



Literary Criticism II

Schools of Literary Criticism

Faculty of Al-Asun (Languages)

Department of English

Academic year 2021-2022

Fourth Year

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Introduction

This book was compiled with the clear intention of providing the student with a manual that works along lectures. In it an overall presentation of the modern schools of literary criticism will be provided in a simple manner. This serves the learning outcomes that the course targets. *This book* surveys the main literary theories. It introduces each representative theory, its key concepts, and its key critics and theorists. It starts with New Criticism in the first half of the twentieth century and moves forward up to recent trends in literary theory. It enables students to acquire sufficient knowledge about literary theories necessary for their study of literature. By the end of this course the students will be able to clarify the differences between the different schools of literary theory as well as write analytical essays where he engages critically with the ideas and authors in an atmosphere of encouragement and creativity. Literary theory simply defined, is a way of thinking about the text. Each school of literary criticism approach the text from a particular angle using its own terminology and perspective. Sometimes literary schools of criticism come as reactions to previous or contemporaneous schools of criticism. For example, reader response criticism which stresses the role of the reader in the act of interpreting a text came as a reaction to New Criticism, “which treat the literary work as independent of the author’s thoughts or intentions, and critical approaches such as new historicism and cultural studies, which assume that literature is largely determined by factors in the external environment.” (Abrams, *Glossary* 54).

In this manner, New Criticism treated the text as cut off from any context. In return Reader Response criticism reversed this and focused on the act of reading and the role of the reader not as discoverer of

meaning but as a 'maker' of meaning. Other schools of criticism reacted to New Criticism by focusing on the author's psychology and investigated the text as a revelation of the author's unconscious very much like dreams and slips of the tongue. Other schools such as New Historicism focused on the political and social conditions in which the text was produced as well as its reception by the readers of its time. To cut a long story short, we are going to lay bare the principals of each school of literary criticism and compare them as well as have the space to voice our preferences and take on all of that.

New Criticism

New Criticism was a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. It emphasized close reading,

particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. The movement derived its name from John Crowe Ransom's 1941 book *The New Criticism*. Also very influential were the critical essays of T. S. Eliot, such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet and His Problems," in which Eliot developed his notion of the "objective correlative." Eliot's evaluative judgments, such as his condemnation of Milton and Shelley, his liking for the so-called metaphysical poets and his insistence that poetry must be impersonal, greatly influenced the formation of the New Critical canon.

New Criticism developed as a reaction to the older philological and literary history schools of the US North, which, influenced by nineteenth-century German scholarship, focused on the history and meaning of individual words and their relation to foreign and ancient languages, comparative sources, and the biographical circumstances of the authors. These approaches, it was felt, tended to distract from the text and meaning of a poem and entirely neglect its aesthetic qualities in favor of teaching about external factors. On the other hand, the literary appreciation school, which limited itself to pointing out the "beauties" and morally elevating qualities of the text, was disparaged by the New Critics as too subjective and emotional. Condemning this as a version of Romanticism, they aimed for newer, systematic and objective method.

New Critics believed the structure and meaning of the text were intimately connected and should not be analyzed separately. In order to bring the focus of literary studies back to analysis of the texts, they aimed to exclude the reader's response, the author's intention, historical and cultural contexts, and moralistic bias from their analysis.

The hey-day of the New Criticism in American high schools and colleges was the Cold War decades between 1950 and the mid-seventies, doubtless because it offered a relatively straightforward and politically uncontroversial approach to the teaching of literature. Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction* both became staples during this era.

Studying a passage of prose or poetry in New Critical style required careful, exacting scrutiny of the passage itself. Formal elements such as rhyme, meter, setting, characterization, and plot were used to identify the theme of the text. In addition to the theme, the New Critics also looked for paradox, ambiguity, irony, and tension to help establish the single best and most unified interpretation of the text.

Although the New Criticism is no longer a dominant theoretical model in American universities, some of its methods (like close reading) are still fundamental tools of literary criticism, underpinning a number of subsequent theoretic approaches to literature including poststructuralism, deconstruction theory, and reader-response theory.

