**Literary Theory**

"Literary theory" is the body of ideas, approaches and methods we use in the practical reading of literature. By literary theory we refer not to the meaning of a work of literature but to the theories that reveal what literature can mean. Literary theory is a description of the underlying principles, one might say the tools, by which we attempt to understand literature. All literary interpretation draws on a basis in theory but can serve as a justification for very different kinds of critical activity. It is literary theory that formulates the relationship between author and work; literary theory develops the significance of race, class, and gender for literary study, both from the standpoint of the biography of the author and an analysis of their themes within texts. Literary theory offers varying approaches for understanding the role of historical context in interpretation as well as the relevance of linguistic and unconscious elements of the text. Literary theory in recent years has sought to explain the degree to which the text is more the product of a culture than an individual author and in turn how those texts help to create the culture.

**What’s a CLT?**

We refer to the more relevant literary theories that are applicable to the texts we study in class as “Contemporary Literary Theories,” or “Critical Literary Theories.” The reason for this is as just like some forms of technology can become outdated, so can literary theories. Theories such as Romanticism, American Pragmatism, Darwinian literary studies, German hermeneutics, New Criticismand Reader-Response criticism have all fallen the way of the camera flashcube. When reading a text, we can use different theories to understand and interpret deeper meanings from the text, through different lenses. One you understand a literary theory, putting on that lens can feel quite natural. In applying literary theory, you need to show how you got to the reading through using examples from the text.

**What do I need to know?**

In applying a CLT to a text and applying a certain reading, you will need to understand:

* The basics of the theory.
* Why the theory could be considered important and meaningful to your interpretation and reading of the text.
* What message this sends to society.

**Why do I need to know it?**

In critically engaging with literature, you are more likely to appreciate it. In applying CLTs well, you will demonstrate a depth of knowledge that will improve your understanding not just of the text itself, but the world around you.The texts that we study in class lend themselves to different critical lenses, some are obvious; however, some are not.It is up to you as a scholar and a theorist to find the angle that works best for you.

**Literary Theory: The Basics**

While not all of the following theories can easily be applied to the texts we study in class, most of these can be applied to texts to enhance and create a richer analysis of the text. When applying a theory in an essay, you need to ensure that you are clear about the theory that you are applying and have named it, and you have also followed rule number one of ATAR: answering all aspects of the question.

1. **Postcolonialism**

**Postcolonialism** is the study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. Postcolonialism is a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of European imperial power. In general postcolonialism represents an ideological response to colonialist thought, rather than simply describing a system that comes after colonialism. Postcolonialism encompasses a wide variety of approaches, and theoreticians may not always agree on a common set of definitions. On a simple level, it may seek through anthropological study to build a better understanding of colonial life from the point of view of the colonised people, based on the assumption that the colonial rulers are unreliable narrators.

On a deeper level, postcolonialism examines the social and political power relationships that sustain colonialism and [neocolonialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocolonialism), including the social, political and cultural narratives surrounding the coloniser and the colonised.

**Colonial discourse**

Colonialism was presented as "the extension of civilization", which ideologically justified the self-ascribed racial and cultural superiority of the Western world over the non-Western world. Imperial stewardship was thought to improve the intellectual and moral reformation of the coloured peoples of the lesser cultures of the world. The 'civilizing missions' of European countriesproposed that some races and cultures have a higher purpose in life, whereby the more powerful, more developed, and more civilized races have the right to colonise other peoples, in service to the noble idea of "civilization" and its economic benefits.

**Edward Said** (pronounced sigh-eed) – **Creating the “Oriental other”**

According to Said, "The West" created the cultural concept of "the East", which allowed the Europeans to suppress the peoples of the Middle East, of the Indian Subcontinent, and of Asia, from expressing and representing themselves as discrete peoples and cultures. All cultures were described and explained by colonists as ‘Oriental.’ Orientalism conflated and reduced the non–Western world into the homogeneous cultural entity known as "the East". Therefore, in service to the colonial type of imperialism, the us-and-them Orientalist paradigm allowed European scholars to represent the Oriental World as inferior and backward, irrational and wild, as opposed to a Western Europe that was superior and progressive, rational and civil—the opposite of the Oriental Other.

Said said that the European West applied Orientalism as a *homogeneous* form of [The Other](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other_(philosophy)) (something so different that it is not considered to be equal, and in some cases, not human), in order to facilitate the formation of the cohesive, collective European cultural identity denoted by the term "The West."Orientalism fictionally depicts the Orient as an irrational, psychologically weak, and feminised, non-European Other, which is negatively contrasted with the rational, psychologically strong, and masculine West.

