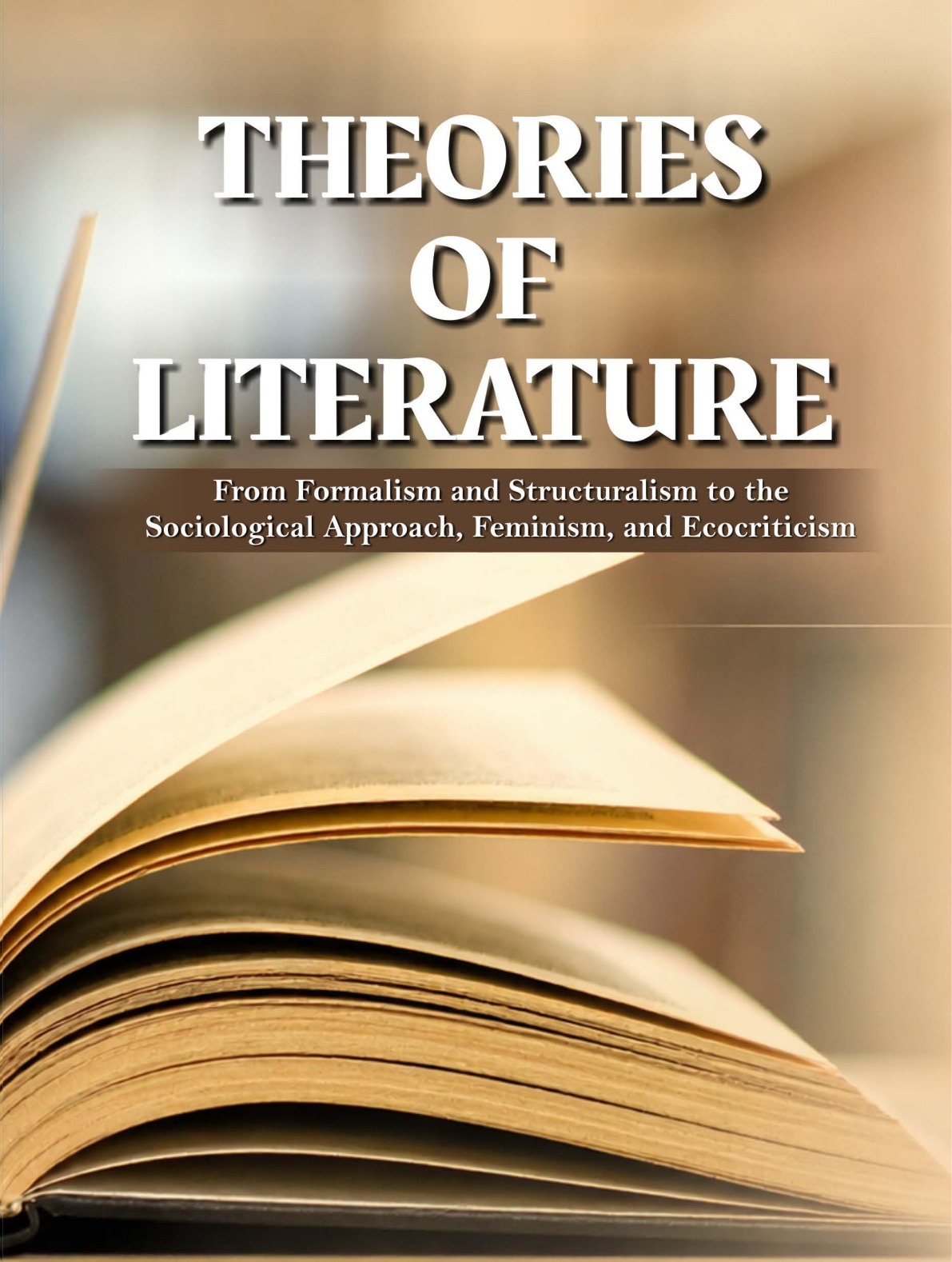
THEORIES OF LITERATURE

From Formalism and Structuralism to the Sociological Approach, Feminism, and Ecocriticism



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PREFACE

This textbook was prepared as a reference for students taking the Theory of Literature course in English Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara. The material in this book has been compiled and developed from lecture materials covering eight major approaches in literary studies: Formalism, Structuralism, the Psychology of Literature, Sigmund Freud's structural theory of personality, the concept of the Oedipus Complex, the Sociological Approach, Feminism, and Ecocriticism.

Each chapter in this book follows a consistent format: Chapter Title, Specific Learning Objectives, Course Material, Case Study/Sample Questions, and Exercises/Evaluation. This format is intended to help students understand the learning outcomes of each chapter, deepen their understanding of concepts through explanation and applied examples, and test their comprehension through independent exercises.

This textbook remains a draft and is intended for further development. Feedback, corrections, and refinements from the course lecturer as well as other readers are warmly welcomed to help improve the quality of this textbook in future editions.

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CHAPTER I
FORMALISM AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF LITERARY THEORY

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Distinguish the meaning of the term “criticism” in everyday usage
2. From its meaning in the academic context of literary criticism.
3. Explain the position of literary theory as a “lens” for examining literary works.
4. Identify the two main functions of literary criticism.
5. Outline the historical origins of Russian Formalism and New Criticism, along with their two main principles.
6. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the formalist approach in examining literary texts.

Course Material

1.1 Understanding the Term “Criticism”

In everyday conversation, “criticism” is often understood as the act of finding fault, condemning, or expressing disapproval of something. Within the discipline of literary

studies, however, the term carries a much broader and more neutral meaning. Literary criticism refers to the activity of interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating the value of a work of art — whether considered individually or in comparison with other works. The results of this activity may take the form of critical commentary, reviews, articles, or essays containing such analysis and evaluation.

A literary critic, therefore, does not merely search for a work's weaknesses, but rather seeks to understand and explain how the work functions and what meaning can be drawn from it.

1.2 Critical Analysis as a Persuasive Essay

Critical analysis is an in-depth examination of one aspect of a literary work — this may include characterization, conflict, narrative point of view, style, or other elements. Although it takes the form of an examination of a work, critical analysis remains, at its core, a piece of persuasive writing: the writer seeks to prove a particular idea or argument about the work under discussion.

A good critical analysis must therefore have a clear purpose or point and be able to answer the questions "why" and "so what." For instance, when a critic notices a recurring symbol throughout a novel, they do not stop at merely identifying the symbol, but go on to explain why it matters and what it contributes to the work's overall meaning.

1.3 Literary Theory as a Reading Lens

Put simply, literary theory can be understood as a collection of different lenses that critics use to view and discuss works of art, literature, and even culture. Each lens carries assumptions distinctive to its particular school of thought, allowing critics to focus on aspects of a work considered significant within that framework.

Literary theory is a set of concepts and methods used to explain and interpret literature, while also uncovering a work's meaning through textual criticism and interpretation. Different theories offer different approaches to understanding the role of historical context, linguistic elements, or unconscious elements within a text. It is worth noting that a reader need not explicitly name the theory they are using; theory functions as a starting point for developing one's own ideas and opinions about the work being read.

1.4 The Two Main Functions of Literary Criticism

Broadly speaking, literary criticism serves two main functions:

- Analyzing, examining, and evaluating literary works.
- Formulating general principles for the study of literary works

1.5 New Criticism and the Rise of the Formalist Approach

New Criticism holds that a text, although it may carry many messages, must possess a central theme that organically unifies all of its artistic elements. For this school, a literary text is viewed as a self-contained artistic creation, and close reading becomes the primary method for uncovering that meaning. The motto closely associated with New Criticism is "the text itself" — asserting that a work's meaning must be drawn from the text, not from anything outside it.

In line with New Criticism, the Formalist approach views literary criticism as a way of approaching, analyzing, and understanding a text through its own narrative structure. Formalists strive for objectivity by disregarding external factors and focusing entirely on the literary work itself. The focus of formalist study includes:

- The form, organization, and structure of the text
- Word choice and language
- The possibility of multiple meanings
- Irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor
- Setting, character, symbol, and point of view

A literary work is viewed in isolation, without regard to authorial intent, the writer's background, social-historical context, or anything else outside the text.

1.6 The Historical Origins of Russian Formalism

Formalism, also known as Russian Formalism, emerged from two literary discussion groups. The Moscow Linguistic Circle was founded in 1915, while the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ) was founded a year later, in 1916, in St. Petersburg (later Leningrad), led by Viktor Shklovsky. Its members met regularly to discuss their interpretations and views of the literary works they read, applying a highly structured and scientific approach.

This approach arose as a direct reaction to Marxist literary theory, which viewed literary works as products of an author shaped by surrounding political and social conditions. Formalism, in contrast, held that a text should be understood on its own terms.

In 1929, the influence of Formalism in the Soviet Union waned, as it was considered to lack a political perspective aligned with the state ideology of the time. However, through Roman Jakobson, Formalist ideas were carried to the West, where they later developed into Anglo-American New Criticism. This school emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and reached its height of influence between the 1940s and 1950s.

1.7 The Two Main Principles of Formalism

1. A literary text is held to exist independently of any particular reader and, in a certain sense, to possess a fixed meaning.
2. The greatest literary works are considered timeless and universal, comprehensible across different eras.

1.8 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Formalist Approach

Strengths: the formalist approach can be carried out without extensive research, emphasizes literary value independent of context, and nearly every other critical approach must begin with this kind of close reading.

Weaknesses: the text is treated in isolation, thereby disregarding the context in which the work was created; it cannot account for allusion (references outside the text); and it is very difficult to apply consistently to longer works.

Case Study / Sample Questions

Read the following poem by Robert Frost:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

— Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" (1916)

Conduct a close reading of this poem, focusing solely on the text itself, without referring to any information about its author.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. How do the structure and form of this poem (four five-line stanzas, the ABAAB rhyme scheme, the regular meter) contribute to its overall meaning?
2. Identify the key symbols in this poem (e.g., “the two roads,” “the yellow wood,” “the road less traveled”). What meanings can be constructed from these symbols?
3. How do the speaker’s point of view and word choices shape the poem’s tone, particularly the shift from description to reflection in the final stanza?
4. Based on close reading alone — without reference to the author’s biography or context — what argument can you build about the poem’s theme of choice and uncertainty?
5. Would your formalist reading change if you were given information about the author’s background? Explain why the formalist approach deliberately avoids such questions.

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain the difference between the everyday meaning of “criticism” and its meaning in the academic context of literary criticism.
2. Why is literary theory often compared to a “lens”? Explain with a brief example.
3. Outline the two main functions of literary criticism as discussed in this chapter.

4. Explain the historical background of Russian Formalism and its relationship to Marxist literary theory.
5. State and explain the two main principles of Formalism.
6. Choose a short story or poem you are familiar with, then carry out a simple formalist analysis focusing on its structure, language, and symbols.
7. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the formalist approach. In your view, under what conditions is this approach most appropriate, and when is another approach more necessary?

"You have to store up books, becoming acquainted with human experience; let them lie around your thoughts, becoming yours—ring upon ring, as a tree grows, let them rise up from the depths like coral islands.

- Victor Shklovsky



Source: *Wikipedia*

Figure 1.1 Victor Shklovsky

CHAPTER II STRUCTURALISM

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the origins of Structuralism as a twentieth-century intellectual movement and identify its founding figure.
2. Explain Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified.
3. Outline Saussure's three core claims about language: arbitrariness, relationality, and constitutiveness.
4. Identify the main characteristics of Structuralist literary theory, including the role of binary oppositions.
5. Apply a structuralist reading to a literary text by identifying its underlying narrative structure and binary oppositions.

Course Material

2.1 Structuralism as a Twentieth-Century Movement

Structuralism is a twentieth-century intellectual movement, inaugurated in 1950 by the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Although it developed largely as a French movement, Structuralism was imported into Britain mainly during the 1970s, where it attained widespread influence, and even a measure of notoriety, throughout the 1980s. At its core lies a single guiding idea: that things cannot be understood in isolation, but must instead be seen in the context of the larger structure of which they form a part.

