

Literary criticism: The reasoned discussion of literary works, which involves evaluation and interpretation

Literary theory: The philosophical discussion behind literature's methods and goals

Literary criticism is the actual evaluation of a book, while literary theory is the framework through which that book is evaluated. Important distinction.

Must be confirmed with ms martin.

Sign value: the value itself that you assign to something based off of its ability to impress

Conspicuous consumption:

Marxist theory: Focuses on

- 1) Power and how it operates
 - Social power. (The influence an individual or organization has over others in society)
 - Economic power. (Access to wealth)
 - Sexual power (Using sexuality to influence others.)
- 2) The ideologies shown in the media and how they sustain or reproduce power.
- 3) The degree to which authors, readers, and characters display a lack of awareness of the oppressiveness of their social and economic conditions compared to that which oppressed them. \
- 4) On the seduction of the reader by the text (or the ability of the reader to disengage with the characters and consider the larger social forces)
- 5) On the alienation of the reader from participating in its production.

Get 3 and 5 checked

Dialectical Materialism: The means of production control the foundation of a society's institutions and beliefs.

Revised: Dialectical materialism is Karl Marx's ideology that explains how the proletariat and working class are the ones who control production and thus society's institutions and development. As a comparison, in a factory, the workers are the proletariat, and the people who own the factories are the bourgeoisie. This ideology is the best version of a mix of socialism and communism (Marxism). In reality, the bourgeoisie make the decisions and hold the power.

Ideologies		tions, and
actions.		
Agam's e		individual that
explains		es. Can be

theoretical or physical. For example: environmentalism, conservatism, fascism, and feminism.

Reflectionism: A text will reflect the society that produced it.
No further explanation.

Proletariat: The working class. It is the proletariat whose labour produces wealth for the bourgeoisie.

Bourgeoisie: The owners. The bourgeoisie own the property and therefore control the means of production.

Capitalism: Economic system in which the means of production are privately owned by individuals or corporations to competitively produce goods and services for the public.

Communism: An economic system in which all resources are shared evenly amongst the people (in theory). There is no private ownership.

Commodification: The valuing of material things not for their usefulness, but for their power to impress others (sign value).

Ex : Stanley waterbottle. Something is only worth as much as the fame and attention it's purchase can bring.

???

False Consciousness: When cultural conditioning leads people to accept a system that is unfavourable to them.

Conspicuous consumption: To buy something for the purpose of showing it off in an attempt to impress others, rather than for buying something for its usefulness.

Def: ---Conspicuous consumption is the practice of buying and displaying goods and services, often expensive or non-essential, specifically to showcase one's wealth and social status to others

Sign value: The value of something based upon its ability to impress others.

Difference from commodification: Actually owning it for the sole purpose of impressing others.

Alienation: The process whereby people become foreign to the world they are living in.

Thinking Questions and how to solve them:

1. What or whose ideological values structure the text?

Look for belief systems/ideologies in the story (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, conservatism, environmentalism, consumerism).

Ask: What set of ideas do the characters live by? Whose worldview dominates the text?

Use your notes on ideologies, reflectionism, and false consciousness.

If a character accepts oppression without questioning it → false consciousness.

If the text reinforces the norms of its society → reflectionism.

2. Who has the power in the text? How does this operate and change as the text progresses?

Identify whether power is economic, social, or sexual (first set of notes).

Ask: Does the bourgeoisie (owners) or proletariat (workers) control the situation?

Look for shifts in power:

Do workers/underdogs gain awareness (overcoming false consciousness)?

Does commodification or sign value give someone temporary power?

Tie this to dialectical materialism → the struggle between those who own and those who work.

3. What dominant social structures are perpetuated or disrupted in the text?

Identify institutions: family, class, gender, government, religion, corporations.

Ask: Does the story reinforce the status quo (capitalism, patriarchy, hierarchy), or challenge it?

Use terms:

Capitalism if private ownership is emphasized.

Communism/collectivism if equality is imagined.

Alienation if characters are disconnected from society because of these structures.

4. To what degree do the protagonist and/or characters believe in and live by the social order?

Do they accept the system (false consciousness)?

Do they resist it (revolutionary, questioning capitalism or oppression)?

Are they alienated (feel foreign in their society)?

Example: a poor worker character who keeps buying luxury goods to “fit in”
→ conspicuous consumption & false consciousness.

5. What are the social forces that affect the author’s writing and the text’s reception?

Think outside the text: What was happening when it was written? What ideologies were dominant in that society?

Use reflectionism: the text reflects its context.

Ask: Why might readers at the time have accepted the ideology? Why might modern readers resist it?

Example: A Victorian novel might normalize gender inequality → reflects the patriarchy of its time.

Feminist theory: Focuses on:

- 1) How women are represented in mens texts.
- 2) How women write their own experiences and representations
- 3) How women read about themselves
- 4) How to make feminist readings visible to to readers
- 5) How women writers have fared in given eras

Patriarchal: Control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.