What is applicable in Said’s theory is how other cultures have labelled the original inhabitants of lands (not just East Asians) as ‘Other’ in order to colonise land and subjugate people. Said’s theory exposes how the West demonises, excludes, demeans and patronisesdifference, whether it is based on skin colour or cultural practises. ‘The Other’ in society is usually seen as distinct from what one would consider the ‘norm’ andone responds with‘abjection’(physical revulsion) to marginalised groups.

**Frantz Fanon – The Psychology of the Colonised**

In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), the [psychiatrist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychiatrist) and [philosopher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher) [Frantz Fanon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frantz_Fanon) analysed and medically described the nature of colonialism as essentially destructive. Its societal effects—the imposition of a subjugating colonial identity—are harmful to the mental health of the native peoples who were subjugated into colonies. Fanon wrote that the essence of colonialism is the systematic denial of "all attributes of humanity" of the colonised people.

In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon describes the oppressed person who is perceived to be a lesser creature in the White world that they live in, and studies how they navigate the world through a performance of White-ness. He discusses the impact of performing the language of the colonisers ‘correctly’ on the colonised psyche and sense of self.

**Gayatri Spivak**

In [critical theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_theory), the term **subaltern** designates the colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the [hierarchy of power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierarchy) of a [colony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony), and of the empire's metropolitan homeland. Spivak’s seminal essay, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ discusses the impossibility of an authentic voice for the colonised in order to oppose ‘Orientalism.’To be heard and to be known, the subaltern native must adopt Western ways of knowing (language, thought, reasoning); because of such Westernisation, a subaltern people can never express their native ways of knowing, and, instead, must conform their native expression of knowledge to the Western, colonial ways of knowing the world.The subordinated native can be heard by the colonisers only by speaking the language of their empire; thus, intellectual and cultural filters muddle the true voice of the subaltern native.

**Homi Bhabha – Diaspora, mimicry and the Third Space**

The nature of the world is changing, we are a more multicultural society due to **diaspora** (immigration). As such, the notion of what an ‘Australian citizen’ is can be ever changing. Bhabha has explained many new concepts that have arisen from both colonisation and immigration. One of his central ideas is that of "hybridisation," which describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. The **third space** acts as an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals/cultures interact.

**Mimicry** appears when members of a colonised society imitate and take on the culture of the colonisers. Colonial mimicry comes from the colonist's desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is, as Bhabha writes, "almost the same, but not quite".For many migrants, mimicry is the only path to acceptance.

1. **Psychoanalytical theory**

Psychoanalytic theory views the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves, although the former is generally considered a more respectable approach.

**Freudian Approach**: A Freudian approach often includes pinpointing the influences of a character's id(the instinctual, pleasure seeking part of the mind), superego(the part of the mind that represses the id's impulses) and the ego(the part of the mind that controls but does not repress the id's impulses, releasing them in a healthy way). Freudian critics like to point out the sexual implications of symbols and imagery, since Freud's believed that all human behaviour is motivated by sexuality. They tend to see concave images, such as ponds, flowers, cups, and caves as female symbols; whereas objects that are longer than they are wide are usually seen as phallic symbols. Water is usually associated with birth, the female principle, the maternal, the womb, and the death wish. Freudian critics occasionally discern the presence of an Oedipus complex (a boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother) in the male characters of certain works.

**Jungian Approach:** Jung is also an influential force in myth (archetypal) criticism. Psychological critics are generally concerned with his concept of the process of individuation (the process of discovering what makes one different form everyone else). Jung labelled three parts of the self: the shadow, or the darker, unconscious self (usually the villain in literature); the persona, or a man's social personality (usually the hero); and the anima, or a man's "soul image" (usually the heroine).A neurosis occurs when someone fails to assimilate one of these unconscious components into his conscious and projects it on someone else. The persona must be flexible and be able to balance the components of the psyche.

1. **Feminist theory**

Feminist theory sees cultural and economic oppression in a patriarchal society that have hindered or prevented women from realising their creative possibilities and women‘s cultural identification as merely a negative object (or Other) to man as the defining and dominating Subject. There are several assumptions and concepts held in common by most feminist critics:

1.Our civilization is pervasively patriarchal.

2.The concepts of gender are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs, effected by the omnipresent patriarchal bias of our civilization.

3.This patriarchal ideology also pervades those writings that have been considered great literature. Such works lack autonomous female role models, are implicitly addressed to male readers, and leave the alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting.