2.2 Understanding Culture through Structure

Structuralism offers a way of understanding culture and meaning in the arts by relating an individual work—a novel, a painting, a symphony—to something larger than itself. In structuralist theory, the relationship between cultural phenomena forms a web, network, or structure that exists beneath the way human beings think, act, and produce art. Because of this, Structuralism has been applied well beyond literary studies, finding use in philosophy, history, anthropology, and literary theory alike.

2.3 Ferdinand de Saussure: The Father of Structuralism

Structuralism owes a profound debt to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose work had a lasting effect on linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy alike. Structuralism holds that all human activities and their products—even perception and thought themselves—are constructed rather than natural, a position closely related to semiology, the study of

signs, symbols, and communication, and of how meaning is constructed and understood.

Saussure developed an approach to the study of language in which the linguistic sign (a word) is understood as the relationship between a "sound image"—a spoken or written word, which he called the signifier—and the concept evoked in the mind, which he called the signified. This differed sharply from earlier accounts of the relationship between words and things, which had assumed that words and the things they denoted were connected directly.

2.4 The Sign: Signifier and Signified

A sign, in Saussure's account, is anything that conveys meaning, and it is composed of two inseparable parts. The signifier is the physical form a sign takes—its letters, sounds, or image—while the signified is the mental concept that the signifier evokes. The word "tree," for example, functions as a signifier whose corresponding signified is the mental concept of a real-life tree; neither element exists as a sign without the other.

2.5 Three Core Claims about Language

In developing his account of linguistic structure, Saussure advanced three claims that later Structuralists found especially significant:

1. Arbitrariness—the meanings given to words are purely arbitrary, and those meanings are maintained by convention only; there is no inherent connection between a word and what it designates.
2. Relationality—the meanings of words are relational, meaning that signs gain their meaning only from their relationships with other signs; no word can be defined in isolation from other words.
3. Constitutiveness—language constitutes our world instead of simply recording or labelling it. Meaning is always attributed to an object or idea by the human mind, and is constructed by and expressed through language; it is not already contained within the thing itself, as the contrast between the terms "terrorist" and "freedom fighter" for the same person makes clear.

2.6 Structuralism in Literary Theory and Criticism

When a literary text is studied through Structuralism, the text is connected to a wider structure. This might include the kind of literature the text belongs to (its genre), or the universal patterns by which stories are told around the world. The structuralist critic mines a text for common themes or patterns, working from the premise that human consciousness has universal features which it is the critic's task to uncover and explain. Any literary text, on this view, can be reduced to its basic parts; once this has been done, the text can be compared to other works that share a similar narrative structure.

A familiar example illustrates the method: “boy meets girl, girl finds herself in danger of some kind, boy rescues girl.” This basic pattern recurs across an enormous range of books and films. Regardless of the particular style in which it appears—whether an epic poem, a novel, or a play—the underlying parts of the story remain the same: a classic structure of hero, tension, and resolution.

2.7 Two Basic Structuralist Questions

Structuralism approaches a literary text by asking two basic questions:

1. Are there any patterns in one text which are similar to patterns in another? Structuralism is interested above all in similarities between texts.
2. Are there any opposites in the text which are set against each other? In Structuralism, opposites of this kind are called binary oppositions, such as good/evil, light/dark, or tall/short.

In his 1983 study Literary Theory, Terry Eagleton observes that Structuralism carries out what he calls a “remorseless demystification” of literature: when Structuralism is applied to a literary text, it strips the text of its aesthetic form and subjective meaning and reduces it to its bare essentials, leaving only the underlying structure. Eagleton extends this point by arguing that a literary work is itself a construct built out of language, and that its inner workings can in principle be classified and

studied with the same systematic rigour applied to the objects of any other science.

2.8 Main Characteristics of Structuralist Literary Theory

Structuralist literary theory can be summarized through five main characteristics::

1. A focus on the underlying structure of a literary text.
2. The meaning of a text lies in the inter-relationship of its parts.
3. Binary oppositions are key to understanding a text.
4. The individuality and personality of the author are unimportant; what matters are the deep structures.
5. Literary texts are constructs: meaning does not come from inside the text, but from the relationship of each part of the text with other parts.

In practice, this means that Structuralist critics typically look for:

1. Parallels and echoes between texts.
2. Reflections and repetitions within a text.
3. Contrasts and patterns running through a text.
4. The underlying plot and structure of a text.
5. Character and motive, treated as functions within the structure rather than as unique individuals.
6. Situation and circumstance, treated as recurring narrative conditions rather than one-time events.

2.9 Practice: A Structuralist Reading of Romeo and Juliet

To help students see how a structuralist reading works in practice, this section applies the concepts introduced above to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597).

The play is beautifully written, its language memorable, and productions of it are staged all over the world. But stripped down to its bare essentials, the story is simple: "boy meets girl, they fall in love, they kill themselves." There is also a parallel plot, a conflict between two families, and the two levels of plot are interrelated, each affecting the other across the course of the play. The Prologue announces the structure of the whole: it introduces two households of equal social standing in Verona whose ancient feud breaks out again into open violence, and it foretells the fate of a pair of "star-cross'd lovers" whose deaths will, at last, bring an end to their parents' quarrel.

A structuralist interpretation focuses on the overall plot and on the binary oppositions at work in the play. In Romeo and Juliet, the main binary opposition is love and hate: it runs throughout the play in the contrast between Romeo and Juliet's love for each other and the hatred that the two families bear toward one another.

Practice questions:

1. Beyond love/hate, identify one further binary opposition at work in Romeo and Juliet (for instance, youth/age, light/dark, or fate/free will), and explain where it appears in the play.
2. Explain how the parallel plot—the conflict between the two families—affects and is affected by the central love plot. What does this interrelationship suggest about the play's underlying structure?
3. Apply Eagleton's notion of "demystification" to Romeo and Juliet. What is lost when the play is reduced to its structuralist essentials, and what, if anything, is gained?
4. Identify another story you know—from a book, film, or fairy tale—that follows the same hero+tension+resolution pattern discussed in section 2.6. What binary opposition organizes that story?

Case Study / Sample Questions

Consider two stories, written specifically for this exercise. In the first, set in a small fishing village, a young sailor falls in love with a merchant's daughter; her family disapproves and has already promised her to a wealthier suitor, forbidding the match. The sailor is lost at sea during a storm, and the daughter, refusing to live without him, drowns herself rather than marry the man her family has chosen. In the second, set in a present-day city, two software engineers from rival companies fall in love

online without realizing who the other works for; when their employers' bitter lawsuit becomes public, each is ordered by their company to cut off contact. Rather than separate, the two resign from their jobs together and leave the city.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. Identify the shared narrative structure underlying both stories described above.
2. What binary opposition organizes each story, and how does it parallel the love/hate opposition in Romeo and Juliet?
3. Drawing on Eagleton's notion of demystification, what is lost when these two stories are reduced to their structuralist essentials, and what is gained by doing so?
4. Choose one structuralist concept from this chapter—signifier/signified, binary opposition, or narrative structure—and explain how it helps account for why these two very different stories feel similar to a reader.

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain the origins of Structuralism as an intellectual movement and identify its founding figure.
2. Explain Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified, using an example of your own.
3. State and explain Saussure's three core claims about language: arbitrariness, relationality, and constitutiveness.
4. Outline the main characteristics of Structuralist literary theory.
5. Identify the binary opposition in Romeo and Juliet discussed in this chapter, and explain how it organizes the play.
6. Choose a literary work, film, or fairy tale you are familiar with, then identify its underlying narrative structure and any binary oppositions that organize it.



Source: *Britannica*

Figure 2.1 Ferdinand de Saussure

Time changes all things; there is no reason why language should escape this universal law

-Ferdinand de Saussure

CHAPTER III PSYCHOLOGY OF LITERATURE (PSYCHO-LITERATURE)

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between the discipline of psychology and literature.
2. Identify the three areas of study in the psychology of literature according to Holland (1990).
3. Outline the basic assumptions underlying the psychology-of-literature approach.
4. Apply the psychology-of-literature approach to analyze the author, character, or reader of a work.

Course Material



3.1 Literature as a Source for Understanding the Human Psyche

One of the cognitive values offered by drama and the novel is psychological value. René Wellek (1982) even argued that novelists can teach us more about human nature than psychologists themselves. This view affirms that literary works are not merely entertainment,

but also a mirror reflecting the complexity of the human psyche — thoughts, feelings, fears, and desires that often unspoken in real life, yet are vividly captured through fictional characters.

3.2 The Three Areas of Study in the Psychology of Literature

Holland (1990) divides the study of the psychology of literature into three main areas:

- Psychology of the Author — this area examines the author as an individual who pours their experiences, personality, and psychological state into the work they create. The creative process is viewed as a window into the author's own psyche.
- Psychology of the Character — this area focuses on fictional characters within a literary work, examining their motivations, inner conflicts, and psychological development as though they were real individuals. This approach draws heavily on personality theory, including Freudian psychoanalytic theory.
- Psychology of the Reader — this area examines how readers receive, interpret, and emotionally respond to a literary work. Reader responses can vary depending on each reader's life experience, background, and psychological state.

3.3 The Basic Assumptions of the Psychology of Literature

The psychology-of-literature approach rests on three basic assumptions: first, that human beings consist of both physical and psychic (psyche) elements; second, that psychology is the science that studies this human psyche; and third, that the human psyche can be explained through observable patterns of behavior.

This assumption aligns with Freud's (1908) view in Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming, which holds that an author's creative work can be understood as an extension of the day-dreaming process experienced by every individual, only shaped by the author into a form that can be enjoyed by others.

3.4 The Relationship between Psychology and Literature

Psychology concerns itself with the study of observable patterns of human behavior, while literature shows how human beings behave in confronting problems and their surroundings. Psychology thus provides a conceptual framework for understanding human behavior in general, while literature offers a concrete and contextual representation of that behavior through fictional characters and events. The two disciplines complement one another: psychology supplies the theoretical framework, while literature supplies "living" data in the form of rich and detailed human experience.

3.5 Applying the Three Areas of Study in Practice

In practice, the study of an author's psychology can be carried out by examining letters, journals, interviews, or biographical records to understand their creative process. The study of a character's psychology — which will be explored further in Chapters IV and V through Freud's theory of personality structure and the concept of the Oedipus Complex — focuses on the motivations, inner conflicts, and psychological development of fictional characters. Meanwhile, the study of a reader's psychology examines how readers from different backgrounds may produce different emotional responses and interpretations of the same work.

Case Study / Sample Questions

Consider two stories, written specifically for this exercise. In the first, set in a small fishing village, a young sailor falls in love with a merchant's daughter; her family disapproves and has already promised her to a wealthier suitor, forbidding the match. The sailor is lost at sea during a storm, and the daughter, refusing to live without him, drowns herself rather than marry the man her family has chosen. In the second, set in a present-day city, two software engineers from rival companies fall in love online without realizing who the other works for; when their employers' bitter lawsuit becomes public, each is ordered by their company to cut off contact. Rather than separate, the two resign from their jobs together and leave the city.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. Which area of study in the psychology of literature (author, character, or reader) is most relevant for explaining the difference in response between these two readers? Explain your reasoning.
2. Why can a reader's life experience influence the way they interpret a literary work?
3. If you wanted to study the psychology of this novel's author, what sources of data could you use besides the text of the novel itself?
4. Discuss: can all three areas of study in the psychology of literature (author, character, reader) be applied simultaneously within a single piece of research? Provide your argument.

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain why Wellek (1982) argued that novelists can teach us more about human nature than psychologists.
2. State and explain the three areas of study in the psychology of literature according to Holland (1990).
3. Outline the three basic assumptions underlying the psychology-of-literature approach.
4. Explain the connection between Freud's idea of day-dreaming and an author's creative process.
5. Choose a literary work you have read, then determine which area of study in the psychology of literature would be most suitable for analyzing it. Explain the reasoning behind your choice.

CHAPTER IV

SIGMUND FREUD AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE MIND: ID, EGO, SUPEREGO

Specific Learning Objectives

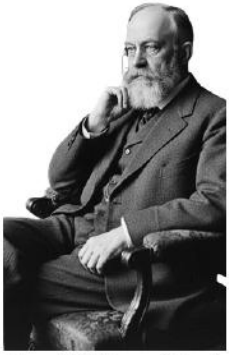
After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the life and contributions of Sigmund Freud to psychoanalysis and literary criticism.
2. Explain the tripartite model of human personality: Id, Ego, and Superego.
3. Analyze the operating principles and characteristics of each structure of personality.
4. Apply Freud's tripartite theory to explain a character's inner conflict in a literary work.

