Suci Suryani

THE CRITICAL THEORY TO INTERPRET PROSE

An Introduction

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THE CRITICAL THEORY TO INTERPRET PROSE
AN INTRODUCTION

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15 x 23 cm, viii + 105 halaman

Cetakan ke-1, Oktober 2024

ISBN 978-623-499-998-3

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Sanksi Pelanggaran Pasal 113
Undang-Undang No. 28 Tahun 2014 Tentang Hak Cipta

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Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to praise Alhamdulillah to Allah the most gracious and merciful and Sholawat to the great prophet Muhammad peace upon him.

Secondly, I would like to thank you to English Study Program, Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, University of Trunojoyo Madura which supports me to write the teaching material for the subject of Literary Criticism. The program of book grant makes the books written by some colleagues provided to enrich the availability of some books in English Study Program.

The last but not the least, I would like to send my gratitude to my beloved family. I love you full guys.

Preface

This book is a compilation book for the students of English Study Program of UTM who enroll themselves for the subject of Literary Criticism. The subject is offered for third year of semester one as a requirement one. It is provided to lead the students to have the literary criticism knowledge and skill for their future as they will have graduated from bachelor degree and they will continue to their magister program or look for a job position as teachers, education consultants that provide service to help people to criticize literature, the literary critic, and so forth. It meets the suggestion from the Indonesia education ministry that the college must provide the curricula that suits the needs of job vacancy of organization, office, factory, and college. This book entitled THE CRITICAL THEORY TO INTERPRET PROSE: AN INTRODUCTION is arranged into eight chapters. Every chapter has its own instructional objective that meet the semester learning plan. Each chapter consists of the main material, summary, and questions for discussion and has its own material to be discussed to give new insight and skill to the students.

Chapter one is CRITICAL THEORY TO INTERPRET PROSE that leads the students to understand about critical theory used to interpret prose. Chapter two is NEW CRITICAL THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE that

makes the students understand about new critical theory and how to apply it to interpret prose. Chapter three is PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE to leads the students understand the psychological problem in literature and how to interpret prose based on psychoanalytic theory. Chapter four is MARXIST THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE that makes the students understand Marxist theory and how to apply it to analyze prose. Chapter five is FEMINIST THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE that leads the students understand feminist theory and the way to interpret prose using the theory. Chapter six is LGBT THEORIES AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE that makes the students understand LGBT theory and the way to interpret prose based on the theory. Chapter seven is AFRICAN AMERICAN THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE leading the students to understand African American theory and how to analyze prose using the theory. Chapter eight is POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND ITS PRACTICE TO INTERPRET PROSE leading the students to understand postcolonial theory and the way to apply the theory to analyze prose.

Bangkalan, 2nd October, 2024

Suci Suryani

Table Of Contents

Chapter 1.

CRITICAL THEORY TO INTERPRET PROSE

> The students will be able to describe the background of the critical theory to interpret literature; the benefit of understanding critical theory; what the literary criticism is, what critical theory is; the benefit of critical theory for students of literature.

1.1 Introduction

In the early decades of the twentieth century, students of literature were taught that the author was our primary concern in reading a literary work: our task was to examine the author's life in order to discover what the author meant to communicate—his or her message, theme, or moral—which is called authorial intention. Our focus has changed over the years to the point that, now, among many contemporary critical theorists at least, the author is no longer considered a meaningful

object of analysis. We focus, instead, on the reader; on the ideological, rhetorical, or aesthetic structure of the text; or on the culture in which the text was produced, usually without reference to the author. So, for all intents and purposes, the author is "dead." It's a simple idea, really, yet, like many ideas that belong to a particular academic discipline, it can be used to exclude people rather than to communicate with them. This situation is especially objectionable because it results in the exclusion of those of us who might stand to benefit from critical theory in the most concrete ways: current and future teachers at the elementary and secondary levels; faculty and students at community colleges; and faculty and students in all departments at the thousands of liberal arts colleges responsible for the bulk of American education but whose members may not be on the "fast track" to academic stardom.

1.2 The Benefit of Understanding Critical Theory

What are the concrete ways in which we can benefit from an understanding of critical theory? As I hope the following chapters will illustrate, theory can help us learn to see ourselves and our world in valuable new ways, ways that can influence how we educate our children, both as parents and teachers; how we view television, from the nightly news to situation comedies; how we behave as voters and consumers; how we react to others with whom we do not agree on social, religious, and political issues; and how we recognize and deal with our own motives, fears, and desires. And if we believe that human productions—not just literature but also, for example, film, music, art, science, technology, and architecture—are outgrowths of human experience and therefore reflect human desire, conflict, and potential, then we can learn to interpret those productions in order to learn something important about ourselves as a species. Critical theory, I think you will find, provides excellent tools for that endeavor, tools that not only can show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses but also can strengthen our ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight. Critical theory develops your ability to see any given

problem from a variety of points of view, which is a skill worth having no matter what career you pursue.

This is why it seems so important that we study a number of theories in succession, not just to remind ourselves that multiple viewpoints are important if we are to see the whole picture but to grasp the very process of understanding that underlies human experience and to thereby increase our ability to see both the value and the limitations of every method of viewing the world. In fact, one of the most important things theory can show us is that methodologies are ways of seeing the world, whether we're talking about physics or sociology, literature, or medicine. Theories can also overlap a good deal with one another, producing very compatible, even similar, readings of the same work. Critical theories are not isolated entities, completely different from one another, separable into tidy bins, like the tubs of tulips, daffodils, and carnations we see at the florist. It would be more useful to think of theories, to continue the metaphor, as mixed bouquets, each of which can contain a few of the flowers that predominate in or that serve different purposes in other bouquets.

Thus, for example, while Marxism focuses on the socioeconomic considerations that underlie human behavior, it doesn't exclude the psychological domain of human experience; rather, when it addresses human psychology, it does so in order to demonstrate how psychological experience is produced by socioeconomic factors rather than by the causes usually posited by psychoanalysis. Similarly, while feminist analysis often draws on psychoanalytic and Marxist concepts, it uses them to illuminate feminist concerns: for example, to examine the ways in which women are psychologically and socioeconomically oppressed. And even when critics use the same theoretical tools to read the same literary work, they might produce very different interpretations of that work. Using the same theory doesn't necessarily mean reading the literary work in the same way. If you read other critics' interpretations of The Great Gatsby, you will probably find that they agree with my interpretations on some

points and disagree on others even when we seem to be using the same critical tools.

1.3 What the Literary Criticism is

At this point, a brief explanation of a few important concepts might be useful. I refer above to other "critics," and it's important to remind ourselves that the terms critic and literary criticism don't necessarily imply finding fault with literary works. Literary criticism, by and large, tries to explain the literary work to us: its production, its meaning, its design, its beauty. Critics tend to find flaws in one another's interpretations more than in literary works. Unlike movie critics and book reviewers, who tell us whether or not we should see the films or read the books they review, literary critics spend much more time explaining than evaluating, even when their official purpose, like that of the New Critics, is to assess the aesthetic quality of the literary work. Of course, when we apply critical theories that involve a desire to change the world for the better—such as feminism, Marxism, African American criticism, lesbian/gay/queer criticism, and postcolonial criticism—we will sometimes find a literary work flawed in terms of its deliberate or inadvertent promotion of, for example, sexist, classist, racist, heterosexist, or colonialist values. But even in these cases, the flawed work has value because we can use it to understand how these repressive ideologies operate.

1.4 What the Critical Theory is

Critical theory (or literary theory), on the other hand, tries to explain the assumptions and values upon which various forms of literary criticism rest. Strictly speaking, when we interpret a literary text, we are doing literary criticism; when we examine the criteria upon which our interpretation rests, we are doing critical theory. Simply put, literary criticism is the application of critical theory to a literary text, whether or not a given critic is aware of the theoretical assumptions informing her or his interpretation. In fact, the widespread recognition that literary criticism cannot be separated from the theoretical assumptions on which it is based

is one reason why the word criticism is often used as if it included the word theory.

Examples of critical theory include Jacques Derrida's essays on his deconstructive theory of language; Louise Rosenblatt's definitions of text, reader, and poem; and even my attempts in the following chapters to explain the operations of and relationships among theoretical concepts from various critical schools. Examples of literary criticism would include a deconstructive interpretation of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), a Marxist analysis of Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970), a gay reading of the imagery in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" (1855), and the various interpretations of The Great Gatsby offered in the following chapters.

Despite their tendency to interpret rather than to evaluate literature, literary critics have an enormous effect on the literary marketplace, not in terms of what they say about particular works but in terms of which works they choose to interpret and which works they ignore. And of course, critics tend to interpret works that lend themselves readily to the critical theory they employ. Thus, whenever a single critical theory dominates literary studies, those works that lend themselves well to that theory will be considered "great works" and will be taught in the college classroom, while other works will be ignored. Because most of us who become teachers tend to teach the works we were taught, a popular critical theory can result in the institutionalization, or canonization, of certain literary works: those works then are taught to successive generations of students as "great works" with "timeless" appeal.

Reading with the grain thus implies seeing what the author intended us to see, while reading against the grain implies seeing something the author didn't intend, something of which he or she was unaware. However, we generally talk about what the text intends, rather than about what the author intended. As the New Critics observed, we can't always know what the author intended, and even if authors say what they intended, the literary work might fail to live up to that intention or might go beyond it. Of

course, some critics do choose to talk about the author's intention, and they shoulder the burden of providing biographical arguments to try to convince us that they're right. By the same token, talking about what the text intends doesn't guarantee that our analysis is correct; we still must provide evidence from the text to support our view. In any event, any given theory can read with or against the grain of any literary work at any given point in the text. It's usually important to know whether we're reading with or against the grain so that we don't, for example, condemn a literary work for its portrayal of sexist behavior when that very portrayal is given in order to condemn sexism. Like many elements of literary interpretation, this is a sticky one, and readers often disagree about what a work invites us to see and what it does not.

1.5 The Benefit of Critical Theory for Students of Literature

Naturally, critical theory has specific benefits for students of literature. For example, critical theory can increase your understanding of literary texts by helping you see more in them than you've seen before. And by giving you more to see in literature, critical theory can make literature more interesting to read. As you'll see in the following chapters, critical theory can also provide you with multiple interpretations of the same literary work, which will increase the possibility of finding interesting essay topics for your literature classes. Finally, a practice that is increasing in popularity in literary studies is the application of critical theory to cultural productions other than literature— for example, to movies, song lyrics, and television shows—and even to your own personal experience, which will help you see more and understand more of the world in which you live.

New Critical theory focuses exclusively on the ways in which language operates in a literary text to make meaning. Chapter 2 will provide concepts from New Critical theory to help you interpret literature thematically—that is, in terms of a literary text's meaning as a whole concerning general topics about human experience, such as love and hate, tradition and change, the initiation into adulthood, conformity and rebellion, and the like.

And in order to help you analyze how a text's meaning is linked to its language, this chapter will help increase your understanding of such literary devices as, for example, setting, characterization, point of view, ambiguity, imagery, symbol, and metaphor. Many of you will be familiar with this approach because it resembles the way we are usually taught to interpret literary works in high-school or preparatory-school literature classes. In addition, Chapter 2 will help you improve and expand your ability to generate a thesis (a debatable opinion that forms the main point of your interpretation) and to support your thesis with evidence from the literary work you are interpreting.

Chapters 3 through 8 introduce you to a range of critical theories that I believe you will find very interesting as well as very helpful to your study of literature. In Chapter 4, we'll use concepts from psychoanalytic theory to interpret literature. Psychoanalytic theory asks us to examine the emotional causes of the characters' behavior and to view a given story, poem, or play as the unfolding of the characters' personal psychological dramas. In contrast, Marxist theory, as we'll see in Chapter 4, asks us to look at the ways in which characters' behavior and plot events are influenced by the socioeconomic conditions of the time and place in which the characters live. From a Marxist perspective, all human experiences, including personal psychology, are products of the socioeconomic system—which is usually some sort of class system—in which human beings live. In Chapter 5, we'll see how feminist theory asks us to look at the ways in which traditional gender roles, which cast men as naturally dominant and women as naturally submissive, affect characters' behavior and plot events. Lesbian, gay, and queer theories, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, ask us to examine the ways in which literary works reveal human sexuality as a complex phenomenon that cannot be fully understood in terms of what is currently defined as heterosexual experience. In Chapter 7, we'll see how African American theory focuses our attention on the many different ways in which race and racial issues operate in literary texts. Postcolonial theory, as we'll see in Chapter 8, asks us to look at the

ways in which literature offers us a view of human experience as the product of a combination of cultural factors, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural beliefs and customs.

Of course, there are many more critical theories than those introduced here. For example, in addition to the theories we draw upon in this book, courses in critical theory may include units on structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, rhetorical criticism, or Jungian theory, among others. The theories I've chosen for you were selected because I believe you will find them most helpful as you develop your understanding of literature and most relevant to your life. And these theories will lay a strong foundation for further study in critical theory, should you choose to pursue your education in that direction.

Clearly, the ability to pick the appropriate theory for a literary work you want to interpret, or to pick an appropriate literary work for a theory you want to use, is a skill worth developing. For most of us, it's a question of trial and error. We experimentally apply different theories to a piece of literature we want to analyze until we find one that yields the most interesting and perhaps the most thorough interpretation. Of course, the ability to use any given theory to analyze any given text differs from person to person, so the key is to find the combination of theory and literary text that works for you. In fact, you might see some of the ways in which different readers can use the same theory to come up with different readings of the same literary work if you or your instructor interprets any of our five literary texts in ways that differ from the interpretation exercises I offer you.

1.6. Summary

A reader's interpretation doesn't tell us whether or not he or she likes a given literary work. An interpretation tells us what the reader thinks the literary work means. An interpretation is thus an opinion that is debatable. Your interpretation, therefore, can be judged right or wrong by other readers, just as you can judge their interpretations right or wrong. So the point in offering

an interpretation is not just to state what you think the literary work means—not just to give your opinion—but to use evidence from the literary work to explain why you think your interpretation is valid. Interpreting a literary work, then, is like being both a detective and a lawyer: first you have to figure out what you think the work means; then you have to "make a case" for your opinion that will be as convincing to others as you can make it.

Once students begin to use critical theories to interpret literature, they often see so many theoretical concepts in literary works that they think the authors must have put those concepts there on purpose. How else, many students wonder, could these critical theories show us so much about literature? The truth is, however, that authors may or may not deliberately use concepts from critical theories when they write literary works. Let's use psychoanalytic theory as an example. Shakespeare, for example, lived and died long before Sigmund Freud developed his psychoanalytic approach to understanding human behavior. Yet we can use psychoanalytic concepts to interpret Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, for instance, to understand his characters' motivations or to gain insight into some of the psychological forces operating in the society represented in his work. For Freud didn't invent the psychological forces that motivate human beings. As he himself stated, Freud simply observed those psychological forces and gave them names. That is, Freud discovered something that had always existed and that would continue to exist whether or not anyone ever discovered it: the human psyche.

