

CRITICAL LENS RESEARCH SITES:

Directions: For each of the three critical lenses, *start* with the OWL site (good clear & basic info).

- If there is time at the end of the period, explore the secondary sites and fill-in “new” information as you find it.

○ FEMINISM:

- OWL Feminism site;
- Secondary: Bedford/St. Martin on Feminism

○ PSYCHOANALYSIS:

- OWL Psychoanalysis site;
- Secondary: Bedford/St. Martin on Psychoanalysis

○ NEW HISTORICISM:

- OWL New Historicism site;
- Secondary: Bedford/St. Martin on NH
 - New World Encyclopedia on NH

○ MARXISM:

- OWL Marxism site;
- Secondary: Bedford/St. Martin on Marxism

Overview: Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism

Summary:

This resource will help you begin the process of understanding literary theory and schools of criticism and how they are used in the academy.

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Introduction

A very basic way of thinking about literary theory is that these ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature, and even culture. These different lenses allow critics to consider works of art based on certain assumptions within that school of theory. The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important.

For example, if a critic is working with certain Marxist theories, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation. If a critic is working with post-colonial theories, s/he might consider the same story but look at how characters from colonial powers (Britain, France, and even America) treat characters from, say, Africa or the Caribbean. Hopefully, after reading through and working with the resources in this area of the OWL, literary theory will become a little easier to understand and use.

Disclaimer

Please note that the schools of literary criticism and their explanations included here are by no means the only ways of distinguishing these separate areas of theory. Indeed, many critics use tools from two or more schools in their work. Some would define differently or greatly expand the (very) general statements given here. Our explanations are meant only as starting places for your own investigation into literary theory. We encourage you to

use the list of scholars and works provided for each school to further your understanding of these theories.

We also recommend the following secondary sources for study of literary theory:

- *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 1998, edited by David H. Richter
- *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 1999, by Lois Tyson
- *Beginning Theory*, 2002, by Peter Barry

Although philosophers, critics, educators and authors have been writing about writing since ancient times, contemporary schools of literary theory have cohered from these discussions and now influence how scholars look at and write about literature. The following sections overview these movements in critical theory. Though the timeline below roughly follows a chronological order, we have placed some schools closer together because they are so closely aligned.

Timeline (most of these overlap)

- Moral Criticism, Dramatic Construction (~360 BC-present)
- Formalism, New Criticism, Neo-Aristotelian Criticism (1930s-present)
- Psychoanalytic Criticism, Jungian Criticism(1930s-present)
- Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)
- Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)
- Structuralism/Semiotics (1920s-present)
- Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction (1966-present)
- New Historicism/Cultural Studies (1980s-present)
- Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present)
- Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)
- Gender/Queer Studies (1970s-present)
- Critical Race Theory (1970s-present)

Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)

Summary:

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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? And Marxists 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

Marxist Literary Criticism: Brief Guide

Along with psychoanalytical, feminist, and cultural criticism, Marxist literary criticism exemplifies what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur terms a "hermeneutics of suspicion." These are approaches that concern themselves not with what the text says but what it hides. As Terry Eagleton, a leading Marxist critic, writes, the task of Marxist literary criticism "is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent."

By its very nature, **ideology** is silent. Like the water in the aquarium breathed by the fish, ideology is virtually invisible. Its invisibility gives it greater power. Ideology - defined in general as the shared beliefs and values held in an unquestioning manner by a culture - exerts a powerful influence upon a culture. Those who are marginalized in the culture are most aware of the ways in which an ideology supports the dominant class in the society. Those who enjoy the fruits of belonging to a dominant group of the society barely generally are filled with what Marx

called "false consciousness." Since it is not in their interest to notice the ways in which an economic structure marginalizes others, they tend to buy into an ideology that supports that structure.