Course Material

4.1 Sigmund Freud: Father of Modern Psychology

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was born in Austria and spent most of his life working in Vienna as the founder of psychoanalysis and a pioneer of the "psychology of the mind." He pioneered the method of dream analysis and



Source: *Dribbble*

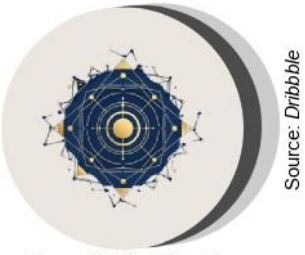
Figure 4.1 Sigmund Freud

efforts to map the human unconscious. In 1938, on the eve of Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, Freud was forced to relocate to London to escape persecution, and he died there in 1939.

The theoretical framework he developed continues to exert a profound influence on literary studies, literary criticism, and cultural studies to this day, as reflected in his major reference work, The Interpretation of Dreams (1899).

4.2 The Tripartite Model of Personality

Freud (1923), in The Ego and the Id, proposed that human personality is composed of three distinct elements: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. These three elements interact continuously and give rise to the complex range of human behavior. When conflicts among these internal structures remain unresolved, they can give rise to psychological distress or neurosis — a condition that frequently serves as a central theme in modernist literary works.



Source: *Dribbble*

Figure 4.2 The Tripartite Model of Personality

4.3 The Id: Primordial Instinct

The Id is a psychic apparatus that is entirely unconscious. It consists of instinctual drives, biological needs, and primal affective motives. The Id operates purely on the pleasure principle, demanding immediate gratification of needs and desires. The Id is present from birth and represents the most primitive aspect of human personality (Freud, 1920, Beyond the Pleasure Principle).

4.4 The Ego: Reality and Reason

The Ego is responsible for navigating external reality and is strongly shaped by social and environmental forces. Its formation begins early in life, through the individual's first encounters with the outside world. The Ego acts as a critical mediator between the unconscious impulses of the Id and the moral and social standards of the Superego. Unlike the Id, the Ego operates on the reality principle, which allows for delayed gratification — satisfying the Id only at the appropriate time and in the appropriate context (Freud, 1923).

4.5 The Superego: Moral Compass

The Superego functions to modify and inhibit the Id's instinctual impulses that tend to provoke antisocial behavior. This structure develops through the unconscious internalization of values and standards, drawn from parental figures as well as the broader social

environment, and generally begins to form around the age of five. The Superego encompasses the "ego ideal," or the self-image a person strives to attain, which drives the individual toward moralistic goals rather than merely realistic or pleasure-oriented ones (Freud, 1930, Civilization and Its Discontents).

4.6 Internal Struggle and Ego Strength

The Id and the Superego exist in a systemic and ongoing conflict. The term "ego strength" describes the Ego's capacity to continue performing its executive function amid this opposing dual pressure. A strong Ego can manage this tension effectively; conversely, excessive weakness in the Ego causes an individual to give in to impulse, while excessive rigidity in the Ego can give rise to neurotic disturbance.

A psychologically healthy personality — often portrayed as a "resolved" protagonist in literary works — demonstrates a dynamic balance among these three psychic structures (Anna Freud, 1936, The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence).

4.7 Practice: Applying the Tripartite Model to *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021)

To help students see how the tripartite model operates outside of written fiction, this practice example applies the Id, Ego, and Superego to the three principal characters of Disney's animated film Raya and the Last Dragon (2021,

directed by Don Hall and Carlos López Estrada), adapting the character analysis developed by Wardhani and Saptanto (2023).

Raya (the protagonist)



Source: *wikipedia.com*

Figure 4.3 Raya

Id: Raya's single-minded pursuit of the missing dragon-gem pieces, and her readiness to risk her own safety to obtain them, reflects the Id's drive for immediate gratification — she is convinced that reassembling the gem will instantly undo Kumandra's suffering and bring her father back.

Ego: Her rational, risk-weighing leadership shows the Ego at work: when Boun and the others offer to join her quest, she initially refuses, judging the danger too great, which demonstrates her capacity to balance the goal of restoring Kumandra against practical reality.

Superego: Raya's decision to set aside her anger toward Namaari, ask the divided tribes to trust one another, and ultimately destroy the gem so that its power can be shared by everyone reflects the Superego's pull toward a shared moral good over personal vengeance.

Sisu (the dragon)

Id: Sisu's spontaneous, instinctive willingness to help — such as destroying a dangerous trap to protect Raya without weighing the consequences — echoes the Id's impulse to act on inner drives without regard for risk.



Source: *wikipedia.com*

Figure 4.4 Sisu

Ego: Her confident self-assessment of her own abilities, even when Raya is skeptical, illustrates an Ego that maintains self-assurance while navigating an unfamiliar and demanding world.

Superego: As in Wardhani and Saptanto's (2023) analysis, Sisu does not display a clearly articulated Superego in the film, since her actions emphasize spontaneity and self-confidence rather than internalized moral judgment.

Namaari (the antagonist)



Source: *wikipedia.com*

Figure 4.5 Namaari

Id: Namaari's attempt to seize the last dragon gem for the benefit of her own tribe, Fang, without regard for the consequences to others, reflects the Id's pursuit of self-interest.

Ego: Her later willingness to negotiate with Raya and propose cooperation between Fang and Heart shows the Ego mediating between her tribe's interests and the possibility of a collective solution.

Superego: Namaari's remorse over her role in Sisu's death and in Kumandra's disunity, and her eventual turn toward reconciliation, demonstrate the Superego's drive to recognize wrongdoing and restore moral and social harmony.

Practice questions:

1. Find one scene not discussed above for Raya, Sisu, or Namaari, and explain which psychic structure — Id, Ego, or Superego — it best illustrates.
2. Compare Raya's ego strength with Namaari's. Whose journey shows a greater shift toward a balanced Ego by the end of the film, and what evidence supports your answer?
3. Sisu is read as displaying Id and Ego traits but no clear Superego. Do you agree with this reading, or can you identify a moment that suggests otherwise? Justify your answer.
4. Raya's decision to destroy the dragon gem and share its power with all the tribes, including Namaari, is presented as a Superego-driven choice. Construct a counter-argument for why this decision could instead be read as an Ego-driven, strategic choice.

Case Study / Sample Questions

A fictional character named Arman has just discovered that a colleague stole his major idea and claimed it as their own in front of their supervisor. Inwardly, Arman feels a strong urge to retaliate harshly and publicly — an impulse driven by the desire to immediately vent his anger. Yet he recognizes that such an act could damage his career and lead to legal consequences. At the same time, he feels guilty for having secretly hoped his colleague would fail, and he asks himself whether his own silence up to this point has truly been fair.

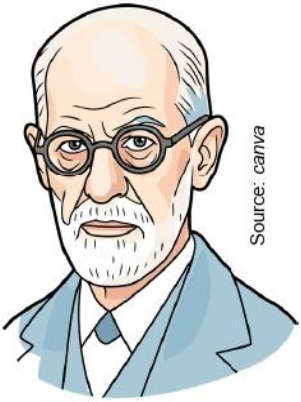
Questions for discussion: ?

1. Identify the elements within Arman that can be associated with the Id, Ego, and Superego. Explain your reasoning for each.
2. Which principle (the pleasure principle or the reality principle) ultimately determines Arman's action? Explain its implications.
3. If Arman ultimately chooses to remain silent and devise a wiser strategy instead, what does this suggest about his "ego strength"?
4. If developed into a story, how might a situation like this illustrate the theme of neurosis or psychological conflict commonly found in modernist literary works?

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Briefly explain Sigmund Freud's life history and his contribution to psychoanalysis.
2. Outline the difference in operating principles between the Id and the Ego.
3. Explain how the Superego is formed and what role the "ego ideal" plays within it.
4. What is meant by "ego strength," and what happens when the Ego is excessively weak or excessively rigid?
5. Choose a character from a novel or film you are familiar with, then explain that character's inner conflict using the framework of Id, Ego, and Superego.

"The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind."
(Freud, 1899)



Source: *canva*

Figure 4.6 Ilusstration of Sigmund Freud

CHAPTER V THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX IN LITERARY STUDIES

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the origins and meaning of the concept of the Oedipus Complex.
2. Outline the stage of psychosexual development underlying this concept.
3. Identify applications of the Oedipus Complex concept in canonical literary works.
4. Evaluate the criticisms and continuing relevance of the Oedipus Complex concept in contemporary literary studies.

Course Material



5.1 The Origins of the Concept

The term Oedipus Complex was introduced by Sigmund Freud to refer to a universal psychological conflict experienced in early childhood. Freud borrowed the name of this concept from Sophocles' classical tragedy, Oedipus Rex, which tells the story of Oedipus, who unknowingly kills his own father and marries his mother. Freud interpreted this myth as a symbol of unconscious desires that he believed lie buried within every individual.

5.2 The Phallic Stage and Parent–Child Dynamics

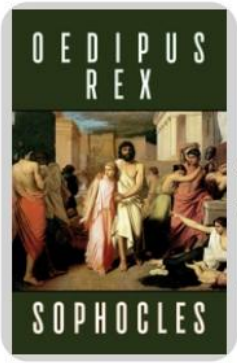
According to Freud, the Oedipal conflict occurs during the phallic stage, between approximately three and six years of age. At this stage, the child develops an unconscious attraction toward the parent of the opposite sex, along with feelings of hostility toward the parent of the same sex. In boys, this dynamic takes the form of desire toward the mother accompanied by rivalry with the father. For girls, Carl Jung later termed the parallel conflict the Electra Complex (Jung, 1913).

Resolution of this conflict — through the process of identification with the same-sex parent — allows the child to internalize social values and form the superego, as discussed in Chapter IV.

5.3 The Oedipus Complex in Literary Works

Oedipal dynamics have shaped literary criticism and interpretation for centuries. The following three examples illustrate its application:

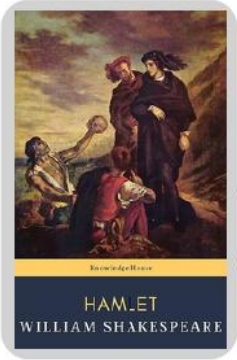
- **Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)** — the story from which the concept itself originates, in which Oedipus unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. This tragedy stands as the most literal example of Oedipal dynamics, and is the very source of the name given to Freud's theory.



Source: *Storytel*

Figure 5.1 E-book's cover of Oedipus Rex (2023)

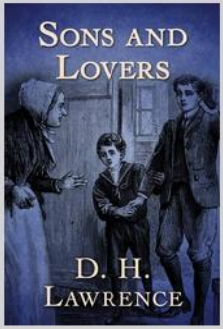
- **Hamlet (Shakespeare)** — the character of Hamlet displays prolonged hesitation and inaction in avenging his father's death, which a number of psychoanalytic critics have interpreted as the result of repressed Oedipal desire toward his mother, Gertrude, causing him to unconsciously resist punishing Claudius, who has in effect fulfilled Hamlet's own hidden desire.



Source: *Amazon.com*

Figure 5.2 Book's cover of Hamlet (2024)

- **Sons and Lovers (D.H. Lawrence)** — the character of Paul Morel is portrayed as having an intensely strong emotional attachment to his mother, which interferes with his ability to form healthy romantic relationships with other women, leading the novel to be frequently read as a literary exploration of Oedipal dynamics in adult life.



Source: *Storytel*

Figure 5.3 E-book's cover of Sons and Lovers (2020)

5.4 Criticisms of the Oedipus Complex Concept

- Considered culturally biased, oriented toward a Western and heteronormative family structure.
- Heavily focused on male experience, and thus seen as inadequate for explaining women's psychological development.
- Criticized by feminist scholars as a reductive and patriarchal concept (Mitchell, 1974, Psychoanalysis and Feminism).
- Considered to lack strong empirical support according to modern psychology

5.5 Enduring Value and Relevance

Despite these criticisms, the symbolic and metaphorical value of the Oedipus Complex continues to thrive in literary analysis. The concept provides a rich framework for exploring themes of guilt, identity, family, and power, while revealing the psychological depth of characters in literary works. Whether accepted as scientific truth or as symbolic fiction, the concept remains influential and has secured its place within the literary canon (see Eagleton, 1983, Literary Theory: An Introduction).