Some authors, however, wrote essays in which they explained what they wanted their work to mean, and, of course, many authors are alive and can tell us what they intended their work to mean. Yet even then, we still have to face the problem of whether a given literary work achieves the author's intention, fails to achieve the author's intention, or is even richer and more complex than the author expected it to be. All we really have to go on is the literary work itself, even when we know the author's

intention. So that's what we go on: the literary work itself. Our interpretation can draw on historical elements relevant to the author's life and times, but our interpretation must be supported by adequate evidence—elements of plot, characterization, dialogue, setting, imagery, and so forth—from the literary text. Therefore, even when we feel that our interpretation must be what the author intended the work to mean, we generally say "the text seems to intend" or "the text implies" rather than "the author seems to intend" or "the author implies."

So whatever your experience as you work your way through this textbook, remember that it's natural to feel confused at times. In fact, I think you should honor your confusion because it means that you've been courageous enough to let go of your usual way of understanding things in order to try a new way that you haven't quite grasped yet. You've let go of the riverbank in order to cross to the other side of the river. Although it may take a little while to get to that other side, you can't even begin the journey if you don't let go of solid ground. And no matter how you look at it, that's a brave and a very worthwhile act.

1.7. Assignment

1. What do you know about the background of the critical theory to interpret literature?
2. Mention the benefit of understanding critical theory.
3. What is the difference between the literary criticism and the critical theory?
4. Mention the benefit of critical theory for students of literature.

Chapter 2.

New Critical Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of new critical theory; literary language (theme: paradox, irony, ambiguity, tension; figurative language: **images**, **symbols**, **metaphors**, and **similes)** and organic unity; to interpret the prose entitled "Battle Royal" and any others prose works based on new critical theory.

2.1. Introduction

New Criticism occupies an unusual position, both in this textbook and in the field of literary studies today. On the one hand, it's the only theory covered in this book that is no longer practiced by literary critics, so it can't really be called a contemporary theory. On the other hand, New Criticism, which dominated literary studies from the 1940s through the 1960s, has

left a lasting imprint on the way we read and write about literature. Some of its most important concepts concerning the nature and importance of textual evidence—the use of concrete, specific examples from the text itself to validate our interpretations— have been incorporated into the way most literary critics today, regardless of their theoretical persuasion, support their readings of literature. In fact, if you're an English major, you probably take for granted the need for thorough textual support for your literary interpretations because this practice, which the New Critics introduced to America and called "close reading," has been a standard method of high school and college instruction in literary studies for the past several decades. So in this sense, New Criticism is still a real presence among us and probably will remain so for some time to come.

"The text itself" became the battle cry of the New Critical effort to focus our attention on the literary work as the sole source of evidence for interpreting it. The life and times of the author and the spirit of the age in which he or she lived are certainly of interest to the literary historian, New Critics argued, but they do not provide the literary critic with information that can be used to analyze the text itself. In the first place, they pointed out, sure knowledge of the author's intended meaning is usually unavailable. We can't telephone William Shakespeare and ask him how he intended us to interpret Hamlet's hesitation in carrying out the instructions of his father's ghost, and Shakespeare left no written explanation of his intention. More important, even if Shakespeare had left a record of his intention, as some authors have, all we can know from that record is what he wanted to accomplish, not what he did accomplish. Sometimes a literary text doesn't live up to the author's intention. Sometimes it is even more meaningful, rich, and complex than the author realized. And sometimes the text's meaning is simply different from the meaning the author wanted it to have. Knowing an author's intention, therefore, tells us nothing about the text itself, which is why New Critics coined the term intentional fallacy to refer to the

mistaken belief that the author's intention is the same as the text's meaning.

2.2. Literary Language and Organic Unity

The importance of the formal elements of a literary text is a product of the nature of literary language, which, for New Criticism, is very different from scientific language and from everyday language. Scientific language, and a good deal of everyday language, depends on denotation, the one-to-one correspondence between words and the objects or ideas they represent. Scientific language doesn't draw attention to itself, doesn't try to be beautiful or emotionally evocative. Its job is to point not to itself but to the physical world beyond it, which it attempts to describe and explain. Literary language, in contrast, depends on connotation: on

the implication, association, suggestion, and evocation of meanings and of shades of meaning. (For example, while the word father denotes male parent, it connotes authority, protection, and responsibility.) In addition, literary language is expressive: it communicates tone, attitude, and feeling. While everyday language is often connotative and expressive, too, in general it is not deliberately or systematically so, for its chief purpose is practical. Everyday language wants to get things done. Literary language, however, organizes linguistic resources into a special arrangement, a complex unity, to create an aesthetic experience, a world of its own.

Unlike scientific and everyday language, therefore, the form of literary language— the word choice and arrangement that create the aesthetic experience—is inseparable from its content, its meaning. Put more simply, how a literary text means is inseparable from what it means. For the form and meaning of a literary work, at least of a great literary work, develop together, like a complex living organism whose parts cannot be separated from the whole. And indeed, the work's organic unity—the working together of all the parts to make an inseparable whole— is the criterion by which New Critics judged the quality of a

literary work. If a text has an organic unity, then all of its formal elements work together to establish its theme, or the meaning of the work as a whole. Through its organic unity, the text provides both the complexity that a literary work must have, if it is to adequately represent the complexity of human life, and the order that human beings, by nature, seek. For New Criticism, then, the explanation of literary meaning and the evaluation of literary greatness became one and the same act, for when New Critics explained a text's organic unity they were also establishing its claim to greatness. Let's take a closer look at each of the criteria of literary value embodied in organic unity: complexity and order.

For New Criticism, the complexity of a text is created by the multiple and often conflicting meanings woven through it. And these meanings are a product primarily of four kinds of linguistic devices: **paradox**, **irony**, **ambiguity,** and **tension**. Briefly, **paradox** is a statement that seems self-contradictory but represents the actual way things are. For example, a paradox of everyday experience can be seen in the old saying Joni Mitchell uses so effectively in her song "Big Yellow Taxi": "You don't know what you've got 'till it's gone." Not unlike the biblical reference above, this old adage tells us that you have to lose something (physically) before you can find it (spiritually). **Irony**, in its simple form, means a statement or event undermined by the context in which it occurs. The following description of a wealthy husband's sense of moral rectitude, from Edith Wharton's House of Mirth (1905), is an example of an ironic statement. An example of an ironic event can be seen in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970) when Pecola finally receives the blue eyes she has wished for so desperately. Her wish has been "fulfilled" only because she has lost touch with reality so completely that she believes her brown eyes are blue.

Ambiguity occurs when a word, image, or event generates two or more different meanings. For example, in Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), the image of the tree produced by the scar tissue on Sethe's back implies, among other things, suffering (the "tree" resulted from a brutal whipping, which is emblematic of all the

hardships experienced under slavery), endurance (trees can live for hundreds of years, and the scar tissue itself testifies to Sethe's remarkable ability to survive the most traumatic experiences), and renewal (like the trees that lose their leaves in the fall and are "reborn" every spring, Sethe is offered, at the novel's close, the chance to make a new life). Finally, the complexity of a literary text is created by its **tension**, which, broadly defined, means the linking together of opposites. In its simplest form, tension is created by the integration of the abstract and the concrete, of general ideas embodied in specific images. For example, in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949), the concrete image of Willy's tiny house, bathed in blue light and surrounded by enormous apartment buildings that emanate an angry orange glow, embodies the general idea of the underdog, the victim of forces larger and more numerous than itself.

As noted earlier, the complexity of the text, to which all of these linguistic devices contribute, must be complemented by a sense of order if a literary work is to achieve greatness. Therefore, all of the multiple and conflicting meanings produced by the text's **paradoxes**, **ironies**, **ambiguities**, and **tensions** must be resolved, or harmonized, by their shared contribution to the **theme**. The text's theme, or complete meaning, is not the same thing as its topic. Rather, the theme is what the text does with its topic. The theme is an interpretation of human experience, and if the text is a great one, the theme serves as a commentary on human values, human nature, or the human condition. In other words, great literary works have themes of universal human (moral and/or emotional) significance. They tell us something important about what it means to be human.

Close reading, the scrupulous examination of the complex relationship between a text's formal elements and its theme, is how the text's organic unity was established by the New Critic. Because of New Criticism's belief that the literary text can be understood primarily by understanding its form (which is why you'll sometimes hear it referred to as a type of formalism), a clear understanding of the definitions of specific formal elements is

important. In addition to the formal elements discussed above—the linguistic devices of paradox, irony, ambiguity, and tension—we should also take a moment to briefly define a few of the most frequently used kinds of figurative language: **images**, **symbols**, **metaphors**, and **similes**. Figurative language is language that has more than, or other than, a strictly literal meaning. **Images** often occur in symbols, metaphors, and similes, all three of which are forms of comparison. For example, the different effects of the following three images: (1) a white picket fence bordering a tidy green lawn; (2) a white picket fence gathered in a bundle and (3) a white picket fence fallen on its side, smudged heavily with dirt. These images are associated with very different ideas and experiences, create very different moods, and would help us interpret the, presumably, very different meanings of the literary passages in which they appeared.

Symbol—"Most of us have to earn our bread." This sentence means that most of us have to work for a living because the word bread symbolizes life. As this example illustrates, a symbol has both literal and figurative meaning. Bread is, literally, a form of food made largely of flour and water that is eaten by human beings. Figuratively, the word bread can be used to figure, or stand for, ideas that have similar qualities. Bread sustains life, so it can symbolize life. A **metaphor** has only figurative meaning. And links together two persons, things, or ideas that are, in a literal sense, not similar. The figurative meaning of "My grandmother is a treasure" is that my grandmother is a wonderful person, a person of great human value. Think of a **simile** as a metaphor that uses like or as. A metaphor can be considered a more direct, and therefore stronger comparison.

New Critics considered unity, or what they called organic unity, the most important quality of a literary text. A text has unity when its theme and formal elements work together as an inseparable whole. Put simply, when a text has unity, what it means can't be separated from how it means. In a unified text, every character, every plot event, every image, every tension,

every ambiguity— in short, all the text's formal elements—contribute to the representation of the text's theme. At various points in the text, there will certainly be contradictory or conflicting meanings created by a particular plot event, ambiguity, image, or other formal element. But these conflicting meanings add to the richness and depth of the text as long as they work together in a shared contribution to the meaning of the text as a whole—that is, to the text's theme.

2.3. The Practice to Interpret "The Battle Royal"

Set in 1950 in a small city in the American South, Ralph Ellison's "The Battle Royal" offers a gripping representation of racist brutalization that occurs within the walls of a single room over the course of a single evening. For the "entertainment" of a group of drunken white civic leaders, ten African American young men, who have few opportunities to make money, are paid five dollars each to compete against one another in a horrifying group "boxing" match, a battle royal, and submit to other acts of physical and psychological abuse.

The story is told by an unnamed first-person narrator—the valedictorian of his high-school graduating class who participates in the battle royal before giving his graduation speech to the assembled white leaders—so we see the evening's events from his point of view. Indeed, the story consists of the narrator's personal responses to his experiences at this gathering of civic leaders, and his narrative of that evening is framed, or preceded and followed, by his reflections on himself and his family.

"The Battle Royal" is also told from a "single window" in another way: the narrator isn't just alone in his own thoughts; he's also alone in his complete lack of emotional bonds with other human beings. It is striking that his thoughts about others—including his family and the other young men who participate in the battle royal—reveal an absence of personal connectedness that leaves him profoundly isolated in his efforts to survive the racism rampant in the American South of the 1950s. However, their efforts to survive and thrive don't include the sacrifice of

emotional ties. Indeed, the narrator's emotional isolation from others reflects his emotional disconnectedness from himself and suggests that alienation—which might be defined as the loss of shared values and the absence of loyalty to and affection for one's fellow human beings—is an important topic in this story.

With the topic of alienation in mind, our task is to discover the story's theme, or meaning as a whole, and to support our discovery with formal elements from the text itself. In order to fulfill this task, we must identify: (1) the **central**, or most important **tension** operating in the story, which will guide us to the story's theme and help us lay the groundwork for our interpretation; (2) the story's theme; and (3) the formal elements in the story that support the theme we have identified, thereby showing that our interpretation of the story is valid. Let's find the text's **central tension** embodied in plot events; in characters' behavior, attitudes, or physical appearance; and in the text's imagery which identifies an example of alienation in the story and contrasts that example with its opposite. (1) The narrator's alienation from the other young men participating in the battle royal vs. the young men's bond with one another. (2) The narrator's position at the head of his graduating class due to his grades vs. Tatlock's position at the head of his group of friends due to their loyalty to him. (3) The narrator's focus on pleasing the white civic leaders vs. the other young men's focus on their collective purpose. These examples cluster around the opposition between alienation and belonging. All of the African American characters suffer racist oppression. However, Tatlock and his friends have one another for support, and the narrator's family members have ties to both family and community.

Find the textual evidence—including such formal elements as characterization, plot events, setting, imagery, ambiguity, and so forth—that answers each of these questions, then we will be able to support our thesis. That is, we will be able to show that our statement of the story's theme is valid. (1) Where do we see the bond among Tatlock and his friends? (2) How do they work together, by plan, during the battle royal, and how does

that collective purpose help them? The two questions are for finding the textual evidence of setting and plot event and the answers are to support the thesis of a sense of belonging helps Tatlock and his friends on the evening of the battle royal. The next two questions are to find the textual evidence of characterization and imagery that lead to the thesis of the narrator alienation from others. (1) How does the narrator feel about using the service elevator with them? (2) What image in the story do you think best represents the narrator's alienation from others? The interpretation towards the textual evidences lead us to the text's theme that can be stated as follows: A sense of belonging can help us in the worst of times, and without it we risk becoming alienated not only from others but from ourselves, as well.

2.4. Summary

New Criticism explores what it considers more general topics, seeks what it considers more general themes, and focuses on the text's formal properties rather than on its social or psychological dimension. Sometimes, however, a literary text can compel our emotional attention so effectively—as we see, for example, in the vivid and horrifying details provided by the narrator of "The Battle Royal"—that it may be difficult to think about themes, formal elements, or anything else associated with New Critical theory. Indeed, New Criticism's interest in how the formal elements of a text work together to support its theme might seem too far removed from the realities portrayed in the text to be meaningful. So an understanding of New Critical concepts can help us to not only read literature through a New Critical lens, but to gather valid evidence to support other kinds of interpretations, as well. There are many more kinds of formal element, such additional formal elements as, for example, foreshadowing, flashback, stream of consciousness, irony, alliteration, authorial intrusion, and dozens more. The more we increase our literary vocabulary, the more we will be able to recognize, analyze, and enjoy in our reading of literature.

Read the Short Story entitled "The Battle Royal" by Ralph Ellison (1952) and answer the following question by including the text evidences and interpretation as the basis of the New Critical Theory applied

1. What bonds are shared by the narrator's family?
2. In what ways is the narrator alienated from himself?
3. How does the narrator's alienation harm him?

Chapter 3.

Psychoanalytic Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of psychoanalytic theory; basic concepts: the family, the unconscious and repression, the defenses; core issues: low self-esteem, insecure or unstable sense of self, oedipal fixation (or oedipal complex); dream symbolism: basements, attics, male imagery, female imagery; the relation between basic concepts, core issues, and dream; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works.