Reader Response Criticism

This school of criticism comes as a reaction to New Criticism

Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

At its most basic level, reader-response criticism considers readers' reactions to literature as vital to interpreting the meaning of the text. However, reader-response criticism can take a number of different approaches. A critic deploying reader-response theory can use a psychoanalytic lens, a feminist lens, or even a structuralist lens. What these different lenses have in common when using a reader-response approach is they maintain "...that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does" (Tyson 154).

Tyson explains that "...reader-response theorists share two beliefs: 1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and 2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature" (154). In this way, reader-response theory shares common ground with some of the deconstructionists discussed in the Post-structural area when they talk about "the death of the author," or her displacement as the (author)itarian figure in the text.

Typical questions:

- How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning?
- What does a phrase-by-phrase analysis of a short literary text, or a key portion of a longer text, tell us about the reading experience prestructured by (built into) that text?
- Do the sounds/shapes of the words as they appear on the page or how they are spoken by the reader enhance or change the meaning of the word/work?

- How might we interpret a literary text to show that the reader's response is, or is analogous to, the topic of the story?
- What does the body of criticism published about a literary text suggest about the critics who interpreted that text and/or about the reading experience produced by that text? (Tyson 191)

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

- Peter Rabinowitz - *Before Reading*, 1987
- Stanley Fish - *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, 1980
- Elizabeth Freund - *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*, 1987
- David Bleich
- Norman Holland - *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, 1968
- Louise Rosenblatt
- Wolfgang Iser - *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, 1974
- Hans Robert Jauss

Psychoanalytic Criticism (1930s-present)

SIGMUND FREUD

Psychoanalytic criticism builds on Freudian theories of psychology. While we don't have the room here to discuss all of Freud's work, a general overview is necessary to explain psychoanalytic literary criticism.

The Unconscious, the Desires, and the Defenses

Freud began his psychoanalytic work in the 1880s while attempting to treat behavioral disorders in his Viennese patients. He dubbed the disorders 'hysteria' and began treating them by listening to his patients talk through their problems. Based on this work, Freud asserted that people's behavior is affected by their unconscious: "...the notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware..." (Tyson 14-15).

Freud believed that our unconscious was influenced by childhood events. Freud organized these events into developmental stages involving relationships with parents and drives of desire and pleasure where children focus "...on different parts of the body...starting with the mouth...shifting to the oral, anal, and phallic phases..." (Richter 1015). These stages reflect base levels of desire, but they also involve fear of loss (loss of genitals, loss of affection from parents, loss of life) and repression: "...the expunging from consciousness of these unhappy psychological events" (Tyson 15).

Tyson reminds us, however, that "...repression doesn't eliminate our painful experiences and emotions...we unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to 'play out'...our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress" (15). To keep all of this conflict buried in our unconscious, Freud argued that we develop defenses: selective perception, selective memory, denial, displacement, projection, regression, fear of intimacy, and fear of death, among others.

Id, Ego, and Superego

Freud maintained that our desires and our unconscious conflicts give rise to three areas of the mind that wrestle for dominance as we grow from infancy, to childhood, to adulthood:

- id - "...the location of the drives" or libido
- ego - "...one of the major defenses against the power of the drives..." and home of the defenses listed above

- superego - the area of the unconscious that houses Judgment (of self and others) and "...which begins to form during childhood as a result of the Oedipus complex" (Richter 1015-1016)

Oedipus Complex

Freud believed that the Oedipus complex was "...one of the most powerfully determinative elements in the growth of the child" (Richter 1016). Essentially, the Oedipus complex involves children's need for their parents and the conflict that arises as children mature and realize they are not the absolute focus of their mother's attention: "the Oedipus complex begins in a late phase of infantile sexuality, between the child's third and sixth year, and it takes a different form in males than it does in females" (Richter 1016).

Freud argued that both boys and girls wish to possess their mothers, but as they grow older "...they begin to sense that their claim to exclusive attention is thwarted by the mother's attention to the father..." (1016). Children, Freud maintained, connect this conflict of attention to the intimate relations between mother and father, relations from which the children are excluded. Freud believed that "the result is a murderous rage against the father...and a desire to possess the mother" (1016).