Case Study / Sample Questions

One of the most well-known psychoanalytic readings is Freud's interpretation of Hamlet's hesitation, in William Shakespeare's play Hamlet, to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius, the uncle who has now become king and married his mother. Freud interpreted Hamlet's hesitation not as an ordinary character flaw, but as the repression of Oedipal feelings: Claudius had done precisely what Hamlet himself secretly desired — killing the father and marrying the mother. As a result, punishing Claudius would mean punishing an act that, unconsciously, was also Hamlet's own desire (see Jones, 1949, Hamlet and Oedipus).

Questions for discussion:

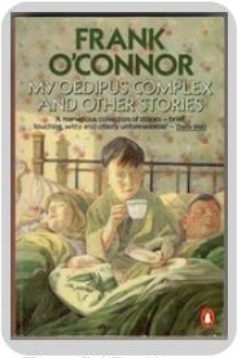
1. Explain the psychoanalytic logic behind Freud's interpretation of Hamlet's hesitation.
2. In your view, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this Oedipal reading of Hamlet?
3. How might a feminist critic respond to or critique this kind of reading?
4. Find another literary work or film that displays a similar dynamic between a child character and a parent. Explain whether this dynamic can be read through the framework of the Oedipus Complex, and explain its limitations, if any.

Exercises / Evaluation

This exercise uses Frank O'Connor's short story "My Oedipus Complex" (1950) as its primary text. Read the story carefully, then answer the following questions, drawing explicit connections to the concepts introduced in this chapter.

1. Summarize the situation that triggers Larry's hostility toward his father once the father returns from the war. At what point in the story does this hostility become explicit, and what does Larry's age suggest about Freud's account of the phallic stage described in section 5.2?
2. Larry announces to his mother that he intends to marry her and have children with her once he is grown. Explain how this declaration illustrates Freud's concept of the Oedipus Complex, and discuss what makes the story's treatment of the concept comic rather than tragic, in contrast to Sophocles's Oedipus Rex.
3. Identify two specific scenes in which Larry expresses rivalry with his father over his mother's attention. For each scene, explain which aspect of Oedipal dynamics described in section 5.2 it illustrates.
4. When Larry's baby brother, Sonny, is born, the conflict within the household shifts. Explain how the arrival of a sibling complicates or extends the Oedipal triangle described by Freud, and how Larry and his father's relationship briefly changes as a result.
5. In the story's final scene, Larry comforts his father and the two reach an uneasy truce. Drawing on the chapter's discussion of resolution through identification with the same-sex parent (section 5.2), evaluate whether this ending depicts a genuine resolution of the Oedipus Complex or something short of it.

6. Compare the treatment of the Oedipus Complex in "My Oedipus Complex" with its treatment in Hamlet (see the Case Study above) or Sons and Lovers (section 5.3). What does this comparison reveal about how the concept can be adapted across different literary genres and tones?
7. Considering the criticisms discussed in section 5.4 (cultural bias, the focus on male experience, and the lack of empirical support), does O'Connor's story reinforce or complicate these criticisms? Support your answer with evidence from the text.



Source: *Talking about books*

Figure 5.4 Book's cover of My Oedipus Complex and Other Stories

CHAPTER VI CARL JUNG AND THE THEORY OF ARCHETYPES

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the life and foundational contributions of Carl Gustav Jung to analytical psychology.
2. Distinguish between the personal unconscious (Freud) and the collective unconscious (Jung).
3. Define archetypes and identify the main archetypes described by Jung.
4. Explain the personality attitudes of extraversion and introversion as formulated by Jung.
5. Apply Jungian archetypal theory to the analysis of characters and themes in literary works.

Course Material

6.1 Carl Gustav Jung: Life and Foundational Contributions



Source: *Wikipedia*

Figure 6.1 Carl Gustav Jung

Carl Gustav Jung (26 July 1875 – 6 June 1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded the school of analytical psychology. His work has proven influential across a wide range of disciplines, including

literature, philosophy, and religious studies. Although Jung began his career as a close associate of Sigmund Freud, the two eventually parted ways over fundamental theoretical disagreements — most notably over the nature and scope of the unconscious mind.

According to Jung, the central goal of all human beings is to achieve individuation — a process by which the unconscious is gradually known and integrated into the conscious mind (Jung, 1959; Stevens, 2004). This concept of wholeness lies at the heart of analytical psychology and provides the foundation for his theory of archetypes.

6.2 Personal Unconscious versus the Collective Unconscious

A central point of divergence between Freud and Jung lies in their respective conceptions of the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious is primarily personal: each individual possesses his or her own unconscious, which, while sharing structural similarities with others (such as defense mechanisms), contains content that is unique to that individual's personal history — hidden thoughts, repressed memories, and suppressed desires.

Jung went further, proposing the existence of a collective unconscious — a deeper layer of the unconscious that is shared by all human beings, regardless of culture or historical period. This collective unconscious is understood as a storehouse of hidden memory traces inherited from our ancestral past:

the accumulated residue of human evolutionary development (Jung, 1959). Rather than being shaped solely by personal experience, the collective unconscious reflects the shared biological and psychological heritage of the human species. Jung placed particular emphasis on the study of diverse cultures, arguing that the remarkable similarities between culturally distant mythologies, rituals, and symbolic systems are evidence of this common psychological inheritance.

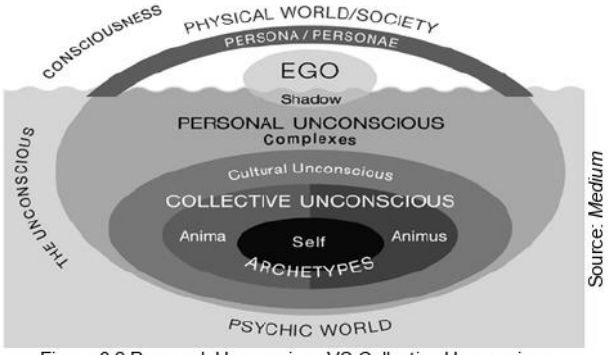


Figure 6.2 Personal Unconscious VS Collective Unconscious

6.3 Archetypes: Definition and Function

The contents of the collective unconscious are known as archetypes. Jung defined archetypes as universal, inherited patterns or images that surface across all human cultures in the form of recurring symbols, characters, and narrative situations — heroes, maidens, wise elders, tricksters, and so forth (Jung, 1964; Campbell, 1949). These patterns are not learned through individual experience but are, rather, pre-formed structures within the human psyche that shape how we perceive and respond to the world.

Jung described archetypes as projection-making factors in the brain: they cause us to see in the external world something whose actual source lies within ourselves. In this way, archetypes represent significant features of an ancient human social environment that have been internalized as part of the psychic structure of the species (Jung, 1964; Campbell, 1949). In literary studies, the concept of the archetype provides a powerful tool for identifying recurring character types, plot structures, and symbolic motifs across texts from vastly different cultures and periods.

6.4 The Main Archetypes

Jung identified a number of core archetypes that he considered central to human psychological life. The four primary archetypes are the following:

The Self: The archetype of wholeness, unity, and organization within the personality. The Self represents the totality of the psyche, both conscious and unconscious, and serves as the organizing principle of the entire personality. It is often symbolized in dreams and myths by the circle, the mandala, or other images of completeness.

- **The Persona:** The social mask that an individual presents to the outside world. The persona is the artificial, public self that conforms to societal expectations and norms. While the persona serves a necessary social function, an over-identification with it — mistaking the mask for the true self — can lead to psychological imbalance and a loss of authentic identity.
- **The Anima / Animus:** The anima represents the feminine dimension present in the male psyche, while the animus represents the masculine dimension present in the female psyche. These archetypes reflect the idea that every person carries within them characteristics of the opposite gender, and their integration is an important part of the individuation process.
- **The Shadow:** The dark side of the personality, containing animal urges, repressed impulses, and feelings of inferiority that the ego refuses to acknowledge. Despite its frightening qualities, Jung regarded the shadow as an important source of creativity and vitality. Confronting and integrating the shadow, rather than repressing it, is essential to genuine psychological growth.



Source: *Instagram*

Figure 6.3 The Main Archetypes

6.5 Other Archetypes in the Collective Unconscious

Beyond the four primary archetypes, Jung and subsequent scholars have identified a wide range of additional archetypal figures that recur across world mythologies and literary traditions. These include, among others:

- **The Hero:** The strong, capable figure who saves and protects others, frequently at great personal cost.
- **The Wise Man / Sage:** The elder figure of knowledge and guidance, often depicted with a long white beard, who imparts wisdom to the hero or protagonist.
- **The Trickster:** A mischievous and boundary-crossing figure who disrupts the established order, often serving as a catalyst for change or revealing hidden truths through humor and chaos.
- **The Great Mother:** The nurturing, loving, and life-giving feminine figure, whose opposite is the terrible mother — the destructive, devouring, or withholding force.
- **The Father:** The demanding, rewarding, authoritative, or guiding paternal figure. Jungian critics have identified several variants: the Demanding Father, the Wise or Guiding Father, and the Absent or Authoritarian Father (Jung, 1959; McGuire, 1959).
- **The Wild Man:** The untamed, primitive figure who represents raw, instinctual nature unconstrained by social conventions.

6.6 Personality Attitudes: Extraversion and Introversion

In addition to his theory of archetypes, Jung made a lasting contribution to the study of personality through his concept of psychological attitudes. He proposed that individuals can be broadly classified into two orientations: extraversion and introversion (Jung, 1964; Stevens, 2004).

- **Extraversion:** The extraverted attitude orients the individual toward the external world — an outward channeling of psychic energy (libido) into activities, people, and social involvement. Extraverts draw energy from external interaction and tend to be action-oriented and socially engaged.
- **Introversion:** The introverted attitude drives the individual inward, toward the subjective world of the mind. Introverts are more interested in reflection, ideas, and inner experience than in external social engagement (Jung, 1964; Stevens, 2004). In literary analysis, these categories provide a useful lens for examining characterization and the psychological dynamics between characters.

6.7 Jungian Archetypes in Literary Studies

Archetypal criticism, drawing directly on Jung's theory, has become an important strand of literary analysis. The approach identifies recurring characters, images, and narrative structures — understood as manifestations of archetypes — across literary texts from different cultures and historical periods. Archetypes are understood as structures of general human character that have existed since ancient times (McGuire, 1959; Stevens, 2004; Tacey, 2021). The father archetypal symbol, for example, emerges from the unconscious activities that make up the psychic working system and has thus become part of a collective agreement about what fatherhood means (Leigh, 2015; Nurdayanti, 2020).

The Jungian method of literary analysis typically proceeds by: (1) reading the literary work in full; (2) identifying passages that indicate archetypal character patterns or symbolic images; (3) classifying these into specific archetypal categories based on Jung's theory; and (4) interpreting how the archetype shapes the protagonist's psychological development and individuation process. This approach is particularly well-suited to exploring how characters embody universal human struggles, and how narrative structures mirror the psyche's journey toward wholeness.

Case Study / Sample Questions

A recurring focus of Jungian literary criticism is the father archetype, which has been systematically studied in modern Indonesian literature. Research applying Jung's analytical psychology to Indonesian novels has identified three prominent variants of the father archetype in these texts: the Demanding/Rewarding Father, the Wise/Guiding Father, and the Absent/Authoritarian Father (Jung, 1959; McGuire, 1959). These archetypal patterns recur across novels as expressions of the collective unconscious, shaping the psychological development and individuation journey of the protagonist.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. Explain the key difference between Freud's concept of the personal unconscious and Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. In what way does this difference affect how a literary critic approaches a text?
2. Identify a character from a novel, film, or folktale who embodies the archetype of the Hero. Explain how this character displays the features of the Hero archetype as described by Jung, and discuss whether the character also displays aspects of the Shadow.
3. Why might Jung's emphasis on the cross-cultural study of myths and symbols be especially valuable for the study of Indonesian literature? Illustrate your answer with reference to at least one example from Indonesian mythology or literary tradition.