Recurrent terms in Marxist literary criticism:

- **Base vs. Superstructure:** Base in Marxism refers to economic base. Superstructure, according to Marx and Engels, emerges from this base and consists of law, politics, philosophy, religion, art.
- **Ideology:** the shared beliefs and values held in an unquestioning manner by a culture. It governs what that culture deems to be normative and valuable. For Marxists, **ideology** is determined by economics. A rough approximation: "tell me how much money you have and I'll tell you how you think."
- **Hegemony:** coined by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, this "refers to the pervasive system of assumptions, meanings, and values -- the web of ideologies, in other words, that shapes the way things look, what they mean, and therefore what reality is for the majority of people within a given culture" (See glossary in case studies in contemporary criticism book).
- **Reification:** often used to describe the way in which people are turned into commodities useful in market exchange. For example, some would argue that the media's obsession with tragedy (e.g. the deaths of Jon Benet Ramsey, Diana, JFK Jr., the murders at Columbine High School in Colorado) make commodities out of grieving people. The media expresses sympathy but economically thrives on these events through ratings boost.

What do Marxist literary critics do with texts?

- They explore ways in which the text reveals ideological oppression of a dominant economic class over subordinate classes. In order to do this a Marxist might ask the following questions:
 - Does the text reflect or resist a dominant ideology? Does it do both?
 - Does the main character in a narrative affirm or resist bourgeois values?
 - Whose story gets told in the text? Are lower economic groups ignored or devalued?
 - Are values that support the dominant economic group given privilege? This can happen tacitly, in the way in which values are taken to be self-evident.
- They look at the conditions of production for the work of art. For example, they ask
 - What were the economic conditions for publication of a work?
 - Who was the audience? What does the text suggest about the values of this audience?

What other approaches resemble Marxist literary criticism?

- Marxist literary criticism often shares with feminist criticism a desire to challenge the power structures in contemporary society. For feminist, the issue is a marginalized gender; for Marxists, the issue is not gender but economic power, leading to political power.
- Marxist literary criticism can also be viewed as a type of **cultural criticism**, in that it seeks to analyze a discourse (of power) that makes up one of the discourses that determine a text's historical meaning.

A READING OF "LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD" USING YOUR CRITICAL LENS

In addition to your research on—and responses to questions about—your Critical Lens, you will do a close reading of "Little Red Riding Hood," interpreting the story *via* your critical lens.



- **Annotate:** As you read, annotate the story from the point of view of your critical lens. Don't be afraid to be a little "over the top" in using your lens to inform your annotations – I want to see you applying the research that you've done;
- **Write Summative "Critical Exegesis":** After reading the story, you'll write a thorough interpretation of the story's overall theme or central meaning, again, *from the perspective of your critical lens.*

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

By Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm

Annotations:

Once upon a time there was a sweet little maiden. Whoever laid eyes upon her could not help but love her. But it was her grandmother who loved her most. She could never give the child enough. One time she made her a present, a small, red velvet cap, and since it was so becoming and the maiden insisted on always wearing it, she was called Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother. She's sick and weak, and this will strengthen her. Get an early start, before it becomes hot, and when you're out in the woods, be nice and good and don't stray from the path, otherwise you'll fall and break the glass, and your grandmother will get nothing. And when you enter her room, don't forget to say good morning, and don't go peeping in all the corners."

"I'll do just as you say," Little Red Cap promised her mother.

Well, the grandmother lived out in the forest, half an hour from the village, and as soon as Little Red Cap entered the forest, she encountered the wolf. However, Little Red Cap did not know what a wicked sort of an animal he was and was not afraid of him.

"Good day, Little Red Cap," he said.

"Thank you kindly, wolf."

"Where are you going so early, Little Red Cap?"

"To Grandmother's."

"What are you carrying under your apron?"

"Cake and wine. My grandmother's sick and weak, and yesterday we baked this so it will help her get well."

"Where does your grandmother live, Little Red Cap?"

"Another quarter of an hour from here in the forest. Her house is under the three big oak trees. You can tell it by the hazel bushes," said Little Red Cap.

