MYTHOLOGICAL THEORY

Mythological, archetypal, and psychological criticism are all closely related. This is because Freud based many of his theories on the idea of the social archetype. His pupil, Carl Jung, refined Freud's theories and expanded them into a more cross-cultural philosophy. Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung defined an archetype as "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." Jung theorized that human beings were born with an innate knowledge of certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lay in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Every culture has a creation story, a-life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories— when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different. When looking for archetypes, critics take note of general themes, characters, and situations that recur in literature across writers, genres, periods, and societies. Traditional literary and mythological archetypes can be successfully translated to other genres and time periods. Because they draw on feelings, situations, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, the plays of William Shakespeare, the novels of Jane Austen, the episodes of Homer can be, and have been, updated and reformatted time and time again.

Three main points of study:
1. archetypal characters
2. archetypal images
3. archetypal situations

1. *Archetypal Characters*
   the HERO
   - a figure, often larger than life, whose search for identity and/or fulfillment results in his or her destruction (often accompanied by the destruction of society in general).
   - The aftermath of the death of the hero, however, results in progress toward some ideal.
   - While this applies to modern superheroes such as Superman (Clark Kent, searching for the balance between his super self and his mortal identity), it also applies to the central figures in many religions.
   - Christianity's Jesus, who must come to terms with his destiny as the Messiah, Judaism's Moses, reluctant to fulfill his assigned destiny as the leader of the Israelites, and thousands of other literary and religious figures throughout history are examples of the archetype.

     Variations of the HERO figure include
     - the "orphaned" prince
     - the lost chieftain's son
     - either raised ignorant of his heritage until he is rediscovered (King Arthur, Theseus).

   the SCAPEGOAT:
   - an innocent character on whom a situation is blamed—or who assumes the blame for a situation—and is punished in place of the truly guilty party, thus removing the guilt from the culprit and from society.

the LONER or OUTCAST:

- a character who is separated from (or separates him or herself from) society due to either an impairment or an advantage that sets this character apart from others. Often, the Hero is an outcast at some point in his or her story.
- Jesus goes into the desert to discern his destiny.
- Buddha leaves society to attain Nirvana.
- Victor Frankenstein travels to remote locales to avoid people when he realizes that he has created a monster.

  Two common variations of the LONER are
  - the UNDERDOG, the smaller, weaker, lessworldly wise character, who usually emerges victorious at the end of the story;
  - the guilt-ridden figure in search of redemption.

the VILLAIN:

- the male or female personification of evil.
- While nearly all works of literature include an antagonist to provide conflict with the protagonist, not all antagonists are villains.
- Villains personify evil. Their malice is often apparently unmotivated, or is motivated by a single grievance from the past. The villain's malice is often limitless, and rarely is the villain reformed within the context of the story. Examples of archetypal villains are Satan and Loki, from Norse mythology.

  Some variations of the VILLAIN figure include:
  - the "mad scientist"
  - the bully

the TEMPTRESS:

- the female who possesses what the male desires and uses his desire (either intentionally or unintentionally) as a means to his ultimate destruction. Examples are Eve, Juliet, Lady Macbeth.

the EARTH MOTHER/GODDESS:

- Mother Nature, Mother Earth—the nurturing, life-giving aspect of femininity.

the SPIRIT or INTELLECT:

- the often-unidentified feminine inspiration for works of art and literature. Examples would be Dante's Beatrice, Shakespeare's Dark Lady, etc.

the SAGE:

- largely of Eastern origin, the sage is the elderly wise man, the teacher or mentor. Examples from Western literature would be Merlin and Tiresias.
- Yoda from Star Wars and Gandalf from The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings are contemporary derivations.

  Some variations of the SAGE include:
  - the wise woman, the crone, or witch. Note that, while the male SAGE's wisdom is usually spiritual or philosophical (often with political or military applications), the wise woman's wisdom tends to concern the workings of nature—hence, the connection of the wise woman with witchcraft and the associated superstitions.
  - the stern, but loving authority figure.
  - the oracle: male or female prophet, fortuneteller, soothsayer.

