CRITICAL APPROACHES:
A handout composed by our class as we study Edgar V. Roberts, Ch. 24

First of all, what are critical approaches?

Ways for readers to analyze literature; theories developed by literary critics so that readers can develop a richer appreciation for a work

Seven (7) Important Critical Approaches

1. Moral/intellectual—readers find morals/intellectual knowledge in story and choose whether to accept/reject message for their own life; readers look for the “true and significant”; readers look for applications to their own life; in this way, literature is instructive and helpful and writers have a responsibility to society

2. Topic/historical—readers examine the background of the story and the life and times of the author; what occurred during author’s life and times informs the story; the story may comment on his/her current events or societal views

3. New critics/formalism—readers appreciate the literary devices and artistry of the work; works designated as classics for timeless themes and characters; critics examine and make literary arguments based only upon what is in the text; story as a form or piece of art

4. Gender studies—readers examine the interaction of the genders and performance of characters in their respective gender roles; has history in feminism, but approach not limited to determining how women may have been oppressed; study of how gender affects viewpoints, actions, and interactions

5. Economic determinism—readers examine the economic situation (including health, clothing, money, etc.) of the characters and how it affects them; stems from Marxist theory of class struggle; conflicts w/ U.S. capitalism thinking, but economic determinism seems to have infiltrated U.S. thinking

6. Psychological—readers examine formative experiences, unconscious desires, and hidden motives that cause character behavior; readers also examine the author and his/her artistic process; stems from Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis; likens characters as representative types of human beings so that comparisons may be drawn and models may be studied

7. Archetypal—readers look for patterns in literature, the ways stories normally develop regardless of geographical or historical boundaries; appreciation and identification of universal devices or situations; e.g. damsel in distress; hero saves the day; lower beings answering to a higher power, etc.