Exercises / Evaluation

The following exercises draw on the concepts introduced in this chapter. Choose one of the literary works listed below, or a work of your own selection, and answer the questions that follow.

1. Select a protagonist from a novel or short story and identify which of Jung's four primary archetypes — the Self, the Persona, the Anima/Animus, or the Shadow — is most clearly manifested in the character. Support your analysis with specific evidence from the text.
2. Identify at least two characters in your chosen work that can be read as embodying archetypes from Section 6.5 (such as the Hero, the Wise Man, the Trickster, or the Great Mother). For each character, explain which archetype is represented and how the text supports this reading.
3. Examine the protagonist's journey over the course of the narrative. Using the concept of individuation (Section 6.1), discuss whether the protagonist achieves greater psychological wholeness by the end of the work, and what role the encounter with shadow or anima/animus figures plays in this process.
4. Compare the personality of the protagonist and one secondary character using Jung's distinction between extraversion and introversion (Section 6.6). How do these contrasting orientations create tension or complementarity within the narrative?

5. Drawing on the academic references provided in Section 6.7, write a short analytical paragraph (150–200 words) that reads a specific scene or passage from your chosen work through the lens of Jungian archetypal criticism. Identify which archetype is operative in the scene and explain how its presence contributes to the work's broader meaning.

CHAPTER VII THE SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LITERATURE

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the basic concept of the sociological approach in literary studies.
2. Outline Wellek and Warren's five principles concerning the relationship between literature and society.
3. Identify the three approaches within the sociology of literature: reflection, production, and reception.
4. Apply the sociological approach to analyze a contemporary literary work or film.

Course Material



7.1 Understanding the Sociological Approach

The sociological approach views literary works as products of social institutions, interpreting them through their connections to social, political, and economic forces. Proponents of this approach argue that literature cannot be studied apart from its social context — the two are inseparable. A text is always embedded within the historical moment and social conditions surrounding its creation.

7.2 Wellek and Warren's Five Principles (1956)

1. Language is social — the medium of literature is language, and language itself is a product of society, carrying particular cultural values and structures.
2. Convention is social — literary forms, genres, and conventions are socially constructed and evolve alongside changing social formations.
3. The author is a social being — the writer is embedded within society; their class, gender, and historical moment shape what and how they write.
4. Social reality as raw material — social reality (class, conflict, institutions) becomes the primary subject matter of literature, particularly in the novel genre.
5. Literature has a social function — literary works can reinforce ideology, challenge norms, or give voice to the experiences of marginalized groups.

7.3 Literature and Industrial Society: The Novel as the Dominant Genre

Laurenson and Swingewood (1972) define sociology as the scientific and objective study of human beings in society — examining social institutions and processes, and addressing questions of how society is made possible, how it functions, and why it persists. This principle is relevant to the sociology of literature: just as sociology examines how society functions, the sociology of literature examines how literature both reflects and shapes that same social structure.

Swingewood (1972) argues that the novel emerged as the genre that came to define industrial-capitalist society, mapping social mobility, alienation, and conflicts within class, family, and institutions.

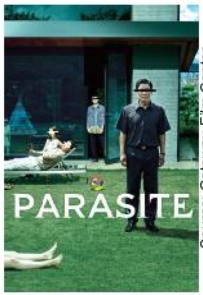
7.4 Three Approaches within the Sociology of Literature

1. Literature as Social Reflection — examines how literary texts reflect particular social conditions, ideologies, and historical circumstances; the text is read as a document of a society's beliefs and conflicts (Goldmann, 1964, The Hidden God).
2. The Author's Social Situation — focuses on literary production: the author's class position, systems of patronage, publishing institutions, and the material conditions under which a text is created (Williams, 1977, Marxism and Literature).
3. Literary Reception and Patronage — examines how literary works are received, consumed, and evaluated by particular readers at particular historical moments, including questions of readability, taste, and cultural gatekeeping (Jauss, 1982, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception).

7.5 A Case Study in Contemporary Film

The sociological approach applies not only to written texts, but also to audiovisual works such as film. Parasite (2019, directed by Bong Joon-ho) depicts the sharp class polarization of contemporary South Korea — the spatial opposition between the basement dwelling and the wealthy hillside home functions as both a literal and symbolic mapping of socioeconomic inequality, recalling Marx's notion of the base-superstructure relationship.

Crazy Rich Asians (2018, directed by Jon M. Chu) explores the intersection of ethnicity, class, and diasporic identity among Singapore's super-wealthy elite, highlighting how social institutions such as family and marriage police the boundaries of belonging and cultural authenticity. Slumdog Millionaire (2008, directed by Danny Boyle), set in Mumbai's Dharavi settlement, meanwhile exposes postcolonial poverty, caste dynamics, and the myth of meritocracy — the film's quiz-show format ironically mirrors a society whose structural inequality is masked behind a narrative of individual success.



Source: Gateway Film Center

Figure 7.1 Parasite (2019) Movie



Source: IMDb

Figure 7.2 Crazy Rich Asians (2018)



Source: IMDb

Figure 7.3 Slumdog Millionaire (2008)

Case Study / Sample Questions

In the film Parasite (2019), the impoverished Kim family lives in a dark, damp semi-basement apartment, while the wealthy Park family lives in a modern, lavishly furnished home on a hillside. Throughout the film, vertical position — above and below — is consistently used to depict each family's class position, culminating in the discovery of an even deeper, secret basement hidden within the Park family's home.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. How can the spatiality (arrangement of space) in Parasite be read as "literature as social reflection" in Goldmann's terms?
2. Identify which social institutions appear in Parasite's narrative (family, work, education, etc.) and explain how each becomes a site of class conflict.
3. Use one of the three approaches within the sociology of literature (reflection, production, or reception) to briefly analyze Crazy Rich Asians or Slumdog Millionaire.
4. Discuss: can Wellek and Warren's five principles be applied equally to written literary works and audiovisual works such as film? Explain your argument.

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain the basic concept of the sociological approach in literary studies.
2. State and explain Wellek and Warren's (1956) five principles concerning the relationship between literature and society.
3. Why is the novel considered the genre that represents industrial society, according to Swingewood (1972)?
4. Explain the difference between the three approaches within the sociology of literature: reflection, production, and reception.
5. Choose a contemporary film or novel you are familiar with, then carry out a brief analysis using one of the three approaches within the sociology of literature.

CHAPTER VIII FEMINISM AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the origin and core meaning of the term "feminism" as a critique of patriarchy.
2. Outline the three historical waves of feminism and the distinct concerns of each.
3. Identify the central concerns and aims of feminist literary criticism.
4. Explain the contributions of major feminist theorists—Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Elaine Showalter—to literary studies.

Course Material

8.1 Understanding Feminism

The term feminism derives from the Latin femina, meaning woman, and came into use during the 1890s to describe the pursuit of equality between men and women. Feminism emerged as a struggle for equality and liberation for women, and at its core it stands as a critique of patriarchy—the structuring of society, culture, and knowledge around male dominance and the

corresponding subordination of women. As a movement, feminism encompasses a range of ideologies oriented toward defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women.

8.2 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism informed by feminist theory and by the wider politics of feminism. Feminist critics work to restore women's place within literary history and to expose the sexism embedded within literary texts and within the disciplines that study them. In doing so, feminists have criticized existing disciplinary paradigms and worked to formulate new feminist ones—frameworks that, in turn, prepared the way for theories modeling how subjects, social structures, and forms of knowledge are jointly produced. Feminist literary criticism developed over roughly forty years across three successive waves, each shaped by a new generation of writers and activists.

8.3 First-Wave Feminism

First-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States. Its central concern was legal inequality, above all the campaign to secure women's right to vote.



Source: *Simply psychology*

Figure 8.1 First-wave of feminism

8.4 Second-Wave Feminism

Second-wave feminism was a period of feminist activity in the United States that began in the early 1960s and continued through the late 1990s. Whereas the first wave had concentrated mainly on overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, the second wave broadened the debate considerably, taking in sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, and both de facto and official forms of inequality.



Source: *The Collector*

Figure 8.2 Second-wave of feminism

8.5 Third-Wave Feminism

Third-wave feminism is generally dated from the 1980s to the present. It marked a realization that women could reclaim the stereotypes once used against them and transform these into a source of empowerment, redefining women and girls as assertive, powerful, and in control of their own sexuality. This wave also carried a heightened recognition that women differ widely in colour, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and cultural background. The third wave embraces diversity and ongoing change, and—as in the waves before it—resists any single, all-encompassing feminist idea.



Source: *Feminism in India*

Figure 8.3 Third-wave of feminism

8.6 Core Concerns of Feminist Literary Criticism

Intellectually, feminist studies investigate gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and sexuality as categories that organize social and symbolic systems. From this standpoint, the literary text is never treated as primarily a representation of reality, nor as a simple reproduction of a personal voice expressing the small details of individual experience. Feminists have also formulated a number of overarching theories of their own, theories which have in turn been challenged by feminists working within different disciplines, under headings such as realist, constructivist, and post-structuralist feminism.

Michael Groden, in his guide to literary theory and criticism, identifies four recurring tasks of feminist criticism: rediscovering women's overlooked literary work, assessing the formal qualities of texts written by women, examining what literature reveals about the social and economic position of men and women, and tracing the psychological development of female figures within literature.

Taken together, feminist literary criticism advocates equal rights for women in every area of life:

1. Social rights, including freedom from discrimination within the family and community.
2. Political and professional rights, including equal participation in public and institutional life.
3. Personal and economic rights, including financial independence and control over one's own choices.
4. Aesthetic and psychological rights, including recognition of women's creative and intellectual contributions on their own terms.

8.7 Prominent Theorists

Virginia Woolf

Woolf argued that men have long treated women as their inferiors, defining what it means to be female and controlling the political, social, and literary structures within which women are expected to operate. In A Room of One's Own, she imagines a sister of Shakespeare, equally gifted, whose creativity went unrecognized solely because of her sex. For Woolf, women must reject this socially constructed femaleness and instead establish an identity of their own, portraying that identity, in her words, "to the world of reality and not to the world of men."



Source: *Wikipedia*

Figure 8.4 Virginia Woolf

Simone de Beauvoir

De Beauvoir held that within a male-dominated order, the female is not simply distinct from the male but becomes the "Other"—an object whose existence is defined and interpreted from the standpoint of the dominant male. She argued that women must break free of the bonds of a patriarchal society, define themselves on their own terms, and refuse the male classification that reduces them to a secondary, "other" status, if they are to become significant human beings in their own right.



Source: *Wikipedia*

Figure 8.5 Simone de Beauvoir

Kate Millett

Millett was among the first critics to challenge the ideological assumptions built into both masculinity and femininity. She distinguished sex, determined at birth, from gender, which she described as a social construct shaped by cultural norms—a distinction she summarized in her well-known formulation that one's sex is given, while one's gender as a woman is socially created. Conformity, whether conscious or unconscious, to the sex



Source: *Women's Media Center*

Figure 8.6 Kate Millett

roles prescribed by society is what Millett termed "sexual politics": the operation of power relations within society. On this basis, she argued that women must work to disenfranchise the centre of power within their culture—male dominance.

Elaine Showalter

Showalter, an American feminist literary critic, is a leading figure in the use of historical and non-literary material—diaries, memoirs, and social and medical history—as a resource for understanding literary texts and the women who wrote them.



Source: *Women's Media Center*

Figure 8.7 Elaine Showalter

8.8 Foundational Works of Feminist Criticism

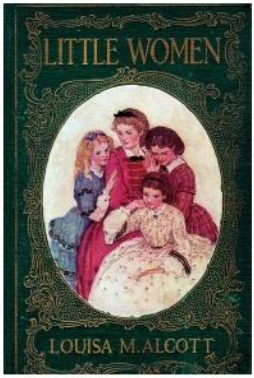
Several texts are widely regarded as foundational to the development of feminist literary criticism:

1. American Women, a 1963 report by the President's Commission on the Status of Women, documenting women's inequality in education, employment, and public life.
2. The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan (1963), which exposed the ideology of domesticity that left middle- and upper-class women economically and emotionally dependent on men.