2. *Archetypal Images*

COLORS:
- red as blood, anger, passion, violence;
- gold as greatness, value, wealth;
- green as fertility, luxury, growth;
- blue (the color of the sky) as peace, serenity;
- white as purity, goodness, God-like holiness, etc.

NUMBERS:
- three for the Christian Trinity, stability (a stand with three legs can stand steadily on
- most surfaces);
- four for the four seasons, the four ancient elements (earth, water, fire, air);
- twelve for the months of the year, the tribes of ancient Israel, the apostles of Jesus.

WATER:
- the source of life and sustenance; cleansing or purification; baptism.

FIRE:
- ambiguously both protective and destructive;
- on an archetypal level, fire often symbolizes human knowledge and industry (Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to humankind when there were no other gifts left to give.)

The FOUR ANCIENT ELEMENTS:
- fire
- water
- air
- earth

GARDENS:
- natural abundance;
- easy, beautiful life;
- new birth, hope;
- Eden, the original Paradise from which humankind was expelled.

GEOMETRIC SHAPES:
- a triangle for the Trinity
- a circle for perfection and eternity, wholeness, union.

CELESTIAL BODIES:
- the sun (masculine) is both the giver and destroyer of life
- the moon (feminine) marks the passage of time and controls the course of human events. Planting, harvesting, etc., are all determined more by the phases of the moon than the progress of the sun.

MASCULINE IMAGES/SYMBOLS:
- columns
- towers
- boats
- trees
- etc.

FEMININE IMAGES/SYMBOLS:
- bodies of water
- caves
- doorways
- windows.

CAVES:
- ambiguously can represent the womb (the source of life) and the grave
- often represent the entrance to the underworld (related to the grave), as well as to the unexplored regions of the human mind and soul.

YIN AND YANG:
- any scheme that suggests that each of a pair of opposites partakes of the other's nature, complements the other, and essentially completes the other; the idea that without a balance of opposing forces, the world would erupt into chaos.

3. *Archetypal Situations*
   ## the QUEST:
   - the hero's endeavor to establish his or her identity or fulfill his or her destiny.

     Variations on the QUEST can include:
     - the Faustian bargain: the selling of one's soul to the devil (metaphorically representing the notion that one would "give anything" in order to…) in exchange for unlimited power, knowledge, wealth, etc. Examples include King Midas.
     - the pursuit of revenge for a real or perceived wrong, as exemplified by Captain Ahab's quest in *Moby Dick*.
     - the descent into the underworld. (Note that this is usually one part of the quest rather than the entire quest itself.)

   ### *Steps (or stages) into which the QUEST can be divided:*
   The CALL:
   > Typically, the Hero is challenged to embark on the Quest or is called to it by a god or god-figure. Usually there is a sense of destiny associated with the call to the quest – this is the Hero's purpose; it will be his or her defining moment.

   The DECISION:
   > The Hero makes an intentional decision to accept the challenge or call and pursue his (or her) destiny. There is usually a sense that this decision is irrevocable – the ship sails, the bridge burns, the home planet is destroyed, etc. At this point, the Hero must go forward; there is no turning back.

   The PREPARATION:
   > This is the period during which the Hero learns what he or she needs to know in order to complete the Quest. He or she develops the skills, builds the strength, gathers the tools and other materials, and collects the allies he or she will need to succeed. Often the Hero will meet a MENTOR, an older, wiser individual who has the knowledge and skills the Hero needs. This MENTOR may or may not supernatural.

Steps (or stages) into which the QUEST (continued):
The OBSTACLES:
This is the quest itself, the journey to the palace where the treasure is hidden or the captive is imprisoned. It is a long trip. I tis a dangerous trip. Many of the Hero's allies will desert him or her, be rendered incapable of continuing, or die. The Hero will lose many if not all, of the tools and weapons collected during the Preparation and will have to continue the Quest alone.
Some of the Obstacles encountered might be in the form of persons:

- The TEMPTOR/TEMPTRESS or SEDUCER/SEDUCTRESS, who is able to offer the Hero something he or she deeply desires (often a hidden or secret desire) so that the Hero is (almost) willing to abandon the quest.
- The SHADOW, an evil figure who actually mirrors those things the Hero most fears or dislikes about himself/herself

Some of the Obstacles encountered might be geographical:

- Difficult terrain
- Remote locations
- Seemingly insurmountable mountains, oceans, rivers, etc.

