

Literary Criticism – Topic 2 – *The advent of modern criticism and feminism*

The last Topic's readings by A.C. Bradley and Russ McDonald are both examples of the "old school" of literary criticism even though "The Flaw..." criticizes Bradley and it was written just a few years ago. Both critics represent a **humanistic point of view, that is, literary texts can reflect aspects of our lives while giving us insight into a more fulfilling existence. TIME YOURSELF ON THE GROUPWORK – GET DONE BY END OF THE PERIOD.**

Most literary critics of the second half of the 20th century, have rejected these humanistic notions. Instead, and please keep in mind that I am vastly oversimplifying here (while simultaneously preparing you for the vast overlong sentences of modern literary criticism) modern literary criticism postulates that texts, once written, are "detached" from their authors. Furthermore, the idea of author "intentionality" is a fallacy. Instead, texts either reflect and propagate the society around them (from such frameworks as: economic – Marxism; gender relations – feminism) or the text, upon close examination collapses (this is called deconstructionism) into a jumble of contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities.

Please remember: If you get lost or confused by any of this, there are many online sites that give more background and depth than we can go into here. One of these is Purdue's Online Writing Lab which has a fantastic introduction to Literary Criticism (and sections on each of its respective schools of thought). The url is:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/722/01/>



Group Work (to be answered in each person's journal – but discussed as a group)
(make sure you get done with this by the end of the period – have a timekeeper and stick with it!)

1. Let's start with a tough one. Considering the second paragraph above ("Most literary...") – which do you believe that modern literary critics believe more (sorry about the oversimplifying here): 1) *Twelfth Night* is a reflection of Shakespeare 2) *Twelfth Night* is a reflection of the society that molded the playwright known as Shakespeare? In order to be specific in your answer, use at least one quote from each side of last night's readings (there are 3, including Gibson) on feminism to answer your question.

2. According to your background sheet on Feminism ("Feminist Approaches to Literary Texts"), feminists often argue that male fears are portrayed through female characters. How does this "mesh" (agree) with Clement's criticism of *She's the Man*? Be specific in your answer with at least two examples.

3a. Explicate (explain in simpler and in a more extended way) this sentence from your reading: "For feminist literary critics, society and culture not only reflect gender, but also, in part, construct and define gender." How then, given that, is it appropriate for Clement to critique a popular movie like *She's the Man*? Look closely at the end of her essay ("Given the influence..."). How does what she says here – back up the premise that culture defines gender? Be specific and thoughtful – use a quote or two.

3b. Next, What are the implications then, according to this (literature constructing society), of teaching a sexist or racist work? Be specific. How is this opposed to the idea of the universal text and humanism (see above)? How does your group feel about this?

4. Briefly summarize what are the (first - not much here), second, and third waves of feminism that Clement refers to. How are these different or similar to the three stages of feminism as outlined by Elaine Showalter? Make sure you understand the difference between these. Recently (2017) a female member of congress was silenced by a man, while she was quoting another woman – against what she saw as an oppressive act – and yet she "persisted". Quickly relate this incident to these waves.

5a. What is wrong with the notion "that only exceptional girls really want to play sports, and that kind of girl can find a place on boy's teams?" (Clement 1). Does this kind of notion that only the best of the best women can compete in the world of men – exist in *Twelfth Night*? Let's assume that it doesn't. What is the danger then, again according to Jennifer Clement, of using an established work like *Twelfth Night* as the basis for a movie like *She's the Man*? How does it give this (and other antifeminist notions found in the film) credence (look it up)?

5b. Consider this quote: "Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so... In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values" (Tyson, cited by Brizee and Tompkins). Many of you admired *She's the Man*, (before and perhaps after you read this article). Does whether you "like" something mean that it can't be anti-woman? Is it possible that such a "likable" movie is even more insidious (look it up)? Explain with specifics.

5c. How does this discussion (specifically question 5) continue what you began when you worked on Shakespeare (or *Macbeth*) Made Easy? We talked in that group work about what is lost in a paraphrase (and isn't that exactly what *She's the Man* is?); but isn't something (in this case, negative) gained – see the end of question 4? How is that idea a primary thesis of Clement's article?