Feminist theorists often argue that male fears are portrayed through female characters. Under this theory you would focus on the relationships between genders by examining the patterns of thought, **performance** of gender roles, behaviour, values, enfranchisement, and power in relations between the sexes.

While first and second-wave feminism fought for gender equality in voting rights, careers and wages, later Feminist theory questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. This feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow binary gender roles.

1. **Marxist theory**

Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate as well as the relationships of power in texts. A Marxist critic grounds theory and practice on the economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, especially on the following claims:

1. The evolving history of humanity, its institutions and its ways of thinking are determined by the changing mode of its ―material production—that is, of its basic economic organisation.

2. Historical changes in the fundamental mode of production effect essential changes both in the constitution and power relations of social classes.

3. Human consciousness in any era is constituted by an ideology—that is, a set of concepts, beliefs, values and a way of thinking and feeling through which humans perceive and explain what they take to be reality. A Marxist critic typically undertakes to ―explain the literature of any era by revealing the economic, class, and ideological determinants of the way an author writes, and examine the relation of the text to the social reality of that time and place.

The main ideas proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were that two opposing classes, the **Bourgeoisie** (Dominant class who control and own the means of production) and **Proletariat** (Subordinate class: the ones who do not own and control the means of production) are the two classes who engage in hostile interaction to achieve class consciousness.

The bourgeoisie is already quite well aware of its position and power in the capitalist paradigm. As individuals, workers know that they are being exploited in order to produce surplus value (value produced by the worker that is appropriated by the capitalists); however, the working class must realise that they are being exploited not only as individuals but as a class. It is upon this realisation that the working class reaches class consciousness.

Marxism attempts to reveal the ways in which our socioeconomic classes and system is the ultimate source of our experience.

Theorists working in the Marxist tradition, therefore, are interested in answering the overarching question, who does 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.

1. **Postmodernist theory**

**Postmodernism** is best understood as a questioning of the ideas and values associated with art and literature. It questions our cultural understandings of what art is, and in doing so, attempts to blur the lines between what is considered ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. One famous postmodernist stated that a bus ticket had the same cultural and aesthetic value as the works of Shakespeare.

Key theorists and ideas:

**Roland Barthes:** Roland Barthes argued for the “death of the author” and the “birth of the reader” and as such there is no “original text” anymore. What Barthes meant was that all meanings are now in the hands of the reader, the audience creates the meaning not the author or creator of the text. This means that regardless of the deep meanings the creators want their text to carry, if the audience don’t read it that then it can be meaningless.

**Deleuze and Guattari**- All texts are rhizomatic, all words in texts can have multiple meanings (they are polysemic) and texts can encompass multiple genres.

**Jean Baudrillard** - Postmodernism is almost a response to the era in media when the division between high and popular culture was obvious. There were theorists who believed some texts had more validity than others because they were serious or part of ‘high’ culture. Postmodernists disagree with this – they believe these are value judgments and nothing actually to do with quality. As a response to this postmodernist texts can also be considered those that mix high and popular culture together. Jean Baudrillard argued for the “implosion of meaning in the media” he suggested that old structures of high and popular culture have been replaced with a mixture of the two he referred to it as the “bombsite” where the two meet, or‘bricolage.’

**Julia Kristeva** –no texts are independently original and therefore all texts employ intertextuality.

**Gestalt theory**–Gestalt psychologists are intrigued with the fact that we can perceive certain visual phenomena, such as a pattern of black lines on a white page, in any number of different ways: certain tendencies inherent in our brains, show us the right way of ‘reading’ the patterns due to our previous experiences. As such, we can easily identify the difference between a poem and prose, a picture book and a novel, or detective fiction from science fiction. They state that our responses to the genre or genres of a literary work constitute a complex series of identification and revision. A writer might deliberately confound out tentative assumptions about the genre in which they are writing, or a work that is essentially in one literary form may include episodes in or allusions to many other literary forms as well. The reader brings to a literary work generic expectations shaped by other works from the same form. We feel gratification when an author sticks to our pre-learned ideas of genre, but we can sometimes have negative assumptions of texts when an author overturns or disregard them.

1. **Gender and Queer theory**

Queer theory is grounded in gender and sexuality. Due to this association, a debate emerges as to whether sexual orientation and gender is natural or essential to the person, as an essentialist believes, or if sexuality and gender is a social construction and subject to change.

The essentialist feminists believed that genders "have an essential nature (e.g. nurturing and caring versus being aggressive and selfish), as opposed to differing by a variety of accidental or contingent features brought about by social forces". Due to this belief in the essential nature of a person, it is also natural to assume that a person's gender preference would be natural and essential to a person's personality.