3.1 Introduction

Psychoanalytic concepts have become part of our everyday lives, and therefore psychoanalytic thinking should have the advantage of familiarity. Psychoanalytic concepts such as sibling rivalry, inferiority complexes, and defense mechanisms

are in such common use that most of us feel we know what they mean without ever having heard them defined. Seeing the world psychoanalytically can be simple without being simplistic. If we take the time to understand some key concepts about human experience offered by psychoanalysis, we can begin to see the ways in which these concepts operate in our daily lives in profound rather than superficial ways, and we'll begin to understand human behaviors that until now may have seemed utterly baffling. And, of course, if psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behavior. The concepts we'll discuss below are based on the psychoanalytic principles established by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), whose theory of the psyche often is referred to today as classical psychoanalysis. We must remember that Freud evolved his ideas over a long period of time, and many of his ideas changed as he developed them. So the attempt in this chapter is to outline those areas of classical psychoanalytic theory that are particularly useful to literary criticism and to show how this view of human behavior is relevant to our experience of literature.

3.2. Basic Concepts

3.2.1. The Family

For psychoanalytic theory, our adult personality is the result of the emotional experiences we had while growing up. And the family (which can be anything from the traditional two-parent family to the experience of group living in an orphanage) is the most important source of our early emotional experiences—both those that affirm our being and those that harm us psychologically—because it is in the family that our sense of self and our way of relating to others are first established. However, psychoanalytic theory is more interested in understanding the origin of psychological problems rather than the origin of psychological strengths because this theory wants to offer ways of overcoming psychological problems. And it is important to remember that, for psychoanalytic theory, we all have

psychological problems of some sort because we have all had some harmful emotional experiences growing up, regardless of how loving our family might be. In other words, having psychological problems is part of being human.

3.2.2. The Unconscious and Repression

When we look at the world through a psychoanalytic lens, we see that it is comprised of individual human beings, each with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behavior that are the direct result of that early experience. Because the goal of psychoanalysis is to help us resolve our psychological problems, often called disorders or dysfunctions (and none of us is completely free of psychological problems), the focus is on patterns of behavior that are destructive in some way. In fact, it is our not knowing about a problem—or, if we do know we have a problem, not realizing when it is influencing our behavior—that gives it so much control over us. For this reason, we must begin our discussion with the concept central to all psychoanalytic thinking: the existence of the unconscious. The notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware—that is, unconscious—was one of Sigmund Freud's most radical insights, and it still governs classical psychoanalysis today.

The unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them. The unconscious comes into being when we are very young through the repression of these unhappy psychological events. However, repression doesn't eliminate our painful experiences and emotions. We unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to "play out," our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress. Thus, for psychoanalysis the unconscious is a dynamic entity that engages us at the deepest level of our being.

3.2.3. The Defenses

The defenses are the means by which we keep ourselves from becoming conscious of the experiences we've repressed. Many of our defenses develop during our childhood as ways of protecting ourselves emotionally. However, as we grow older our defenses become more destructive than helpful because they keep us from understanding—and therefore from healing—our own psychological wounds. The most common defenses include the following.

- Denial—We are in denial when we believe that an emotionally painful situation doesn't exist or an emotionally painful event never occurred.
- Avoidance—We are practicing avoidance when we stay away from people, places, or situations that might stir up the memory of repressed experiences.
- Displacement—We are displacing when we take out our negative feelings about one person on someone else so that we can relieve our pain or anger without becoming aware of the real cause of our repressed feelings.
- Projection—We are projecting when we believe, without real cause, that someone else feels the same way we feel, specifically that someone else has the problem we want to deny that we, ourselves, have. Once we project our problem onto someone else, we can then attack that person (in thought, word, or deed) for having the problem in order to prove to ourselves that we don't have it.

3.3. Core Issue

Whether or not we realize it, we all have at least one core issue (also called core conflict). A core issue is a psychological problem that is the underlying cause of some sort of recurring self-destructive behavior, whether that behavior is something as seemingly mild as being habitually late for important appointments (for example, job interviews!) or something as serious as being habitually involved with abusive romantic partners. While most of us have experienced, on occasion, the

problems listed below, they are considered core issues only if they are responsible for most or all of the emotional difficulties we have as adults. Examples of core issues include, among others, the following.

3.3.1. Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem is the unwarranted belief that we are less worthy than other human beings and, therefore, don't deserve attention, love, or any other form of life's rewards. In fact, we often believe we deserve to be punished by life in some way.

3.3.2. Insecure or unstable sense of self

Our sense of self is insecure or unstable if we are unable to sustain a feeling of personal identity, unable to sustain a sense of knowing ourselves. This core issue makes us very vulnerable to the influence— for good or ill—of other people, and we may have a tendency to repeatedly change the way we look (our clothing, hairstyle, and the like) or behave as we become involved with different individuals or groups.

3.3.3. Fear of Abandonment

Fear of abandonment is the unwarranted nagging belief that our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don't really care about us (emotional abandonment). Sometimes fear of abandonment expresses itself as fear of betrayal, the unwarranted nagging belief that our friends and loved ones can't be trusted: for example, can't be trusted not to laugh at us behind our backs or not to lie to us, or, in the case of romantic partners, can't be trusted not to cheat on us by dating others.

3.3.4. Oedipal Fixation (or oedipal complex)

A dysfunctional bond with a parent of the opposite sex that we don't outgrow in adulthood and that doesn't allow us to develop mature relationships with our peers.

3.4 Dream Symbolism

Unlike most other critical theories, psychoanalytic theory has its own system of symbols that can be of use especially if we are interpreting a literary work as if it were a dream (which we will

do later in this chapter when we interpret Emily Dickinson's poem "I started Early—Took my Dog"). For psychoanalytic theory, certain objects tend to have symbolic meaning for most human beings, whether we are aware of this meaning or not, and these symbols often show up in our dreams. The most common symbols include the following.

3.4.1. Water

Water can symbolize the unconscious, the emotions, and/or sexuality (which may or may not include reproduction)—all of which are, like water, fluid (without fixed form), often unpredictable, and frequently deeper than we may realize.

3.4.2. Buildings

Usually, buildings symbolize the self, as if our body were the "building" in which we lived.

3.4.3. Basements

Because buildings usually symbolize the self, basements are often associated with the unconscious as the place where we repress unpleasant memories. (Both basements and the unconscious keep things below the surface.)

3.4.4. Attics

Analogously, attics are often associated with the intellect or the conscious mind, though in some dreams (especially dreams in which there are no basements), attics can, themselves, symbolize the unconscious as the place where we repress unpleasant memories. (We store things out of sight in attics just as we keep them below the surface in basements, in other words, just as we repress unpleasant memories in the unconscious.)

3.4.5. Male Imagery

Male imagery consists primarily of phallic symbols, for example, towers, guns, serpents, swords, or anything that can be associated with the penis. (If it stands upright, goes off, or has a serpentine form, it might be a phallic symbol.)

3.4.6. Female Imagery

Most frequently, female imagery consists of anything that can be associated with the womb, for example, caves, walled-in gardens, or containers.

3.5 The Relation between Basic Concept, Core Issue, and Dream.

Of course, there are so many factors affecting our emotional development at any given point in our youth that different individuals can respond to similar family situations in very different ways. Nevertheless, for psychoanalytic theory the relationship among the basic concepts discussed earlier can be expressed in a formula that goes something like this.

- A distressing event or situation that occurs in our youth is repressed into our unconscious because we don't feel we can face it consciously.
- We keep that repressed experience buried in our unconscious through the use of the defenses.
- If the experience buried in our unconscious affects us powerfully enough, it will become a core issue—that is, a fundamental part of our personality that determines many of our feelings and a good deal of our behavior.
- Core issues, especially when we remain unaware of them, result in the repetition of certain self-destructive behaviors and may show up in the recurrence of disturbing dreams.

3.6. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

3.6.1. Background

The story of a woman who murders her suitor and sleeps with his corpse in her bed, as Miss Emily Grierson does in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931), seems a likely candidate for psychoanalytic theory. For it would be an understatement to say that Emily, the story's main character, exhibits dysfunctional behavior. Indeed, Faulkner's tale offers us a portrait of a woman who goes insane. The first question many readers ask, once they realize that Emily poisons Homer Barron with the arsenic she

purchases from the druggist, is why Emily commits this murder. And the answer many readers give is that Emily kills Homer because he plans to leave her. She expects him to marry her—that's why she buys him the monogrammed, silver toilet articles (personal grooming articles, such as hairbrushes) and arranges her bedroom like a bridal suite—so it's reasonable to conclude that he must have refused to marry her. Fine. That explanation works.

But what does it really tell us about Emily? Many people have disappointments like hers without resorting to murder. And how do we explain her keeping Homer's body in her bed and, over the years, sleeping with the corpse, as indicated in the closing description of Emily's gray hair on the indented pillow next to Homer's head? Finally, how do we explain her other unhealthy behavior, such as her determination to completely isolate herself from the community and her desire to live in the past, a desire evident in her reference to the long-dead Colonel Sartoris as if he were still alive and in her refusal to allow her house to be numbered for home mail-delivery? Again, there is a simple answer: Emily is crazy. After all, her great-aunt Wyatt was crazy, and perhaps insanity runs in the Grierson family. But, again, that answer tells us very little about Emily.

3.6.2. Emily's Core Issues

▪ **Fear of Abandonment**

What happens to Emily that could give her such an extreme fear of abandonment that she murders Homer and keeps his body? Well, in addition to the fact that Emily apparently lost her mother at a young age, her father keeps her isolated (which must feel like being abandoned by the whole town), and then he abandons her, himself, by dying. Find the evidence in the story that shows how Mr. Grierson keeps Emily from forming ties: with other family members, with members of the community, and with young men.

▪ **Fear of Intimacy**

Emily may or may not want to go out and mix with the community while her father is alive, but it is clear that, after his death, she doesn't want to be with anyone except Homer

Barron. In other words, once her father's death deprives her of the only person she knows, she so fears abandonment that she is afraid to get close to anyone else for fear that she will be abandoned again. This means that her fear of abandonment contributes to her fear of intimacy. How does the story show us Emily's fear of intimacy? List as many examples as you can.

- **Oedipal Fixation**

  How is Homer a stand-in for Emily's father? Despite their differences, the two men have a good deal in common that could make them seem similar in Emily's eyes. Find every example you can of the traits the two men share.

3.6.3. Emily's Defenses

The defenses listed in the "Basic concepts" section of this chapter include denial, avoidance, displacement, and projection. Which defenses do you see operating in Emily? It seems to me that her primary defenses are denial and avoidance.

- **Denial**

  Find in the story all the ways in which Emily is in denial, all the ways in which she just says no to reality. Include, among other evidence, Emily's refusal to release her father's body, the ways in which Emily's personality becomes a good deal like her father's because resembling her dead father is one way of keeping him "alive," itit denying that he is dead, and, Emily's apparent refusal to see any difference between her social class and that of Homer Barron.

- **Avoidance**

  Find in the story all the ways in which Emily practices avoidance—that is, all the ways she finds to stay away from people, places, and situations that might remind her of experiences she wants to forget. Include all the ways in which Emily seems to be trying to live in the past after her father is buried and after Homer's death. For living in the past helps Emily avoid an awareness of whatever current situation she doesn't want to face.

3.6.4. Emily and Her Family

By this point in our discussion of the story, the role of Emily's father in the creation of her core issues is probably fairly obvious to you. Find all the textual evidence you can to support the following claims, each of which relates to all three of Emily's core issues. (You may have collected above some of the evidence you'll need here.) Emily's father does everything he can to isolate her from everyone in her family and in her community. Mr. Grierson puts Emily on a pedestal (no one is good enough for her) and behaves toward her in an overprotective, even jealous manner.

Focusing your essay

Given the textual evidence you've collected, I think you might focus your essay on the ways in which "A Rose for Emily" illustrates the following well known psychoanalytic premise: adults tend to model their romantic relationships on the relationship they had with a parent of the opposite sex. Don't be overwhelmed by all the possible interpretations this story offers. If you like, focus on only one or two main ideas from among all those offered, and develop those one or two ideas as fully as you can. For example, focus just on Emily's fear of abandonment, or focus just on her oedipal fixation. Whatever your interpretation, be sure you understand the psychoanalytic concepts you choose to employ, compose a clear statement of your thesis, and support your interpretation with adequate textual evidence.

3.7 Summary

When we read psychoanalytically, is to see which concepts are operating in the text in such a way as to enrich our understanding of the work and, if we plan to write a paper about it, to yield a meaningful, coherent psychoanalytic interpretation. From the perspective of classical psychoanalytic theory, which is our primary focus in this chapter, we might attend mainly to the work's representation of oedipal dynamics or of family dynamics in general; to what the work can tell us about human beings' psychological relationship to death or to sexuality; to the way the

narrator's unconscious problems keep asserting themselves over the course of the story; or to any other psychoanalytic concepts that seem to produce a useful understanding of the text.

Some critics have objected to the use of psychoanalysis to understand the behaviour of literary characters because literary characters are not real people and, therefore, do not have psyches that can be analyzed. However, psychoanalyzing the behavior of literary characters is probably the best way to learn how to use the theory. Furthermore, this practice has been defended by many psychoanalytic critics on two important grounds: (1) when we psychoanalyze literary characters, we are not suggesting that they are real people but that they represent the psychological experience of human beings in general; and (2) it is just as legitimate to psychoanalyze the behavior represented by literary characters as illustrations of real-life issues.

This might be a good place to pause and answer a frequently asked question concerning psychoanalytic readings of literary works: if we find psychoanalytic concepts operating in a literary text, does it mean that the author has deliberately put them there, and how can an author put them there if he or she lived before Freud or never heard of him? The answer is simple: Freud didn't invent psychoanalytic principles; he discovered them operating in human beings. In other words, Freud named and explained principles of human behavior that were present long before he found them and that would be present even if he didn't describe them. So any literary text that accurately describes human behaviour or that is the product of an author's unconscious (which we presume all creative works are to some extent) will include psychoanalytic principles whether or not the author had any awareness of those principles when writing the work.

For psychoanalysis, literature, and indeed all art forms, are largely products of unconscious forces at work in the author, in the reader, or, for some contemporary psychoanalytic critics, in our society as a whole. Our use of psychoanalytic concepts is not limited to one literary genre or to one artistic medium; we can use

psychoanalytic criticism to read works of fiction, poetry, drama, folklore, and nonfiction, and we can use it to interpret paintings, sculptures, architecture, films, and music. Any human production that involves images, that seems to have narrative content (the way many paintings seem to tell a story), or that relates to the psychology of those who produce or use it (which means just about everything!) can be interpreted using psychoanalytic tools.

3.8. Assignment

Read the Short Story entitled "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner (1931) and answer the following question by including the text evidences and interpretation as the basis of the Psychoanalysis Theory applied.

1. Find the evidence in the story that shows how Emily's fear of abandonment manifests itself during the year after her father's death. Consider, for example, her long illness, her subsequent haircut, which makes her look like a little girl, and the "crayon [chalk] portrait" of her father (where does she keep it?).

2. How does Emily's choice of Homer Barron also show that she fears intimacy? How is Homer characterized as a person who avoids emotional intimacy?

3. Remember, too, that Emily doesn't want the community to bury her father; she wants to keep his body in the house with her. So how is Homer, even after his death, a stand-in for her father?

Chapter 4.

Marxist Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of Marxist theory; fundamental premises of Marxism; basic concepts: classism, capitalism, capitalist ideologies: competition, commodification, the American dream, rugged individualism, the role of religion; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works based on Marxist theory.