6. Think back to (the essay is in the textbooks in the bins) your reading by Virginia Wolfe, "Shakespeare's Sister" (from *A Room of One's Own*). If you need to, refresh your memories by checking out Woolf's essay in your textbooks (page 1124) How, specifically, can you relate that (Wolfe's) reading to what you've been answering in questions 1-5 (if you need to come back to this question later – with your reading in front of you – the books with that article are under your desk of course). Specifically, think

about what Jennifer Clement says about the importance of Title IX (“A Sport of our Own”) and her objection to what she sees as its dismissal? Couldn’t Title IX be called “A League of our Own”?

7. How does the Wife of Bath (tonight, if you have time find the handout with her prologue – the Vertext of our discussion is also available on the website) and her tale – but more importantly her Prologue fit into this discussion? Wasn’t she (like the Viola of *She’s the Man*, exceptional – what about all the other “oppressed” women of her time?). Be specific.

8. On page 2 of Clement’s article she states that “the movie’s use of upper-class markers of privilege, such as private boarding schools, debutante balls, cars for the students, and enormous houses, naturalizes those privileges...” However, can you argue that Shakespeare’s play **also** makes the same argument that **class determines privilege**? Why are those in Shakespeare’s play allowed to have this romp (or a *Twelfth Night*, if you will)? Be as specific as you can be.

9. (Quickly – and come back to this on your own if time runs out). Though you only have an excerpt – state in one sentence (use all of your groups information and knowledge) what you believe the **THESIS** of Jennifer Clement’s article to be. A thesis is the main point – (a main **provable** point).

Make sure that you understand solo work #2 – if you have time, work as a group to try to find such an example.

Solo Work – some of it going back a bit to McDonald

1. Whether or not you agree with Jennifer Clement – has she made you think about a text (a movie can be a text) – *She’s the Man* – in a way that you ordinarily wouldn’t? For some of you, will you ever look at this film – the same way? Explain – in this context – one role of literary criticism.

2. Examine page 10 of McDonald’s (“Flaw in the Flaw”) article closely (first full paragraph – beginning with the extended quote). Find a set of lines in *Twelfth Night* that have a similar set words with double meanings, (with a closeness or proximity to other words). What is result of paraphrasing those lines? Be specific and completely answer the question.

3. To whom is McDonald’s essay addressed? What is the effect of changing that audience from high school teachers to their students (yes, I just gave you the answer to the 1st part of the question)? Be specific. Harder: What is the effect of changing the audience of Shakespeare’s plays from Elizabethans to 21st century viewers (and more specifically to students)? Be specific. Ah, being meta again....

4. Do areas of study such as feminism tend to polarize us as readers (into separate groups) or bring us together (by giving us an understanding of those different from ourselves)? This question is not as simple as it appears. Keep in mind: are you *likely to react to a text if you feel it furthers your oppression*? Try to include one quote from *Twelfth Night* in justifying your answer.

5. Consider Clement’s article. How does its author use a historical framework (including Title IX) to further her argument about a fictional work (*She’s the Man*)? See your group work.

Questions for tomorrow (or if today is Friday then for Monday (or Tuesday if Monday is a holiday))

1. Have any of the historical introductions or biographical information about an author that you read in your text books helped you with your reading of any of the works of fiction or poems that we have covered. Be specific – cite one or two examples. Ah ha – remember the background and text quotes you were required to pull out for Swift?

2. Continuing the thought of question 3a Group Work above: do authors have an intention when they write something? Be as specific as you can in answering. Do you have an intention when you write a paper? Is that intention always easily discernable? Is it to get a good grade? Answer the question? Learn something? Impress the reader? Become a better writer in general? Or is it a combination of these?

3. Consider your answer to the second part of the first question above. Would your answer be the same if you were asked the intention of your paper right after you wrote it as opposed to, say, a year later? Why? Explain your answer. Which intention is correct?

4. There is considerable debate (don’t get me started on this) about the true authorship of Shakespeare’s work (including a film called, *Anonymous*). How would or would your reading of our last play, *Macbeth*, have been different if it were written by the Earl of Oxford instead of Shakespeare of Stratford? Ok – this should get you a thinking: What is more important your reading of that play or your historical knowledge of its construction? Answer as specifically as you can, citing any examples (from Shakespeare or not) that you can to bolster your argument.

Don’t forget your section on FREE THOUGHTS – ½ to 1 full page that should be at the end of EACH Topic’s work. ALSO NOTE: Your next Topic is on Author Intentionality, BUT you will also have a summary sheet on New Historicism (that summary sheet will be on your quiz). REMEMBER: Any time I am in the room – before school or any period (as long as I’m not actively teaching – if World Lit is working on group work that’s fine) you may come in with anyone from my Brit Lit classes to work on this.