Social constructivism is a concept that proposes the realities we produce and the meanings we create are a result of social interaction; communicating and existing in a cultural context that conveys meaning to us.

Furthermore, queer theorists have offered the argument that there is no essential self at all, and that people exist not just as subjects but also as objects of the social world. In this way, an identity is not born but rather constructed through repeated performative actions that are in turn informed by existing social constructions of gender. By thus analysing and understanding the ways in which gender is shared and historically constituted, the production of gender can occur differently and beyond a socially constructed binary upon which heterosexuality depends.

Queer theorists look for clues in texts that reveal a character’s, or author’s repressed or obvious deviation from heteronormative sexuality in order to question our preconceived ideas of hegemonic heterosexuality.

In his famous *History of Sexuality* (1977) **Michel Foucault** maintained that speaking about heteronormative gender roles or performing them was an articulation of social rules about gender and thus a participation in power and the law. Foucault saw the work of the modern state as an increasingly invisible implication of people in the exercise of power around sex and gender.

Gender roles in our society are easily identified and mass performed and therefore are identified to be hegemonic. Hegemonic masculinity, a concept explained by **R.W. Connell** explains how and why men maintain dominant social roles over women, and other gender identities, which are perceived as "feminine" in a given society. Hegemonic masculinity represents the culturally idealised form of manhood that was socially and hierarchically exclusive and concerned with violence and aggression, stoicism (emotional restraint), courage, toughness, physical strength, athleticism, risk-taking, adventure and thrill-seeking, competitiveness, and achievement and success. In order for a man to be a legitimate member of society, he must perform these heteronormative gender roles.

Gender theorists look for clues in texts that reveal our ideas of gender to be both a social construct and a performance in order to question the dominant ideology in society.

**Theory in action – an example:**

The following is a number of readings of the story ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ by Jenna Gardiner.

Gardiner, J. (2016). Little Red Riding Hood: A Critical Theory Approach. Retrieved from <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/julie.sparks/courses/100Wfall2016/rrh_literary_criticism_> fairy\_talered%20riding%20hood.pdf

A LONG time ago, in a house near a wood,

As most pretty histories go,

A nice little girl lived, called Red Riding Hood,

As some of us already know.

One day said her mother, “Get ready, my dear,

“And take to your granny some cakes,

And a bottle of wine to soothe her

And ask after her pains and aches.

Set out before it gets hot

And when you are on your journey,

Walk nicely and quietly, not off like a shot.

Do not run off the path along the way,

Or you may end up falling and break the wine pot.”

Out set Riding Hood, so obliging and sweet,

And she met a great Wolf in the wood,

Who begun most politely the maiden to greet.

In as tender a voice as he could

He asked in what house she was going and why;

Red Riding Hood answered him all:

He said, “Give my love to your Gran; I will try

At my earliest leisure to call.”

Off he ran, and Red Riding Hood went on her way,

But often she lingered and played,

And made as she went quite a pretty nosegay

With the wild flowers that grew in the glade.

So as she ran from the path (against which she had been warned)

Looking for flowers farther than she should.

With each one, she saw a still prettier one for which she yearned

And so got deeper and deeper into the wood.

But in the meanwhile the Wolf went, with a grin,

At the Grandmother’s cottage to call;

He knocked at the door, and was told to come in,

Then he ate her up—sad cannibal!

Then the Wolf shut the door, and got into bed,

And waited for Red Riding Hood;

When he heard her soft tap at the front door, he said,

Speaking softly as ever he could:

“Who is there?”

“It is I, your dear grandchild; I’ve brought

Some wine and nice little cakes.”

“Pull the bobbin1, my child, and come in as you ought;

I’m in bed very bad with my aches.”

When she entered the room, the old Woolf hid himself

Very carefully (such was his plan):

“Put your basket and things, little dear on the shelf,

And come into bed to your Gran,”

The obedient child laid herself down by the side

Of her Grandmother dear (as she thought):

But all at once, “Granny!” Red Riding Hood cried,

“What, very long arms you have got!”

He answered, “The better to hug you, my child.”

“But, Granny, what very large ears!”

“The better to hear you,” the voice was still mild,

But the little girl hid her fears.

“Grandmother, you have very large eyes!”

“The better to see you, I trow2.”

“What great teeth you have got!” and the wicked Wolf cries,

“The better to eat you up now!”

