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Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Letters and English Language

Master 1 -Literature and Civilisation

British Literature

Semester II

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LECTURE 01

Marxist Theory (1930s-present)

1. The Framework of Marxist Theory

The principles of Marxism were not designed to serve as a theory about how to interpret literary texts but as a theory that has provided a revolutionary way of understanding history. They were originally meant to be a set of social, economic, and political ideas that would, according to their followers, change the world. They are the basis of a system of thought that sees inequitable economic relationships as the source of class conflict. That conflict is the mechanism by which Western society developed from feudalism to capitalism, which, according to Marxism, will eventually give way to socialism, the system that will characterize world economic relationships, and finally to "utopian communism." For a political system to be considered communist, the underclasses must own the means of production--not the government. Therefore, communism has not yet really existed.

Marxism has a long and complicated history. Although it is often thought of as a twentieth-century phenomenon, partly because it was the basis of the social-governmental system of the Soviet Union, it actually reaches back to the thinking of Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), a nineteenth-century German philosopher and economist. The first announcement of his way of seeing things appeared in *The German Ideology* in 1845, in which he introduced the concept of **dialectical materialism** and argued that the modes of production control a society's institutions and beliefs, and contended that history is progressing toward the eventual triumph of communism. When Marx met the political economist Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) in Paris in 1844, they decided to collaborate to explain the principles of communism (later called Marxism) and to organize an international movement. These ideas were expounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history and anticipated that it would lead to a **Revolution** in which the workers would overturn the capitalists, take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government to distribute fairly, and thus class distinctions would disappear. In the three-volume work *Das Kapital* (1867), Marx argued that history is determined by economic conditions and urged an end to private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and the means of production. Despite the variations and additions that have occurred in the century that followed, Marx's writings still provide the theory of economics, sociology, history, politics, and religious belief called Marxism.

Marxist perspective opposes the idealist philosophy that focuses on conceptualizing a spiritual worldview. Idealism as a set of metaphysical philosophies asserts that reality is fundamentally mental, or mentally constructed, and stresses the role of the spiritual in the interpretation of experience. According to this immaterial view, consciousness is the pre-condition and determines the material existence and not vice versa. Notable idealist philosophers that followed the ancient Platonic thought include the British George Berkeley who revived idealism in 18th century Europe and the German modern philosophers Immanuel Kant, Georg

Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Arthur Schopenhauer who dominated 19th-century philosophy. Therefore the core definition of Marxist philosophy encapsulates **historical materialist** approach that focuses on exploring scientific and concrete explanations of this world with the observable historical facts. Unlike other philosophies, Marxism with its revolutionary nature does not only tend to understand and explain the ideologies of the world but also to change the world through revolution.

The revolution that both Marx and Engels anticipated did not come in the 19th century and did not even occur in their lifetime. The reminiscent of Marxist perspective began to evoke in 1917 in a country unimagined by both theorists –Russia- which had seen an extended period of imperialism of despotic Tsars. At the same time, Russian revolutionaries like Lenin and Leon Trotsky took Marx's literary work and his beliefs as inspiration. The remarkable work of Trotsky *Literature and Revolution* (1924) is one of the earliest writings produced in Marxist criticism.

2. Basic Principles of Marxist Theory

2.1. Base/Superstructure Paradigm

The concept of base and superstructure is one of the fundamental concepts of Marxism that establishes a relationship between the cultural world of ideas and the material existence of production means. Marx called the economic conditions of life the *base* or *infrastructure*, which refers to the modes of production from technology and raw materials to the class formations and socio-economic relationships. This economic base has a powerful effect on the *superstructure*, Marx's term for the social and cultural institutions and traditions that promulgate and sustain the specific **ideology** of the ruling class. Marx sometimes referred to the superstructure as *consciousness*, the way we think and look at reality. Marx famously said, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." Accordingly, our ability to think for ourselves is limited, and thus our ideas are shaped by the material conditions of life. The superstructure includes religion, law, art, philosophy, and politics that represent a particular ideology.

The term **Ideology** refers to a system of ideas and beliefs that guides and organizes the social and cultural elements of the superstructure. Ideology is typically associated with the ideas and beliefs of the ruling class, which controls the means and modes of production. Since ideology is dictated by the dominant class, it functions to secure its power. When such cultural conditioning leads the people to accept a system that is unfavourable for them without protest or questioning, that is, to accept it as the logical way for things to be, they have developed a **false consciousness**. Marxism works to rid society of such deceptions by exposing the ideological failings that have been concealed. It takes responsibility for making people aware of how they have unconsciously accepted the subservient, powerless roles in their society that have been prescribed for them by others. Since Marx, the term ideology has undergone a number of refinements and complications. For example, the Hungarian Marxist critic **Georg**

Lukács (1885-1971) argues in *History of Class Consciousness* (1923) that ideology is a form of false consciousness that arises whenever the subjective consciousness of a specific class (typically, the ruling class) is taken to be the objective consciousness of society at large. It is called false consciousness because it obscures the reality of historical processes.

