How do literary critics think? Here are some basics:

- Reality is not only a social construct but it is a representation of that social construct. In other words, what interest us is not reality as something we can measure or have direct access to, but reality as representation.

- Representation is the mediation of reality in time, place, and medium. For literature this medium is language—all the way from word to form; for film it is the cinematic language (time/image/apparatus); for architecture it is materials and form in space; etc. Each cultural artifact is singular and universal at the same time, and this double character of cultural objects has to do with the specific form the medium takes in space and time.

- We interpret representations (we don’t prove right or wrong, or quantify) assuming that cultural objects embody meaning. We don’t simply try to figure out what they mean but how cultural objects mean.

- Form and content are inseparable in the construction of meaning. It is not interesting to know what a novel tells us, if we don’t examine how it tells it to us and how the telling works.

How do critics understand ideas or values? Here are some basic assumptions of modern criticism:

- Ideas are not value-free. They exist as part of a historical moment and are imbedded in power structures. Ideas and their expression can be referred to by different names, such as ideology:
  - a set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests, or more broadly, from a definite class or group (Williams)
  or
  - a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (Althusser)

Or we can also refer to them as discursive formations, if we relate various sets of ideas that are intersect and form a complex discourse network (Foucault).

- Ideas are not ahistorical. They appear at concrete moments in time and are imbedded in the social matrix in which they appear.

- Ideas are not transhistorical. Concepts don’t travel throughout time untransformed (be this beauty, the good-life, etc.).

- Ideas don’t exist outside their enunciatory contexts. They mean different things to different people in different places.