Red Riding Hood shrieked, and—bang! off went a gun

And shot the old Wolf through the head:

One howl and one moan, one kick and one groan,

And the wicked old rascal was dead.

Some sportsman (he certainly was a dead shot)

Had aimed at the Wolf when she cried;

So Red Riding Hood got safe home—did she not?

And lived happily there till she died.

**Psychoanalytic criticism:**

The fact that the mother feels the need to warn her to stay on the path suggests that Red Riding Hood may be a bit rebellious as the red colour of her cloak implies.

The Wolf is anthropomorphised and friendly as if he had been waiting for her. The implication is that they are connected.

The Wolf acts as her Id and represents her desires. After meeting him, she no longer walks purposefully, but lingers and plays. The Wolf by stopping her has enlightened her to the sensory (sensual) pleasures that are just beyond the well-worn path, the flowers. The path is her conscious or knowable mind, while the woods representing her unconscious also symbolise all that she has yet to explore.

The Wolf as humanity‘s animal instincts and specifically man‘s instinct to hunt women is clearly shown. The grandmother as an older non-fertile woman deserves little attention. The waiting and work for the nubile young girl is the primary focus of this wolfish being.

The Wolf‘s request that she not only enter but says, “Come into bed to your Gran” demonstrates the male desire to lure young women into bed. The fact that Red Riding Hood is wearing a red cloak and has wine (a red liquid) suggest a complicity in this attempt by the Wolf—an attempt of seduction.

If the Wolf is the *shadow*, or the darker, unconscious self, the villain and the heroine, is the *anima*, or a man's ―soul image. Then it is the unconscious desires of men (the hero‘s villainous side) to seduce and control women that are being illustrated through Red Riding Hood‘s predicament. She becomes an image of lust for the male reader and a warning to the female reader.

As a father has been missing through the entire story the implication is that the Red Riding Hood has been seeking a father figure and that is why the Wolf is almost successful in his attack. The gun handled by the sportsman represents a phallic symbol of power.

**Message:** If one is to achieve safety in life she or he must not take risks and instead accept the guidance of those older and wiser. Failure to stay on the right path determined by society can lead into danger as shown by the woods and what happens to Red Riding Hood‘s grandmother and what almost happens to her.

**Marxist criticism:**

This tale is already setting up the beginning of a lesson. Red Riding Hood is being told how to follow the rules of society. She has a place and she must stay in it. However, she is wearing a red riding hood. The fact that it is red suggests a desire to stand out and not be subjugated by class also it isa riding coat indicating that she has a desire to be a rider as the bourgeoisie or upper class would be able to do.

The fact that Red Riding Hood and the Wolf meet in the forest: a place without society and its social designations means that they can meet as equals; however, the finer garb of Red Riding Hood‘s cloak suggests that she is attempting to associate herself with a higher class than the wolf or the two woodcutters who look on and inadvertently act as protectors.

Free from the watchful eyes of society and no longer concerned with manners or class, Red Riding Hood lowers herself to the ground, the earth. She enjoys the true worth of the land rather than the trappings of society. It is wild flowers that intrigue her and even the Wolf begins to remove the trapping of class, his peasant clothes.

The grandmother while weak has still attempted to be a useful member of society as the industry of her spinning wheel suggests. The disposal of her by the Wolf illustrates the danger of individualism and the vulnerability of the proletariat in society. The Wolf wants something, something that is not good for the collective society. In order to gain it he must destroy the communal good.

The fact that Red Riding Hood is bringing her grandmother indulgent treats such as wine and nice little cakes shows a concern with the trappings of the bourgeoisie class rather than providing good nourishing staples such as buttermilk and bread. This again demonstrates that the intended audience for this tale is an upper-class reader.

Her obedience and conforming to authority even when it is threatening is illustrated by the removal of her red cloak. That fact that she lays down as commanded but still questions shows that oppressed groups must question and protest dictatorial ways.

The strong can either protect or oppress the weak, and the implication is that all those oppressed must rise up or they will live at the whims of those both evil and strong and benevolent and strong.

**Message:** Little Red Riding Hood‘s attempt for power of the upper class is stripped away as her red hood and cloak have been. Those that seek to challenge society will be punished or destroyed by it. She is rendered voiceless at the end of the tale and represented as the voiceless oppressed.

**Feminist criticism:**

Red Riding Hood is introduced as a “nice little girl”. No father is present or mentioned; however, the mother‘s concern that Red Riding Hood stays on the path and to be careful not to break open the wine bottle indicates a patriarchal fear of the maiden being compromised and sullied by an outside world full of amorous males. She is also given instructions by her mother on how to present herself in a proper feminine fashion; ―walk nicely and quietly and stay on ―the path.

