

METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS IN LITERARY STUDIES.

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Literary studies, the field dedicated to the exploration and understanding of literature, has always been a dynamic discipline. Its methods of analysis have evolved alongside changing societal perspectives, technological advancements, and the very nature of literary production itself. This article explores the key methodological trends that have shaped literary studies, highlighting their strengths, limitations, and contributions to our understanding of texts and their contexts.

Introduction. Introduction. Traditional Approaches: Laying the Foundation

1. Formalism:

- Focus: Internal elements of the text, form, structure, language, and literary devices.
- Strengths: Emphasizes the text's autonomy and artistic integrity.
- Limitations: Can neglect historical and social contexts, overlooking the text's potential for broader cultural and societal implications.
- Key Figures: Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Cleanth Brooks.

2. New Criticism:

- Focus: Close reading and textual analysis to uncover the text's meaning and unity.
- Strengths: Emphasizes the importance of careful attention to detail and the text's internal coherence.
- Limitations: Can be overly focused on the text, neglecting the author's intentions or the text's historical context.
- Key Figures: John Crowe Ransom, T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards.

3. Historicism:

- Focus: Understanding the text in its historical context, considering the author's life, social and cultural conditions, and the prevailing ideas of the time.
- Strengths: Provides a richer understanding of the text's meaning and relevance.
- Limitations: Can sometimes overly prioritize historical context, neglecting the text's enduring artistic qualities.
- Key Figures: Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Hayden White.

### **Modern Trends: Expanding Horizons**

#### **1. Structuralism:**

- Focus: Analyzing the underlying structures and systems that govern language, literature, and culture.
- Strengths: Offers a systematic approach to understanding literary texts and their relationships to broader cultural structures.
- Limitations: Can be overly abstract and distant from the lived experience of the reader.
- Key Figures: Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes.

#### **2. Post-Structuralism:**

- Focus: Challenging the idea of fixed meanings and universal truths, emphasizing the role of interpretation and the instability of language.
- Strengths: Highlights the complexity and subjectivity of interpretation, acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings within a text.
- Limitations: Can lead to a sense of relativism, making it difficult to establish firm interpretations.
- Key Figures: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler.

#### **3. Feminist Literary Criticism:**

- Focus: Analyzing literature through a lens of gender, exploring representations of women, power dynamics, and the social construction of gender.
- Strengths: Raises awareness of gender bias and inequality in literary texts and their cultural impact.
- Limitations: Can sometimes reduce literary analysis to a single dimension of gender.
- Key Figures: Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Judith Butler.

#### **4. Postcolonial Literary Criticism:**

- Focus: Examining literature from the perspective of colonized and formerly colonized cultures, highlighting issues of power, identity, and representation.
- Strengths: Broadens our understanding of literary traditions beyond the Eurocentric canon, revealing the complexity of cultural interactions.

◦ Limitations: Can sometimes focus too narrowly on the experience of the colonized, neglecting the complexities of power dynamics within the colonizer's culture.

◦ Key Figures: Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha.

#### **5. Psychoanalytic Criticism:**

◦ Focus: Analyzing texts through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, exploring the unconscious mind, motivations, and symbolism.

◦ Strengths: Offers insights into the psychological depth of characters and the unconscious dimensions of literary works.

◦ Limitations: Can be overly interpretive and subjective, sometimes relying on speculative interpretations.

◦ Key Figures: Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva.

#### **6. Reader-Response Criticism:**

◦ Focus: Exploring the reader's role in creating meaning, emphasizing the subjectivity and interaction between the text and the reader.

◦ Strengths: Acknowledges the active role of the reader in interpreting literature, highlighting the importance of individual experience and interpretation.

◦ Limitations: Can be difficult to establish a common ground for interpretation, potentially leading to subjective and highly individualistic readings.

◦ Key Figures: Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt.

### **Emerging Trends: Bridging Disciplines and Exploring New Horizons**

#### **1. Cultural Studies:**

◦ Focus: Analyzing literature within its broader cultural context, examining the interplay between texts, social practices, and power dynamics.

◦ Strengths: Provides a comprehensive understanding of literary works as products of and contributors to culture.

◦ Limitations: Can sometimes be overly broad and lack a focused analysis of the text itself.

◦ Key Figures: Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Judith Butler.

#### **2. Digital Humanities:**

◦ Focus: Using digital tools and methods to analyze large datasets of literary texts, explore patterns in language, and uncover hidden connections.

◦ Strengths: Allows for quantitative analysis and visualization of literary trends, opening up new avenues for research.



◦ Limitations: Can sometimes focus too heavily on data and neglect the nuanced interpretation of individual texts.

◦ Key Figures: Stephen Ramsay, Franco Moretti, Matthew Jockers.

### 3. **Ecocriticism:**

◦ Focus: Analyzing literature through the lens of environmental concerns, exploring the relationship between humans and nature, the representation of landscapes, and the impact of environmental degradation.

◦ Strengths: Raises awareness of environmental issues in literary texts and their broader cultural significance.

◦ Limitations: Can sometimes prioritize environmental themes over other aspects of the text.

◦ Key Figures: Greg Garrard, Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell.

### 4. **Disability Studies:**

◦ Focus: Analyzing literature through the lens of disability, exploring representations of disability, the social construction of difference, and the challenges faced by disabled individuals.

◦ Strengths: Raises awareness of disability issues in literature and their broader social and cultural implications.

◦ Limitations: Can sometimes focus too narrowly on the experience of disability, neglecting the intersections with other social identities.

◦ Key Figures: David Mitchell, Lennard Davis, Alison Kafer.

### **The Future of Literary Studies: A Convergence of Methods**

The future of literary studies lies in the continued development and integration of these diverse methodological approaches. A nuanced understanding of literature requires a multifaceted approach, acknowledging the text's internal complexities, historical context, cultural relevance, and the subjective experience of the reader.

The use of digital humanities tools allows for the analysis of vast datasets, uncovering patterns and connections previously unobserved. Interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on insights from fields like psychology, sociology, and anthropology, enrich our understanding of literary works and their broader significance.

By embracing these trends, literary studies can continue to evolve as a dynamic and intellectually stimulating field, contributing to a deeper understanding of human experience, culture, and the power of language.

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