The Italian Marxist **Antonio Gramsci** used the concept of *hegemony* to describe the way in which ideology is not simply oppressive and coercive, but also involves an element of consent. He refined Lukács' view of ideology and argued for a model of the superstructure: "civil society" would correspond to "the function of **hegemony** which the dominant group exercises throughout society," while "political society" (the State) would correspond to 'direct' domination exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. Hegemony works through institutional modes of consensus and consent (e.g., universities, political parties, state bureaucracies, corporations). The goal for the dominant social group is to achieve hegemony by extending its ideology – its values, beliefs, and ideals – to every level of society.

The Welsh Marxist critic **Raymond Williams** suggested in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that every historical time period has competing hegemonies. The dominant hegemony promotes the interests of the ruling classes, the residual hegemony defends the culture and belief system of the previous era, and the emergent hegemony shares revolutionary ideas of new social groups that may later become the dominant hegemony. This model acknowledges the presence of counter-hegemonic potentialities within the social totality.

Of special note is the French philosopher **Louis Althusser**, who drew on Poststructuralism and psychoanalysis in his highly influential rereading of Marx. Althusser is most famous for his elaborations on Gramsci's theory of ideology and the specific mechanisms of ideological hegemony. Following **Jacques Lacan**, he argues that false consciousness is an imaginary construction: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their material conditions of existence". Althusser here refers to the Lacanian Imaginary, which corresponds to the phase of development when the individual has not yet experienced differentiation from the mother, a space of fantasy formations, and of resistance to reason and the entire order of the Symbolic. The Real represents a potential for critique of the Symbolic order.

2.2. Dialectical Materialism and Class Conflict

According to Marx, the moving force behind human history is its economic systems, for people's lives are determined by their economic circumstances. A society is shaped by its forces of production and the methods it uses to produce the material elements of life.

One of the basic assumptions of Marxism is that the forces of production and the way goods and services are produced, will, in a capitalist society, inevitably generate conflict between social classes, which are created by the way economic resources are used and who profits from them. More specifically, the struggle will take place between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist), who control the means of production by owning the natural and human resources, and the proletariat, who supply the labour that allows the owners to make a profit. The

conflict is sometimes realized as a clash of management and labour, sometimes simply as friction between socioeconomic classes. They are generally two parts that struggle against each other, not just physically but also ideologically. Marx referred to this confrontation as **dialectical materialism**. Actually the term includes more than class conflict, for it refers to the view that all change is the product of the struggle between opposites generated by contradictions inherent in all events, ideas, and movements. A thesis collides with its antitheses, finally reaching synthesis, which generates its own antithesis, and so on, thereby producing change and progress. The concept of ‘**dialectics**’ was originally developed in the eighteenth century by the German philosopher **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** who believed that the immaterial spiritual thoughts govern this world and dialectics refers to the emergence of new ideas as a result of two conflicting or opposing ideas. Marx put this idea into materialist terms as he theorized a dialectical struggle between classes that would yield a classless communist society. Classical Marxism was thus a form of **historical determinism**, which means that the analysis of history could conceivably proceed along scientific lines. In fact, Louis Althusser called Marxism “a new science: the science of history.” The Marxist is aware that the working class does not always recognize the system in which it has been caught. The dominant class, using its power to make the prevailing system seem to be the logical and natural one, entraps the proletariat into holding the sense of identity and worth that the bourgeoisie wants them to hold, one that will allow the powerful to remain in control.

3. Marxism and Literary Criticism

Although Marxism was not designed as a method of literary analysis, its principles were applied to literature early on as Marxism provided a new way of reading and understanding literature. In Russia, literature was sometimes accepted as a means of productive propaganda and at other times viewed as a threat if it did not promote party ideology. Although it was linked to the philosophical principles set down by Marx and Engels, its place was uncertain and shifting, culminating finally in the Soviet Writer's Union, founded (and headed) by Joseph Stalin to make certain that literature promoted socialism, Soviet actions, and its heroes. Besides, the Soviet Union suppressed Russian Formalism because it did not comply with the party's perspective.

One of the Russian critics who continued his political and critical practice to support Marxism was Mikhail Bakhtin who introduced a concept called ‘**Dialogism**’ to affirm variety and plurality. In contrast to ‘Dialectics’ that refers to merging thesis and antithesis via conflict or tension to have a synthesis, Bakhtin believed that in a dialogic process, various approaches coexist and are relativistic in their interaction. Here, each ideology can be more prominent in particular circumstances. Changes can be made within these ideologies if a strategy does not have the desired effect. With this concept, he wanted to raise an argument against the absolute hegemony of authorial control and the increasing homogenization of political and cultural life, and to emphasize the need to consider the ‘other’.

With an innovative approach, many Marxist critics started various revolutionary movements in many Western countries after Russia, among which the **Frankfurt School** (1923–1970) which is a group of German Marxist thinkers associated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt. These thinkers applied the principles of Marxism to a wide range of social

phenomena, including literature, cultural studies, and political economy. Major members of the Frankfurt School include Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse.

The first major Marxist critic outside Russia was **Georg Lukács** (1885-1971) who was responsible for what has become known as reflectionism. Named for the assumption that a text reflects the society that has produced it, the theory is practiced for the purpose of discovering how characters and their relationships typify and reveal class conflict, the socioeconomic system, or the politics of the time and place. Such examination will in the end lead to an understanding of that system and the worldview of the author. Reflection theory seeks not just to find surface appearances provided by factual details but to determine the nature of a given society, to find "a truer, more concrete insight into reality". In the end, the reflectionists attribute the fragmentation and alienation that they discover to the ills of capitalism.

