

SCHOOLS OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Is _____ a great novel?

Throughout history, there have been many ways of evaluating literature. As you read through this brief overview of some approaches to literary criticism, decide how your novel fits into each school.

CLASSICISM

Who - Aristotle (4th c. B.C.E.)

What - Literature should please and instruct, should emphasize what is beautiful and good.

Judgement:

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NEOCLASSICISM

Who - John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Johnson (16 - 18th c.)

What - Literature is that which is considered in good taste by the educated elite.

It emphasizes order and simplicity, reason and analysis.

Views human beings as basically imperfect.

Artists include Raphael.

Composers include Palestrina, Hadyn and Mozart.

Judgement:

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IMPRESSIONISM or ROMANTICISM

Who - Samuel Coleridge, Joseph Conrad, William Hazlitt (19th c.)

What - Literature should be judged by the sensory impressions it makes on readers.

Impressionist criticism focuses on the inner reaction of the reader.

Artists include Cassat, Degas, Monet and Renoir.

Composers include Claude Debussy

Judgement:

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AESTHETICISM

Who - Walter Pater (19th c.)

What - Literature is art and so should be valued for its artistic merits since beauty is the most meaningful aspect of life.

Frequently uses symbols.

Interior decoration features ebonized wood, blue and white porcelain, and much use of nature (flowers, birds).

Judgement:

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MODERNISM

Who - T.S. Elliot, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams (early 20th c.)

What - Literature frequently uses irony and satire to show the alienation of modern society.

Tends to use first person point of view and a 'stream of consciousness'.

Art focuses on abstraction and surrealism.

Music focuses on atonal music: Eric Satie.

Judgement:

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STRUCTURALISM or SEMIOTICS

Who - Roland Barthes (20th c.)

What - Literature should be analyzed as to its structure to determine its value.

How does it use language?

How does it break the rules of language?

Judgement:

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NEW CRITICISM

Who - John Crowe Ransom (19th - 20th c.)

What - Literature should be analyzed for literary techniques.

It is irrelevant when it was written, what the author meant, or how the reader feels.

Judgement:

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READER RESPONSE

Who - C.S. Lewis (late 20th c.)

What - Readers' reactions and connections to literature help create the meaning.

Judgement:

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CURRENTLY POPULAR APPROACH

Who - 21st century

What - Literature is a product of historical forces and should be evaluated for its worth based on how it depicts societal groups and on whether the author is entitled to depict those groups; includes criticism from various perspectives including feminism, queer and gender studies, and post-colonialism.

Judgement:

When you read a book, how do YOU evaluate it?

What do you think makes a book truly great?