Agam's definition: A patriarchy is a system of society in which men hold most of the power and control, while women are excluded

Gender: The traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in identity and behavior. They are social constructs generated by the patriarchal biases of our civilization.

Gender Study: Academic field devoted to gender identity and gender representation.

Gynocriticism: Focuses on writings by women and examining the female literary tradition to find out how women writers across the ages have perceived themselves and imagined reality, attempts to identify distinctly feminine subject-matter and mode of experience, and identifies a female voice in literary texts.

The "Other": An individual who is perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way.

Paternalism: The view that male authority figures need to protect and/or sustain/support female figures.

Matriarchy: The less traditional organization of female leadership.

Objectification: The seeing and/or treating of a person, usually a woman, as an object.

Misogyny: The dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

Infantilization: The treatment of someone as if they were a child, even though their mental capacity is much greater. Often towards people who lack privilege in a given society.

Thinking questions and solving steps

1. How are women represented in the text?

Look for stereotypes (nurturing mother, femme fatale, passive love interest).

See if women are objectified (treated as things) or infantilized (treated like children).

Ask: Are women shown as independent or dependent? As “the Other” compared to men?

Connect to patriarchy (are men in charge of their identity/roles?).

2. What are male characters’ attitudes toward female characters in the text? How is this evident?

Look for paternalism: are men portrayed as “protecting” women?

Look for misogyny: do men dismiss, belittle, or control women?

Evidence = dialogue, narration, decisions made for women.

Use your notes on patriarchal control. Example: a man who controls finances or freedom of a woman → patriarchal dominance.

3. What gaps exist in the female characters’ stories?

Ask: Whose voices are missing or silenced?

If women exist only in relation to men → it’s a gap.

Apply gynocriticism: imagine what the female voice might add if it were present.

Example: If a novel tells only the male hero’s perspective, but not how the wife felt → that’s a silenced female story.

4. What choices and/or limitations do female characters have?

Are women free to choose careers, partners, roles? Or limited to marriage, motherhood, domesticity?

Look for constraints from patriarchy: laws, traditions, social expectations.

Highlight whether women resist or accept these limitations.

Use terms like objectification, infantilization, or the Other if their choices are denied or minimized.

5. What were the social and historic conditions for women in this period that might help us understand their roles and desires in the text?

Think historical context:

19th century → women had few rights, patriarchy was dominant.

Post-WWII → women pushed back against domesticity.

Modern → conversations about equality, feminism, gender studies.

Link to gender as a social construct: how expectations shaped women's roles.

Reflection: Does the text reflect the conditions of its time, or challenge them?

Psychoanalytic theory: Focuses on:

- 1) The division of the human psyche into 3 parts
 - Personal consciousness
 - Personal unconscious
 - Collective unconscious
- 2) To live fully, we must deal with the 3 archetypes that compose the self:
 - The shadow
 - The anima
 - The persona
- 3) To become psychologically healthy adults, individualization must occur, which means we must accept the different sides of ourselves.

Personal Conscious: The waking condition; knowing what is happening around oneself; the state of being conscious.

This is your awake everyday awareness. Knowing whats happening around you. Ex: noticing your hunger, solving a math problem.

Personal Unconscious: Those things that have been repressed, rejected from consciousness, something that has built up during the individual's lifetime.

Mental storage for the things that youve forgotten, pushed away or dont think about as often. Ex: repressed memories, experiences or embarrassing moments.

Collective Unconscious: A storehouse of knowledge, experiences, and images shared by the human race, and regarded as the repository of memories, images and patterns of experiences called archetypes.

A shared library of human experiences that everyone taps into. For example, myths about heroes or mother figures.

Archetypes: Narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes and images that recur throughout diverse cultures and periods and elicit a similar and powerful response in readers the world over.

Recurring themes and characters that come from the collective unconscious. Show up a lot in modern media (the hero, the trickster, the old man)

The Shadow: Our darker side, the part of ourselves we would prefer not to confront, those aspects we dislike. Seen in characters such as "the villain" or Satan/devil figures.

The Anima/Animus: The "soul image" or life force / motivation that causes one to act. Often only aware of this in our dreams when we recognize these characteristics in someone else (projection). The female and male parts of the psyche.

Projection: When we recognize personal characteristics in another individual or their actions.

The Persona: The image we show to others; the mask we put on for the external world which may not be at all what we think ourselves to be inside.

Individuation: Accepting the different sides of ourselves, even those we dislike. If we reject some part of the self, we are likely to project that element onto someone else, seeing ourselves as incapable of being wrong or guilty.

Thinking Questions and how to solve:

How to Answer Each Psychoanalytic Question

1. What are the root causes behind behaviours and actions?

Look for hidden motives: Why is the character acting this way beyond the surface?

Check for repressed memories/trauma in the personal unconscious.

Use projection: is the character seeing their own flaws in others?

Tie behaviour to an archetype (e.g., hero acting brave because society projects heroic myths → collective unconscious).

2. How can the shadow, anima and the persona be interpreted?

Shadow: darker impulses, guilt, anger, selfishness → often shown in villains or internal conflicts.