Some of the Obstacles encountered might take the particular forms:

- mythical animals and beings
- legendary animals and beings

The CLIMAX:
This is, of course, the moment when the Hero is at the point of either succeeding or failing. The failure might be physical, emotional, or psychological. The climax also involves the movement when it becomes obvious that the Hero will succeed.

The RETURN:
After the successful Quest, the Hero returns home, *but he or she always returns a changed person.*

the RENEWAL OF LIFE:
- death and rebirth, resurrection as seen in the cycle of the seasons, the phases of the day, sleeping and waking. Examples are "Sleeping Beauty," "The Secret Garden," etc.

INITIATION:
- coming of age, rites of passage. Some examples include the first hunt, weddings, teenage angst films.

THE FALL:
- any event that marks a loss of innocence; a devolution from a paradisiacal life or viewpoint to a painted one.

REDEMPTIVE SACRIFICE:
- any voluntary loss, especially a loss of life, that results in another's gaining or regaining a desired state.

the CATALOG OF DIFFICULT TASKS:
- (labors of Hercules, Cinderella's treatment by her stepmother and stepsisters, etc.).

the END OF THE WORLD:

- usually apocalyptic, involving warfare, a huge battle, a metaphoric final battle between good and evil.

  Variations on the end of the world include
  - Armageddon: the final battle between good and evil according to the Christian New Testament (book of Revelation), in which evil is finally vanquished, evildoers receive their eternal punishment, and God reigns over a newly created Heaven and Earth;
  - Ragnarok: the final battle between two feuding segments of the Norse pantheon. Both sides are largely decimated, as is the human race. Two humans survive to repopulate the human world and worship a new pantheon formed of the gods who survive the battle.
  - the Great Flood: found in the Judeo-Christian worldview and other belief systems from around the world, the story of a great deluge that covered the earth with water, killing an entire generation of life
  - forms on earth. A handful survived, repopulating the earth. According to these several accounts, the flood was a punishment for human wrongdoing.

the TABOO:

- the commission of a culturally forbidden act, such as incest or patricide, often unknowingly or inevitably. Any act or attitude that can be seen as "unnatural," a crime against the ways Nature is supposed to operate.

the BANQUET:

- fellowship; nourishment of the body and soul; display of wealth; often used as a symbol for salvation, Heaven.

Essential questions for a mythological/archetypal reading:

- Examine all of the characters—major and minor—and their situations. What archetypes seem to be present?
- How do any of the characters change over time? What events or people make them change?
- What is suggested in the setting (time of day, season of year, location—garden, body of water, etc.) that might suggest an archetypal reading?
- What types of symbols are used? What do they represent?
- How are the symbols in this work different from the traditional uses of those symbols? What is significant about this difference?
- What myths are at work in different parts of this work? What features of the story are reminiscent of other stories you know?

Examining "Cinderella" from an Archetypal Perspective

- Consider Cinderella's attendance at the ball as symbolic of her attaining salvation. (The tasks assigned to her by her stepmother and stepsisters—the tempters—distract her from focusing on her own salvation. Through the agency of a supernatural entity—the fairy godmother—she receives the unearned love of the prince.)
- Examine the stepmother and stepsisters as archetypal villains.
- Examine the chores Cinderella must complete (especially involving the beans in the fireplace in Grimm version) as the archetypal catalogue of difficult tasks.

NEW HISTORICISM

A common tendency in the study of literature written in, and/or set in, a past or foreign culture is to assume a direct comparison between the culture as presented in the text and as it really was. New Historicism asserts that such a comparison is impossible for two essential reasons.