Another important figure in the evolution of Marxist criticism is the Algerian-born French philosopher **Louis Althusser** (1918-1990), whose views were not entirely consonant with those of Lukacs. Whereas Lukacs saw literature as a reflection of a society's consciousness, Althusser asserted that literature and art can affect society, even lead it to revolution. Building on Antonio Gramsci's idea that the dominant class controls the views of the people by many means, one of which is the arts, Althusser agreed that the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant one, a process he called **interpellation**. One way that capitalism maintains its control over the working classes is by reinforcing its ideology through its arts. Althusser went on to point out, however, that the arts of the privileged are not all the arts that exist. There remains the possibility that the working class will develop its own culture, which can lead to revolution and the establishment of a new hegemony, or power base.

Marxism established itself as part of the American literary scene with the economic depression of the 1930s. As new journals dedicated to pursuing this new kind of social and literary analysis sprang up, writers and critics alike began to use Marxist interpretations and evaluations of society in their work. Eventually, it became increasingly important to ask how a given text contributed to the solution of social problems based on Marxist principles. The movement grew strong enough and resulted in the appearance of such critics as **Edmund Wilson** and his famous essay "Marxism and Literature" (1938).

Currently two of the best-known Marxist critics are the American **Fredric Jameson** and the British **Terry Eagleton**. Jameson is known for the use of Freudian ideas in his practice of Marxist criticism. Whereas Freud discussed the notion of the repressed unconscious of the individual, Jameson talks about the political unconscious, the exploitation and oppression buried in a work. The critic, according to Jameson, seeks to uncover those buried forces and bring them to light. Of special interest to Eagleton is his examination of the interrelations between ideology and literary form. The constant in his criticism is that he sets himself against the dominance of the privileged class. Both Jameson and Eagleton have responded to

the influence of poststructuralism and the mixture of schools in literary criticism today. In fact, it is not uncommon to find psychoanalytic ideas in the writing of a feminist critic, or postcolonial notions influencing a Marxist. As groups that share an active concern for finding new ways of understanding what we read and the lives we live, their interaction is not surprising. The borrowing back and forth may make it difficult to define freestanding schools of literary analysis, but in practice it makes the possibilities for literary analysis all the richer.

4. The Role of Literature and Marxist Criticism

Although Marxist views about literature coexist comfortably with the principles of some other schools of criticism, they stand in direct opposition to the concerns of the Formalists, for Marxist critics see a literary work not as an aesthetic object to be experienced for its own intrinsic worth but as a product of the socioeconomic aspects of a particular culture. Marxists generally accept, then, that critics must do more than explain how a work conforms to certain literary conventions or examine its aesthetic qualities. The good Marxist critic is careful to avoid the kind of approach that concerns itself with form and craft at the expense of examining social realities. The function of literature is to make the populace aware of social ills and sympathetic to action that will wipe those ills away. However, the ideology that a text inevitably carries can be found in either its content or its form. That is, a text has both subject matter and a manner of presentation that can either promote or criticize the historical circumstances in which it is set. To many Marxists, it is content that is the more significant of the two. The "what" is more revealing than the "how." The "what" is important because it overtly expresses an ideology, a particular view of the social relations of its time and place. It may support the prevailing ideology of the culture, or it can actively seek to show the ideology's shortcomings and failings. By depicting the negative aspects of a socioeconomic system -injustice, oppression, and alienation- literature can awaken those who are unfavourably treated by it, and thus can be a means of changing the superstructure and the base because it can arouse people to resist their treatment and overthrow unfair systems.

The manner of presentation (the "how") can also be instrumental in revealing the ideology of a text. In fact, realistic presentations that clearly depict the time and place in which they are set are preferable to many Marxist readers because they make it easier to identify with an ideology or to object to it. However, others find in modern and postmodern forms evidence of the fragmentation of contemporary society and the alienation of the individual in it. The narrative that is presented in an unrealistic manner -that is, through stream of consciousness or surrealism- may make a less overt identification with the socioeconomic ills of capitalism or with socialist principles, but it can nevertheless criticize contradictions and inequities found in the world that capitalism has created.

Believing that all products of a culture, including literature, are the results of socioeconomic and ideological conditions, the Marxist critic must have not only an understanding of the subject matter and the form of a work but also some grasp of the historical context in which it was written. He must also be aware of the worldview of its author, who wrote not as an individual but as one who reflects the views of a group of people. Such grounding helps the reader identify the ideology that inevitably exists in a text, so that s/he can analyze how that

ideology supports or subverts the power structure it addresses. To make a Marxist analysis, then, you can begin by asking questions such as the following:

- * Who are the powerful people in the society depicted in the text? Who are the powerless people? Are they depicted with equal attention?
- * Why do the powerful have that power? Why is it denied to others?
- * Do you find evidence of class conflict and struggle?
- * Do you find repression and manipulation of workers by owners?
- * Is there evidence of alienation and fragmentation?
- * Does the bourgeoisie (ruling class – upper class) in the text, either consciously or unconsciously, repress and manipulate less powerful groups? If so, what are the tools they use? Media? Religion? Literature?
- * What does the setting tell about the distribution of power and wealth?
- * Does the society that is depicted value things for their usefulness, for their potential for trade, or for their power to convey social status?
- * What ideology is revealed by the answers to the preceding questions? Does it support the values of capitalism or any other "ism" that institutionalizes the domination of one group of people over another -for example, racism, sexism, or imperialism? Or does it condemn such systems?
- * Does this text make you aware of your own acceptance of any social, economic, or political practices that involve control or oppression of others?