Freud pointed out, however, that "...the Oedipus complex differs in boys and girls...the functioning of the related castration complex" (1016). In short, Freud thought that "...during the Oedipal rivalry [between boys and their fathers], boys fantasized that punishment for their rage will take the form of..." castration (1016). When boys effectively work through this anxiety, Freud argued, "...the boy learns to identify with the father in the hope of someday possessing a woman like his mother. In girls, the castration complex does not take the form of anxiety...the result is a frustrated rage in which the girl shifts her sexual desire from the mother to the father" (1016).

Freud believed that eventually, the girl's spurned advances toward the father give way to a desire to possess a man like her father later in life. Freud believed that the impact of the unconscious, id, ego, superego, the defenses, and the Oedipus complex was inescapable and that these elements of the mind influence all our behavior (and even our dreams) as adults - of course this behavior involves what we write.

Freud and Literature

So what does all of this psychological business have to do with literature and the study of literature? Put simply, some critics believe that we can "...read psychoanalytically...to see which concepts are operating in the text in such a way as to enrich our understanding of the work and, if we plan to write a paper about it, to yield a meaningful, coherent psychoanalytic interpretation" (Tyson 29). Tyson provides some insightful and applicable questions to help guide our understanding of psychoanalytic criticism.

Typical questions:

- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work?
- Are there any Oedipal dynamics - or any other family dynamics - at work here?
- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example, fear or fascination with death, sexuality - which includes love and romance as well as sexual behavior - as a primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)?
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?
- What might a given interpretation of a literary work suggest about the psychological motives of the reader?
- Are there prominent words in the piece that could have different or hidden meanings? Could there be a subconscious reason for the author using these "problem words"?

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

- Harold Bloom - *A Theory of Poetry*, 1973; *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens*, 1976
- Peter Brooks
- Jacques Lacan - *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 1988; "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" (from *Écrits: A Selection*, 1957)
- Jane Gallop - *Reading Lacan*, 1985
- Julia Kristeva - *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984
- Marshall Alcorn - *Changing the Subject in English Class: Discourse and the Constructions of Desire*, 2002

CARL JUNG

Jungian criticism attempts to explore the connection between literature and what Carl Jung (a student of Freud) called the “collective unconscious” of the human race: “...racial memory, through which the spirit of the whole human species manifests itself” (Richter 504). Jungian criticism, which is closely related to Freudian theory because of its connection to psychoanalysis, assumes that all stories and symbols are based on mythic models from mankind’s past.

Based on these commonalities, Jung developed archetypal myths, the *Syzygy*: “...a quaternion composing a whole, the unified self of which people are in search” (Richter 505). These archetypes are the Shadow, the Anima, the Animus, and the Spirit: “...beneath...[the Shadow] is the Anima, the feminine side of the male Self, and the Animus, the corresponding masculine side of the female Self” (Richter 505).

In literary analysis, a Jungian critic would look for archetypes (also see the discussion of Northrop Frye in the Structuralism section) in creative works: “Jungian criticism is generally involved with a search for the embodiment of these symbols within particular works of art.” (Richter 505). When dealing with this sort of criticism, it is often useful to keep a handbook of mythology and a dictionary of symbols on hand.

Typical questions:

- What connections can we make between elements of the text and the archetypes? (Mask, Shadow, Anima, Animus)
- How do the characters in the text mirror the archetypal figures? (Great Mother or nurturing Mother, Whore, destroying Crone, Lover, Destroying Angel)
- How does the text mirror the archetypal narrative patterns? (Quest, Night-Sea-Journey)
- How symbolic is the imagery in the work?
- How does the protagonist reflect the hero of myth?
- Does the “hero” embark on a journey in either a physical or spiritual sense?
- Is there a journey to an underworld or land of the dead?
- What trials or ordeals does the protagonist face? What is the reward for overcoming them?

