

UNIVERSITY SETIF2

Literary Theory/ second year/ dr. Mounir M

Lecture 2: Literary Theory and Other Sciences

Literary Theory and Philosophy:

Philosophy provides critical concepts that underpin many literary theories:

1. **Existentialism and Literature:** Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus explored themes of meaninglessness, freedom, and personal responsibility. Their ideas permeate existentialist literary theory, which looks for these themes in literary works.
 - **Example:** In Sartre's own play *No Exit*, characters trapped in a room serve as metaphors for the human condition: "Hell is other people." Existentialist criticism would focus on the characters' struggles with free will and existential dread.
2. **Deconstruction:** Derrida's **Deconstruction** challenges the idea of stable meanings in texts, revealing contradictions and binary oppositions that create meaning. It suggests that meaning is always deferred and unstable.
 - **Example:** In William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, deconstructionist critics might explore the breakdown of traditional narrative structure, highlighting the unstable meaning of time and identity in the text.

Literary Theory and Sociology:

Literature reflects social structures and norms, and sociology helps uncover how these are represented in texts:

1. **Marxist Literary Theory:** Focuses on class struggle and economic power. Marxist critics analyze literature to understand how it either reinforces or critiques capitalist ideology.
 - **Example:** In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a Marxist reading would focus on the ways in which the novella critiques the rise of oppressive power structures under the guise of equality.

2. **Cultural Studies:** An interdisciplinary field, cultural studies examines how literature contributes to the formation of social and cultural identities.

- **Example:** In *Harry Potter*, cultural studies might explore how the series reflects ideas of class and race within British society, with characters like Hermione and the house-elves being analyzed for their representation of marginalization and empowerment.

Literary Theory and Psychology:

Psychology offers tools to analyze the minds of characters, authors, and readers:

1. **Psychoanalytic Criticism:** Based on Freud's theories, psychoanalytic criticism delves into unconscious desires, repressions, and symbolic meanings in literature.

- **Example:** In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, psychoanalytic critics might explore Hamlet's oedipal complex, focusing on his conflicted feelings toward his mother, Gertrude, and his obsession with her relationship with Claudius.

2. **Archetypal Criticism:** Derived from Carl Jung's idea of universal archetypes—symbolic patterns common across cultures—this theory explores recurring symbols like the hero, the trickster, or the quest.

- **Example:** Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* argues that many mythological stories follow the "hero's journey." In modern literature, this can be seen in *The Lord of the Rings*, where Frodo embarks on a classical quest to defeat a great evil.

Literary Theory and History:

1. **New Historicism:** This approach argues that literature must be understood within the context of the power structures of its time, analyzing how texts are both products and producers of their historical conditions.

- **Example:** In *The Tempest*, a New Historicist reading would explore the play's colonial themes, analyzing how

Shakespeare's depiction of Caliban reflects early modern European views of colonization and the "Other."

2. **Postcolonial Theory:** Postcolonial criticism examines literature produced in or about colonized countries, focusing on issues of identity, power, and resistance.
 - **Example:** Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is often analyzed through postcolonial theory, focusing on how it challenges colonial narratives by giving voice to the colonized Igbo people and depicting the complexities of their society.

Conclusion:

Literary theory is deeply intertwined with other sciences, such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history, each providing valuable tools for interpreting and understanding texts. These interdisciplinary approaches reveal the richness and complexity of literature as both a reflection and critique of human society and experience.

These lectures provide a foundational understanding of literary theory and its intersection with other disciplines. For further reading and reputable sources on these topics, I recommend the following:

1. **"Literary Theory: An Introduction" by Terry Eagleton** - This is a comprehensive guide to various literary theories.
2. **"The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism"** - This anthology provides a wide range of critical essays and theoretical texts.
3. **"Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory" by Peter Barry** - This book is an accessible introduction to literary theory.