Some questions require you to go outside the text for answers, and these deal with the historical circumstances of the text and the writer. You may want to take the time to do some library work to examine the following topics:

- * What are the values and the socioeconomic conditions of the author's time and place? Where are they reflected in the text?
- * What biographical elements of the author's life can account for his ideology? For example, to what social class did he belong? Where is that evident in the text?
- * What were the circumstances of the work's publication? How was it received? Banned? Favourably or unfavourably reviewed?

Scholars who developed the Marxist Theory:

- Karl Marx - *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848 (with Friedrich Engels); *Das Kapital*, 1867; *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
- Louis Althusser - *Reading Capital*, 1965
- Terry Eagleton - *Marxism and Literary Criticism, Criticism and Ideology*, 1976
- Frederic Jameson - *Marxism and Form, The Political Unconscious*, 1971

LECTURE 02

Feminist Theory (1960s-present)

The term feminism is used to describe a political and cultural movement aimed at establishing equal socio-political rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference and a struggle to advocate gender equality and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights (property rights, voting rights); for women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, for abortion rights, and for reproductive rights (including access to contraception); for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and against other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women.

During much of its history, most feminist movements and theories had leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America. However, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms, which accelerated in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the collapse of European colonialism. Since that time, women in former European colonies and the Third World have proposed "Post-colonial" and "Third World" feminisms. Some Postcolonial Feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, are critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric. Black feminists, such as Angela Davis and Alice Walker, share this view.

In literary field, the term refers to a number of different critical approaches that seek to draw attention to the ways in which patriarchal social structures have marginalized women and male authors have exploited women in their portrayal of them. This school of theory looks at how aspects of culture are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and this critique strives to expose the explicit and implicit misogyny in male writing about women. Feminist criticism is also concerned with less obvious forms of marginalization such as the exclusion of women writers and their contributions from the traditional literary canon.

Although the feminist movement dates as far back as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and had some significant advocates in the early 20th century, such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, it did not gain widespread recognition as a theoretical and political movement until the 1960s and 1970s.

Though a number of different approaches exist in feminist criticism, there exist some areas of commonality:

1. Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically.

2. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, women are defined only by their difference from male norms and values.
3. While biology determines human sex (male or female), culture determines gender (masculine or feminine).
4. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by prompting gender equality

Feminist criticism has followed what some theorists call the three waves of feminism:

First Wave Feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally it focused on the promotion of equal property rights for women and the opposition to ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. In Britain, the Suffragettes campaigned for the women's vote, which brought about the Representation of the People Act in 1918, granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses, and in 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one. In the United States, leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Susan B. Anthony, who campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote. American first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states.

An important text of the first wave is Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which asserted the importance of women's independence and how the patriarchal society prevented women from realising their creative potential. Woolf also inaugurated the debate of language being gendered –an issue which was later dealt with by the Australian feminist scholar **Dale Spender** who wrote *Man Made Language* (1981) and the French poststructuralist feminist **Hélène Cixous** who introduced *écriture féminine* in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975).

The term first wave was coined retrospectively after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities.

Second Wave Feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. It has been suggested that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism with the second wave largely concerned with the issue of equality and ending discrimination. Therefore, this wave was characterised by a critique of patriarchy in constructing the cultural identity of woman. Simone de Beauvoir famously stated in her work *The Second Sex* (1949), "one is not born a woman, but becomes one" –a statement that highlights the fact that women have always been defined as the 'other', the lacking, and the negative. A prominent motto of this phase was the slogan coined by the American feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch "The Personal is Political", which became synonymous with

the second wave. Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and thus encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures. Transcending their domestic and personal spaces, women began to venture into the hitherto male dominated terrains of career and public life. Marking its entry into the academic realm, the presence of feminism was reflected in journals, publishing houses and academic disciplines.

Simone de Beauvoir and French Feminism

The French author and philosopher **Simone de Beauvoir** is now best known for her treatise *The Second Sex* (1949), a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. It sets out a feminist existentialism which prescribes a moral revolution. As an existentialist, she accepted Jean-Paul Sartre's precept 'existence precedes essence'; hence her statement "one is not born a woman, but becomes one." Her analysis focuses on the social construction of Woman as the Other. She argues that for feminism to move forward, the attitude that considers men to be the ideal toward which women should aspire must be set aside.

From the 1970s to the 1990s French feminism became a branch of feminist thought, compared to Anglophone feminism, which is distinguished by an approach which is more philosophical and literary. Its writings tend to be metaphorical, being less concerned with political doctrine and generally focused on theories of "the body." The term includes writers who are not French, but who have worked substantially in France such as the Bulgarian-French philosopher and psychoanalyst **Julia Kristeva**, the Israeli-born philosopher and psychoanalyst **Bracha Ettinger** and the French philosopher and literary critic **Hélène Cixous** (born in Algeria of Jewish origin).

Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) are the major works of the second wave. Millett's work specifically depicts how Western social institutions work as covert ways of manipulating power, and how this permeates into literature, philosophy, and art in general. She undertakes a thorough critical study of the portrayal of women in the works of male authors like D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet.

Third Wave Feminism This phase began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave. Resisting the perceived over generalized ideologies and a white, middle class focus of second wave feminism, third wave feminism borrows from post-structural and contemporary race theories to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. Writers like Alice Walker work to reconcile feminism with the concerns of the black community and the survival and wholeness of her people, men and women, and for the promotion of dialog and the valorization of women and of all the varieties of work women perform.

In the third wave, feminism has been actively involved in academics with its interdisciplinary associations with Marxism, Psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and post-structuralism, dealing with issues such as language, writing, and sexuality. One of the leading feminist voices of this phase and one of the founders of feminist literary criticism in the United States academia is **Elaine Showalter** who introduces the concept and practice of 'gynocriticism' in "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979). Showalter argues, "One of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be." Then she explains her theory of criticism,

The programme of *gynocritics* is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture. Before we can even begin to ask how the literature of women would be different and special, we need to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition. As we recreate the chain of writers in this tradition, the patterns of influence and response from one generation to the next, we can also begin to challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canons of achievement. It is because we have studied women writers in isolation that we have never grasped the connections between them. When we go beyond Austen, the Brontes and Eliot, say, to look at a hundred and fifty or more of their sister novelists, we can see patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition which correspond to the developmental phases of any subcultural art.

Gender Studies and Queer Theory

Drawing on certain branches of feminist criticism, Gender and Queer theory traces its roots to the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976). **Gender and Queer theory** (1980s–present) is an approach to gender and sexuality that asserts that gender roles and sexual identity are social constructions rather than an essential, inescapable part of human nature. Queer theory consequently studies literary texts with an eye to the ways in which different authors in different eras construct sexual and gender identity. A primary concern in gender studies and queer theory is the manner in which gender and sexuality is discussed. Many critics working with gender and queer theory are interested in the breakdown of binaries such as male and female. Gender studies and queer theory maintains that cultural definitions of sexuality and what it means to be male and female are socially constructed. In fact, the distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" activities and behavior is constantly changing.

Queer and feminist theories, like other perspectives based on socially-based identities, tend to overlap. Both of these theories are described as responses to the oppression of those who do not conform to socially constructed gender norms. A key difference between the queer and feminist theories involves their respective scope. Feminist theory is only concerned about the issues affecting women while the subjects of queer theory are diverse and include women, homosexuals, transsexuals, and those considered deviants. A major influence in this field is of the American philosopher and gender theorist **Judith Butler** and Butler's cultivation of the relationship of gender and sexuality that has come to found the basis of queer theory concerns. The analysis of society in relation to sexuality and gender is a display of dominance that shows the way that biology is influenced by culture and society. In her best-known work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), and its sequel, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993), Butler asserts that gender is socially constructed (the result of socialization) rather than innate and that conventional notions of gender and sexuality serve to perpetuate the traditional domination of women by men and to justify the oppression of homosexuals and transgender persons. Butler's *Gender Trouble* was one of the founding texts of queer theory, and her work continued to inform much debate within cultural theory, especially in the United States, in the early 21st century.

Typical Questions

- How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?
- What are the power relationships between men and women?
- How are male and female roles defined?
- Do characters take on traits or roles from opposite genders? How does this change others' reactions to them?
- What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy?
- What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operation of patriarchy?
- What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition?

List of scholars who contributed to the feminist theories:

- Mary Wollstonecraft - *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792
- Simone de Beauvoir - *Le deuxième sexe*, 1972
- Elaine Showalter - *A Literature of Their Own*, 1978; "Toward a Feminist Poetics," 1979
- Alice Walker - *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1983
- Mary Ellmann - *Thinking About Women*, 1968
- Kate Millet - *Sexual Politics*, 1977

- Betty Friedan - *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963
- Judith Butler - *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990
Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex', 1993
- Hélène Cixous - "*The Laugh of the Medusa*". Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, 1976