Free from the watchful eyes of the woodcutters, Red Riding Hood is able to make her own decisions. She is no longer a bud but has become a blooming flower. She is becoming a woman and running off the path designated by a patriarchal society that wishes her to be a good girl.

The Wolf‘s easy and brutal disposal of the grandmother illustrates the lack of value that a male dominated society places on older women who are no longer attractive or able to bear children. The attempt to feminise, speak ―softly as he can to Red Riding Hood is an attempt to lure a naïve young woman into his dominating male clutches. It mimics the act of seduction.

The comments on arms, ears, teeth, and eyes being large and the Wolf‘s response that these attribute will better allow him to take her in by holding, hearing, seeing and ultimately eating her illustrates the culture of male domination and perhaps even brutal domination of women prevalent in patriarchal societies.

Red Riding Hood has not fought her own battle. Instead she has been saved at the last minute by a man, a man carrying a phallic weapon symbolising his power and her vulnerability to the dangers offered by the world. She has learned her lesson and will now stay on the right path. Whether this path, dictated by a patriarchal society, will bring happiness is left questionable.

**Message:** Red Riding Hood has the mind and desire to seek independence, but not the means to secure of protect it. She questions the Wolf, but cannot fight him off due to a patriarchal society which tells her to respect her elders and has led her to get into the bed with the Wolf, thus putting her in a vulnerable situation. She does not have a gun or the masculine strength associated with it.

**Other theories, ideas and concepts that you need to know**

Literary theories are not just a group of ‘-isms’ chosen by your English teachers to inflict cruel and unusual punishment on you. When applied well, they can add depth to your arguments and broaden your contextual knowledge. The following theories, ideas and concepts will be of use to you in your coursework and are drawn from a number of sources such a philosophy, literary studies and gender studies.

**Ecocriticism**

Ecocritics investigate such things as the underlying ecological values, what, precisely, is meant by the word nature, and whether the examination of "place" should be a distinctive category, much like class, gender or race. Ecocritics examine the human perception of wilderness, and how it has changed throughout history and whether or not current environmental issues are accurately represented or even mentioned in popular culture and modern literature. Scholars in ecocriticism engage in questions regarding anthropocentrism, and the "mainstream assumption that the natural world be seen primarily as a resource for human beings" as well as critical approaches to changing ideas in "the material and cultural bases of modern society." Ecocritics are concerned with the human impact on the environment.

**Peter Singer**

A utilitarian ethicist who argues against “speciesism”: the practice of privileging humans over other animals, and argues in favour of the equal consideration of interests of all sentient beings.

**Hierarchical vs. Holistic narratives**

Hierarchical narratives privilege human life above all other life.

Holistic narratives refuse to privilege human life over biological life at large. We are important to ourselves, and thus specifically positioned in our ethical considerations, but neither the universe or God values us over our fellow creatures. Human life is one among many trajectories within this greater whole. There is no higher or lower life, only life. Existential narratives view nonlife as the default with biological life arising as a contingent and fragile blossom amidst the concrete. Human life has value, but it is at odds within the underlying laws of the cosmos.

**Collectivism**

**Collectivism**, any of several types of social organisation in which the individual is seen as being subordinate to a social collectivity such as a state, a nation, a race, or a social class. Collectivism may be contrasted with individualism, in which the rights and interests of the individual are emphasised. According to collectivism, the group or society is the basic unit of moral concern, and the individual is of value only insofar as he serves the group. The individual’s life belongs not to him but to the group or society of which he is merely a part, that he has no rights, and that he must sacrifice his values and goals for the group’s “greater good.”

**Individualism**

The idea that the individual’s life belongs to them and that they have an inalienable right to live it as they see fit, to act on their own judgment, to keep and use the product of their effort, and to pursue the values of their choosing. It’s the idea that the individual is sovereign, an end in themselves, and the fundamental unit of moral concern.

**Utilitarianism**

An ethical theory that determines right from wrong by focusing on outcomes. It is a form of consequentialism. **Utilitarianism** holds that the most ethical choice is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number.

Bentham – **The Panopticon**: The 18th Century philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, developed the idea of the Panopticon while visiting Russia. A Panopticon is a building for prisoners with a tower at the centre, from which it is possible to see each cell in which a prisoner is incarcerated. Each individual is seen but cannot communicate with the wardens or other prisoners. The panopticon induces a sense of permanent visibility that ensures the functioning of power. The fact that the inmates cannot know when they are being watched means that they are motivated to act as though they are being watched at all times. Thus, they are effectively compelled to regulate their own behaviour. Bentham decreed that power should be visible yet unverifiable. The prisoner can always see the tower but never knows from where he is being observed, like a security camera that does not show movement and may or may not be turned on.