4. A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf (1929), a seminal work laying the foundations of present-day feminist criticism.
5. The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), widely regarded as the foundational work of twentieth-century feminism.

8.9 Practice: Applying Feminist Literary Criticism to Little Women (Louisa May Alcott)

To help students see how feminist literary criticism operates in practice, this section applies the concepts introduced above to three central characters of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–69), drawing on the theorists discussed earlier in this chapter.



Source: *National Geographic*

Figure 8.8 Book's cover of Little Women

Jo March

Creative ambition (Woolf): Jo's determination to become a published writer, judged on her own literary merit rather than as a feminine accomplishment, echoes Woolf's argument that women's creative gifts have historically gone unrecognized purely because of their sex; Jo's persistent submission of manuscripts under conditions of financial hardship and social disapproval dramatizes the structural obstacles Woolf identified. Refusing the "Other" (de Beauvoir): Jo's refusal of Laurie's marriage proposal—made not out of indifference to him but out of an unwillingness to be absorbed into a role defined entirely by a husband's expectations—illustrates de Beauvoir's insistence that a woman must resist being defined from the outside and instead define herself on her own terms. Sex versus gender (Millett): Jo's tomboyish manner and her impatience with the social rituals expected of young women approaching marriageable age can be read through Millett's distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender roles: Jo's sex is female, but she persistently resists the "woman" that her society expects her to become.



Source: *Project Gutenberg*

Figure 8.9 Jo March

Meg March

Domestic ideology: Meg's path toward marriage and domestic life, together with her early longing for material comforts she cannot afford, illustrates the ideology of domesticity that Betty Friedan would later name—an ideology in which a middle-class woman's worth is measured by her performance of domestic roles. Negotiated autonomy: Yet Meg's eventual choice to marry for love rather than money, against the urging of wealthier relatives, shows a measure of self-definition exercised inside, rather than outside of, the domestic role assigned to her.



Source: *louisalcottismypassion*

Figure 8.10 Meg March

Marmee (Mrs. March)

Showalter's social-historical lens: Marmee's letters and counsel to her daughters, along with her own account of managing anger and hardship while her husband is away at war, are exactly the kind of non-literary, socially embedded material that Showalter identifies as essential to understanding women's lived experience within a text.



Source: *Mary Riza*

Figure 8.11 Marmee (Mrs March)

Moral authority within constraint: Marmee exercises considerable moral and intellectual authority over her household despite operating entirely within the domestic sphere, illustrating how nineteenth-century women could wield real influence even while excluded from the public, political world that first-wave feminism sought to open to them.

Practice questions:

1. Find one scene involving Amy or Beth March not discussed above, and explain which concept—Woolf's creative recognition, de Beauvoir's "Other," or Millett's sex/gender distinction—it best illustrates.
2. Compare Jo's resistance to social expectations with Meg's accommodation of them. Which sister's path better exemplifies "self-definition" in de Beauvoir's sense, and why?
3. Showalter argues for using non-literary material such as letters and diaries to understand women's experience. Identify a specific non-literary detail in Little Women (a letter, a piece of domestic advice, a remembered hardship) and explain what it reveals.
4. Jo's eventual marriage at the novel's end is sometimes read as a retreat from her earlier independence. Construct an argument, using any of the theorists discussed in this chapter, for why this ending could instead be read as compatible with feminist self-definition.

Case Study / Sample Questions

In Little Women, when the March family urgently needs money so that Mrs. March can travel to tend to her wounded husband, Jo earns the needed sum by selling her own hair—widely regarded as her most striking physical feature—to a wig-maker, and presents the money to her mother without hesitation. Later in the novel, when her close friend Laurie proposes marriage, Jo turns him down, explaining that she does not feel for him what a wife should feel for a husband, even though she values their friendship deeply and knows that refusing him will disappoint her family.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. How can Jo's decision to sell her hair be read as an assertion of economic agency within a household where her father is absent and money is scarce?
2. Does Jo's refusal of Laurie's proposal exemplify de Beauvoir's idea that a woman must refuse to be defined "from the outside," or could it be read in another way? Explain your reasoning.
3. Compare Jo's two decisions—selling her hair and refusing Laurie—using Millett's concept of "sexual politics." Whose expectations is Jo resisting in each case, and whose does she ultimately accommodate?
4. If Showalter's approach were applied to this case, what additional historical or biographical material about Louisa May Alcott's own life might help illuminate Jo's choices?

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain the origin of the term “feminism” and outline its core concerns as a critique of patriarchy.
2. Summarize the distinguishing concerns of first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave feminism.
3. Outline the core concerns of feminist literary criticism as discussed in this chapter.
4. Explain Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of woman as “the Other,” and Kate Millett’s distinction between sex and gender.
5. Why does Elaine Showalter argue for the use of non-literary, historical material in feminist literary analysis?
6. Choose a literary work or film you are familiar with that features a strong female protagonist, then carry out a brief feminist analysis of one of its characters, using at least one of the theorists discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER IX

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND QUEER THEORY: JUDITH BUTLER

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain Judith Butler's central claim that gender is performative rather than an innate, biologically fixed trait.
2. Explain how Butler's critique of earlier feminist and psychoanalytic thinkers—de Beauvoir, Irigaray, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Freud, Kristeva, and Foucault—supports her argument against a fixed, universal category of "woman."
3. Explain how drag functions, in Butler's account, as a clarifying illustration of gender as a repeated performance rather than a natural fact.
4. Outline how Butler's performativity thesis extended into queer theory and into the study of gender in media and popular culture.
5. Apply Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze a literary work.

Course Material

9.1 Judith Butler: Biographical and Intellectual Background



Source: *Pioneer Works*

Figure 9.1 Judith Butler

Judith Butler is among the most influential theorists in contemporary feminist and queer thought. Born in Ohio in 1956, she received a PhD in philosophy from Yale University in 1984 and has held positions as Professor of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, and as Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School. Her scholarship spans feminist philosophy, queer theory, political philosophy, and ethics, and extends into literary theory and nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy, including work on Kafka and on Jewish philosophy.

Butler's central project is to re-conceptualize how gender, sex, and the subject are understood, and by extension how these categories inform social theory and political critique. Her work asks how gender becomes culturally "intelligible," what norms and exclusions operate in producing gendered subjects, and how gender came to feel so fundamental to identity. Her major works include "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), Bodies That Matter (1993),Excitable Speech (1997), Undoing Gender (2004), and Giving an Account of Oneself (2005), among others.

9.2 Gender Performativity within the Three Waves of Feminism

As discussed in Chapter VII, feminist theory is often described as unfolding across three historical waves: a first wave concerned chiefly with legal and political rights, a second wave that broadened the debate to social and economic inequality, and a third wave, from the 1990s onward, marked by an emphasis on diversity, intersectionality, and a growing skepticism toward fixed or universal categories such as "woman." It is within this third-wave context that Butler's Gender Trouble (1990) emerged and gained its influence, extending feminism's internal critique of its own foundational categories.

9.3 The Theory of Gender Performativity

In Gender Trouble, Butler challenges the assumption that gender is a stable, biologically determined attribute. She proposes instead that gender is performative: it does not express a pre-existing inner identity but is continually constituted through repeated acts, gestures, and forms of speech. On this view, masculinity and femininity are not expressions of an essential self but effects produced by the sustained repetition of culturally recognizable norms.

A central implication of this argument is that the category "woman" cannot be treated as a stable foundation for feminist politics. Butler contends that feminism risks reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome if it assumes a fixed, universal female subject. Instead, she calls for an approach that interrogates how the categories of sex and gender are themselves produced and constrained by relations of power.

Butler's later work extends and refines these ideas. Bodies That Matter (1993) considers how the materiality of the body itself is discursively produced, addressing criticism that performativity theory neglects the physical body. Excitable Speech (1997) applies performative theory to language and hate speech, examining how repeated speech acts can both wound and be resisted. Across this body of work, Butler draws on Michel Foucault's account of discourse and power, as well as J. L. Austin's theory of the performative utterance, to argue that identity is an ongoing process rather than a finished state.

9.4 Critiquing Earlier Theorists: de Beauvoir and Irigaray

A significant portion of Gender Trouble is devoted to Butler's critical engagement with earlier feminist and psychoanalytic thinkers, whose accounts of womanhood she reads as reintroducing the very fixed categories that feminism should be questioning. She engages critically with Simone de Beauvoir's account of woman as defined in contrast to man, where man possesses freedom and radical subjectivity that woman is positioned as merely aspiring toward. She also addresses Luce Irigaray's view that women are unrepresentable within language, since the very act of signification is structured as masculine. For Butler, both accounts, in different ways, still treat womanhood as a stable position defined relative to a masculine norm.

9.5 Critiquing Lévi-Strauss: The Exchange of Women

Butler also critiques Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, particularly his account of kinship as a system of exchange in which women function as the location or medium of relationships between men—circulated in forms such as brides and gifts—while men remain the true subjects of the exchange.

9.6 Critiquing Lacan: The Symbolic Order

Drawing on and critiquing Jacques Lacan, Butler examines the psychoanalytic idea of the Symbolic Order, in which signification comes to dominate the subject and the self is constituted through a series of prohibitions, repressions, and losses. In this framework, masculinity and femininity are figured through the positions of "having" and "being" the phallus, positions Butler treats as interdependent rather than as separate, natural essences. She further critiques the Lacanian account of lesbianism as a form of disappointed heterosexuality, and discusses Joan Riviere's concept of the masquerade, in which women who desire masculine attributes adopt an exaggerated femininity as a defensive strategy.

9.7 Critiquing Freud: Melancholia and Gender Identity

Butler engages with Freud's concept of melancholia, in which an unresolved loss is dealt with by incorporating the lost object into one's own identity. She questions the way melancholia has been linked to homosexuality in psychoanalytic thought, and reframes gender identity itself as a kind of melancholic structure, in which a prohibited object of desire is internalized as identity rather than mourned.

9.8 Critiquing Kristeva: The Semiotic

Where Lacan treats the Symbolic Order as a paternal, masculine domain that a subject must enter by repressing the feminine, Julia Kristeva proposed the concept of the semiotic—a disruptive, pre-linguistic register in which the maternal body surfaces, particularly in poetic language, outside paternal control. Butler is critical of this move, arguing that Kristeva's appeal to a recoverable maternal body risks becoming its own kind of essentialism.

9.9 Critiquing Foucault: Herculine Barbin

Butler also critiques Michel Foucault's discussion of Herculine Barbin, an intersex individual whose memoirs Foucault published. Foucault describes Barbin's early life, before medical and legal intervention imposed a fixed sex, as a kind of "happy limbo of nonidentity." Butler argues that this framing is overly romantic and sits in tension with Foucault's own arguments elsewhere in The History of Sexuality about how power operates on and through the body.

9.10 Drag and the Performance of Gender

Butler treats drag performance as a clarifying cultural example of her broader argument: because a drag performer's anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance do not align in the conventional way,

drag exposes the imitative and constructed structure underlying all gender presentation, revealing that even conventional gender is a kind of performance rather than a natural fact. This leads to Butler's broader conclusion in Gender Trouble: that gendered identity is produced through the repeated performance of behaviors and stylized bodily expression, and that without this ongoing repetition, the distinction between “man” and “woman” would have no stable basis at all.

9.11 Queer Theory and the Extension of Butler’s Work

Butler's performativity thesis became a foundational reference point for queer theory, a field that questions stable categories of sexual and gender identity more broadly. Where earlier feminist criticism often treated “women” as a unified social group, queer theory—building on Butler—asks how the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, masculinity and femininity, are themselves historically contingent constructions. This shift encouraged scholars to examine how gender and sexual norms are reinforced, and how they can be destabilized, through cultural representation.

9.12 Gender in Media and Youth Culture

Angela McRobbie

Angela McRobbie's scholarship examines how gender is constructed and negotiated within youth culture and media, including magazines, fashion, and popular culture aimed at young women. Her work complements Butler's



Source: *Polity*

Figure 9.2 Angela McRobbie

theoretical framework by tracing how performative gender norms circulate concretely through cultural texts and consumer practices, showing how femininity is produced, marketed, and sometimes contested in everyday cultural life.