First, the "truth" of a foreign or past culture can never be known as established and unchangeable.
- Any understanding of the "truth" is, at best, a matter of interpretation on the parts of both the writer and the reader.
- This is most blatantly evident in the fact that the "losers" of history are hardly ever heard. The culture that is dominated by another is often lost to history because it is the powerful who have the resources to record history.
- Even in recent past events, who really knows both sides of the story? Who really knows the whole of the Arab-Israeli story? Or the Iraqi story?
- New Historicists argue that these unknown histories are just as significant as the histories of the culture of power and should be included in any world-view.
- Since these unrepresented or underrepresented histories often contradict "traditional" understandings, there is no way to know the *absolute* historical truth.

Second, while the text under consideration does indeed reflect the culture in which it was written (and to some degree in which it is set), it also participates in the culture in which it is written.
- The very existence of that text in its culture changes the culture it "reflects."
- While works like To *Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Raisin in the Sun* certainly reflected the culture of the mid-20th century United States, both also raised awareness of prejudice and injustice and helped to bring about change.

Main areas of study/points of criticism:
Traditional history is, by its nature, a subjective narrative, usually told from the point of view of the powerful.
- The losers of history do not have the means to write their stories, nor is there usually an audience interested in hearing them. Most cultures, once dominated by another, are forced to forget their past.
- To maintain its sovereignty, the culture of power simply does not allow the defeated culture to be remembered.
- Traditional history is not only subjectively written, it is also read and discussed subjectively.
- Although modern readers say they take history at face value, no one can help but compare the past to the present as a means of understanding it, which makes it subjective.

The powerless also have "historical stories" to relate that are not to be found in official documents, mostly because they played no hand in creating those documents. No reader can claim to have the "truth" of a text or event; or even that an understanding of the "truth" is possible. At best, one can acknowledge the validity of a particular point of view.

When examining a text, the questions to ask are *not*:
- Are the characters based on real people?
- Are any characters or events in the text drawn from the author's life and experiences?
- Is the text an accurate portrayal of the time period in which it is set?

Instead, **ask:**
- What view or understanding of the relevant culture does this text offer?
- How does this text contribute to or shape an understanding of the culture it represents?

The text, rather than being a static artifact of a definable culture, is a participant in a dynamic, changeable culture. Every reader brings to the text a unique set of experiences and points of view that alter the meaning of the text.

Essential questions for a New Historicist reading:
- What events occurred in the writer's life that made the author who he or she is? What has affected his or her view of life?
- Who influenced the writer? What people in his or her life may have helped form this world-view?
- What did the writer read that affected his or her philosophy?
- What were the writer's political views? Was he or she liberal? Conservative? Moderate?
- In what level in the social order was the writer raised? How did his economic and social situation affect him or her?
- To what level in the social order did the writer *aspire*?
- From what level in the social order did the writer's friends come? How were they employed?
- How powerful or influential was the writer socially?
- What were the writer's social concerns? What did he or she do about them?
- What type of person was the writer in his or her society?
- What was happening in the world at the time the book was written? What was occurring during the time in which it is set?
- What were some major controversies at the time the book was written? The time in which it is set?
- Who was on either side of the controversy? Who were the powerful? Who were the powerless?
- Why were the powerful in their positions of power? What qualities did they have? What events transpired to get them to their positions?
- What is similar about the perspective of this book and other books written in or about the same era?
- What is different?
- How did the public receive the work when it was first published? What factors helped shape this reception?
- How did the critics receive the work when it was first published? What factors helped shape this reception?
- Did this work have any impact on its society or culture? What was the nature of this impact?
- What different or untraditional perspectives of history does this text represent?
- How does this text adhere to the conventions of literature in the era in which it was written?
- How does this text violate or depart from those conventions?

Examining "Cinderella" from a New Historicist Perspective
- What can we infer about the society in which this story—considering, especially, the violence and vengeance in the Grimm version—would evolve and be told to young children?
- What can we infer about property and inheritance laws in the society in which "Cinderella" evolved? What can we infer about the society's view of royalty and monarchic power?
- What societal and cultural values can we infer about
  - family relationships?
  - the nature of "goodness"?
  - rewards for "goodness"?
  - the status of women?