Theory into Practice

Analysis of Literary Works

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Psychoanalytic Approach

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsey is in many ways typical of Woolf's protagonists: middle class, married and somewhat matronly, strong willed, imaginative but *ambivalent* in deeply hidden ways about her own needs and desires. Woolf's concern for personal relationships – a concern that characterized the Bloomsbury group of writers– invites psychoanalytic readings of a novel so obviously indebted to the Oedipus and castration complexes. The story opens with James, the Ramsey's youngest child, at his mother's feet. Meanwhile, Mr. Ramsey storms about the house declaiming that there will be no trip to the lighthouse, a journey James wants very much to take. The weather will be fine, his mother murmurs, but his father contradicts her, "it won't be fine" (4). The bond with the mother is looked upon jealously by the powerful father who symbolically withholds the phallus/lighthouse, the means by which James can win his mother's heart but also the sign of his ascension to the *symbolic* order. This threat of castration should initiate the normative process of development in which the male child learns to identify with the father and to transfer his desire to a more appropriate love object. Ten years later we discover the outcome of James's development. He is sixteen now, and his mother is dead. He has clearly not resolved the Oedipal conflicts that had surfaced so long before; "He had always kept this old symbol of taking a knife and striking his father to the heart" (184). The imagery is appropriate, especially when we recall that the narrator frequently refers to Mr. Ramsey's presence as an "arid scimitar," a reference to his ability to use reason, the *sine qua non* of the Symbolic order. His son appropriates this same image in order to move towards resolution by his dissociation of his father and from the tyrannical authority that he once wielded: "that fierce sudden black-winged harpy, with its talons and its beak all cold and hard. . . . That he would kill, that he would strike to the heart" (184). It is odd that he would associate this authority with a "harpy," a legendary creature with the body of a vulture and the head and breasts of a woman. Perhaps for James, male authority and power are a distortion of some primal femininity that he associates with his mother. This aligns with a Lacanian reading of Woman as the screen on which men project their desires and from which they receive their sense of masculine identity. The arrival at the lighthouse suggests that the tyrant has been dispatched, the mother is no longer a screen or a threat or an object of desire, and the phallus can now be handed on to James without his father fearing for his own position: "There!" his sister, Cam, thinks, as they land. "You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting. . . . His father had praised him" (206). The scene ends with Mr. Ramsey standing in the bow of the boat "as if he were saying, 'There is no God' " (207). For James, the father is no longer a god-like tyrant, and there appears to be no longer any obstacle to James identifying with him.

Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street***Marxist Approach**

Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, published in 1853, is a story that captures what critical theory might call the *alienation* of modernity. Sequestered in a suite of offices, where scriveners do nothing but copy and proofread legal documents, the narrator, "an eminently safe" lawyer, reflects on the "cool tranquility of his snug retreat" (20). Unlike Bartleby, whose alienation is expressed in terms of a near-autistic withdrawal from the world, the lawyer constructs a fantasy realm to protect him from the very social forces that guarantee his financial success. He is a prototype of what Herbert Marcuse calls the "one-dimensional man," whose function is to safeguard the interests of the ruling classes. The narrator's fondness for John Jacob Astor, one of the great early American capitalists, is based not on any sense of the man's character but rather on his name, which he loves to repeat, "for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion" (20). The typical one-dimensional thought, which restricts human activity to the sphere of material existence, reduces Astor to the sound of money. In a quite similar fashion, the narrator portrays himself as equally empty of character, a nameless factotum – successful, highly regarded (or so he claims), articulate – but without emotional investments in the people around him until Bartleby comes to work for him. When confronted with his new employee's recalcitrance, his "preference" not to work, the narrator reflects on the human condition: "The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam" (45). Bartleby is "useful," not so much as a scrivener but as a reminder that the lawyer is in fact a human being. The message conveyed by the story lies in the gap between the lawyer's *ideological* function in a modern capitalist society and the humanity of which Bartleby reminds him. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that Bartleby himself is even more profoundly alienated, a condition symbolized by his position "close up to a small side-window," with a view of a wall, surrounded by a "high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from [the lawyer's] sight" (68). From a Marxist point of view, Melville presents the reader with a meditation on a crucial period for capitalist development, a period during which industrial capabilities were consolidated in monopolies and trusts, which required the services of law firms to guarantee their smooth operation and protect the private property derived from them, the "rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds" (20) that are the lawyer's stock in trade. However, Melville's depiction of the law office, though rendered in comic terms, illustrates the *alienating* effects of labor. The other scriveners – Nippers, Turkey, and Ginger Nut – are entirely cut off from the natural world in which they might create useful things and are also cut off from the legal materials that they are instrumental in constructing. Nippers and Turkey are victims of the mind-numbing work involved in copying documents. They are representatives of a class of literate clerical workers required by the industrial capitalist system. Their alienation is no different from the unskilled laborer, except that they could, at least, accomplish "a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched" (23). Nippers and Turkey comically depict the dehumanization and alienation created by industrial capitalism and sustained by a legal *ideology* that protects and nurtures

private property. Bartleby's dehumanization – his imprisonment in a “dead-wall reverie” (52) – results ultimately in a form of rebellion, a refusal to work. One of the strengths of Melville's story from a Marxist perspective is that it captures the complexities of class struggle, and it does so by showing in realistic terms the effects of the exploitation of workers.

Southern Agrarian Class Conflict in William Faulkner's “Barn Burning”