Liesbet van Zoonen

Liesbet van Zoonen's research addresses how gender is represented in media and communication, arguing that gender is socially constructed and represented differently across media platforms and genres. Her work is critical of the assumption that new communication technologies are inherently liberating for women, emphasizing instead that media representation frequently reproduces the objectification and marginalization of women even within seemingly progressive or novel formats.



Source: *Academia Europaea*

Figure 9.3 Liesbet van Zoonen

Read alongside Butler, van Zoonen's work illustrates how performative gender norms are enacted and reinforced through mass and networked media specifically.

9.12 Gender in Media and Youth Culture

Butler's theory of performativity has had a lasting influence across feminist theory, queer studies, literary and cultural criticism, and media studies. It shifted scholarly attention away from asking what gender is toward asking how gender is done—a move that opened new avenues for analyzing literature, film, advertising, and everyday behavior as sites where gender norms are rehearsed, naturalized, or subverted.

At the same time, Butler's work remains a subject of debate. Critics have raised questions about whether performativity theory adequately accounts for the lived, material experience of bodies, and whether it offers a sufficiently concrete basis for feminist political organizing if the category of “woman” is treated as unstable. Butler has continued to respond to these debates in subsequent writing, including later work on precarity, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility in Precarious Life (2004) and Frames of War (2009).

9.14 Practice: A Butlerian Reading of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando

To help students see how gender performativity operates as a tool of literary analysis, this section applies

Butler's concepts to Virginia Woolf's Orlando: A Biography (1928), whose title character lives for centuries and, midway through the novel, wakes to find that he has become a woman—continuing the same personality, memories, and social position across the change.

Gender as Repeated Performance

Orlando's transformation, and the novel's insistence that "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it" while remaining "fundamentally the same person," dramatizes Butler's claim that masculinity and femininity are not expressions of a fixed inner self. What visibly changes for Orlando is not an essential identity but the surrounding repertoire of dress, gesture, and social expectation that Orlando must now enact—precisely the kind of repeated, culturally legible performance Butler describes.

Refusing a Stable "Woman"

Because Orlando has direct, embodied experience of being read as both a man and a woman, the novel resists treating "woman" as a stable category with a fixed set of attributes—the same move Butler makes in her critique of de Beauvoir and Irigaray. Orlando's alternation between periods of dressing and acting as a man and as a woman, sometimes within the same day, suggests that gendered identity is something assembled from available cultural roles rather than an essence discovered within.

Costume and Cultural Intelligibility

Much of the novel's account of Orlando's life as a woman turns on costume, comportment, and the reactions of others—the elaborate skirts that restrict Orlando's movement, the legal and social status that depends on how Orlando is dressed and addressed. This attentiveness to surface and convention echoes Butler's account of drag: it is precisely the visible mechanics of gender presentation, not any hidden truth of the self, that make a person legible to others as a man or a woman.

Practice questions:

1. Identify one specific passage describing Orlando's change of dress or manner after becoming a woman, and explain how it illustrates Butler's claim that gender is constituted through repeated acts rather than expressed from within.
2. Woolf's narrator insists that Orlando remains "fundamentally the same person" despite the change of sex. How does this claim support, or complicate, Butler's argument against treating "woman" as a stable category?
3. Compare Orlando's fluid movement between genders with Butler's discussion of drag in section 9.10. In what ways is Orlando's situation similar to drag performance, and in what ways is it different?
4. Using the concepts from section 9.4, explain how Orlando's story might be read as a challenge to Simone de Beauvoir's account of woman as defined only in relation to man.

Case Study/Sample Questions

Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, in which Viola disguises herself as the young man Cesario after being shipwrecked in Illyria, also works well as a case study in Butlerian analysis. As Cesario, Viola serves Duke Orsino and becomes the object of Countess Olivia's affection, while Viola herself falls in love with Orsino—a triangle of desire that depends entirely on how convincingly Viola's performance of masculinity is read by the other characters.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. How does Viola's success at performing masculinity as Cesario, to the point of attracting Olivia's romantic interest, support Butler's claim that gender is constituted through repeated, legible acts rather than expressed from an inner essence?
2. Olivia falls in love with Cesario without knowing Viola's underlying sex. What does this suggest about the relationship between gender performance and desire, as Butler theorizes it in her discussion of drag in section 9.10?
3. At the play's end, Viola resumes women's dress and marries Orsino, restoring conventional gender roles. Does this ending undercut a Butlerian reading of the play, or can it still be reconciled with Butler's theory? Explain your reasoning.
4. Compare Viola's cross-dressing in Twelfth Night with Orlando's transformation discussed in section 9.14. What does each text suggest about how gender is read and recognized by other characters?

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain what Butler means by the claim that gender is "performative," and how this differs from viewing gender as an innate trait.
2. Summarize Butler's critique of Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, and explain why Butler regards both accounts as still treating "woman" as a stable category.
3. Explain how Butler uses Freud's concept of melancholia to reframe the formation of gender identity.
4. Explain why Butler treats drag as a clarifying example of her argument about gender, rather than as an exception to ordinary gender presentation.
5. Outline how Butler's performativity thesis contributed to the emergence of queer theory.
6. Choose a literary work, film, or television show you are familiar with in which a character's gender presentation shifts or is called into question, and analyze it using Butler's theory of gender performativity.

CHAPTER X ECOCRITICISM: LITERATURE, NATURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the meaning and scope of ecocriticism.
2. Outline the historical development of ecocriticism as an academic field of study.
3. Identify the key critical questions in ecocritical analysis.
4. Apply Buell's criteria to evaluate environmentally themed literary texts.

Course Material

10.1 Understanding Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism examines the relationship between texts and nature — how literature represents, shapes, and is shaped by the ecological environment and human attitudes toward nature (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2004). The field is also known by several other names, including Green Studies, Eco-Poetics, Environmental Literary Criticism, and Green Cultural Studies.

10.2 The Three Core Questions of Ecocriticism

1. Representation — how does literature depict nature?
2. Agency — does the environment have the power to influence characters and plot?
3. Ethics — what values shape the relationship between humans and nature?

10.3 The History and Development of Ecocriticism

The term "ecocriticism" was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," which proposed applying ecology as a lens for literary study. The field was later institutionalized academically in 1992 with the founding of ASLE (the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment).

A subsequent major milestone was the publication of The Ecocriticism Reader (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm — an anthology that defined the field and established its basic methodology. Glotfelty described ecocriticism as an earth-centered approach, paralleling gender-centered feminist criticism and class-centered Marxist criticism.

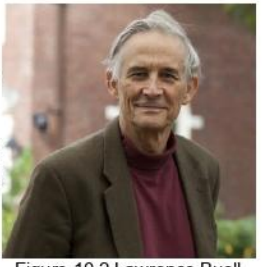


Source: *Columbia University*

Figure 10.1 William Rueckert

10.4 Place as a New Critical Category and Buell's Four Criteria

Ecocritics propose that "place" be treated as an interpretive category on par with race, class, and gender — not merely a passive backdrop, but an active force in literary meaning-making (Glotfelty, 1996; Buell, 1995). Relevant critical questions include: how is nature represented in a poem or novel? What role does the physical setting play in the plot? Are the values expressed consistent with ecological wisdom? How do metaphors about the land shape the way humans treat it?



Source: YCFC

Figure 10.2 Lawrence Buell

Lawrence Buell (1995), in The Environmental Imagination, proposes four criteria for evaluating a text as an "environmental text":

1. The nonhuman environment is present as a substantial presence, not merely as a framing device for setting.
2. Human interest is not regarded as the only legitimate interest within the text.
3. Human accountability to the environment forms part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. The environment is treated as a process, rather than as something constant or fixed.

10.5 Environmental Ethics and the Responsibility of Literature

Environmental historian Donald Worster (quoted in Glotfelty, 1996) cautions that the global crisis the world faces today is not caused solely by how ecosystems function, but by how human ethical systems function. Addressing this crisis requires a precise understanding of humanity's impact on nature, but beyond that, it also requires understanding the ethical systems underlying human behavior and working to reform them. This view affirms the important position of the humanities — including writers, historians, and philosophers — at the center of any response to the ecological crisis.



Source: *Wikipedia*

Figure 10.3 Donald Worster

Further directions within ecocriticism have also expanded to address posthumanism and transcorporeality (Alaimo, 2010), postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010), and the framework of the Anthropocene (Chakrabarty, 2009).

10.6 Practice: An Ecocritical Reading of Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier

To help students see how the three core questions from section 8.2 and Buell's four criteria from section 8.4 can be applied together, this section offers an ecocritical reading of *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier* (2016), a poem by Craig Santos Perez, a Chamorro poet from Guam whose work returns repeatedly to Pacific life, colonialism, and the climate crisis facing island and coastal communities. Structured as thirteen brief numbered sections in deliberate homageto Wallace Stevens's well-known Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird, Perez's poem offers a sequence of shifting glimpses of a single glacier, moving between planetary statistics, scenes of human response to the climate crisis, and an intimate closing image of the glacier reduced to something small enough to hold.

Representation: Refusing a Single Image of the Glacier

Across its thirteen sections, the poem refuses to settle on one fixed picture of its subject. The glacier appears in turn as a body of ice first glimpsed in a scene of food-scarce polar bears, as one among some two hundred thousand glaciers found around the world, as a substance that has absorbed greenhouse gases, and, by the poem's final section, as something small enough to be held in two human hands. This shifting, multiplied

This shifting, multiplied representation satisfies Buell's first criterion that the nonhuman environment be present as a substantial presence in a text, rather than simply a backdrop against which a human drama unfolds.

Agency: A Glacier That Acts

Several of the poem's sections grant the glacier an active role rather than a passive one: across its thirteen parts, the ice calves, its mass advances and disappears, it floods city streets, and it eventually retreats. By giving the glacier actions of its own that affect human cities and economies, the poem satisfies Buell's second criterion, treating the nonhuman world as an agent within the text rather than as a static stage.

Ethics: Kinship and Accountability

The poem repeatedly affirms a bond connecting humans, animals, and the glacier itself, extending moral consideration beyond the human to the geological. At the same time, several sections quietly question human responses to glacial melt, including the building of sea walls and the pursuit of new tourism and drilling opportunities created by the retreating ice, holding up these responses as inadequate, or even self-serving, in the face of the crisis. In this way, the poem satisfies Buell's third criterion: human accountability to the environment forms part of its ethical orientation.

Process: A Glacier in Motion

Finally, the poem treats the glacier not as a fixed, unchanging feature of the landscape but as a process unfolding before the reader: from a planetary-scale presence early in the poem to something that, by its last section, has shrunk to fit within two warm human hands. This movement across thirteen short sections embodies Buell's fourth criterion, that the environment be treated as a process rather than as something constant.

Perez's identity as a Chamorro poet from Guam also connects the poem to the postcolonial ecocriticism mentioned in section 8.5: for Pacific Island communities, glacial melt and the resulting rise in sea level are not abstract statistics but a direct threat to ancestral land, making the poem's argument about scale and accountability inseparable from questions of place, colonialism, and indigenous survival.

Practice questions:

1. Choose one of the poem's numbered sections not discussed above (consult the full poem via the citation in the References list), and analyze it using the three core ecocritical questions from section 8.2: representation, agency, and ethics.
2. Why might Perez have chosen to model his poem so closely on Wallace Stevens's poem about a blackbird viewed thirteen ways? What does this multiplicity of "ways of looking" suggest about how ecocriticism approaches its subject?

3. The poem moves from a glacier that is one among roughly two hundred thousand worldwide to a glacier small enough to fit in human hands. What argument about scale and human responsibility might this movement be making?
4. How does Perez's identity as a Chamorro poet from the Pacific island of Guam shape the poem's ecological argument? Connect your answer to the discussion of postcolonial ecocriticism in section 8.5.

Case Study / Sample Questions

Craig Santos Perez's *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier*, discussed in section 8.6, also works well as a case study in its own right. The poem's thirteen short sections move through a series of distinct vantage points on a single glacier: among them, a statistic about the total number of glaciers worldwide, an image of greenhouse gases being absorbed, an assertion of kinship linking humans, animals, and the glacier itself, a description of cities flooding as the glacier's mass disappears, and a closing image of the glacier melting away in human hands.

Questions for discussion: ?