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

- Maud Bodkin - *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, 1934
- Carl Jung - *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Vol. 9, Part 1 of *Collected Works*. 2nd ed. Trans. R.F.C. Hull, 1968
- Bettina Knapp - *Music, Archetype and the Writer: A Jungian View*, 1988
- Richard Sugg - *Jungian Literary Criticism*, 1993

Biographical Criticism

We use the author's biography or autobiography or any information from any source about his life, to shed light on the meaning of a text written by him be it a novel, a poem, or a play. Biographical criticism is to understand why the author wrote what he wrote, which requires us to understand the author's world. For example, what worldview was typical of the author's time? What aspects of this world view seem prevalent in this story or character? Does the author accept or rebel against this worldview. How people responded to the author's works and life.

What ideas did people find in the author's life and work.

Archetypal Criticism

In literature and art, an archetype is a character, a tradition, an event, a story, or an image that recurs in different work, in different cultures, and in different periods of time. Archetypal criticism focuses on those patterns in a work that commonly occur in other literary works. These patterns include persistent images, figures, story patterns shared by people and cultures.

So an archetype is a kind of original model, e.g. the flood that covers the entire planet initiating a kind of clean slate is an original mood for stories.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung believed that common archetypes existed in the collective unconscious. He based this assertion in part on the fact that there are images, character types, setting and story patterns that existed across cultures.

Archetypal characters:

Hero/ heroine

Sidekick

Outcast

Caring mother

Archetypal situations:

- 1- Pursuit of revenge
- 2- The journey
- 3- The quest
- 4- The loss of innocence
- 5- The end of the world
- 6- Searching for father

Archetypal critical questions:

- 1- What images, symbols, figures are present in a literary work that are present in other literary works.
- 2- What myths, dreams, rituals are present in a literary work that are present in other works.

Marxist Criticism

Marxist criticism does not support communism or socialism. This is simply a way of reading and interpreting art. Marxist criticism makes a division between the surface and hidden meanings of the content of a literary work. It relates the context of a work to the social-class status of the author. It explains the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which produced it. It relates the literary work to the social assumption of the time which it is consumed or read.

Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)

WHOM DOES IT BENEFIT?

Based on the theories of Karl Marx (and so influenced by philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel), this school concerns itself with class differences, economic and otherwise, as well as the implications and complications of the capitalist system: "Marxism attempts to reveal the ways in which our socioeconomic system is the ultimate source of our experience" (Tyson 277).

Theorists working in the Marxist tradition, therefore, are interested in answering the overarching question, whom does it [the work, the effort, the policy, the road, etc.] benefit? The elite? The middle class? Marxist critics are also interested in how the lower or working classes are oppressed - in everyday life and in literature.

THE MATERIAL DIALECTIC

The Marxist school follows a process of thinking called the material dialectic. This belief system maintains that "...what drives historical change are the material realities of the economic base of society, rather than the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, religion, and art that is built upon that economic base" (Richter 1088).

Marx asserts that "...stable societies develop sites of resistance: contradictions build into the social system that ultimately lead to social revolution and the development of a new society upon the old" (1088). This cycle of contradiction, tension, and revolution must continue: there will always be conflict between the upper, middle, and lower (working) classes and this conflict will be reflected in literature and other forms of expression - art, music, movies, etc.

THE REVOLUTION

The continuing conflict between the classes will lead to upheaval and revolution by oppressed peoples and form the groundwork for a new order of society and economics where capitalism is abolished. According to Marx, the revolution will be led by the working class (others think peasants will lead the uprising) under the guidance of intellectuals. Once the elite and middle class are overthrown, the intellectuals will compose an equal society where everyone owns everything (socialism - not to be confused with Soviet or Maoist Communism).

Though a staggering number of different nuances exist within this school of literary theory, Marxist critics generally work in areas covered by the following questions.

Typical questions:

- Whom does it benefit if the work or effort is accepted/successful/believed, etc.?
- What is the social class of the author?
- Which class does the work claim to represent?
- What values does it reinforce?
- What values does it subvert?
- What conflict can be seen between the values the work champions and those it portrays?
- What social classes do the characters represent?

- How do characters from different classes interact or conflict?