4.1. Introduction

Students often ask why we study Marxist criticism now that the Communist Bloc in Europe has failed, thereby proving that Marxism is not a viable theory. In addition to ignoring the existence of China, among other communist countries, such a question overlooks two important facts. First, beyond some

relatively small and relatively short-lived communes, there has never been, as far as we know, a true Marxist society on the face of the earth. Communist societies, though they claim to be based on the principles developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883), have been, in reality, oligarchies in which a small group of leaders controls the money and the guns and forces its policies on a population kept in line through physical intimidation. Second, even if communist countries were true Marxist societies and even if all of them had failed, Marxist theory would still give us a meaningful way to understand history and current events. Indeed, one could use Marxism to interpret the failure of Marxist regimes. However, before we can attempt a Marxist interpretation of such political events, or of events of any kind, we must first, of course, understand Marxist theory.

4.2. Fundamental Premises of Marxism

What exactly is Marxist theory? For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ ideological realities is built. Economic power therefore always includes social and political power as well, which is why many Marxists today refer to socioeconomic class, rather than economic class, when talking about the class structure. In Marxist terminology, economic conditions are referred to as material circumstances, and the social/political/ideological atmosphere generated by material conditions is called the historical situation. For the Marxist critic, neither human events (in the political or personal domain) nor human productions (from nuclear submarines to television shows) can be understood without understanding the specific material/historical circumstances in which those events and productions occur. That is, all human events and productions have specific material/historical causes. An accurate picture of human affairs cannot be obtained by the search for abstract, timeless essences or

principles but only by understanding concrete conditions in the world. Therefore, Marxist analysis of human events and productions focuses on relationships among socioeconomic.

From a Marxist perspective, differences in socioeconomic class divide people in ways that are much more significant than differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. For the real battle lines are drawn, to put the matter simply, between the "haves" and the "have-nots," between the bourgeoisie—those who control the world's natural, economic, and human resources—and the proletariat, the majority of the global population who live in substandard conditions and who have always performed the manual labor—the mining, the factory work, the ditch digging, the railroad building—that fills the coffers of the rich. Unfortunately, those in the proletariat are often the last to recognize this fact; they usually permit differences in religion, race, ethnicity, or gender to separate them into warring factions that accomplish little or no social change. Few Marxists today believe, as Marx did, that the proletariat will one day spontaneously. develop the class consciousness needed to rise up in violent revolution against their oppressors and create a classless society. However, were the proletariat of any given country to act as a group, regardless of their differences (for example, were they all to vote for the same political candidates, boycott the same companies, and go on strike until their needs were met), the current power structure would be radically altered.

4.3. Basic Concept

Note that the basic concepts listed below are all examples of socioeconomic ideologies that have existed for centuries and in which many people believe today. Marxism didn't invent these ideologies. Rather, Marxism opposes them. For according to Marxist theory, each of these ideologies fosters a socioeconomic hierarchy that grants enormous wealth and power to a relatively small number of people at the top of the socioeconomic ladder, prevents a large number of people from escaping the poverty in which they are trapped at the bottom of the ladder, and keeps

those on the middle rungs—if there are any middle rungs—at the financial mercy of such unpredictable occurrences as increased taxes and the rising costs of healthcare, education, and housing. Therefore, the definition of each socioeconomic ideology listed below is followed by a Marxist description of that ideology's flaws.

For Marxism, an ideology is a belief system, and all belief systems are products of cultural conditioning. For example, capitalism, communism, Marxism, patriotism, religion, ethical systems, humanism, environmentalism, astrology, and karate are all ideologies. The critical theories we will study in this book are all ideologies. Even our assumption that nature behaves according to the laws of science is an ideology. However, although almost any experience or field of study we can think of has an ideological component, not all ideologies are equally productive or desirable. Undesirable ideologies promote repressive political agendas and, in order to ensure their acceptance among the citizenry, pass themselves off as natural ways of seeing the world instead of acknowledging themselves as ideologies. "It's natural for men to hold leadership positions because their biological superiority renders them more physically, intellectually, and emotionally capable than women" is a sexist ideology that sells itself as a function of nature, rather than as a product of cultural belief. "Every family wants to own its own home on its own land" is a capitalist ideology that sells itself as natural by pointing, for example, to the fact that almost all Americans want to own their own property, without acknowledging that this desire is created in us by the capitalist culture in which we live.

From a Marxist perspective, the role of ideology in maintaining those in power is so important that we should briefly examine a few more examples so that we can see how it works. Classism, for example, is an ideology that equates one's value as a human being with the social class to which one belongs: the higher one's social class, the better one is assumed to be because quality is "in the blood," that is, inborn. From a classist perspective, people at the top of the social scale are naturally superior to those below them: those at the top are more

intelligent, more responsible, more trustworthy, more ethical, and so on. People at the bottom of the social scale, it follows, are naturally shiftless, lazy, and irresponsible. Therefore, it is only right and natural that those from the highest social class should hold all the positions of power and leadership because they are naturally suited to such roles and are the only ones who can be trusted to perform them properly.

4.3.1. Classism

Classism is the belief that our value as human beings is directly related to the social class to which we belong: the higher our social class, the higher our natural, or inborn superiority. It is only right and proper, classists believe, that those in the highest class should assume leadership roles, for they are, by birth, more intelligent, honorable, energetic, and dependable than those beneath them on the social scale. Analogously, classist ideology tells us that people born into the lowest class have, by birth, a greater tendency to be slow-witted, dishonorable, lazy, and undependable. In traditional classist societies, social class is determined by birth and cannot be changed by the accumulation or loss of wealth because class superiority or inferiority is believed to be "in the blood"—that is, determined by the class to which our parents belong.

Marxist theory, in contrast, rejects the idea that the social class into which we are born determines our superiority or inferiority as human beings. All our class standing determines is whether we'll be socially advantaged or disadvantaged. In other words, Marxist theory considers classism unfair and unwise because it grants privileges to a small segment of the population and withholds privileges from a large segment of the population without regard for individual merit. And unfortunately, classist ideology is hard to defeat It has become increasingly difficult in the United States to clearly place people either in the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. How do we classify, for example, the person who employs several workers in a small, family-owned business but whose yearly profits are less than the annual wages of a salesperson working for a big corporation? In other words, in this

country at least, some workers earn more than some owners. To complicate matters further, the words bourgeoisie (noun) and bourgeois (adjective) have come to refer in everyday speech to the middle class in general, with no distinction between owners and wage earners. At this point in history, therefore, it might be more useful to classify Americans according to socioeconomic lifestyle, without reference to the manner in which their income is acquired.

Whether or not we would agree on which individuals belong to the bourgeoisie and which to the proletariat, most of us can observe the striking difference in socioeconomic lifestyle among the following groups: the homeless, who have few, if any, material possessions and little hope of improvement; the poor, whose limited educational and career opportunities keep them struggling to support their families and living in fear of becoming homeless; the financially established, who own nice homes and cars and can usually afford to send their children to college; the well-to-do, who can afford two or more expensive homes, several cars, and luxury items; and the extremely wealthy, such as the owners of large, well-established corporations, for whom money (mansions, limousines, personal airplanes, yachts) is no problem whatsoever. We might loosely refer to these five groups as America's underclass, lower class, middle class, upper class, and "aristocracy."

4.3.2. Capitalism

As we saw earlier, the word capital means money. So capitalism is a system in which everything—every object, every activity, every person—can be defined in terms of its worth in money, its "going rate" on a specific market. Because the market (the availability of and demand for a given product) is considered the best regulator of a product's monetary worth, capitalist governments tend to avoid regulating business profits. Industries are therefore left in private hands.

Marxist theory suggests, however, that unregulated business profits tend to promote what might be called an ethics of greed, according to which the only virtue, or the only virtue

anyone really wants to cultivate, is the virtue of making the most money. For only an ethics of greed could permit the kinds of huge profits enjoyed, for example, by the large American pharmaceutical companies, which have resulted in the inability of most Americans who become ill, especially who become chronically ill, to pay for their medication without prescription insurance, which most Americans don't yet have. Marxist theory can point to many examples of the destructive nature of capitalism's promotion of greed, including the squeezing out, by large chain stores, of the small, independent businesses that used to be so numerous in the United States and the rapidly rising cost of many necessities, in addition to prescription drugs, beyond the easy reach of many people in the United States and throughout the world: hospitalization and other healthcare services.

4.3.3. Capitalist ideologies

Competition—Capitalism believes that competition among individuals—competition for jobs, for pay raises, for customers, for loans, for awards, and so forth—is the best way to promote a strong society because competition ensures that the most capable, most intelligent people will rise to the top. In contrast, Marxist theory suggests that unrestrained competition is oppressive because it tends to ensure that the most selfish, unethical people will rise to the top, as they're the ones willing to do whatever it takes to win. The result is that the needs of the community as a whole are usually overlooked, and the needs of those least willing or able to compete are usually sacrificed entirely. That is, competition emphasizes the importance of the individual—"me, me, me"—instead of the group. In addition, it's difficult to confine the spirit of competition to the school or the workplace. We tend to bring it home with us and become competitive in our personal lives, as well, getting unduly upset if we don't win the Scrabble game or if our child doesn't win the spelling contest or if our furniture isn't as new as our neighbor's.

Commodification—A commodity is anything that has a price tag. Because capitalism defines everything in terms of its monetary worth, it encourages commodification. That is, it

encourages us to relate to things and people as commodities. We commodify something when we relate to it in terms of how much money it's worth, or put another way, how much money it can be exchanged for (its exchange value). When we buy something with a high price tag, we acquire social status, so we also commodify something when we relate to it in terms of the social status its ownership gives us (its sign exchange value). For example, I commodify the man I'm dating if I go out with him because he spends a great deal of money on me, in which case I'm dating him for his exchange value. Also, I commodify him if I go out with him to impress my friends, in which case I'm dating him for his sign-exchange value.

The American Dream—The American Dream is a capitalist ideology associated specifically with American history and culture. According to the ideology of the American Dream, anyone who has the determination to work hard enough and the persistence to work long enough can rise from "rags to riches" because America is the land of equal opportunity for all. Marxist theory points out, however, that our belief in the American Dream blinds us to the reality that a vast number of people have not had and do not have equal opportunity in education, employment, or housing due to such factors as, for example, their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class.

Rugged individualism—The American Dream has fostered the ideology of rugged individualism, which holds up for our admiration the example of the individual who strikes out alone in pursuit of a goal not easily achieved, for example, the goal of undertaking an untried, high-risk line of business, in which attempt one could lose all one's money, or rushing for gold on the American frontier, in which attempt one could lose one's life

The Role of Religion- For many people, religion is a source of spiritual strength and moral guidance. And Martin Luther King has shown us that the church can function as a powerful force against political oppression when parishioners organize for that purpose. Marxist theory observes, however, that religion too often plays a role in oppressing the poor. One of the

best-known Marxist sayings is that "religion is the opiate of the masses." This means that religion acts as a kind of drug that keeps poor people quiet. Belief in God is not the issue here. Rather, the issue is what is done in the name of organized religion to keep the poor oppressed. For example, white plantation owners in the pre-Civil-War American south used the Bible to justify slavery. And religious belief has long been used to keep poor people satisfied in the knowledge that they'll get their reward in heaven, thus keeping the poor from rebelling against those who oppress them.

4.4. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

4.4.1. Background

America was founded on the belief that human beings should not be bound by a class system that keeps sons and daughters chained to the same profession, and therefore the same socioeconomic class, as their parents. Nevertheless, at different times and places in American history, the traditional class system— according to which one's family name, one's ancestry, is one's defining characteristic—has been the factor that determines one's social class and therefore one's social standing in the community. We see the remnants of this kind of traditional class system operating in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931). The death of Mr. Grierson reveals that he has lost his fortune and that his daughter Emily, the story's main character, will not inherit the money the family once had. Nevertheless, the town of Jefferson still considers Emily a member of the upper class because, as a Grierson, she can trace her lineage back to one of the big plantation families who ruled the South before the Civil War. In order to determine how the story wants us to respond to the classism it portrays—in order to determine if the story promotes or attacks classist ideology—we must determine the story's attitude toward that ideology. So: (1) let's take a look at each example of classist behavior portrayed in the story and see whether the effects of that behavior are positive or negative; and (2) given that classism is an ideology that promotes the belief in the superiority of members of the upper class, we will also check

to see if the text paints a positive or negative portrait of its upper-class characters.

Mr. Grierson's classism—The Grierson family belongs to the upper stratum of southern society occupied by the wealthy plantation owners before the Civil War, from whom they are descended. In contrast, the rest of the town belongs to the middle and lower classes. Mr. Grierson's classism is visible in his refusal to let Emily mingle with those he considers her social inferiors: because the only young people available are "beneath her," he doesn't allow her to have boyfriends or friends of any kind. Also, it is logical to assume that another reason for his keeping Emily isolated is that he doesn't want anyone to know that he has lost his fortune. If Emily mixed in the social life of the town, she would need a wardrobe befitting her station. If she married, a dowry and wedding finery would be required. Mr. Grierson cannot afford such expenditures, but his classism has fostered a personal pride that won't let him reveal the truth of his circumstance to those beneath him. Because he believes in the superiority of the upper class, he needs to maintain the illusion. Find the evidence in the story that reveals Mr. Grierson's classism.

The community's classism—The white community in which Emily lives apparently consists of middle-class and working-class people. Their attitude toward Emily is conflicted: at times they respect her social rank or sympathize with her situation; at times they seem jealous and are glad to see her brought down a peg or two. But both their favorable and unfavorable feelings about Emily result from their classism, from their belief that she is somehow superior to them because she is a member of the upper class. Find all the evidence in the story you can to illustrate the community's classism.

Focusing your essay-Based on the work we've done so far, I think you might safely focus your essay on the ways in which "A Rose for Emily" illustrates the damaging effects of classism. For it seems we can reasonably argue that classist ideology harms all of the story's main characters. Classism isolates both Mr. Grierson and Emily from the rest of the community. Classism deprives

Emily of the chance to develop the interpersonal skills she needs to make a life for herself after her father's death. In fact, we might say that, given the extreme degree of Emily's isolation, classism helps drive her mad. Classism very probably plays a role in Homer Barron's death, both because it is probably his classist attitude toward social rank that inspired him to court her and because Emily's classist pride is probably a factor in her decision to kill him rather than let him humiliate her by deserting her.

4.6. Summary

For Marxism, literature does not exist in some timeless, aesthetic realm as an object to be passively contemplated. Rather, like all cultural manifestations, it is a product of the socioeconomic and hence ideological conditions of the time and place in which it was written, whether or not the author intended it so. Because human beings are themselves products of their socioeconomic and ideological environment, it is assumed that authors cannot help but create works that embody ideology in some form. The fact that literature grows out of and reflects real material/historical conditions creates at least two possibilities of interest to Marxist critics: (1) the literary work might tend to reinforce in the reader the ideologies it embodies, or (2) it might invite the reader to criticize the ideologies it represents. Many texts do both. And it is not merely the content of a literary work—the "action" or the theme—that carries ideology, but the form as well or, as most Marxists would argue, the form primarily. Realism, naturalism, surrealism, symbolism, romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, tragedy, comedy, satire, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, and other genres and literary devices are the means by which form is constituted. If content is the "what" of literature, then form is the "how."