Marxist Approach

William Faulkner's short story “Barn Burning” demonstrates the political and economic power disparities between the bourgeoisie, represented by the justice system and aristocratic landowners, and the proletariat, represented by the Snopes family. Taking place within living memory of the Civil War, the story is a critique of the southern sharecropping system and captures the immorality, greed, and lack of caring by the South's affluent classes. Yet the story also suggests that “barn-burning” nihilism is not the answer to class conflict. As young Sarty's flight suggests at story's end, for a true Marxist revolution, false consciousness, violence, and self-interest must be erased from people's actions. The story opens as Abner Snopes is on trial for burning a barn. When his young son and main character, Colonel Sartoris Snopes, is called as a witness, Sarty's struggle begins. Although he identifies with his father and has inherited his father's ideas of the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, the story focuses on Sarty's burgeoning awareness that his father's barn burning is not a legitimate or helpful response to class inequality. Although Sarty ultimately warns Major de Spain of his father's attempted barn burning at story's end, signifying a break with his father's values, he supports and identifies with his father in the story's opening courtroom scene. Abner Snopes typifies the powerlessness of the proletariat; in the opening trial scene, he does not speak until after the judgment is pronounced, underscoring his lack of voice in the political system as a whole (He is equally silent in a second trial for barn burning). Abner Snopes is ordered to leave the county. After their travel and relocation to Major de Spain's plantation, Abner states that he wishes to have a word with the man who will own him “body and soul for the next eight months.” After leaving Major de Spain's house, Abner remarks that it was built with “nigger sweat” and that Major de Spain intends to add some “white sweat” as well. This comment demonstrates that those who own land and control the means of production hire workers to toil for small wages or life's necessities while the landowners themselves reap great benefit.

Although Abner's silence and control seem respectable, they demonstrate that he has been fully interpellated to accept the class system that offers him no opportunity. Instead of speaking of himself in court, he chooses silence. He burns barns instead of calling for a redistribution of the means of production, landownership, and other material inequalities. Although Abner recognizes the injustices of sharecropping, he cannot imagine an alternative system. This acceptance of the way things are represents Abner's false consciousness. He can imagine only violence as a solution to class conflict. Faulkner's language choice during the pivotal scene where Abner steps in horse droppings and walks across Major de Spain's rug demonstrates the inevitable social construction of individuals' beliefs. As Abner walks toward

the house, Sarty notes that his father could have avoided the droppings with a “simple change in stride.” Once inside, Abner’s foot comes down on the floor “with clocklike finality.” When Mrs. de Spain addresses him, Abner once again does not speak but simply turns and exits. Abner’s unchanging stride suggests that he knows no other way to deal with class conflict. His reactions are socially constructed with a clocklike finality of their own. His silence when addressed by Mrs. de Spain parallels the silence of the courtroom scenes and underscores that Abner believes he cannot gain power through speaking, only through destroying. Oppression continues across generations. The women in the family amply demonstrate the political and economic oppression and false consciousness of Marxist class division. Sarty’s sisters are often described as cattle instead of humans, and attention is drawn to the cheapness of their clothes. Yet Faulkner suggests that the “inertia” surrounding them is their own. Like Abner, the sisters’ problems are socially constructed and to some degree of their own making. Sarty’s mother and aunt also sustain the system of oppression. They save the little money they have to buy Sarty a half-size ax, a gift that symbolizes the movement of the next generation into the working class. Later, when Abner believes Sarty will flee to warn Major de Spain of the barn burning, Abner instructs his wife to hold her son, denying both his wife’s and Sarty’s ambitions to see Sarty escape the family’s entrapment in the vicious cycle of southern agrarian sharecropping.

Throughout the story, Sarty himself wrestles with his father’s ideas about class conflict and violence. In the opening scene, Sarty is hungry, revealing the family’s destitute status. Early on, we see him making mental efforts to make “his father’s enemy” into his enemy as well. Upon exiting the trial, he scraps with the boy who yells “barn burner.” However, as the family pulls away from the trial in their wagon, Sarty hopes that his father is satisfied and will not continue the cycle of destruction based on violence. Sarty’s development is next seen when he and his father walk toward the de Spain house for the first time. Sarty intuits that his father cannot harm such an aristocratic family. He realizes that his father’s violence would be a “buzzing wasp” capable of only an annoying sting but no more. Sarty hopes that his father realizes this as well and will change from what “he couldn’t help but be.” This line suggests that Sarty understands how his father has been socially constructed to understand class relationships and social mobility only through the current system based upon inequality and irresolvable conflict. Sarty’s disavowal of his father’s nihilistic barn burning is the story’s climax. As Abner rushes to burn the de Spain barn, Sarty protests by saying that before other burnings, a messenger was sent to warn the landowners. Abner only continues to prepare for the conflagration while Sarty understands that he could flee from the system of conflict, poverty, and interpellation in which his family is trapped. He says, “I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can’t.” Ultimately, Sarty does break with his father. He warns the de Spain household of his father’s actions, and he runs from his family, spending the night in the woods. The story ends with the sun about to rise, symbolically letting Sarty begin a new life. He understands that his father’s ideological stranglehold kept the family from realizing a better life of economic and political opportunity. “Barn Burning” presents an economic and political system that perpetuates class conflict, robs the working class of power and equality, and creates a false consciousness that destroys the proletariat’s ability to imagine a different system based upon economic and political equality.

Faulkner illustrates the interpellation throughout the entire Snopes family. While Abner Snopes is caught in material and social circumstances that allow him only nihilistic protest through barn burning, Sarty represents the true Marxist mind that realizes that an alternative system is needed, one where the bourgeoisie do not control the means of production and the proletariat are not in eternal insurgency. Although Sarty himself may be too young to think in such precise Marxist terms, the story "Barn Burning" itself suggests that successful economic and political systems must redistribute the means of production and allow society to recognize the equality and humanity of all people.