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

- Karl Marx - (with Friedrich Engels) *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848; *Das Kapital*, 1867; "Consciousness Derived from Material Conditions" from *The German Ideology*, 1932; "On Greek Art in Its Time" from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859
- Leon Trotsky - "Literature and Revolution," 1923
- Georg Lukács - "The Ideology of Modernism," 1956
- Walter Benjamin - "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1936
- Theodor W. Adorno
- Louis Althusser - *Reading Capital*, 1965
- Terry Eagleton - *Marxism and Literary Criticism, Criticism and Ideology*, 1976
- Frederic Jameson - *Marxism and Form, The Political Unconscious*, 1971
- Jürgen Habermas - *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 1990

Postcolonial Criticism

Orientalist discourse

In this discourse, the Arabo Islamic world were represented as barbaric, violent,

backward and in need of western enlightenment. The white man's burden to civilize countries they considered backward. On the other hand, the west was represented as advanced, modern and rational. So this discourse was first analyzed

by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978). Islam and Arab were represented as the others. The west put itself in comparison to the Islamic east. The orient was represented as having negative qualities such as cruelty, sensuality, decadence and

laziness. In order to enter modernity everyday has to follow the westren model of economy, politics and society (universalist claims)

Edward Said was a Palestinian American professor of comparative literature at Columbia university. He has written several books on literary criticism as well as books on Islam and Palestine. Among his books covering Islam is one of his books which uncovered the way the western media vilifies Islam and paints it in a negative light. Islam was represented as a menace to western civilization. Edward Said was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in 2003. He was active in defending the Palestinian to their homes which they lost in 1948.

Colonial racist discourse

This discourse divided humans according to color. Blacks were considered a race that is limited in understanding and is only fit for working on fields. The whites were considered a superior race. So, this myth has been used to justify the British, French, and American enslavement of Africans.

What does post-colonial criticism do?

- 1- Analyzes white representations of colonial countries. How they represent blacks and Muslims in literature.
- 2- Post-colonial writers explore slaves and society. They represent themselves.
- 3- It rejects claims of universalities. The west is not the only model.

- 4- Post-colonialism shows how western literature is silent on matters of imperialism and colonialism.

Colonial discourse analysis and Africa

It mainly tries to understand the mechanics of colonialist writings. In heart of darkness for example we never come across Africans as individuals with names. We never get to hear them talking. So, the way Africans were depicted in colonialist discourse is one of dehumanization which stands in stark contrast with

the way novelists of the time portrayed white men. Africa is depicted as dark, brutal, and barbaric while London is a safe and civilized city.

Western literature of the colonialist period omits mention of colonialization. The evils of imperialism for example, in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, there is no mention of slavery or colonialism. Western literature fell silent and avoided telling the truth about the brutality committed by western colonial forces against (Red Indians) native Americans and Africans to the Americas from Africa and thus

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destroying their lives.

The colonized writes back. While western literature remained shamelessly ignorant of the plight of the African or of the colonized, there started a trend where people from former British colonies started writing literature that represents the African and the Muslim from a different perspective while Africans appear only as brutal masses in *Heart of Darkness*. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Africans are represented as individuals. The hero of the novel, Okonkwo, commits suicide at the end of the novel because he couldn't make peace with the colonialists who occupied its country and undermined its culture through violence.

His suicide is symbolic of his failure to adapt to the new value system imposed by British colonialism. The violence committed by British against Africans was meant to change their identity and make them docile subjects of that British

Empire, something which the hero of Things Fall Apart rejects.

Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present)

HISTORY IS WRITTEN BY THE VICTORS

Post-colonial criticism is similar to cultural studies, but it assumes a unique perspective on literature and politics that warrants a separate discussion. Specifically, post-colonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonized. Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (Western colonizers controlling the colonized).

Therefore, a post-colonial critic might be interested in works such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where colonial "...ideology [is] manifest in Crusoe's colonialist attitude toward the land upon which he's shipwrecked and toward the black man he 'colonizes' and names Friday" (Tyson 377). In addition, post-colonial theory might point out that "...despite Heart of Darkness's (Joseph Conrad) obvious anti-colonialist agenda, the novel points to the colonized population as the standard of savagery to which Europeans are contrasted" (Tyson 375). Post-colonial criticism also takes the form of literature composed by authors that critique Euro-centric hegemony.