The wolf thought to himself, This tender young thing is a juicy morsel. She'll taste even better than the old woman. You've got to be real crafty if you want to catch them both. Then he walked next to Little Red Cap, and after a while he said, "Little Red Cap, just look at the beautiful flowers that are growing all around you! Why don't you look around? I believe you haven't even noticed how lovely the birds are

singing. You march along as if you were going straight to school, and yet it's so delightful out here in the woods!"

Little Red Cap looked around and saw how the rays of the sun were dancing through the trees back and forth and how the woods were full of beautiful flowers. So she thought to herself, If I bring Grandmother a bunch of fresh flowers, she'd certainly like that. It's still early, and I'll arrive on time. So she ran off the path and plunged into the woods to look for flowers. And each time she plucked one, she thought she saw another even prettier flower and ran after it, going deeper and deeper into the forest. But the wolf went straight to the grandmother's house and knocked at the door.

"Who's out there?"

"Little Red Cap. I've brought you some cake and wine. Open up."

"Just lift the latch," the grandmother called. "I'm too weak and can't get up."

The wolf lifted the latch, and the door sprang open. Then he went straight to the grandmother's bed without saying a word and gobbled her up. Next he put on her clothes and her nightcap, lay down in her bed, and drew the curtains.

Meanwhile, Little Red Cap had been running around and looking for flowers, and only when she had as many as she could carry did she remember her grandmother and continue on the way to her house again. She was puzzled when she found the door open, and as she entered the room, it seemed so strange inside that she thought, Oh, my God, how frightened I feel today, and usually I like to be at Grandmother's. She called out, "Good morning!"

But she received no answer. Next she went to the bed and drew back the curtains.

There lay her grandmother with her cap pulled down over her face giving her a strange appearance. "Oh, Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with."

"Oh, Grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"The better to grab you with."

Grandmother, what a terribly big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!"

No sooner did the wolf say that than he jumped out of bed and gobbled up poor Little Red Cap. After the wolf had satisfied his desires, he lay down in bed again, fell asleep, and began to snore very loudly.

The huntsman happened to be passing by the house and thought to himself: "The way the old woman's snoring, you'd better see if anything's wrong." He went into the room, and when he came to the bed, he saw the wolf lying in it.

"So I've found you at last, you old sinner," said the huntsman. "I've been looking for you for a long time."

He took aim with his gun, and then it occurred to him that the wolf could have eaten the grandmother and that she could still be saved. So he did not shoot but took some

scissors and started cutting open the sleeping wolf's belly. After he made a couple of cuts, he saw the little red cap shining forth, and after he made a few more cuts, the girl jumped out and exclaimed, "Oh, how frightened I was! It was so dark in the wolf's body."

Soon the grandmother came out. She was alive but could hardly breathe. Little Red Cap quickly fetched some large stones, and they filled the wolf's body with them. When he awoke and tried to run away, the stones were too heavy so he fell down at once and died. All three were quite delighted. The huntsman skinned the fur from the wolf and went home with it. The grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine that Little Red Cap had brought, and soon she regained her health. Meanwhile, Little Red Cap thought to herself, Never again will you stray from the path by yourself and go into the forest when your mother has forbidden it.

Summative "Critical Exegesis": A fat paragraph, interpreting the story's overall theme or central meaning, again, *from the perspective of your critical lens*. Don't be shy in making specific reference to LRRH and to the research you did on your critical lens:



INDEX OF TEMPLATES

INTRODUCING WHAT "THEY SAY"

- A number of sociologists have recently suggested that X's work has several fundamental problems.
- It has become common today to dismiss X's contribution to the field of sociology.
- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for _____.

INTRODUCING "STANDARD VIEWS"

- Americans tend to believe that _____.
- Conventional wisdom has it that _____.
- Common sense seems to dictate that _____.
- The standard way of thinking about Topic X has it that _____.
- It is often said that _____.
- My whole life I have heard it said that _____.
- You would think that _____.
- Many people assumed that _____.

MAKING WHAT "THEY SAY" SOMETHING YOU SAY

- I've always believed that _____.
- When I was a child, I used to think that _____.
- Although I should know better by now, I cannot help thinking that _____.
- At the same time that I believe _____, I also believe _____.

