

```
graph TD; A([Literary theories and criticism]) --> B([Marxism]); A --> C([Feminism]); A --> D([Psychoanalysis]);
```

Literary theories and criticism

Marxism

Feminism

Psychoanalysis

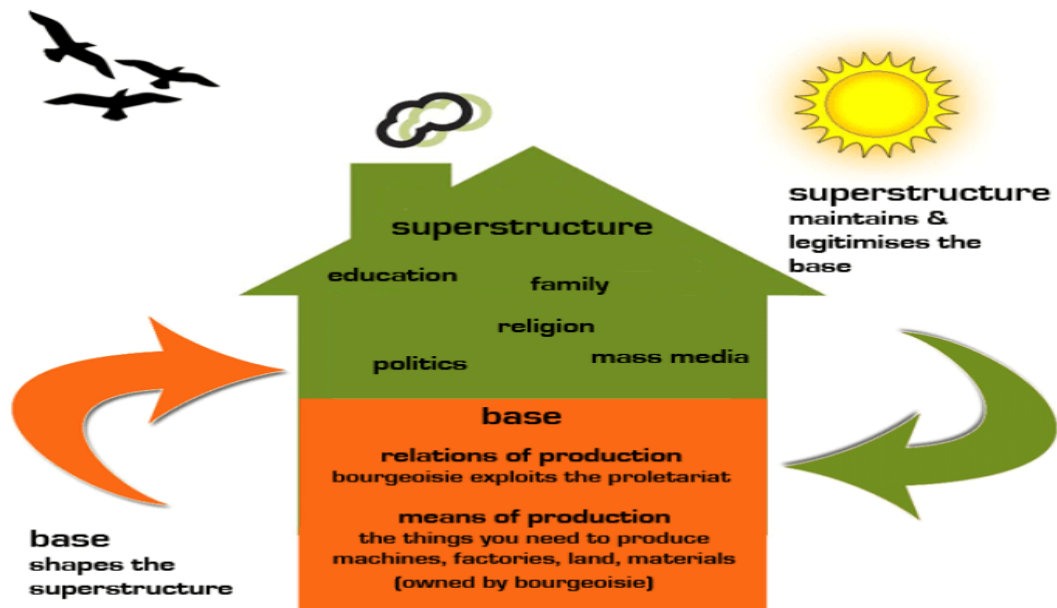
1. Marxism and Literary Theory

Marxism is a materialist philosophy which tried to interpret the world based on the concrete, natural world around us and the society we live in. It is opposed to idealist philosophy which conceptualizes a spiritual world elsewhere that influences and controls the material world. Karl Marx himself has commented on this revolutionary nature of Marxism, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” It is true that while other philosophies tried to understand the world, Marxism tried to change it.

Classical Marxism: Basic Principles

According to Marxism, society progresses through the struggle between opposing forces. It is this struggle between opposing classes that result in social transformation. History progresses through this **class struggle**. Class struggle originates out of **the exploitation of one class by another throughout history**. During the feudal period the tension was between the feudal lords and the peasants, and in the Industrial age the struggle was between the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) and the industrial working class (the proletariat). Classes have common interests. In a capitalist system the proletariat is always in conflict with the capitalist class. This confrontation, according to Marx, will finally result in replacing the system by socialism.

One of the fundamental concepts of classical Marxist thought is the concept of **base and superstructure** which refers to the relationship between the material means of production and the cultural world of art and ideas. It is essentially a symbolic concept which employed the structure of a building to explain this relationship. **The foundation or the base stands for the socio-economic relations and the mode of production and the superstructure stands for art, law, politics, religion and, above all, ideology**. Broadly speaking it refers to the idea that culture is governed by historical conditions and the relations of dominance and subordination prevalent in a particular society. Morality, religion, art and philosophy are seen as echoes of real life processes. In Marx’s own words, they are “phantoms formed in the brains of men.” From this point of view **all cultural products are directly related to the economic base in a given society**.



How to Apply Marxist Theory to Literature

As explained above, class, oppression, power, economy and politics are some of the main elements that should be considered in a Marxist literary criticism. Asking the following questions and analyzing the information that is found from answering these questions will help you to apply the Marxist theory to literature.

- What role does class play in the literary work?
- How does the author analyze class relations?
- What does the author say about oppression?
- Are class conflicts ignored or blamed?
- How do characters overcome oppression?
- Does the work support the economic and social status quo, or does it advocate change?
- Does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo? If so, in what way does it attempt to serve as propaganda?
- Does the work propose some form of utopian vision as a solution to the problems encountered in the work?
- How has the author's ideologies and background affect the way he views the economy, politics or society?