A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON EMPIRE

Seminal post-colonial writers such as Nigerian author Chinua Achebe and Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o have written a number of stories recounting the suffering of colonized people. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe details the strife and devastation that occurred when British colonists began moving inland from the Nigerian coast.

Rather than glorifying the exploratory nature of European colonists as they expanded their sphere of influence, Achebe narrates the destructive events that led to the death and enslavement of thousands of Nigerians when the British imposed their Imperial government. In turn, Achebe points out the negative effects (and shifting ideas of identity and culture) caused by the imposition of Western religion and economics on Nigerians during colonial rule.

POWER, HEGEMONY, AND LITERATURE

Post-colonial criticism also questions the role of the Western literary canon and Western history as dominant forms of knowledge making. The terms "First World," "Second World," "Third World" and "Fourth World" nations are critiqued by post-colonial critics because they reinforce the dominant positions of Western cultures populating First World status. This critique includes the literary canon and histories written from the perspective of First World cultures. So, for example, a post-colonial critic might question the works included in "the canon" because the canon does not contain works by authors outside Western culture.

Moreover, the authors included in the canon often reinforce colonial hegemonic ideology, such as Joseph Conrad. Western critics might consider *Heart of Darkness* an effective critique of colonial behavior. But post-colonial theorists and authors might disagree with this perspective: "...as Chinua Achebe observes, the novel's condemnation of European is based on a definition of Africans as savages: beneath their veneer of civilization, the Europeans are, the novel tells us, as barbaric as the Africans. And indeed, Achebe notes, the novel portrays Africans as a pre-historic mass of frenzied, howling, incomprehensible barbarians..." (Tyson 374-375).

Typical questions:

- How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression?
- What does the text reveal about the problematics of post-colonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?
- What person(s) or groups does the work identify as "other" or stranger? How are such persons/groups described and treated?
- What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance?
- What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference - the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity - in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live?
- How does the text respond to or comment upon the characters, themes, or assumptions of a canonized (colonialist) work?
- Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different post-colonial populations?
- How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonialization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples? (Tyson 378-379)

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

Criticism

- Edward Said - *Orientalism*, 1978; *Culture and Imperialism*, 1994
- Kamau Brathwaite - *The History of the Voice*, 1979
- Gayatri Spivak - *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 1987
- Dominick LaCapra - *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, 1991
- Homi Bhabha - *The Location of Culture*, 1994

Literature and non-fiction

- Chinua Achebe - *Things Fall Apart*, 1958
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o - *The River Between*, 1965
- Sembene Ousmane - *God's Bits of Wood*, 1962
- Ruth Praver Jhabvala - *Heat and Dust*, 1975
- Buchi Emecheta - *The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979
- Keri Hulme - *The Bone People*, 1983
- Robertson Davies - *What's Bred in the Bone*, 1985
- Kazuo Ishiguro - *The Remains of the Day*, 1988
- Bharati Mukherjee - *Jasmine*, 1989
- Jill Ker Conway - *The Road from Coorain*, 1989
- Helena Norberg-Hodge - *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*, 1991
- Michael Ondaatje - *The English Patient*, 1992
- Gita Mehta - *A River Sutra*, 1993
- Arundhati Roy - *The God of Small Things*, 1997
- Patrick Chamoiseau - *Texaco*, 1997

Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism rose against the emotional and psychological stereotyping of women. Women are characterized as weak, passive, emotional and irrational.

Feminist criticism a how women are represented in literary texts. They focus on

how femininity is represented as passive and emotional. Women are portrayed as caregivers and men are associated with reason and action. Feminist movement in politics as well as feminist critique of literature to raise awareness about the importance and outstanding nature of women in literature and to point out how language was used to marginalize women. So feminist critique aims to show that writers of traditional literature have ignored and distorted image of women. It aims as well to create a critical landscape that reflects a balanced view of the nature and value of women.