Realism, for example, gives us characters and plot as if we were looking through a window onto an actual scene taking place before our eyes. Our attention is drawn not to the nature of the words on the page but to the action those words convey. Indeed, we frequently forget about the words we're reading and the way

the narrative is structured as we "get lost" in the story. Part of the reason we don't notice the language and structure, the form, is because the action represented is ordered in a coherent sequence that invites us to relate to it much as we relate to the events in our own lives, and the characters it portrays are believable, much like people we might meet. So we get "pulled into" the story. In contrast, a good deal of postmodern literature (and nonrealistic, experimental literature of any kind) is written in a fragmented, surreal style that seems to defy our understanding and serves to distance or estrange us from the narrative and the characters it portrays. For some Marxists, realism is the best form for Marxist purposes because it clearly and accurately represents the real world, with all its socioeconomic inequities and ideological contradictions, and encourages readers to see the unhappy truths about material/historical reality, for whether or not authors intend it they are bound to represent socioeconomic inequities and ideological contradictions if they accurately represent the real world. Marxist fans of realist fiction often have been inclined to reject nonrealistic, experimental fiction for being inaccessible to the majority of readers and for being too exclusively concerned with the inner workings of an individual mind rather than with the individual's relationship to society. However, many Marxists value nonrealistic, experimental fiction because the fragmentation of experience it represents and the estrangement the reader often experiences constitute a critique of the fragmented world and the alienated human beings produced by capitalism in today's world.

4. 7. Assignment

1. Emily's classism—As the young Emily is growing up, she may or may not share her father's belief that she is too good for the town. By the time he dies, however, it seems clear that she has internalized his classist ideology. Find all the evidence you can in the story to illustrate Emily's classism. Include, for example, the ways in which she acts like a member of a "superior" class (for instance, "china-painting"— painting designs on china

dishes— was considered a pastime of refined young ladies), and her snobbish contempt for almost everyone in town, including the town's leading citizens. Why would a classist like Emily allow Homer Barron, a man from a lower social class, to court her? Might she think that her social rank requires an escort and, having no social experience whatsoever, might Emily feel more comfortable with a man to whom she feels superior? The text doesn't give us explicit evidence with which to answer this question. Can you come up with a reasonable speculation related to social class that doesn't contradict textual data? What evidence is there in the story that Emily believes she can give Homer the appearance of being from a higher class than the one to which he belongs? If Emily thought Homer was going to.

2. The portrayal of the upper class A story that gives us Mr. Grierson, Emily Grierson, Emily's cousins from Alabama, and old lady Wyatt and her heirs as its only representatives of the upper class is not painting an attractive portrait of that class. These very negative characterizations—which make the ordinary townsfolk seem fairly harmless by comparison— insure that the story is not endorsing the classism it illustrates. List all the negative traits "A Rose for Emily" ascribes to the following upper-class characters:
   a. Mr. Grierson,
   b. Emily Grierson,
   c. Emily's cousins from Alabama, and
   d. old lady Wyatt and her heirs.

Chapter 5.

Feminist Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of feminist theory; basic concepts: traditional gender roles, the objectification of women, sexism, the "cult of 'true womanhood'"; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works based on feminist theory.

5.1. Introduction

Broadly defined, feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. However, just as the practitioners of all critical theories do, feminist critics hold many different opinions on all of the issues their discipline examines. In fact, some feminists call their field feminisms in order to

underscore the multiplicity of points of view of its adherents and offer ways of thinking that oppose the traditional tendency to believe there is a single best point of view. Yet many of us who are new to the study of feminist theory, both male and female, have decided ahead of time that we are not feminists because we don't share whatever feminist point of view we have found the most objectionable. In other words, before we even come to the theory classroom, many of us have reduced feminism to whatever we consider its most objectionable element and, on that basis, have rejected it. This attitude reveals, I think, the oversimplified, negative view of feminism that still persists in American culture today. For it is from the culture at large—the home, the workplace, the media, and so on—that we have gathered the antifeminist bias we sometimes bring into the classroom.

To see how this negative oversimplification works to blind us to the seriousness of the issues feminism raises, let's briefly examine one of the most maligned feminist claims: that we should not use the masculine pronoun he to represent both men and women. For many people, this claim suggests what they see as the trivial, even infantile, nature of feminist demands. What possible difference could it make if we continue to use the "inclusive he" to refer to members of both sexes? We know what we mean when we do it: it's simply a convention of language that includes both males and females. Such people believe that feminists should just concentrate on getting women an equal crack at the dough and forget all this nonsense about pronouns! For many feminists, however, the use of the pronoun he to refer to members of both sexes reflects and perpetuates a "habit of seeing," a way of looking at life, that uses male experience as the standard by which the experience of both sexes is evaluated. In other words, although the "inclusive he" claims to represent both men and women, in reality it is part of a deeply rooted cultural attitude that ignores women's experiences and blinds us to women's points of view. The damaging effects of this attitude can be seen in a number of areas.

For example, before the centuries-old struggle for women's equality finally emerged in literary studies in the late 1960s, the

literary works of (white) male authors describing experience from a (white) male point of view was considered the standard of universality—that is, representative of the experience of all readers—and universality was considered a major criterion of greatness. Because the works of (white) female authors (and of all authors of color) do not describe experience from a (white) male point of view, they were not considered universal and hence did not become part of the literary canon. It is interesting to note that popularity was not necessarily considered evidence of universality, for many women writers who enjoyed widespread fame during their lives were not "canonized" in literary histories, which focused primarily on male writers. Of course, those holding up this standard of greatness did not believe they were being unfairly discriminatory; they simply believed that they were rejecting literary texts that were not universal, that were not great. Even when (white) women authors began to appear more frequently in the canon and on college syllabi in the mid-1970s, they were not represented on an equal basis with (white) male authors.

5.2. Basic Concepts

Note that the basic concepts listed here are all examples of patriarchal ideologies that have existed for centuries and that are considered right and proper by many people. Feminism didn't invent these ideologies. Rather, feminism opposes them. For according to feminist theory, these ideologies are responsible for the oppression of women throughout the world and for the failure of most women and men to live up to their full human potential. Therefore, the definition of each patriarchal ideology is followed by feminist theory's argument against it.

5.2.1. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is thus, by definition, sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of women is a form of what is called biological essentialism because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging

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essence as men and women. A striking illustration is the word hysteria, which derives from the Greek word for womb (hystera) and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by overemotional, extremely irrational behavior. Feminists don't deny the biological differences between men and women; in fact, many feminists celebrate those differences. But they don't agree that such differences as physical size, shape, and body chemistry make men naturally superior to women: for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders. Feminism therefore distinguishes between the word sex, which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine. In other words, women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine. Rather, these gender categories are constructed by society, which is why this view of gender is an example of what has come to be called social constructionism.

5.2.2. Traditional Gender Roles

I offer the above examples up front because I think they show some of the ways in which all of us have been programmed to see (or to be blind), myself included. I consider myself a recovering patriarchal woman. By patriarchal woman I mean, of course, a woman who has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, which can be defined, in short, as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world), paying men higher wages than women for doing the same job (if women are even able to obtain the job), and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as mathematics and engineering. Many people today believe such inequities are a thing of the past because anti discriminatory laws

have been passed, such as the law that guarantees women equal pay for equal work. However, these laws are frequently side-stepped. For example, an employer can pay a woman less for performing the same work as a man (or for doing more work than a man) simply by giving her a different job title. So women still are paid roughly between fifty-five and eighty cents, depending on their ethnicity and age, for every dollar earned by men.

5.2.3. The objectification of women

From a patriarchal perspective, women who adhere to traditional gender roles are considered "good girls." They are put on pedestals and idealized as pure, angelic creatures whose sense of self consists mainly or entirely of their usefulness to their husbands, fathers, or brothers. In contrast, women who violate traditional gender roles are thought of as "bad girls," especially if they violate the rules of sexual conduct for patriarchal women, such as dressing or behaving in a manner that could be considered sexually provocative. Patriarchal men sleep with and then discard "bad girls"—who are relegated to the role of sex objects—but they marry "good girls" because only a "good girl" is considered worthy of bearing a man's name and children.

Feminist theory points out, however, that both "good girls" and "bad girls" are objectified by patriarchy. That is, they are not viewed as independent human beings with their own goals, needs, and desires. Rather, they are evaluated only in terms of their usefulness to patriarchal men. They are viewed only as patriarchal objects. If you consider again the examples of patriarchal stereotypes listed earlier, you'll see that they all fall under the "good girl"/"bad girl" categorization of women. Virginal angels and selfless nurturers are examples of patriarchal "good girls"; nags, gossips, seductresses, and "bitches" are examples of patriarchal "bad girls." So even those patriarchal stereotypes that appear to be "positive," such as virginal angels and selfless nurturers, are damaging because they reduce women to their roles as patriarchal objects and suggest that "good" women aspire to nothing else.

5.2.4. Sexism

Patriarchy is based on sexism, which is the belief that women are innately (that is, by nature) inferior to men: less intelligent, less rational, less courageous, and so forth. For this reason, sexist individuals believe that traditional gender roles—which cast men as decision-makers and women as dutiful followers—are right and natural because men's innate superiority dictates that they should be in charge, not only in the family but in business, politics, and all other important social institutions. Although in everyday language the term sexist is usually reserved for a person who expresses his or her patriarchal beliefs with particular arrogance, self-righteousness, or anger, the term really applies to any person who holds sexist beliefs as well as to any practice, policy, or custom that disadvantages women only because they are women. Thus the terms patriarchal and sexist are more or less synonymous, although the term sexist is usually considered insulting while, at least for patriarchal men and women, the term patriarchal is not.

In order to oppose sexism, many feminist thinkers differentiate between our sex, which is our biological makeup as female or male (for example, our sex organs and body chemistry), and our gender, which is our cultural programming as feminine or masculine (for example, our behaving as "sweet programming as feminine or masculine (for example, our behaving as "sweet little things" or "macho-men"). Feminism argues that while we may be born female or male, we are not born feminine or masculine. Rather, it is society that decides which behaviors are considered feminine, and therefore appropriate only to females, and which behaviors are considered masculine, and therefore appropriate only to males. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in her groundbreaking book, The Second Sex (1949), "One is not born a woman; one becomes one." In short, women wear pointy shoes with high heels not because they have pointy feet and need help reaching the top shelf of the cupboard, but because patriarchy tells them such footwear is feminine. And such footwear is considered feminine because, among other things, it makes women less

mobile than men and therefore, in appearance at least, less able to compete.

5.2.5. The "cult of 'true womanhood'"

In the nineteenth century, Victorian patriarchy promoted the "cult of 'true womanhood," which idealized what it called the "true woman," a concept that still influences patriarchal thinking today. The "true woman," who fulfilled her patriarchal gender role in every way, was defined as fragile, submissive, and sexually pure. Her proper sphere was the home; she would not venture beyond that sphere because to do so would be considered unwomanly. Women who had these characteristics were idealized and considered worthy of every form of masculine protection and gallantry. Today, this feminine ideal survives in, for example, various versions of the "helpless female," whose abilities are limited to such "womanly" domains as the cultivation of personal beauty, cooking, and home fashions and who makes men feel, in contrast, capable, powerful, and in control.

As African American feminists have pointed out, however, the Victorian definition of the "true woman" excluded African American women and poor women of all races whose survival required hard physical labor and who, because their jobs took them out of the home, were vulnerable to rape and to sexual exploitation in the workplace. In other words, a woman whose racial or economic situation forced her to perform physical labor and made her the victim of sexual predators was considered unwomanly and therefore unworthy of protection from those who exploited her. Also, because the "cult of 'true womanhood' originated as a white cultural ideal, women of color, no matter how feminine their attire or behavior, were generally devalued, if not entirely excluded from the definition, on racial grounds. Today, the survival of this kind of feminine ideal excludes poor women of all races whose survival requires them to be tough, assertive, or in any way "unfeminine." Such women are often stereotyped as loud, brassy, promiscuous, and unattractive to men except as sexual objects. And the devaluation of women of color

has persisted wherever the definition of feminine beauty has been based on an Anglo-Saxon ideal.

5.3. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

While I think that we can quickly learn to see how Faulkner's story illustrates patriarchal ideology, it is more difficult for many of us to figure out whether the story wants us to accept or reject that ideology. So let's look at "A Rose for Emily" in two separate steps: (1) we'll examine the ways in which the story illustrates patriarchal ideology; then (2) we'll take the harder step—we'll look at the ways in which the story fails to reject the patriarchal ideology it illustrates. In fact, we'll see that the story endorses the sexist attitudes it portrays. We'll see that "A Rose for Emily" is, therefore, an example of a sexist text.

Don't worry if you find this second step difficult to grasp at first. Just do your best. Collect the evidence from the story you're asked to collect. And trust that future practice using feminist concepts to interpret literature will help you know when a literary work illustrates patriarchy in order to show its flaws—as we saw so clearly in "The Battle Royal"—and when a literary work accepts the patriarchal ideology it illustrates, as we'll see in "A Rose for Emily."

5.3.1. How "A Rose for Emily" illustrates patriarchal ideology

"A Rose for Emily" is set in the town of Jefferson during the decades preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century, and illustrations of Emily Grierson's victimization by patriarchy abound. For example, the patriarchal society depicted in the story dictates that the only acceptable way a young woman like Emily can escape from a selfish, domineering father is through marriage, and there is nothing the town can do about the fact that Mr. Grierson forbids Emily that escape. In fact, apparently no one in Jefferson even thinks about doing something. Because Jefferson's patriarchal culture also holds that a woman of Emily's rank must not work for a living, Emily wouldn't be able to survive financially if she left her father's house without a husband to take care of her. In addition, much of the gossip and speculation about

Emily, which contributes to her isolation, reveals the town's steadfast belief that the only acceptable behavior for a woman is behavior that accords with traditional gender roles. And surely patriarchal ideology contributes to Emily's apparent desperation to have a husband, any husband, and to do anything to keep him. So you could write an essay in which you argued that "A Rose for Emily" illustrates the ways in which patriarchal gender roles victimize women, even to the point of driving them crazy. And that might be a good exercise for you to do at this point. So let's collect the kind of textual evidence described earlier, which you would need in order to write such an essay: (1) Mr. Grierson's patriarchal domination of Emily; (2) the limited options available to Emily due to patriarchal ideology; (3) the ways in which Emily is oppressed by the patriarchal attitudes of the townspeople; and (4) the patriarchal aspects of Emily's relationship with Homer Barron.

5.3.2. Mr. Grierson's patriarchal domination of Emily

Find every example you can of Mr. Grierson's patriarchal domination of his daughter and its negative effects on her. Keep in mind that a father's patriarchal domination of his offspring goes beyond the kind of decisions a parent must make in order to protect and educate a youngster. So you'll be looking for the ways in which Mr. Grierson's decisions about Emily are 1. motivated by his own patriarchal beliefs concerning proper behaviour for a young woman, 2. motivated by his desire to maintain complete control, for a patriarchal man believes it is his right and duty to control the females in his family, 3. destructive to Emily's ability to develop social skills, and 4. destructive to Emily's emotional well-being. Keep in mind that Mr. Grierson's domination of Emily continues well into her adulthood: she is around thirty years old when he dies.

5.4. Summary

So far, we've examined how patriarchal ideology works to keep women and men in traditional gender roles and thereby maintain male dominance. That patriarchal ideology functions in

this way is a belief shared by all feminists even if they disagree about other issues. In fact, feminists share several important assumptions, which might be summarized as follows.

- Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so.
- In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is objectified and marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values, defined by what she (allegedly) lacks and that men (allegedly) have.
- All of Western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, as we see, for example, in the numerous patriarchal women and female monsters of Greek and Roman literature and mythology; the patriarchal interpretation of the biblical Eve as the origin of sin and death in the world; the representation of woman as a non-rational creature by traditional Western philosophy; and the reliance on phallogocentric thinking (thinking that is male oriented in its vocabulary, rules of logic, and criteria for what is considered objective knowledge) by educational, political, legal, and business institutions. As we saw earlier, even the development of the Western canon of great literature, including traditional fairy tales, was a product of patriarchal ideology.
- While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine). That is, for most English-speaking feminists, the word gender refers not to our anatomy but to our behaviour as socially programmed men and women. I behave "like a woman" (for example, submissively) not because it is natural for me to do so but because I was taught to do so. In fact, all the traits we associate with masculine and feminine behavior are learned, not inborn.
- All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting women's equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of activism, although the word is usually applied to feminist activity that directly promotes social change

through political activity such as public demonstrations, boycotts, voter education and registration, the provision of hotlines for rape victims and shelters for abused women, and the like. Although frequently falsely portrayed in opposition to "family values," feminists continue to lead the struggle for better family policies such as nutrition and health care for mothers and children; parental leave; and high-quality, affordable day care.

- Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not.

Of course, the assumptions listed above are related, overlapping ideas, and, together, they imply that patriarchal ideology has a pervasive, deeply rooted influence on the way we think, speak, see ourselves, and view the world in which we live. The pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology raises some important questions for feminist theory. For example, if patriarchal ideology influences our identity and experience so strongly, how can we ever get beyond it? If our modes of thinking and our language are patriarchal, how can we ever think or speak differently? In other words, if the fabric of our existence is patriarchal, how can we ever become nonpatriarchal?

5.5. Assignment

1. Emily's limited options What kinds of patriarchal limitations would probably be encountered by an impoverished upper-class white woman living in a small town in the American south during the decades preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century? Many of these limitations are illustrated or implied in the story, and these limitations would exist even if Emily were not under her father's thumb. List the ways in which Emily's options are limited in terms of the following: Choice of vocation (ways of earning a living); Choice of hobbies or leisure activities; Choice of friends; Marital options (the option of remaining unmarried as well as the option of

choosing whatever kind of husband she wants).

2. The patriarchal attitudes of the townspeople. Find as many examples as you can of the towns people's patriarchal attitudes, especially those attitudes that adversely affect Emily. Find those places in the story where the townsfolk talk about Emily in terms of her marriageability (for example, her prospects of finding a husband and the reasons for her failure to find one by a "reasonable" age), which the townsfolk apparently consider a woman's most important quality. Find references in the story to Emily's attitude toward housekeeping and hospitality, two other feminine domains in which she fails to fulfill her traditional role, as the towns people are well aware. Find as much evidence as you can that the town's people seem obsessed with the ups and downs of Homer's courtship of Emily, especially with Emily's failure to conform to the traditional behaviour expected of an unmarried lady, which failure includes her assumed descent to the status of "fallen woman" (a woman who has sexual relations before marriage).

3. How might the towns folk's firm belief in traditional gender roles be responsible for their inability to see the rather obvious connection among Emily's purchase of arsenic, the unexpected disappearance of Homer, and the horrible smell coming from her house shortly thereafter?

Chapter 6.

LGBT Theories And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of LGBT theories; basic concepts: heterosexism, homophobia, homosocial activities, the woman-identified woman, homoerotic imagery, queer theory; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works based on LGBT theories.

6.1. Introduction

How can we understand human identity without understanding human sexuality? Our capacity to be kind, generous, tender, and understanding; our capacity to experience pleasure; the ways in which we define pleasure—all of these personality traits tell us about our sexuality. And they also tell us about the kind of person we are in our everyday lives: working at our jobs, shopping for groceries, playing basketball, or

watching a movie. So whether or not we are sexually active, our sexuality is part of who we are, for our sexuality is related to most or all of the other characteristics by which we define ourselves.

Yet at every level of education, classes in the humanities—that broad field of study which includes literature, history, and philosophy and which explores the various experiences by which we define our humanity—rarely discuss in any depth the topics of sex and sexuality. Even if a class is reading a literary work in which, say, an adulterous affair plays a key role in the story, the affair is usually treated as an event in the plot rather than as a dimension of the character's sexuality or a dimension of the work as a whole that requires close analysis. In fact, if we look at the degree to which the topics of sex and sexuality have been omitted from the humanities, we may reasonably wonder how an academic discipline that claims to study human experience has managed to overlook, or at least under-represent, one of the most important dimensions of that experience.

Surely, part of the reason for this marked omission is the discomfort teachers and students often experience in discussing topics related to sexuality, especially LGBTQ sexuality: lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, or queer sexuality.[1] You might be experiencing some discomfort yourself at this moment. If you are, I hope you won't let it worry you—or prevent you from reading this chapter. Keep in mind that, whatever your personal feelings about sexuality in general and LGBTQ sexuality in particular, it's not unusual to feel a bit uncomfortable, at first, discussing in a classroom setting topics that have rarely, if ever, come up in the classroom, topics that most of us have been raised to believe are strictly private, if not downright transgressive. But whether you're accustomed to the subject or not, I think you'll find this chapter interesting as well as informative because lesbian, gay, and queer theorists have not only helped draw our attention to human sexuality as a serious aspect of studies in the humanities, but they have done so in ways that are meaningful to all of us, regardless of our sexual orientation. For they raise questions that are important

to any understanding of human sexuality and how it relates to human identity and culture. Let me give you a few examples.

Lesbian theorists have raised important questions about what it means to define oneself as a lesbian. For instance, if identifying oneself as a lesbian requires sexual relations with another woman, then shouldn't identifying oneself as a heterosexual woman require sexual relations with a man? If so, how can heterosexual virgins claim to be heterosexual? Furthermore, what "counts" as sexual relations? Must genital contact be involved in order for an encounter to be categorized as sexual? With these questions in mind, how should we define lesbian orientation? In fact, with these questions in mind, how should we define any sexual orientation?

Gay theorists have reminded us that definitions of heterosexuality and homosexuality can differ from culture to culture. For example, in the United States today, sexual relations with, or even sexual desire for, a same-sex partner define a man as gay. However, in white working-class American culture at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as in some South American cultures, a man who has sex with another man is still defined as a heterosexual as long as he assumes the masculine role: as long as he penetrates but is never penetrated by his partner and as long as he behaves in a dominant, aggressive, traditionally masculine manner. In contrast, citizens of ancient Athens didn't choose sexual partners based on sex or gender behavior; they chose them in terms of social caste. A male member of the Athenian elite class could have legitimate sexual relations with anyone beneath him in social rank: women and girls of any class or age, boys of his own class who were past puberty but had not yet attained the age of manhood, and all slaves and foreigners. As these examples suggest, definitions of sexual orientation and of legitimate sexual relations depend on cultural attitudes toward sexuality.

Finally, queer theory, which is an outgrowth of lesbian and gay theories, rejects definitions of sexuality that depend upon the sex of one's partner. As we'll see in the "Basic concepts" section of this chapter, queer theorists believe that the biological sex of the

people to whom we are sexually drawn tells us nothing other than the biological sex of the people to whom we are sexually drawn. That is, queer theorists find human sexuality much too complex, ambiguous, and dynamic to be understood by this single biological fact: many more personal factors must be taken into account in order to begin to understand human sexuality.

Additional questions raised by lesbian, gay, and queer theorists concern the origin of our sexual orientation, as sexual orientation is traditionally defined in the West today. Is our orientation toward same-sex or opposite-sex romantic partners the result of our genes? (This view is called biological essentialism because it tells us that our sexual orientation is an essential, or inborn part of our biological makeup.) Or is our sexual orientation the result of our individual experience? (This view is called social constructionism because it tells us that our sexual orientation is constructed by our experience in society.) Or might genetics be the source of sexual orientation for some people while experience is the source of sexual orientation for others? Or might the answer lie in some combination of our genetic makeup and our experience? A related question involves the issue of choice: if LGBTQ sexuality is simply a matter of personal choice, as some people believe, then when and by what process do individuals choose to be heterosexual?

6.2. Basic Concepts

All of the concepts defined below can be employed to produce lesbian, gay, or queer interpretations of literature, with the following qualifications. As you would expect, the concept of the woman-identified woman is not generally employed from a gay perspective, and the term queer theory signals the use of the theoretical approach by that name described below.

6.2.1. Heterosexism

Heterosexism is institutionalized discrimination against LGBTQ people. It is discrimination that is "built into" such social institutions as the family, education, religion, and the law enforcement system. And it is based on the belief that

heterosexuality is the only right or natural sexual orientation. A heterosexist society—for example, most of heterosexual American culture— permits or encourages discrimination against LGBTQ individuals through its laws, customs, and common practices. The examples of discrimination against LGBTQ people listed earlier are thus examples of heterosexism. In fact, the pressure to be heterosexual placed on young people is so enormous that lesbian poet and theorist Adrienne Rich refers to that pressure as compulsory heterosexuality. In other words, our heterosexist society teaches us that we must be heterosexual regardless of how we feel about it.

6.2.2. Homophobia

Homophobia is the intense fear and loathing of homosexuality. Psychologists tell us that homophobes (homophobic people) hate LGBTQ people because homophobes are uncertain about their own sexuality and are trying to prove to themselves that they are heterosexual. From this perspective, homophobia is a product of compulsory heterosexuality: if there weren't so much pressure on people to be heterosexual, they wouldn't be so terrified of the possibility that they might not be heterosexual. Homophobia is, of course, responsible for hate crimes against LGBTQ individuals. And I think we should also see the ways in which homophobia is responsible for heterosexism, for surely the kind of heterosexist discrimination described earlier is based on the collective, if sometimes unconscious homophobia promoted by traditional heterosexual culture, or what feminism calls patriarchy. Internalized homophobia refers to the self-hatred some LGBTQ people experience because, in their growth through adolescence into adulthood, they've internalized (taken into themselves, or "bought into") the homophobia pressed upon them by heterosexist culture.

6.2.3. Homosocial Activities

Homosocial activities are simply same-sex bonding activities. Going to the movies, playing cards, fixing the car, preparing a meal, or any other shared leisure or work project is a homosocial activity if it is performed by two or more members of

the same sex. The sexual orientation of the participants is irrelevant in homosocial bonding. What is important is the sharing of experiences that makes one feel closer to—"at home" with—members of one's own sex. Homosocial relationships (same-sex friendships) deserve our attention here because, although such relationships contribute to the development and maintenance of a healthy sense of self, many of us limit or even avoid them because we (consciously or unconsciously) fear that we will be perceived as LGBTQ or that we actually are LGBTQ. In other words, homophobia shuts down homosocial bonding and thereby shuts down an important part of human experience.

6.2.4. The Woman-Identified Woman

Throughout much of Western history, compulsory heterosexuality—which included barring women from opportunities to achieve financial independence so that they would have to marry to survive—has caused many women to marry who would have preferred to share their lives with women. In addition, patriarchy (any society in which men hold all or most of the power) tells us that sexual drive of any kind is much more natural in men than in women, a belief that has caused many women, especially in the past, to deny or be unable to recognize their sexual attraction to other women. For these reasons, a strict focus on what we would define today as sexual activity or sexual desire runs the risk of ignoring an important dimension of women's lives—the homosocial dimension—that might best be understood fully from a lesbian perspective. Many lesbian theorists believe, therefore, that lesbian identity is not restricted to the sexual domain but also can consist of directing the bulk of one's attention and emotional energy to other women and having other women as one's primary source of emotional sustenance and psychological support. From this perspective, a lesbian is a woman-identified woman: a woman who identifies exclusively with women and whose primary relationships (which may or may not be sexual) are with women.[3] Thus, just as a woman who has never had sexual relations with a man can still consider herself heterosexual, a woman who has never had sexual relations with a

woman can still consider herself a lesbian. (In contrast, most gay male theorists today assume that gay male identity is defined by sexual activity, or even just sexual desire, between men.) It is also important to note that many lesbian thinkers consider woman-identification essential to a woman's development of her personhood—of a healthy sense of herself as an independent being—for every woman regardless of her sexual orientation.

6.2.5. Homoerotic imagery

Homoerotic imagery consists of erotic (though not necessarily overtly sexual) visual images that imply same-sex attraction or that might appeal sexually to a same-sex reader. For example, a lush, sensual depiction of a group of women helping one another undress or of nude men bathing in a beautiful pond would be considered homoerotic. We can find many homoerotic images in literature as well as in, for instance, painting, sculpture, film, and photography

6.2.6. Queer theory

Some LGBT people have adopted the word queer to refer to themselves for a number of reasons. Referring to themselves positively with a word that has been used to insult them is a way of taking power away from heterosexist society, a way of saying "We're proud that we're different, and we're not going to be intimidated by heterosexism." In addition, the word queer is used positively as a broad, inclusive category that acknowledges the shared political and social experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and all people who consider themselves, for whatever reasons, not heterosexual. Hence, LGBT has evolved, for many, into LGBTQ. Finally, and most important for our interpretation of literature, the word queer is used to indicate a specific theoretical perspective—called queer theory—which we will use later, in our interpretation exercises, to analyze Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily.".

Queer theory argues that human sexuality cannot be understood by such simple opposed categories as homosexual and heterosexual, which define our sexuality by the sex of our partner and nothing more. Human sexuality consists of a host of

important factors that are not related to the sex of our partner. For example, what is our sexual "personality"? Are we kind? Cruel? Generous? Selfish? Assertive? Timid? Are we drawn to a particular physical type, or "look"? Do we tend to be drawn to older or younger partners? Do we tend to be monogamous, or do we prefer a variety of partners? Do we prefer certain sexual acts or certain kinds of locations for sexual encounters? Do we like to role play sometimes? Always? If so, what are our favorite roles? Do we prefer a particular kind of lighting? Does our sexual behavior fit traditional definitions of masculinity or femininity, or do we have traits associated with both or neither? The answers to questions like these are among the many qualities that reveal important aspects of our sexuality not revealed by the current definition of sexual orientation. Furthermore, for queer theory, our sexuality is wholly determined neither by genetics nor environment, neither by nature nor nurture, because the sources of each individual's sexuality can be many and varied. In addition, our sexuality, depending on how we choose to define it, may be different at different times during our lives or even at different times during the week. Thus, human sexuality is a dynamic, fluid force: it's always changing and growing, and its boundaries are not permanently rooted in any one rigid definition or in any single category.

6.3. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931) is a story about Emily Grierson and the man she plans to marry, Homer Barron. That is, it's a tale about a heterosexual couple whose relationship ends in murder, presumably because Homer intends to desert Emily, and she decides to poison him and sleep with his dead body rather than sleep alone. Many students, when they first read Faulkner's story, believe that Homer Barron is gay, which they cite as one of the reasons he doesn't marry Emily. After all, as many readers note, the text tells us that Homer is not the marrying kind, that he likes the company of men and enjoys drinking with the younger men in the town of Jefferson. The problem with using

this textual evidence to argue that Homer is gay, however, is that it is extremely unlikely that Homer could be openly gay in the location in which the story is set: a small town in the American south around the turn of the twentieth century. If the people of Jefferson knew Homer was gay, they would, at the very least, run him out of town. Therefore, we must assume that the townsfolk, including the narrator, interpret Homer's preference for male activities and his opposition to marriage as signs that he is a fun-loving womanizer, that he doesn't want to be tied down to one woman or trade his bachelor freedom for the responsibilities of a family man, which is what the description of Homer would have implied, at least to most straight readers, when the story was published in 1931. As we shall see, however, it is Homer's womanizing that, along with other textual evidence, can support the claim that Homer is gay, whether or not he is aware of it. And Homer's possible gay orientation is only one aspect of the queer dimension of "A Rose for Emily" that our reading will explore.

