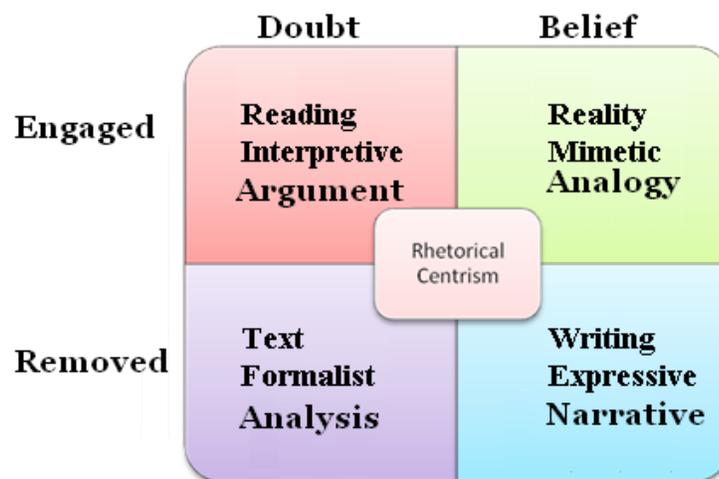


Writing Theory

Written communication, like essays, books, emails, or blog posts have four main parts. These are: the writer, the reader, the text, and the context. Writing theory is a way of thinking about a work of literature that narrows the amount of evidence that may be considered, by focusing on one of these aspects. For instance, a feminist interpretation would focus on the ways gender and power were used in the text, a strategy leading to arguments about the application in today's world. A formalist analysis usually focuses on more technical aspects, like the literary devices in a particular text. Another form of textual discussion is mimetic, in which a reader might draw analogies with a historical situation. The final type is expressivist, in which authors focus on building narratives with a rich personal context, to situate meaning in a related place or time. For instance, reading a heretical book in a deeply devout contemporary environment.



One issue that many students are not aware of is how personal engagement and belief play in our writing preferences. Some readers are removed from a text and doubt the author which plays nicely into a formalist treatment, because it has so many details and clues. However, in order to do an expressive treatment, the writer keep the text at arms distance, but actively engage in authorship through storytelling. Furthermore, if the student engages with the text actively, but still reserves doubt about author's purpose, then adding an interpretive spin brings some resolution. Perhaps most engaged, not only with the text, but also with the author's world is a mimetic treatment, in which the life, world, and culture of the author becomes primary, and which resembles a historical or social profile of a place in time.

I encourage my students to adopt a position of rhetorical centrim. We can dabble in each of the areas, depending on just how much we engage with a text, and how much we identify with the author's purpose in bringing it to us. It is important to become familiar with all types of theoretical discussions, whether primarily interpretive, formalist, mimetic, or expressive.