Anima/Animus: inner opposite gendered qualities; might appear in dreams or as an attraction/repulsion to others.

Persona: the “mask” → what image the character projects to the world vs. who they really are.

Ask: Does the story show the character accepting/rejecting these sides (individuation)?

3. What is happening in the unconscious mind?

Look for symbols of desires, fears, or repressed memories.

Dreams, slips of the tongue, or strange behaviours = signs of unconscious activity.

Personal unconscious: stuff the character has repressed individually (shame, regret, trauma).

Collective unconscious: universal myths/archetypes shaping how characters act (hero's journey, wise mentor, trickster).

4. How do literary symbols reflect repressed desires?

Look for symbols, metaphors, or imagery that point to hidden wants.

Example: a locked door = repressed memory.

A flood = overwhelming emotions.

Fire = passion or destructive desire.

Symbols can reveal what a character (or even the author) cannot openly admit.

Connect to individuation: unresolved desires can prevent characters from integrating their whole selves.



1. “The Fly” (Katherine Mansfield)

Marxist

Power: The Boss (bourgeoisie) has economic/social power, his clerk is submissive (proletariat).

Alienation: He cannot process grief over his son's death → alienated from his emotions by capitalist values of productivity.

Feminist

Women are nearly absent/erased → a gap in the story, showing how patriarchy centers male grief/power.

The Boss's power reinforces patriarchy (wealth, workplace authority).

Psychoanalytic

Shadow: The fly symbolizes suppressed grief/trauma.

Repression: The Boss pushes his grief into the unconscious.

Projection: His cruelty to the fly externalizes his own fear of death and helplessness.



2. “The Story of an Hour” (Kate Chopin)

Marxist

Marriage = a social structure where husbands control wives (patriarchal + economic).

Mrs. Mallard's brief joy at freedom = rebellion against oppressive social order.

Feminist

Patriarchy: Husband's control = limits her choices.

Female desire for autonomy: She feels "free, free, free" → reflects women's oppression in her era.

Infantilization: Society expects women to live only for men.

Psychoanalytic

Shadow: Mrs. Mallard's hidden desire for independence surfaces.

Persona: She performs the role of dutiful wife but internally longs for freedom.

Unconscious: Her joy reflects repressed desires that emerge only when she thinks her husband is dead.



3. "What I Will" (Suheir Hammad)

Marxist

Rejects dominant power structures, especially oppression based on race, gender, colonialism.

Speaks against systemic inequality (social & economic).

Feminist

Assertion of female voice in a patriarchal and often silencing culture.

Rejects objectification and claims self-definition ("what I will").

Psychoanalytic

Individuation: She integrates her identity as woman, immigrant, and individual.

Shadow: Confronts societal repression and turns it into empowerment.



4. "Still I Rise" (Maya Angelou)

Marxist

Class struggle + power: Critiques systems that try to keep marginalized people "down."

Assertion of dignity against oppression → challenges dominant ideology.

Feminist

Female empowerment: Defies stereotypes and misogyny.

Objectification rejected: She embraces her body and sexuality with pride instead of shame.

The Other: Society views her as lesser, but she rises above.

Psychoanalytic

Shadow: Transforms societal hatred into resilience.

Anima/Persona: Refuses the mask imposed by racism/sexism.

Individuation: Accepts her strength and power unapologetically.



5. Animal Farm (George Orwell)

Marxist

Direct allegory of Russian Revolution:

Proletariat = working animals.

Bourgeoisie/elite = pigs.

False consciousness: Animals believe they're free but remain oppressed.

Commodification: Boxer valued only for labor, then discarded.

Feminist

Female animals (Clover, hens) are sidelined → reflects gender invisibility in revolution.

Patriarchal dominance is mirrored (male pigs lead).

Psychoanalytic

Shadow: Napoleon's cruelty shows the dark side of revolution.

Projection: Animals project hopes of equality onto leaders.

Collective unconscious/archetypes:

Boxer = archetypal "loyal worker."

Napoleon = tyrant.

Old Major = wise father figure.



6. The O.C. (Episode 1)

Marxist

Class conflict: Ryan (working-class kid) vs. wealthy Newport Beach elites.

Commodification: Luxury culture = sign value (cars, clothes, houses).

Feminist

Female characters (Marissa, Kirsten) often defined by relationships/beauty
→ objectification.

Patriarchal structures (Caleb Nichol controlling wealth).

Psychoanalytic

Persona: Ryan must hide his troubled background to fit in.

Shadow: His violent past and struggles with identity.

Projection: Wealthy characters project their fears of instability onto Ryan.



7. Russian Revolution (historical context for Animal Farm)

Marxist

Bourgeoisie (Tsar, aristocrats) vs. proletariat (peasants, workers).

Revolution promised equality but replaced one ruling class with another (Soviet elite).

Feminist

Women initially gained some rights but were still marginalized.

Patriarchy continued despite socialist rhetoric.

Psychoanalytic

Collective unconscious/archetypes: Revolution as humanity's recurring dream of equality.

Shadow: Violence, terror, purges = repressed desires for power and control.