Our interpretation of Faulkner's tale will be queer in the inclusive sense of the term because it will analyze more than one kind of sexuality represented in the story. And our reading will be queer in the theoretical sense (it will draw on queer theory) because it will show that the story illustrates the ways in which the terms heterosexual and homosexual, the traditional categories by which our sexuality is defined, are inadequate for understanding the complexities of human sexuality. In order to understand how "A Rose for Emily" illustrates this idea, we'll examine: (1) Emily's lack of a fixed gender identity (the fact that she is described as very feminine and very masculine at different points in the story); (2) Homer Barron's ambiguous sexual orientation; and (3) Homer and Emily as, symbolically speaking, a "gay" couple.

6.3.1. Emily's lack of a fixed gender identity

Find all the descriptions of Emily that relate to her gender identity, to the ways in which she seems to be traditionally feminine at some points in the story and traditionally masculine at others. Remember that femininity and masculinity are defined

by the society in which we live, and Emily lives in a very patriarchal southern town during the decades preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century. This is a society that expects its women, especially unmarried women from the upper class, to be "ladies": gracious; soft-spoken; gratefully dependent upon others; submissive; devoted to hearth and home; as physically attractive as possible; and attired in pleasing, ladylike clothing at all times. So her femininity or masculinity would be defined by such characteristics as her gracious behavior toward others; her melodious voice; her ladylike dependence upon others; her submission to the dictates of custom and public opinion; her engagement in traditional feminine activities in the home; her housekeeping standards; her hospitality; her physical appearance, including her clothing; and the like. 1. List all of the characteristics of physical appearance and behaviour that depict Emily as traditionally feminine. 2. List all of the characteristics of physical appearance and behaviour that depict Emily as traditionally masculine.

6.3.2. Homer's ambiguous sexual orientation

Homer has many of the characteristics of physical appearance and behaviour that heterosexist culture associates with heterosexual men. However, he also has many of the characteristics often seen in men practicing macho overcompensation, in men who have the desire to prove to themselves and to others that they are "real" men—that is, staunch heterosexuals. Macho overcompensation tends to be displayed when a traditional heterosexual man is insecure about his sexuality—that is, when he's afraid he's not masculine enough and worried that there might be something "wrong" with him; when a gay man is in denial about being gay; or when a gay man who knows he is gay is trying to hide his sexual orientation from heterosexist society. Homer's characterization, then, is ambiguous in terms of sexual orientation: it raises questions about his sexuality but doesn't allow us to draw a conclusion with certainty. To see the ambiguity of this aspect of Homer's characterization, collect the textual data required below. 1. List all of the

characteristics of physical appearance and behaviour that depict Homer as a traditional heterosexual man. 2. List all of the ways in which Homer seems to be practicing macho overcompensation. Does the story give any indication which of the motives listed above is responsible for this behavior?

6.4. Summary

Regardless of the differences we've just seen among lesbian, gay, and queer criticism, there is a good deal of overlap in the ways all three domains approach literary interpretation. Note, for example, the similarities in the tasks performed by lesbian and gay critics discussed earlier. In addition, many gay and lesbian critics combine some of the deconstructive insights offered by queer theory with the social and political concerns associated with more traditional forms of lesbian and gay criticism. Indeed, many devotees of queer theory still refer to themselves as gay or lesbian critics. Furthermore, critics from all three domains have taken an interest in recurring themes that appear throughout gay and lesbian literature and that constitute part of an evolving literary tradition. These themes include the following: initiation, including discovering one's queer sexual orientation, experiencing one's first sexual encounters as a gay person, and "learning the ropes" in the gay or lesbian subculture; "coming out" to family and friends; "coming out" at the workplace; dealing with homophobia and with heterosexist discrimination; the psychology of gay self-hatred; overcoming gay self-hatred; the role of camp and drag in gay life; dealing with loneliness and alienation; finding love; building a life with a gay or lesbian partner; the quest to build a lesbian utopia; life before and after Stonewall; life before and after AIDS (in terms of both one's personal life and the collective life of the gay and lesbian communities); caring for loved ones with AIDS; mourning the death of AIDS victims; and the importance of gay and lesbian community. Of course, the themes in gay and lesbian writing change over time as the social and political situation of gay and lesbian writers changes. And themes that occur openly in contemporary works may appear, in literature

from earlier periods, only in disguised forms (as we saw in our discussion of the work of Willa Cather) or in playful forms (consider, for example, the double meanings of the word play in Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, 1894).

Finally, lesbian, gay, and queer criticism often rely on similar kinds of textual evidence. For example, in addition to the more obvious forms of textual cues—such as homoerotic imagery and erotic encounters between same-sex characters— there are rather subtle textual cues that can create a homoerotic atmosphere even in an otherwise heterosexual text, as we saw in the examples of lesbian, gay, and queer criticism provided earlier. No single textual cue can stand on its own as evidence of a homoerotic atmosphere in a text. Nor can a small number of such cues support a lesbian, gay, or queer reading. But a preponderance of these cues, especially if coupled with other kinds of textual or biographical evidence, can strengthen a lesbian, gay, or queer interpretation even of an apparently heterosexual text. Let's take a closer look at a few of the most common examples of these subtle cues.

6.5 Assignment

Homer and Emily as a "gay" couple Although the text depicts Emily's gender identity, traditionally defined, as feminine at some points in the story and masculine at others, much of the aggressive, defiant behavior traditionally associated with men is ascribed to Emily during Homer's courtship of her. One implication is that Emily does not assume the traditional feminine, submissive role in her relationship with Homer. Another implication is that Homer finds her masculine behavior attractive. That is, given the possibility that Homer is either a gay man in denial or a gay man in the closet, his attraction to Emily at this point in the story carries some symbolic weight. And Emily continues, for the most part, to display traditional masculine behavior over the years during which she continues to sleep with Homer's dead body, thus increasing the evidence that she plays a masculine role in their relationship. So although Homer and Emily

are a heterosexual couple in terms of their biological sex, we might argue that, in terms of traditional gender behavior, they are, symbolically speaking, a "gay" couple: both "men." 1. Find the descriptions of Emily that indicate her gender identity at the time Homer courts her. (Don't forget that Emily kills Homer, which is, to say the least, an unfeminine, aggressive act.) 2. Find the descriptions of Emily that indicate her gender identity during the years she sleeps with Homer's dead body.

Chapter 7.

African American Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of African American theory; African American culture and literature; Racism; forms of racism: institutionalized racism, internalized racism, intra-racial racism; double consciousness; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works based on African American theory.

7.1. Introduction

An understanding of racial issues can also increase our ability to appreciate and analyze literature. Indeed, like many nations, the United States consists of people of many different races, all of whom have contributed to our country's literary production as well as to its history. However, Americans of African descent, whose presence in the New World

is as old as the presence of the first European settlers, have developed not only a very large body of internationally acclaimed literature but, as the title of this chapter indicates, a collection of widely used critical tools with which to analyze literature, as well. It makes sense, then, to use an African American perspective as our source, in this chapter, of concepts concerning race.

Despite, however, the enormous role played by African Americans in the history and cultural development of the United States, my recurring experience in the classroom has been one of surprise and alarm at how few opportunities my students have had in school to learn about African American history, culture, and literature or to learn to recognize and understand the enormous gulf that still separates white and black Americans.

For example, I've had many fine students, of all races, who have never heard of or are only slightly aware of the important role played by black Americans in such areas as the development of American art, film, literature, science, education, philosophy, law, medicine, theater, dance, and music. Have you ever seen a film by pioneer filmmaker Oscar Michaux? Are you aware of the role played in the history of American theater, music, and politics by Paul Robeson? What do you know about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad or about the work of Sojourner Truth in the struggle for racial and gender equality? How familiar are you with the philosophical debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois concerning the relationship between education and the attainment of political equality? How much do you know about the outpouring of African American literature, art, and music during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s or during the Black Arts movement of the 1960s? Are you aware of the number and importance of the pioneering advances made both in agricultural science and in industrial uses for agricultural products by scientist and inventor George Washington Carver? Have you heard of the work of political activist and journalist Ida B. Wells? Are you familiar with the painting and collage of Romare Bearden? The influential work of countless black Americans such as these has helped produce the American life we live today. Their efforts

have contributed both to the development of African American culture and to the development of our national culture. Yet these Americans are too often overlooked or underrepresented in our classrooms, and students have few if any opportunities to get a real sense of just how beautifully black are many of the deepest roots of American culture.

Similarly, I've known many fine white students who were so ill-informed concerning the realities of race in America that they believed racism ended with the Civil War—or at least with the turn of the twentieth century—or that the only racists left in the United States today are the members of the Ku Klux Klan. So when we read William Faulkner's story "That Evening Sun" (1931), which portrays the racist attitudes that separate a white family from the black people who work in their home during a period several decades after the Civil War, a number of students nevertheless assumed that the black characters are slaves. "After all," these students said, "the kind of economic oppression and racial prejudice we see depicted in the story occurred only during slavery." Because they themselves hadn't observed—or perhaps more accurately, hadn't recognized—racial prejudice, they assumed that racism was, for the most part, a thing of the past.

Unfortunately, though, the evils of slavery are still with us today in heritage of racial bias that is so thoroughly built into American law, politics, and social behavior that many white Americans are unable to see it. To cite just one striking example, until President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act in August 2010, possession of only five grams of crack cocaine (used predominantly by black Americans) triggered a mandatory prison sentence of five years, while the possession of five hundred grams of powder cocaine (used predominantly by white Americans) was required to trigger the same five-year mandatory prison sentence. And even now, though lessened, there is still a marked sentencing disparity for users of these two forms of cocaine: although now the possession of twenty-eight grams of crack cocaine is required to trigger the minimum five-year mandatory prison sentence, the mandatory trigger for powder cocaine remains five hundred

grams.[1] Such discriminatory laws spotlight drug activity in poor black neighborhoods and have resulted in increased police surveillance in these areas, while drug activity in middle- and upper-class white neighborhoods is largely ignored. In fact, although the majority of drug users of all kinds in the United States are white, the majority of inmates serving prison sentences for drug-related offenses are black. As a result of this kind of racial bias, our prisons contain a disproportionate number of African American inmates, which perpetuates the racist myth that black Americans are "born criminals." That myth, in turn, justifies the laws that disproportionately target and penalize African American.

Do you see why this is called a "circular" problem? Here's the circle. Point 1—Racist beliefs tell us that black Americans are inferior to white Americans. Point 2—These beliefs put black Americans in situations that are inferior to those of white Americans (for example, inferior housing, inferior schools, inferior jobs, and as we just saw, inferior legal status). Point 1 (again)—The inferior situations of black Americans are used to justify racist beliefs.

To be sure that you have a firm grasp of "circular" thinking, let's briefly examine one more specific example of the "circular logic" (or more accurately, "circular illogic") of racist beliefs: the practice of denying job opportunities to African Americans and then arguing that the absence of black Americans in certain occupations is evidence of their inferiority. As recently as the 1950s, the only work readily available to people of color in the United States was menial labor. African Americans were hired as farm hands in rural areas, and in the cities they worked as maids, custodians, waiters, cooks, baggage handlers, and in other "service" occupations. In other words, the only jobs that were easily obtainable were similar to the work people of color performed under slavery. Then, because the majority of African Americans performed menial labor, it was argued that they were incapable of any other kind of work. The fact that other occupations were closed to them wasn't recognized as the cause

of the problem but was seen, instead, as the result of the "limited capacity" of people of color.

Even when the judicial system protects people of color, as does the equal opportunity law that now prohibits racial discrimination in the workplace, discrimination still occurs. For example, many white employers still discriminate against African Americans by hiring the minimum number of African Americans possible and by denying them access to leadership positions or meaningful promotions of any kind. Similarly, although the fair housing law now prohibits racial discrimination in the sale and rental of dwellings, white real-estate agents and landlords often ignore the law and lie to prospective black clients about the availability of housing in order to keep them out of white neighborhoods. While there are many additional examples I could offer of the persistence of racism in the United States today, my point is simply that the failure of our educational system to acknowledge these realities has left many non-black students ignorant of the kinds of racial injustice that still exist in the United States.

7.2. Basic Concepts

7.2.1. African American culture and literature

African American culture is rich and varied and grows, of course, out of black American history and experience. African American culture includes, among many other characteristics, the following elements: 1. oral history (the passing down of knowledge about personal family, and community life by word of mouth), which has contributed to the importance, in African American literature, 2. orality (the sound of the spoken voice produced by the printed word, often achieved by writing in African American Vernacular English, AAVE, which is also called Black Vernacular English, BVE), 3. African American music, specifically jazz, blues, gospel, and hip hop, 4. African American cuisine, 5. folk crafts, such as quilting and woodcarving, 6. the importance of people's names and nicknames as a means of connecting them to their culture and to the past, and 7. a value system that emphasizes the

importance of the family, community, and church in the effort: (a) to survive the harsh realities of racism; (b) to seek the positive, often spiritual, aspects of life; and (c) to insure that every black American has the opportunity to achieve his or her full human potential.

These elements of black American culture are often represented in African American literature and have created an African American literary tradition that you'll come to recognize as you increase your reading of African American authors. Of course, many aspects of African American culture have influenced American culture as a whole, the best-known examples of which are probably jazz, blues, and hip hop music.

Given that some form of racial discrimination is a daily experience for most African Americans, racial issues have greatly influenced African American culture. Therefore, racial issues—for example, the economic, social, and psychological problems caused by racism; the difficulties faced by biracial individuals in America, including the temptation to pass for white;

and the attempt to reclaim the African past of lost ancestors—are frequently portrayed in African American literature. African American authors have also focused a good deal of attention on such historical topics as the horrors of the Middle Passage (the transportation of captive Africans across the Atlantic from the west coast of Africa to the east coast of the United States, South America, and the Caribbean Islands), the horrific ordeal of slavery, the struggle for emancipation, the Civil War, life in the segregated south, and the attempt to find a better life in the north.

Of course, white authors have created African American characters and written about issues of race, too, and we can use concepts from African American theory to analyze their work, as well. However, it's important to keep in mind that, while some white authors have been actively antiracist in their portrayals of African Americans and their depictions of racial issues, many other white authors have reinforced racist stereotypes and racist thinking, whether or not they realized they were doing so. In other words, it's not the portrayal of African American characters or the

depiction of racial issues that makes a literary text racist or antiracist. A text's racial politics (whether the text reinforces racism or attacks racism) depends on the way in which it portrays those characters and depicts those issues.

Racism is an unpleasant topic, to say the least. As you can see, however, it's an important topic, too, and is central to an understanding of African American theory. So let's take a closer look at racism and the various forms racism takes.