INTRODUCING SOMETHING IMPLIED OR ASSUMED

- Although none of them has ever said so directly, my teachers have often given me the impression that _____.
- One implication of X's treatment of _____ is that _____.
- Although X does not say so directly, she apparently assumes that _____.

INTRODUCING AN ONGOING DEBATE

- In discussions of X, one controversial issue has been _____. On the one hand, _____ argues _____. On the other hand, _____ contends _____. Others even maintain _____. My own view is _____.
- When it comes to the topic of _____, most of us will readily agree that _____. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the question of _____. Whereas some are convinced that _____, others maintain that _____.
- In conclusion, then, as I suggested earlier, defenders of _____ can't have it both ways. Their assertion that _____ is contradicted by their claim that _____.

CAPTURING AUTHORIAL ACTION

- X acknowledges that _____.
- X celebrates the fact that _____.
- X agrees that _____.
- X emphasizes that _____.
- X argues that _____.
- X insists that _____.
- X believes that _____.
- X observes that _____.
- X denies/does not deny that _____.
- X questions that _____.
- X claims that _____.
- X refuses the claim that _____.
- X complains that _____.
- X reminds us that _____.
- X concedes that _____.
- X suggests that _____.
- X demonstrates that _____.
- X urges us to _____.
- X deplores the tendency to _____.

INTRODUCING QUOTATIONS

- X states, "_____."
- As the prominent philosopher X puts it, "_____."
- According to X, "_____."

- X herself writes, “_____.”
- In his book, _____, X maintains that “_____.”
- In X’s view, “_____.”
- X agrees/disagrees when she writes, “_____.”
- X complicates matters further when he writes, “_____.”

EXPLAINING QUOTATIONS

- Basically, X is saying _____.
- In other words, X believes _____.
- In making this comment, X argues that _____.
- X is insisting that _____.
- X’s point is that _____.
- The essence of X’s argument is that _____.

DISAGREEING, WITH REASONS

- I think X is mistaken because she overlooks _____.
- X’s claim that _____ rests upon the questionable assumption that _____.
- I disagree with X’s view that _____ because, as recent research has shown, _____.
- X contradicts himself. On the one hand, he argues _____. But on the other hand, he also says _____.
- By focusing on _____, X overlooks the deeper problem of _____.
- X claims _____, but we don’t need him to tell us that. Anyone familiar with _____ has long known that _____.

AGREEING—WITH A DIFFERENCE

- I agree that _____ because my experience _____ confirms it.
- X surely is right about _____ because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that _____.

- X's theory of _____ is extremely useful because it sheds insight on the difficult problem of _____.
- I agree that _____, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe _____.
- Those unfamiliar with this school of thought may be interested to know that it basically boils down to _____.
- If group X is right that _____, as I think they are, then we need to reassess the popular assumption that _____.

AGREEING AND DISAGREEING SIMULTANEOUSLY

- Although I agree with X up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that _____.
- Although I disagree with much that X says, I fully endorse his final conclusion that _____.
- Though I concede that _____, I still insist that _____.
- Whereas X provides ample evidence that _____, Y and Z's research on _____ and _____ convinces me that _____ instead.
- X is right that _____, but she seems on more dubious ground when she claims that _____.
- While X is probably wrong when she claims that _____, she is right that _____.
- I'm of two minds about X's claim that _____. On the one hand, I agree that _____. On the other hand, I'm not sure if _____.
- My feelings on the issue are mixed. I do support X's position that _____, but I find Y's argument about _____ and Z's research on _____ to be equally persuasive.

SIGNALING WHO IS SAYING WHAT

- X argues _____.
- According to both X and Y, _____.