- How do the time period, social background and culture in which the work was written affect the portrayal of the political, economic, and social forces?
- 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 social classes do the characters represent?
- How do characters from different classes interact or conflict?

2. Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)

Feminist criticism is concerned with "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson 83). This school of theory looks at how aspects of our culture are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and aims to expose misogyny in writing about women, which can take explicit and implicit forms. This misogyny, Tyson reminds us, can extend into diverse areas of our culture. Feminist criticism is also concerned with less obvious forms of marginalization such as the exclusion of women writers from the traditional literary canon.

Common Space in Feminist Theories

Though a number of different approaches exist in feminist criticism, there exist some areas of commonality. This list is excerpted from Tyson (92):

1. Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which women are oppressed.
2. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values.
3. All of Western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, for example, in the Biblical portrayal of Eve as the origin of sin and death in the world.
4. While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (scales of masculine and feminine).
5. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by prompting gender equality.
6. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.

Typical questions:

- How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?
- What are the power relationships between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?
- How are male and female roles defined?

- What constitutes masculinity and femininity?
- How do characters embody these traits?
- What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy?
- What does the work say about women's creativity?
- What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition? (Tyson)

3. Psychoanalytic Criticism (1930s-present)

Sigmund Freud

Psychoanalytic criticism builds on Freudian theories of psychology. While we don't have the room here to discuss all of Freud's work, a general overview is necessary to explain psychoanalytic literary criticism.

The Unconscious, the Desires, and the Defenses

Freud began his psychoanalytic work in the 1880s while attempting to treat behavioral disorders in his Viennese patients. He dubbed the disorders 'hysteria' and began treating them by listening to his patients talk through their problems. Based on this work, Freud asserted that people's behavior is affected by their unconscious: "...the notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware..." (Tyson 14-15).

Freud believed that our unconscious was influenced by childhood events. Freud organized these events into developmental stages involving relationships with parents and drives of desire and pleasure where children focus "...on different parts of the body...starting with the mouth...shifting to the oral, anal, and phallic phases..." (Richter 1015). These stages reflect base levels of desire, but they also involve fear of loss (loss of genitals, loss of affection from parents, loss of life) and repression: "...the expunging from consciousness of these unhappy psychological events" (Tyson 15).

Tyson reminds us, however, that "...repression doesn't eliminate our painful experiences and emotions...we unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to 'play out'...our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress" (15). To keep all of this conflict buried in our unconscious, Freud argued that we develop defenses: selective perception, selective memory, denial, displacement, projection, regression, fear of intimacy, and fear of death, among others.

Id, Ego, and Superego

Freud maintained that our desires and our unconscious conflicts give rise to three areas of the mind that wrestle for dominance as we grow from infancy, to childhood, to adulthood:

- id - "...the location of the drives" or libido
- ego - "...one of the major defenses against the power of the drives..." and home of the defenses listed above
- superego - the area of the unconscious that houses Judgment (of self and others)

Oedipus Complex

Freud believed that the Oedipus complex was "...one of the most powerfully determinative elements in the growth of the child" (Richter 1016). Essentially, the Oedipus complex involves children's need for their parents and the conflict that arises as children mature and realize they are not the absolute focus of their mother's attention: "the Oedipus complex begins in a late phase of infantile sexuality, between the child's third and sixth year, and it takes a different form in males than it does in females" (Richter 1016).

Freud argued that both boys and girls wish to possess their mothers, but as they grow older "...they begin to sense that their claim to exclusive attention is thwarted by the mother's attention to the father..." (1016). Children, Freud maintained, connect this conflict of attention to the intimate relations between mother and father, relations from which the children are excluded. Freud believed that "the result is a murderous rage against the father...and a desire to possess the mother" (1016).

Freud and Literature

Some critics believe that we can "...read psychoanalytically...to see which concepts are operating in the text in such a way as to enrich our understanding of the work and, if we plan to write a paper about it, to yield a meaningful, coherent psychoanalytic interpretation" (Tyson 29). Tyson provides some insightful and applicable questions to help guide our understanding of psychoanalytic criticism.

Typical questions:

- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work?
- Are there any Oedipal dynamics - or any other family dynamics - at work here?
- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example, fear or fascination with death, sexuality - which includes love and romance as well as sexual behavior - as a primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)?
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?
- Are there prominent words in the piece that could have different or hidden meanings?