Foucault – **Panopticism**: Foucault argued that the panopticon was destined to spread throughout society. It makes power more economic and effective. It does this to develop the economy, spread education and improve public morality, not to save society. The panopticon represents the subordination and surveillance of bodies that increases the utility of power while dispensing with the need for a large policing body. Knowing that we could be watched at any time means that we police ourselves and others. Foucault states that in turn, we self-surveil and stop ourselves from acting in a way that could be seen as negative in our society, and in turn, we watch others to ensure that they are obeying.

Descartes: ***Cogito, ergo sum*** "**I think, therefore I am**". This proposition became a fundamental element of Western philosophy, as it purported to form a secure foundation for knowledge in the face of radical doubt. While other knowledge could be a figment of imagination, deception, or mistake, Descartes asserted that the very act of doubting one's own existence served—at minimum—as proof of the reality of one's own mind; there must be a thinking entity—in this case the self—for there to be a thought.

Schopenhauer: The **will to life** or *Wille zum Leben* is a psychological force to fight for self-preservation seen as an important and active process of conscious and unconscious reasoning. He explained that the universe and everything in it is driven by a primordial will to live, which results in a desire in all living creatures to avoid death and to procreate. For Schopenhauer, this will is the most fundamental aspect of reality – more fundamental even than being.

Nietzsche **– fatalism:** Fatalism, strictly understood, means that nothing could be other than it is, and Nietzsche's sharp sarcastic comments about "the improvers of mankind" make it quite clear that he does not think that people can change their (collective) nature. Moreover, his persistent emphasis on "instincts,” "drives," and "physiology" suggests a form of determinism based on our biology. Each of us individually has a particular "nature" that (whether actualised or not) cannot be altered.

‘Turkish’ fatalism: Man can strive against fate and try to defeat it, but in the end fate always remains the winner, for which reason the smartest thing to do is to give up or just walk away.

‘Russian’ fatalism: ”I call it Russian fatalism, that fatalism without revolt which is exemplified by a Russian soldier who, finding a campaign too strenuous, finally lies down in the snow. No longer to accept anything at all, no longer to take anything, no longer to absorb anything—to cease reacting altogether. This fatalism is not always merely the courage to die; it can also preserve life under the most perilous conditions by reducing the metabolism, slowing it down, as a kind of will to hibernate.” (Ecce Homo, Nietzsche)

[Virtue ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtue_ethics), derived from Aristotle's and Confucius's notions, which asserts that the right action will be the most 'virtuous.’

[Deontological ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deontological_ethics), notions based on 'rules' i.e. that there is an obligation to perform the 'right' action, regardless of actual consequences (epitomised by [Immanuel Kant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel_Kant)'s notion of the [Categorical Imperative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categorical_Imperative) which was the centre to Kant's ethical theory based on [duty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duty)).

**Categorical Imperative**

The **categorical imperative** is an idea that the philosopher Immanuel Kant had about ethics. Kant said that an "imperative" is something that a person must do. For example: if a person wants to stop being thirsty, it is *imperative* that they have a drink. Kant said an imperative is "categorical," when it is true at all times, and in all situations.

The example of a thirsty person Kant named the “Hypothetical Imperative”. Kant used the *hypothetical* imperative to explain his ideas about the ethics of a *categorical* imperative. For example, it is not usually a moral choice when a person decides to drink water, no matter why they are drinking the water. If a person is very thirsty, then it is a hypothetical imperative that they drink the water.

Instead of the hypothetical imperative, Kant said that the moral choices are governed by a categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is something that a person must do, no matter what the circumstances. It is imperative to an ethical person that they make choices based on the categorical imperative. Another way of saying that, is that an ethical person follows a "universal law" regardless of their situation.

Kant explained his ideas about following the categorical imperative by introducing one more idea he called a "maxim." A maxim is another way of saying what we want to do and why we want to do it in one sentence. We can learn ethical maxims by applying the test of the categorical imperative. And he said we can live ethical lives if we use these maxims whenever we make decisions.

The categorical imperative, hypothetical imperative, and the maxim can all be seen in the example of the thirsty man.

A man locked alone in a room for one night, and he brought nothing with him except a bottle of water. The man has had nothing to drink all day and is very thirsty. We can call this man, "Thirsty Man."