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Feminist Approach

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* offers the reader numerous avenues for interpretation. Most prominent since its publication in 1847 have been interpretations that focus on the representation of women. Feminist theory, particularly that form of it that emphasizes issues of social and sexual equality, has found a rich resource in *Jane Eyre*. As a Bildungsroman, *Jane Eyre* records a young woman's self-formation, her struggle to harmonize her own desire with the demands placed on her by society. This struggle takes many different forms: reason v. passion, self v. society, self-fulfilment v. social duty, passive obedience v. active rebellion, self-mastery v. slavery, wife v. concubine. The nature of these conflicts is symptomatic of the image we have of Jane and that she has of herself: a divided self, a subject torn between responsibilities to herself and to society. This self-division is reflected in her chosen occupation of governess, one of the few positions open to single women of modest means, but this role is ambiguous (she is both part of the household and an employee in it) and therefore stands for the uncertain and confusing status of women in Victorian society.

In the end, however, it is not clear if Jane ever effectively transcends or repairs her divided selfhood. Her desire for liberty – "I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer" – is dampened and finally set aside in a *dialectic* of diminished choices: "I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: 'Then,' I cried, half desperate, 'grant me at least a new servitude!' " (72). Jane's desire for a "new servitude" is to some degree a capitulation to the very *patriarchal* social order that restricts her life options to begin with. But it is also a sign of Jane's willful acceptance of social responsibility. Jane's powerful feelings for Rochester as she reflects, "He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun" (234), signal her enslavement to patriarchal authority. Indeed, Jane frequently uses the language of slavery to describe her relationship with Rochester. His intensity and energy "were more than beautiful to me," she notes, "they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me" (149). However, it is possible to argue that Jane appropriates the language of slavery to assert her own authority and autonomy. When Rochester makes an implicit comparison between her and "the grand Turk's whole seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms and all!" Jane responds in mutinous terms: "I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved – your

harem inmates amongst the rest.” She adds that Rochester will find himself “fettered amongst our hands” and forced to “sign a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred” (229–30). *Jane Eyre* is an *ambivalent* text, unable decisively to assert Jane’s dependence or independence.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Feminist Approach * Ethnic Studies Approach

For a Feminist critic, Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) represents a landmark achievement, for it offers the perspective of an independent-minded black woman, Janie Crawford, who tells the story of her life and loves. Though now regarded as one of the most acclaimed works of the Harlem Renaissance, it was neglected after its first publication, only to be rediscovered and promoted over forty years later by Alice Walker. One of the things that impressed Walker was Hurston’s representation of Janie and the women in her life on their own terms and in their own language. Her uncompromising representation of a black woman’s self-formation was a direct challenge both to the prejudices of white readers and the literary standards of black male writers. Just before her first marriage, Janie’s grandmother, Nanny, tells the story of her escape from slavery and the violent circumstances of her granddaughter’s birth: “ ‘Dat school teacher had done hid her [Janie’s mother] in de woods all night long, and he had done raped mah baby and run on off just before day’ ” (19). A legacy of slavery and sexual violence does not prevent Janie from exploring her own sexuality and eagerly awaiting the day when she might discover the joys of marriage. At first, she experiences a rush of delight at the thought: “She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage!” (11). However, after her first marriage to Logan Killicks, a local man with a bit of property, she has another revelation: “She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (25). Her second husband, Joe Starks, is more ambitious and exciting, a vibrant force behind a new town founded by black people. But Janie soon discovers she is meant to be a silent and passive wife among men who do not understand the desires of women. To her husband and his friends she says, “ ‘how surprised y’all is goin’ tuh be if you ever find out you don’t know half as much ’bout [womenfolks] as you think you do’ ” (75).

A feminist reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* inevitably dovetails with an Ethnic Studies approach. Hurston addresses the issue of race as inextricably bound up with gender identity, and constructs the relationship between Janie and Tea Cake, her third husband, around the problematic: the identity and self-formation of light-skinned black women. Janie’s friend Mrs. Turner makes note of her “coffee-and-cream complexion and her luxurious hair” but cannot “forgive her for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake” (140). Janie embraces blackness, and with Tea Cake she seeks to affirm a particular vision of being black, one that she formed in the wake of her disappointments with Logan and Joe. She did not want to be the kind of black woman who marries for social status. When she longs for love and desire to

enter her relationship with Logan, her Nanny exclaims, “ ‘Lawd have mussy! Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! Dat’s just whut’s got us uh pullin’ and uh haulin’ and sweatin’ and doin’ from can’t see in de mornin’ till can’t see at night’ ” (23). Janie defies her grandmother’s wisdom and seeks to define love and marriage for herself. Though life with Tea Cake is rough, Janie feels a “self-crushing love” (128) for him in large measure because she can speak her mind with him. When things go badly for them, it is not the result of an accident, nor a loss of love. A dog bite infects Tea Cake with rabies and during one of his “fits of gagging and choking” (177) Janie kills him in self-defense. She is acquitted of murder, though some people believe that her light-skinned appearance rather than Tea Cake’s condition was the cause: “ ‘Well, you know whut dey say,’ ” she overhears one man say to another. But what these men do not realize is how strongly Janie had identified, through her intense love, with a black man: “Of course he wasn’t dead,” she thinks to herself. “He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking.” Janie’s appeal lies in her will to consolidate racial and gender differences: “She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. . . . So much of life in its meshes!” (193).