

LECTURE THREE

Traditional Approaches

First things first

- This module is going to be co-taught by both Dr. Jumana Dahhak and me (Dr. Munira Hamad)
- I will start with the book: *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. Fifth Edition.

We are going to cover the first six chapters, namely

1. Getting Started: The Precritical Response
2. First Things First: Textual Scholarship, Genres, and Source study
3. Historical and Biographical Approach
4. Moral and Philosophical Approach
5. The Formalist Approach
6. The Psychological Approach: Freud

The literary works needed for practice

YOU HAVE TO READ THE THREE FOLLOWING LITERARY WORKS:

- Andrew Marvell "To His Coy Mistress" p. 38S
- Nathaniel Hawthorne "young Goodman Brown" p. 382
- Alice Walker "Everyday Use: for your grandmama" p. 401

(These page numbers are correct for the fifth edition. If you have the fourth edition of the book the pages are different but it easy to find the three literary works. They are in the last part of the book which is Appendixes

Nature and scope of the Traditional Approaches

- The story of the professor and Marvell's poem
- Traditional approaches and the work of art (secondary, not important, history, biography)
- Only into the 20th century New Criticism emerged as a reaction against the old school.
- The New critics focus on the work (text) divorced from any extrinsic considerations
- The result of this is a disagreement among scholars

Old School or New Criticism

1. Older Criticism: other disciplines can be used in the study of literature (history, linguistics)
2. New Criticism: Literature has its own internal value
 - astute critics have espoused a more eclectic approach: literature is literature + the possibility of benefiting from traditional quarters. E.g. Oscar Cargill, p. 17
 - Art does not exist in a vacuum.
 - Many literary classics are autobiographical, propagandistic, or topical (new historicism).

A. Textual Scholarship

1. Do We Have an Accurate Version of What We Are Studying?

- The aim of textual criticism: establishment of an authentic text, or the "text which the author intended"
- plays an important role in studying the genesis and development of a piece of literature.
- Many ways in which a text is corrupted, p. 18-9
- Mostly any text has not come unchanged but is the result of conscientious collation of textual variants, interpretation, and emendation or conjecture.

Textual Scholarship

- practitioners are concerned with spelling, punctuation, capitalization, italicization and paragraphing

Are they proofreaders?

- They must be highly skilled in linguistics, literary history, literary criticism, bibliography and other areas.

Textual Scholarship

- seeks to establish an authentic text for the literary critic to interpret and evaluate.
- not a traditional interpretive approach
- an indispensable tool for further meaningful analysis.
- in a surgical metaphor: textual critics are the first who prepare the literary corpus for further study
- textual critics are not scientists, p. 21

Examples of Textual Criticism

- Ezra Pound's editorial surgery of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*
- Dickens's two endings for *Great Expectations*
- Thomas Hardy's four versions of *The Return of the Native* (1878 - 1912), p. 20

2. Text Study in Practice

a. "To His Coy Mistress"

Now therefore while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew.

1. the first edition of the poem had "glew," a dialectal variant of "glow"
2. "Lew" (dialectal "warmth") was also suggested as a possibility.
3. someone conjectured "dew," probably in the eighteenth century to appear in nearly all textbooks



Types of Traditional Approaches

- 1. The Historical/ biographical**
- 2. The Moral/ philosophical**

1. Historical/Biographical Approach

- **Its basics are developed by the French H. A. Taine**
- **Samuel Johnson *Lives of the Poets* (1779)
(authors' lives + their literary achievements)**
- **A literary work chiefly reflects author's life and time or the life and time of the literary characters**
- **Examines how these external factors affect the literary work**
- **Nearly all literature (novels) is open to this approach**

Examples:

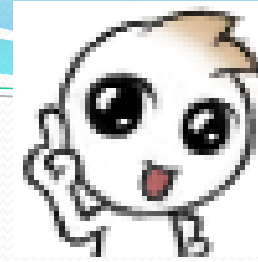
- A historical, ideological or propagandist novel become more meaningful when either milieu or author's life is understood.
- Political and religious verse satires
- Milton's blindness explains a line like "Her face was veiled."

HISTORICAL APPROACH

- determine the historical period of the work
- consider major events, values, beliefs, etc. of the epoch
- consider how the work fits with, or stands apart from, mainstream values or beliefs of the time
- consider other texts of the time that might give the reader insight into the time period

Biographical APPROACH

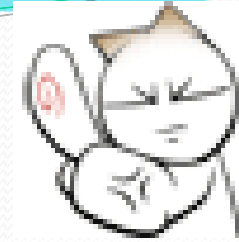
- 1). Are facts about the writer's life relevant to my understanding of the work?
- 2). Are characters and incidents in the work versions of the writer's own experiences?
- 3). Are the writer's values reflected in the work?



Advantages

1. **knowledge of the past gives readers a way to understand the language, ideas, etc.**
2. **can clarify allusions to local and historical events**
3. **can explain special uses of individual words and expressions.**
4. **can show why certain artists wrote as they did**
5. **can identify differences between contemporaries**

Disadvantages+ OPPOSITION:



- reduces art to the level of biography and makes it relative (to the times) rather than universal.
- is deficient in imagination
- has neglected the newer sciences,

Moral-Philosophical Approaches

- Examines the moral or philosophical issues within the literary text
- Approach goes back to Plato, Horace, Samuel Johnson, but has stayed relevant to modern readers
- Focuses on what is being taught