A hypothetical imperative might be that *"a thirsty man must drink water if he wants to stop being thirsty."* If Thirsty Man lived by a maxim based on this hypothetical imperative, it might be *"If I can, I will drink water whenever I am thirsty."*

In this example, Thirsty Man is not making any obvious moral choice. Some philosophers would say that the Thirsty Man's maxim is a reasonable one. Based on Thirsty Man's maxim, he will soon drink the water.

A few minutes later a second man is brought into the room. Both men are told that they will be in the room all night, and that no one else will be back to see them until morning.

Thirsty Man has not yet opened the water bottle. The new man has not had anything to drink for many days. The second man is clearly dying of dehydration. If he is not given water soon he will die. We can call this second man, "Dying Man."

Thirsty Man now has a decision to make, will he share the water or drink it himself?

Thirsty Man does not live by the maxim of "I will drink water when I am thirsty," because that maxim fails the test of being universally fulfilling the *categorical imperative.*

Thirsty Man believes that the categorical imperative is the Golden Rule. To be an ethical person, Thirsty Man believes he must at all times treat others the way he would want them to treat him. From the categorial imperative of the Golden Rule, Thirsty Man has adopted a maxim of "*I will give anything I can to anyone I meet, if that person needs what I have much more than I need it.*"

Thirsty Man prepares to decide if he will drink the water that he wants to drink, or if he will give it to Dying Man. Thirsty Man tests both choices by comparing them to his maxim. He sees that it is *imperative* that he give the water to Dying Man.

Thirsty Man gives the water to Dying Man. Dying Man drinks nearly the entire bottle, but then he chokes on the last sip. There is nothing Thirsty Man can do to stop the choking, and Dying Man dies.

There are many philosophies of ethics, and many philosophers who have very different opinions. Some philosophers might say that it would have been ethical if Thirsty Man had kept the bottle for himself to drink. It was his bottle to begin with and he could do whatever he wanted with it. Other philosophers might say that Thirsty Man was ethically wrong to give the bottle to Dying Man because the water ended up choking the Dying Man to death.

Kant's idea of the categorical imperative would say that Thirsty Man made the right choice, for the right reasons, and he made those ethical decisions in a logical way.

An important part of Kant's idea is that the morality of a choice is based on why we make the choice (intention), and not based on what happens after we make it (consequence)

Bibliography

Barry, P. (2002). ‘Lesbian/gay criticism,’ in P Barry (eds), *Beginning theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp139-155.

Beya, A B. (2017) ‘Mimicry, Ambivalence and Hybridity’,Postcolonial Studies @ Emory. Retrieved from [https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/21 /mimicry-ambivalence-and-hybridity/](https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/21%20%09/mimicry-ambivalence-and-hybridity/)

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Biever, Joan L.; et al. (1998).The Social Construction Of Gender: A Comparison Of Feminist And Postmodern Approaches. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly.* ***11***(2),163*.* [doi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_object_identifier):[10.1080/09515079808254052](https://doi.org/10.1080%2F09515079808254052).

Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*. ***40***(4), 519–531. [doi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_object_identifier):[10.2307/3207893](https://doi.org/10.2307%2F3207893).

Categorical imperative. (2019). *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from https://simple.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Categorical\_imperative&oldid=666107 4.

de Kock, L. (1992). Interview With Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature.* *23*(3), 29-47.

Dubrow, H. (2014). *Genre (Routledge Revivals)*. London: Routledge.

Duff, D. (2014). Modern Genre Theory: Longman Critical Readers. London: Routledge.

Eagleton, T. (2011). Why Marx Was Right. New Haven: Yale University Press. p. 60.

Estok, Simon C. (2005). Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: An Analysis of 'Home' and 'Power' in King Lear. *AUMLA* 103 (May 2005), 15-41.

Gardiner, J. (2016). Little Red Riding Hood: A Critical Theory Approach. Retrieved from <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/julie.sparks/courses/100Wfall2016/rrh_literary_criticism_> fairy\_talered%20riding%20hood.pdf

Gross, E. (2012). ‘The Body of Signification,’ In Fletcher, John; Benjamin, Andrew (eds.). Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva. London: Routledge. pp. 92–93.

Hoare, Q. and Nowell-Smith, G. (1971). Terminology. In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, pp. xiii-xiv.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Colombia University Press. p. 65.

Morton, S. (2007). The Subaltern: Genealogy of a Concept. In *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Malden, MA: Polity. pp. 96-97.

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Random House. pp. 201–25