- Politicians _____, X argues, should _____.
- Most athletes will tell you that _____.
- My own view, however, is that _____.
- I agree, as X may not realize, that _____.
- But _____ are real and, arguably, the most significant factor in _____.
- But X is wrong that _____.
- However, it is simply not true that _____.
- Indeed, it is highly likely that _____.
- But the view that _____ does not fit all the facts.
- X is right/wrong that _____.
- X is both right and wrong that _____.
- Yet a sober analysis of the matter reveals _____.
- Nevertheless, new research shows _____.
- Anyone familiar with _____ should see that _____.

EMBEDDING VOICE MARKERS

- X overlooks what I consider an important point about _____.
- My own view is that what X insists is a _____ is in fact a _____.
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls _____.
- These conclusions, which X discusses in _____, add weight to the argument that _____.

ENTERTAINING OBJECTIONS

- Yet some readers may challenge the view that _____. After all, many believe _____ . Indeed, my own argument that _____ seems to ignore _____ and _____.
- Of course, many will probably disagree with this assertion that _____.

NAMING YOUR NAYSAYERS

- Here many *feminists* would probably object that _____.
- But *social Darwinists* would certainly take issue with the argument that _____.
- *Biologists*, of course, may want to dispute my claim that _____.
- Nevertheless, both *followers* and *critics of Malcolm X* will probably dispute my claim that _____.
- Although not all *Christians* think alike, some of them will probably dispute my claim that _____.
- *Non-native English speakers* are so diverse in their views that it's hard to generalize about them, but some are likely to object on the grounds that _____.

MAKING CONCESSIONS WHILE STILL STANDING YOUR GROUND

- Although I grant that _____, I still maintain that _____.
- Proponents of X are right to argue that _____. But they exaggerate when they claim that _____.
- While it is true that _____, it does not necessarily follow that _____.
- On the one hand, I agree with X that _____. But on the other hand, I still insist that _____.

INDICATING WHO CARES

- _____ used to think _____. But recently [or within the past few decades] _____ suggests that _____.
- What this new research does, then, is correct the mistaken impression, held by many earlier researchers, that _____.
- These findings challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that _____.
- Recent studies like these shed new light on _____, which previous studies had not addressed.

- Researchers have long assumed that _____. For instance, one eminent scholar of cell biology, _____, assumed in _____, her seminal work on cell structures and functions, that fat cells _____. As _____ herself put it, “_____” (200-). Another leading scientist, _____, argued that fat cells “_____” (200-). Ultimately, when it came to the nature of fat, the basic assumption was that _____.

But a new body of research shows that fat cells are far more complex and that _____.

- If sports enthusiasts stopped to think about it, many of them might simply assume that the most successful athletes _____. However, new research shows _____.
- These findings challenge dieters’ common assumptions that _____.
- At first glance, teenagers appear to _____. But on closer inspection _____.

ESTABLISHING WHY YOUR CLAIMS MATTER

- X matters/is important because _____.
- Although X may seem trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today’s concern over _____.
- Ultimately, what is at stake here is _____.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of _____.
- My discussion of X is in fact addressing the larger matter of _____.
- These conclusions/This discovery will have significant applications in _____ as well as in _____.
- Although X may seem of concern to only a small group of _____, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about _____.

From “They Say/I Say”: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006.

COMMONLY USED TRANSITIONS

Cause and Effect

accordingly
as a result
consequently
hence

it follows, then
since
so
then

therefore
thus

Conclusion

as a result
consequently
hence
in conclusion, then
in short

in sum, then
it follows, then
so
the upshot of all this
is that

therefore
thus
to sum up
to summarize

Comparison

along the same lines
in the same way

likewise
similarly

Contrast

although
but
by contrast
conversely
despite the fact that
even though

however
in contrast
nevertheless
nonetheless
on the contrary
on the other hand

regardless
whereas
while
yet

Addition

also
and
besides

furthermore
in addition
in fact

indeed
moreover
so too

Concession

admittedly
although it is true that
granted

I concede that
of course
naturally

to be sure

Example

after all
as an illustration
consider

for example
for instance
specifically

to take a case in
point

Elaboration

actually
by extension
in short

that is
in other words
to put it another way

to put it bluntly
to put it succinctly
ultimately

From "They Say/I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006.