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Feminist criticism aims to expand the literary canon by recovering works of women of the past and by publishing more female writers.

feminists tried to introduce changes to the English language to make it more equal with regard to women. An example of this is using a word such as humanity instead of mankind.

Finally, feminist critique studies how the representation of women and men reflects the time and place of the work. It is interested in how the relationship between men and women is portrayed in the text. It is concerned with the perspective of the work.

Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)

Feminist criticism is concerned with "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 83). This school of theory looks at how aspects of our culture are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and aims to expose misogyny in writing about women, which can take explicit and implicit forms. This misogyny, Tyson reminds us, can extend into diverse areas of our culture: "Perhaps the most chilling example...is found in the world of modern medicine, where drugs prescribed for both sexes often have been tested on male subjects only" (85).

Feminist criticism is also concerned with less obvious forms of marginalization such as the exclusion of women writers from the traditional literary canon: "...unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to underrepresent the contribution of women writers" (Tyson 84).

COMMON SPACE IN FEMINIST THEORIES

Though a number of different approaches exist in feminist criticism, there exist some areas of commonality. This list is excerpted from Tyson (92):

1. Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which women are oppressed.
2. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values.
3. All of Western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, for example, in the Biblical portrayal of Eve as the origin of sin and death in the world.
4. While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (scales of masculine and feminine).
5. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by prompting gender equality.
6. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.

Feminist criticism has, in many ways, followed what some theorists call the three waves of feminism:

1. **First Wave Feminism** - late 1700s-early 1900's: writers like Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) highlight the inequalities between

the sexes. Activists like Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull contribute to the women's suffrage movement, which leads to National Universal Suffrage in 1920 with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment.

2. **Second Wave Feminism** - early 1960s-late 1970s: building on more equal working conditions necessary in America during World War II, movements such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in 1966, cohere feminist political activism. Writers like Simone de Beauvoir (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949) and Elaine Showalter established the groundwork for the dissemination of feminist theories dove-tailed with the American Civil Rights movement.
3. **Third Wave Feminism** - early 1990s-present: resisting the perceived essentialist (over generalized, over simplified) ideologies and a white, heterosexual, middle class focus of second wave feminism, third wave feminism borrows from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories (see below) to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. Writers like Alice Walker work to "...reconcile it [feminism] with the concerns of the black community...[and] the survival and wholeness of her people, men and women both, and for the promotion of dialog and community as well as for the valorization of women and of all the varieties of work women perform" (Tyson 107).

Typical questions:

- How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?
- What are the power relationships between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?
- How are male and female roles defined?
- What constitutes masculinity and femininity?
- How do characters embody these traits?
- Do characters take on traits from opposite genders? How so? How does this change others' reactions to them?
- What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy?
- What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy?
- What does the work say about women's creativity?
- What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operation of patriarchy?
- What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition? (Tyson)

Here is a list of scholars we encourage you to explore to further your understanding of this theory:

- Mary Wollstonecraft - *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792
- Simone de Beauvoir - *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex)*, 1949

- Julia Kristeva - *About Chinese Women*, 1977
- Elaine Showalter - *A Literature of Their Own*, 1977; "Toward a Feminist Poetics," 1979
- Deborah E. McDowell - "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," 1980
- Alice Walker - *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, 1983
- Lillian S. Robinson - "Treason out Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon," 1983
- Camille Paglia - *Sexual Personae: The Androgyne in Literature and Art*, 1990

Here is the Tyson source referenced above:

- Lois Tyson - *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd ed., 2006.

The Story of an Hour Kate Chopin

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death. It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message. She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her. There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul. She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window. She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams. She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines

bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought. There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body. She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome. There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made

the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination. And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! "Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering. Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window. Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long. She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom. Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife. But Richards was too late. When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

A Red, Red Rose by [Robert Burns](#)

O my Luvie is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luvie is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.
So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luvie am I;
And I will luvie thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.
And fare thee weel, my only luvie!
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luvie,
Though it were ten thousand mile.

Suggested texts:

1- Bertens, H. (2014). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. Third Edition. London and New York: Routledge.

References:

2- Culler, J. (2000). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3- Klages, M. (2012). *Key Terms in Literary Theory*. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group