1. How does the poem's title and its thirteen-part structure make an ecocritical argument in itself, independent of any single section's content? Consider the idea, discussed in section 8.4, that "place" should be treated as an active critical category rather than a passive backdrop.

2. Compare the glacier's role across the poem's opening and closing sections. Does it remain equally active throughout, or does its agency change as the poem proceeds?
3. Identify a moment in the poem where human responses to the glacier's melting are described, such as building sea walls or pursuing new tourism or drilling opportunities. What ethical judgment, if any, does the poem seem to make about these responses?
4. Using Buell's four criteria from section 8.4, would you classify this poem as an "environmental text"? Justify your answer with reference to at least two of the four criteria.

Exercises / Evaluation



1. Explain the meaning of ecocriticism and name other terms used for this field of study.
2. Outline the three core questions that form the basis of ecocritical analysis.
3. Explain three important historical milestones in the development of ecocriticism as an academic field.
4. State and explain Buell's four criteria for evaluating a text as an environmental text.
5. Explain the meaning of Worster's statement that the global crisis is caused more by humanity's "ethical system" than by how ecosystems function.
6. Choose a literary work or film that prominently features nature, then evaluate that work using Buell's four criteria.

CHAPTER XI ECOFEMINISM AND VAL PLUMWOOD

Specific Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, students are expected to be able to:

1. Explain the central ecofeminist claim that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women share a common origin in patriarchal and capitalist structures.
2. Explain Val Plumwood's theory of dualism and how paired opposites such as reason/nature and male/female function as tools of domination.
3. Distinguish radical ecofeminism from cultural ecofeminism, and explain Plumwood's critique of both positions.
4. Explain how Sherry Ortner's nature/culture question and the Chipko movement provide theoretical and historical grounding for ecofeminist literary criticism.
5. Apply Plumwood's theory of dualism to analyze a literary text.

Course Material

11.1 Understanding Ecofeminism



Source: ISSE

Figure 11.1 Val Plumwood

Ecofeminism emerged as a way of joining feminist and environmental thought, arguing that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women trace back to the same source: patriarchal and capitalist structures that treat both as resources to be controlled and consumed (d'Eaubonne, 1974; Warren, 1990). As a lens for reading literature, it asks how texts represent women and the natural world, and whether they reinforce or resist the logic that subordinates both. The Australian philosopher Val Plumwood gave this insight one of its most rigorous theoretical foundations, and her work remains a central reference point for ecofeminist literary criticism.

11.2 The Logic of Domination: Nature, Women, and the Language of Conquest

Scholars such as Joni Seager have argued that the rise of modern science was, in part, a project of subduing both nature and women together — the two came to be seen as objects to be controlled, studied, and exploited rather than respected as active forces in their own right (Seager, 1993). Seager also pointed to how the language of exploration and conquest — of "taming" wild land, "penetrating" untouched territory, "mastering" an unpredictable natural world — mirrors the language used historically to describe control over women's bodies and autonomy. This shared vocabulary reveals, ecofeminists argue, a shared ideology: nature and women are cast as passive things waiting to be acted upon, rather than active participants shaping their own histories.

11.3 Val Plumwood's Theory of Dualisms

Val Plumwood built on this foundation by developing a rigorous account of dualism — the tendency in Western thought to organize reality into paired opposites in which one term is treated as superior and the other inferior:

- reason over nature
- culture over wilderness
- male over female
- human over animal
- civilized over savage

(Plumwood, 1993). Plumwood argued these dualisms are not neutral categories; they function as tools of domination, justifying the subordination of whichever side gets coded as "nature" — women, indigenous peoples, animals, the land itself.

Her key move was to show that these dualisms are not separate systems of oppression running in parallel, but a single interlocking structure. The same logic that positions women as closer to nature, and therefore inferior to rational man, also positions colonized peoples as closer to nature, and nonhuman animals as mere resources (Plumwood, 1991, 2002). Because of this, Plumwood insisted that feminist and environmental liberation cannot be pursued separately — dismantling one dualism without addressing the underlying logic leaves the whole structure intact.

11.4 The Universality of Female Subordination: Ortner's Nature/Culture Question

The anthropologist Sherry Ortner's influential essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," gave ecofeminist literary theory one of its foundational questions: why do so many cultures, across otherwise very different traditions, treat women as subordinate (Ortner, 1974)? Ortner proposed that evidence of this subordination shows up in three overlapping ways — in cultural beliefs and everyday language that openly rank women below men; in symbolic associations, such as

ideas about impurity, that quietly code women as lesser; and in social structures that bar women from the arenas where a society's real power is held.

Her broader claim was that women are widely symbolically aligned with "nature," while men are aligned with "culture" — and since culture is consistently valued above nature, this alignment becomes a ready-made justification for treating women as inferior. Plumwood's theory of dualisms can be read as a philosophical elaboration of this same insight, explaining the deeper logical structure that makes the woman/nature alignment so durable across cultures.

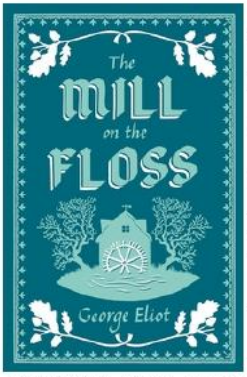
11.5 Radical vs. Cultural Ecofeminism

By the late 1980s, ecofeminism had split into two main strands (Britannica, n.d.). Radical ecofeminism pushes to break the association between women and nature altogether, viewing that link itself as the trap that keeps women confined to a devalued category. Cultural ecofeminism takes the opposite approach, embracing the connection and arguing that women's traditional roles and ways of knowing give them a closer, more intuitive relationship with the natural world — one that should be revalued rather than rejected.

Plumwood was critical of both extremes. She rejected the cultural ecofeminist tendency to simply invert the hierarchy, reasoning that this leaves the underlying dualistic structure of thought intact rather than dismantling it. At the same time, she resisted the radical ecofeminist impulse to sever women from nature entirely, since this move risks abandoning the natural world as a category worth valuing at all. Instead, Plumwood argued for a critical, relational stance that questions the dualism itself rather than choosing a side within it (Plumwood, 1993).

11.6 Ecofeminism Applied to Literature: Reading *The Mill on the Floss*

Plumwood's framework has been used to read nineteenth-century English literature, treating female and "othered" characters as figures positioned on the "nature" side of the culture/nature divide — subject to the same dominating gaze as the natural landscape around them (Chin, 2013) In one such reading of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, a novel's climactic flood is interpreted two ways: as nature reasserting itself against those who tried to master it, and as a metaphor for the unstoppable force of industrialization overtaking the traditional world..



Source: *Bloomsbury*

Figure 11.2 Cover of *The Mill on Floss*

This dual reading illustrates how ecofeminist theory is often used in literary analysis: not just to catalogue oppression, but to trace how nature itself can function narratively as a force of resistance or reckoning against domination.

11.7 The Chipko Movement as Real-World Grounding

Ecofeminist theory did not emerge purely from academic writing — it was shaped by grassroots activism. The clearest example is the Chipko movement, which began in northern India in the 1970s, when rural women physically embraced trees to stop them from being felled by loggers (Shiva, 1988). The movement is frequently cited in ecofeminist literary criticism as proof that the connection between women and environmental stewardship is not just a symbolic pattern in texts, but something borne out in real political action, giving literary readings of the woman-nature bond a concrete historical anchor.

11.8 Practice: A Plumwoodian Reading of *The Mill on the Floss*

To help students see how the three core concepts introduced in this chapter — the logic of domination, Plumwood's dualisms, and the critical, relational stance she recommends — can be applied together, this section develops Chin's (2013) reading of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860), a novel set on the banks of the

fictional River Floss in the town of St Ogg's, using the dualism framework from section 10.3.

Maggie Tulliver and the Dualism of Reason and Nature

The novel's central conflict is built around a contrast between Maggie Tulliver and her brother Tom. Tom is raised to value duty, respectability, and the family's business standing; Maggie is repeatedly described through her impulsiveness, her passionate attachments, and her closeness to the river that runs past the family mill. Read through Plumwood's dualisms, Tom is aligned with the "reason" and "civilized" side of the culture/nature pair, while Maggie is persistently coded on the "nature" side — a positioning the novel's community treats not as neutral difference but as grounds for correcting and constraining her, in the same way Plumwood argues the "nature" side of any dualism is treated as something to be mastered.

The Flood as Domination Reasserted — or Overturned

The novel closes with the River Floss flooding catastrophically, sweeping away the mill and drowning Maggie and Tom together as Maggie rows out to rescue him. Chin's (2013) two readings of this scene map directly onto the logic of domination discussed in section 10.2. If the flood is read as nature reasserting itself, the river — long dammed, milled, and treated as a resource for the Tulliver family's livelihood — refuses to remain the passive, controllable backdrop that the logic of

domination assumes it to be. On this reading, the flood enacts, at the level of plot, the ecofeminist argument that what is coded as "nature" is never merely inert material waiting to be mastered.

If instead the flood is read as a metaphor for industrialization, the river becomes an image of an impersonal historical force — the same force reshaping the mill's economic position across the novel — rather than nature per se. Under this reading, the scene does not undo the reason/nature dualism so much as substitute one dominating force (industrial change) for another (the family's earlier mastery of the river), leaving the underlying hierarchy intact even as its content shifts.

Two Readings and the Limits of Choosing One

Consistent with the critical, relational stance Plumwood recommends in section 10.5, a Plumwoodian reading does not need to settle on one interpretation over the other. Maggie's death alongside Tom, at the moment she acts most decisively rather than passively, resists a simple mapping of "nature" onto pure victimhood and "reason" onto pure control. Holding both of Chin's readings together — nature's reassertion and industrialization's metaphor — mirrors Plumwood's own insistence that dismantling one dualism without addressing the underlying logic of domination leaves the larger structure intact: the novel can be read as staging the failure of mastery over the river without thereby

resolving the deeper hierarchy that made mastery seem desirable in the first place.

Practice questions:

1. Identify one moment earlier in the novel, before the flood, where Maggie is described in terms that align her with nature or instinct rather than reason or duty. How does the community around her respond to that alignment?
2. Using the dualism pairs listed in section 10.3, explain which pair or pairs are most clearly at work in the contrast between Maggie and Tom.
3. Chin's (2013) reading offers two interpretations of the flood. Which do you find more persuasive, and why? Use Plumwood's concept of the logic of domination (section 10.2) to support your answer.
4. Plumwood criticizes both radical and cultural ecofeminism for leaving the underlying dualism intact (section 10.5). Does the ending of The Mill on the Floss fall into either of these patterns, or does it escape them? Explain your reasoning.

Case Study / Sample Questions

George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, discussed in sections 10.6 and 10.8, also works well as a case study in its own right. The novel follows Maggie Tulliver from childhood into adulthood, tracing her repeated conflicts with her family and the town of St Ogg's over her passionate, unconventional behavior, before ending with the sudden flooding of the River Floss, which destroys the family mill and kills Maggie and Tom together.

Exercises / Evaluation

1. Explain the central ecofeminist claim about the shared origin of the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women, and name the two scholars credited with early statements of this claim.
2. Define dualism as Plumwood uses the term, and list the five paired opposites discussed in section 10.3.
3. Explain why Plumwood describes the dualisms she identifies as "a single interlocking structure" rather than separate, parallel systems of oppression.
4. Summarize Ortner's three overlapping forms of evidence for the universality of female subordination.
5. Distinguish radical ecofeminism from cultural ecofeminism, and explain Plumwood's objection to each.
6. Choose a literary work or film in which a female or "othered" character is closely associated with nature, and analyze it using Plumwood's theory of dualism.

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Structuralism is a twentieth-century intellectual movement, inaugurated in 1950 by the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. At its core lies a single guiding idea: that things cannot be understood in isolation, but must instead be seen in the context of the larger structure of which they form a part.

René Wellek (1982) even argued that novelists can teach us more about human nature than psychologists themselves. This view affirms that literary works are not merely entertainment, but also a mirror reflecting the complexity of the human psyche.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was born in Austria and spent most of his life working in Vienna as the founder of psychoanalysis and a pioneer of the "psychology of the mind." He pioneered the method of dream analysis and efforts to map the human unconscious.

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