7.2.2. Racism

Racism is the economic, political, social, or psychological oppression of individuals or groups based on their race. Racism is fueled by the myth that the oppressed race is inferior to the "dominant" race—that is, to the race holding the power in a given society. For example, white racism is fueled by the myths that people of color are less intelligent, less "civilized," less moral, and even less attractive than white people. Racist stereotypes about African Americans include, among others, the following clusters of characteristics: lazy, unambitious, slow-moving, and dim-witted; violent, brutal, and criminally inclined; and sexually promiscuous, hard-drinking, and fond of drugs of any kind. Consider the following example of how racist stereotypes limit our perceptions of our fellow human beings in our everyday lives. A white shopper, having been given poor service by a white sales clerk, thinks, "What a lazy person that sales clerk is!" That same white shopper, having been given poor service by a black sales clerk, thinks, "Black people are so lazy!" Only in the second case is the white shopper stereotyping along racial lines, or ascribing a trait observed in one person to all people of the same race.

While the damaging effects of these negative stereotypes are obvious, even "positive" racial stereotypes are damaging: for example, the stereotypes that African Americans are "born" athletes, "naturally" good dancers (because they have "natural" rhythm), and devoted servants to white families. These so-called "positive" stereotypes are damaging because, like negative stereotypes, they suggest that all African Americans are alike and have no important individual qualities beyond the stereotype to

which they "belong." In addition, both negative and "positive" stereotypes serve a racist desire to view African Americans only in ways that boost white importance. Negative stereotypes depict people of color as clearly inferior to whites, and racist thinking links such "positive" stereotypes as the "born" athlete or the "natural" dancer to what it sees as a "primitive," tribal heritage, while it links such "positive" stereotypes as the devoted servant to black Americans' "rightful" sense of their own inferiority to whites. In short, all stereotypes deprive stereotyped persons of their individuality and, too often, of their humanity.

7.2.3. Forms of racism

Institutionalized racism—In order for racism to have any real force in a society, it must be supported in some way by that society's institutions, for example, by the educational system, the judicial system, the entertainment and fashion industries, law enforcement policies, labor practices (such as the accepted attitudes that govern hiring new employees, determining their salaries, and promoting or firing them), and housing regulations. Three examples of institutionalized racism were described earlier: the enormous difference between mandatory prison sentences for users of crack cocaine (who are predominantly black) and users of powder cocaine (who are predominantly white), the persistence of racial discrimination in the workplace, and the frequent tendency of real-estate agents and landlords to successfully sidestep the fair-housing law. We also discussed earlier the failure of most American schools to include adequate coverage of the historically significant work of African Americans in all fields of endeavor, thereby blinding students to the fact that American history and culture have significant black roots as well as white roots, and this failure is also an example of institutionalized racism. Other examples of institutionalized racism include, for instance, the inadequate resources available to public schools in black neighborhoods; the continued use of racially biased textbooks and achievement tests; the inadequate representation of African American authors (who now hold top international honors) on college syllabi in American literature courses; the inadequate

response of national agencies to African American health problems; the disproportionate number of municipal incinerators in black neighborhoods, which pose a serious health threat to local residents; and even such relatively routine occurrences as the disproportionate number of black motorists pulled over by law enforcement officers.

Internalized racism—Some people of color suffer from varying degrees of internalized racism, which is the acceptance of the belief pressed upon them by racist America that they are inferior to whites, less worthy, less capable, less intelligent, or less attractive. Victims of internalized racism often wish they were white or that they looked more white. Obviously, internalized racism is very damaging to self-esteem: it is difficult to maintain a positive self-image when one has been programmed to believe that one is inferior simply because of one's race.

Intraracial racism—Internalized racism often results in intraracial racism. Intraracial racism is discrimination, within the black community, against those with darker skin and more African features, such as hair texture and the shape of the lips and nose. Intraracial racism is operating when African Americans believe, for example, that light-skinned black people are more beautiful or more intelligent than darker skinned black Americans. Of course, a person who suffers from internalized racism will probably practice intraracial racism because both forms of racism "buy into" the white racist attitude summed up in the frightening old saying, "If you're white, you're alright; if you're brown, stick around; if your black, get back!" Finally, when a literary work depicts intraracial racism or internalized racism, we can assume that institutionalized racism is implied as well—perhaps as part of the current reality in which the characters live, perhaps as part of the history of the society in which they live, or perhaps as both—even if it is not depicted. For as we have already seen, institutionalized racism is the force behind the persistence of all forms of racism.

7.2.4. Double consciousness

Double consciousness, first described by W.E.B. DuBois in The Souls of Black Folk (1903), is the awareness of belonging to two conflicting cultures: the black culture, which grew from African roots and developed in response to a history of racist oppression, and the European culture imposed by white America. For many African Americans, double consciousness results from living in two very different worlds—the world at home and the white dominated world outside the home, such as the school, the workplace, and even the shopping mall— where two different sets of expectations, or cultural "rules," are operating, and sometimes two different languages are spoken.

There are, of course, additional concepts offered by African American theory, but these are enough to get us started using this theory to interpret literature. Let's begin our interpretation exercises by analyzing Ralph Ellison's "The Battle Royal," a story that is unmistakably antiracist because of the great clarity with which it illustrates the horrors of racism, specifically, the institutionalized racism of the segregated south at a time when the judicial system offered black Americans little or no protection from the excesses of white power.

7.3. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

7.3.1. Background

Although the primary purpose of African American theory is to help us analyze the enormous body of literature written by African Americans, this theory can also help us interpret literary works written by white authors because it enables us to see the racial dimension of white literature that we otherwise might have overlooked. For example, African American author and Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison analyzes white literature from an African American perspective by examining, among other things, the various ways in which white authors have often created black characters whose sole purpose is to make their white protagonists look good. In Ernest Hemingway's To Have and Have Not (1937), for instance, Morrison argues that the black character Wesley, a

crewman on the fishing boat of white captain Harry Morgan, is portrayed as silent, submissive, and cowardly in order to make Morgan appear, by contrast, more manly and courageous (Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, Vintage, 1993). Whether or not Hemingway had this purpose consciously in mind when he created Wesley, that is how this character functions in the novel.

Of course, not all black characters are used in such an overtly racist fashion in white literature. In fact, the work of many white authors is antiracist. William Faulkner, for example, frequently depicted the evils of racism. And he created some African American characters who play major roles in his fiction and whose dignity and integrity far surpass those qualities in many of his white characters. Whatever the role of black characters in a white literary work, however, an analysis of their function in the text offers us a starting point for viewing the work of white writers from an African American perspective because such an analysis can often help us see the racial aspects of the work's setting, or historical context, and help us determine the text's attitude toward racial issues.

We can see how this approach can open a white literary work to an African American interpretation by using it to analyze William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931). "A Rose for Emily" is the story of a white woman, Miss Emily Grierson, who lives in the southern town of Jefferson during the decades preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century. Principal among the story's minor black characters, of course, is Tobe, an African American man employed as Emily's domestic servant. Although we're not told exactly when Tobe came to live and work in the Grierson home, we know that he is taking care of household duties when Emily, at about thirty years of age, is left on her own by the death of her father. Although almost nothing is left of the former Grierson fortune, Tobe remains with Emily—cooking, gardening, shopping, and running errands, as Miss Grierson almost never leaves the house—throughout the rest of Emily's life. At the story's

close, Tobe, an old man now, finally leaves the Grierson home, and presumably flees the town of Jefferson as well, when Emily dies.

Certainly, an analysis of Tobe wouldn't suggest that this character is negatively portrayed in order to make Emily, or any other white character, look good by contrast. On the contrary, the characterization of Emily Grierson as a snobbish recluse who poisons her suitor and sleeps with his dead body tends to make other characters, including Tobe, look good by contrast. Rather, I think we can use an African American lens to examine the ways in which the characterization of Tobe, and of the other minor black characters in the story, reveals an antiracist dimension of the tale by drawing our attention to the evils of racism in the time and place in which "A Rose for Emily" is set. Thus, although the main focus of "A Rose for Emily" is white experience, I think our analysis can help us see the text's antiracist message. In addition, attention to the story's portrayal of its African American characters can also help us see some of the ways in which the tale's antiracist project doesn't completely succeed. In order to understand these aspects of "A Rose for Emily," we'll examine: (1) how the portrayal of Tobe reveals the evils of racism; (2) how the portrayal of the story's other minor black characters reveals the evils of racism; and (3) how "A Rose for Emily" doesn't fully accomplish its antiracist project.

7.3.2. How the portrayal of Tobe reveals the evils of racism

Various aspects of Tobe's behavior throughout the story raise questions that can be answered only by considering the racist world in which he lives. In other words, Tobe's main function in the story is quietly to make us aware of the historical realities of racism. To see how the characterization of Tobe works in this way, consider the fact that the text offers us no data at all to explain what appears to be rather illogical, even bizarre, behavior on Tobe's part, thus forcing us to remember the dangers faced by a black man living in a racist white world, as the following questions and answers illustrate. To check your own awareness of racist attitudes, you might try coming up with your own answers to the following questions and then see if you agree with the ones I offer

you questions: a. Why don't the prudish citizens of Jefferson, who are always on the lookout for juicy gossip, object to Emily's living alone in the house with a male servant?, b. Why does Tobe remain in Emily's employ, given that she can't be paying him much, if any money, and that, apparently, she rarely, if ever speaks to him?, c. Why doesn't Tobe report the death of Homer Barron, of which there can be no doubt that he knows?

Answers: a. During the period in which the story is set, racist stereotypes of African American men characterized them as either: (1) "Sambos," loyal, rather sexless individuals whose capacity for devotion to white people made them good servants despite their tendency to be rather slow-moving and dim-witted; or (2) sex-crazed "savages" who would rape white women at will if it weren't for the vigilance of white men. Both stereotypes deprive African American men of their dignity and humanity, which we see in the narrator's failure to refer to Tobe by name. Only Emily calls him Tobe; the narrator refers to him as "the Negro" or "the Negro man." Apparently, the citizens of Jefferson have stereotyped Tobe as a "Sambo": he isn't considered a threat to Emily because he isn't considered a "real" man. (Note that these black male stereotypes correspond to the "mammy" and "Jezebel" racist stereotypes of African American women discussed in our analysis of "Don't Explain."). b. Employment options were few for black men at that time— menial labor was the best that most could expect—and unprovoked physical attack by whites was always a danger. Short of moving to the north, which involved its own difficulties for people of color with no money or connections, staying with Emily is presumably Tobe's best choice. As her servant, he is physically "under her protection"—safe from physical assault, a safety that is further insured by his quiet demeanor—and he is also assured of room and board. c. Especially given the south's idealization of white womanhood at that point in time, Tobe would be in danger of being lynched for the murder of Homer Barron if the town learned of Homer's death, even if the white citizens of Jeffersonsecretly suspected Emily of the murder.

The following questions are offered to summarize African American approaches to literature. Keep in mind that, like feminist, lesbian/gay/queer, postcolonial, or any criticism that analyzes the writing of a specific group of historically oppressed people, African American criticism is both a subject matter—the study of a body of literature written by a specific group of marginalized people—and a theoretical framework. As a subject matter, any analysis of a literary work written by an African American, regardless of the theoretical framework used, might be called African American criticism, even if no attention is paid to elements in the text that are specifically African American. However, as a theoretical framework—and this is our primary concern here—African American criticism foregrounds race (racial identity, African American cultural traditions, psychology, politics, and so forth) as the object of analysis because race, in America, informs our individual and cultural psychology, and therefore our literature, in profound ways. As a theoretical framework, then, African American criticism can be used to analyze any literary text that speaks to African American issues, regardless of the race of its author, although the work of African American writers is the primary focus. 1. What can the work teach us about the specifics of African heritage, African American culture and experience, and/or African American history (including but not limited to the history of marginalization)? 2. What are the racial politics (ideological agendas related to racial oppression or liberation) of specific African American works? For example, does the work correct stereotypes of African Americans; correct historical misrepresentations of African Americans; celebrate African American culture, experience, and achievement; or explore racial issues, including, among others, the economic, social, or psychological effects of racism? Or as can be seen in the literary production of many white authors, does the work reinforce racist ideologies? 3. What are the poetics (literary devices and strategies) of specific African American works? For

example, does the work use black vernacular or standard white English? Does the work draw on African myths or African

7.5. Assignment

How the portrayal of other minor black characters reveals the evils of racism Other than Tobe, black characters are mentioned in the story only three times: the druggist's "Negro delivery boy," as he's called in the story; the African American laborers who have been hired to pave the sidewalks of Jefferson; and the black women (whom we don't actually meet in the story) referred to by Mayor Sartoris when he makes the rule that no black woman would be allowed on the streets of Jefferson without an apron. To see how these characters function in the story, consider the following historical realities of which these characters remind us, and collect the textual data requested.

The African American laborers—Again, the black men hired to pave Jefferson's sidewalks provide an illustration of the limited jobs available to black men at that time in American history. In addition, the description of the paving of the sidewalks offers other reminders of the overt racism common during that period. A. What degrading word is used to refer to the black men hired by the construction company?. B. The laborers are black men, but what is the race of the man in charge, the foreman? C. How does the foreman treat the laborers? D. In addition to the black laborers, what other two "items" are we told the construction company brought with it to Jefferson? What is implied about the African American laborers by including them on a list with animals (especially this kind of animal) and machines?

Chapter 8.

Postcolonial Theory And Its Practice To Interpret Prose

> The students will be able to describe the background of postcolonial theory; basic concepts: colonialist ideology, the colonial subject, anti-colonialist resistance; to interpret the prose entitled "A Rose for Emily" and any other prose works based on postcolonial theory.

8.1. Introduction

Post-colonial theory gives us tools to explore how all of these factors—as well as ethnicity, religion, and other cultural factors that influence human experience—work together in creating the ways in which we view ourselves and our world. Thus, concepts from postcolonial theory can help us understand human experience as a combination of complex cultural forces operating in each of us. Postcolonial theory

developed the concepts we'll study in this chapter because, as its name implies, this theory emerged in an attempt to understand people from different cultures in terms of an important experience they all had in common: colonial domination by a superior European military force. Europe's invasions of non-European peoples began at the end of the fifteenth century with the military competition among England, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands to find new sources of wealth around the globe. By the end of the nineteenth century, England had the largest colonial empire, which covered a quarter of the earth's surface and included India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Ireland, as well as significant holdings in Africa, the West Indies, South America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Probably the most damaging effects of colonial domination were experienced by non-white populations, whose own cultures were completely or almost completely destroyed as British government officials and British settlers imposed their own language, religion, government, education, codes of behavior, and definitions of intelligence and beauty on the conquered peoples.

British post-colonial populations include not only those that had been conquered by the British military and ruled by British officials—such as the populations of India and those of much of the West Indies, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia—but also those native populations subjugated by white settlers and governed today by the majority culture that surrounds them, such as Australian Aboriginal peoples and Native Americans in the United States and Canada. Finally, many postcolonial theorists believe that postcolonial populations also include non-white peoples who have minority status in Britain, Europe, and the United States—for example, in the US, African Americans, Latinos/as, and Asian Americans—because, like colonized populations, these peoples have been deprived of much or all of the culture, language, and status they enjoyed in their homelands or have experienced the loss of cultural traditions due to powerful socioeconomic pressures to conform to the dominant culture.

Postcolonial concepts can also help us explore the ways in which multiple forms of oppression—for example, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and racism—can combine in the daily experience of members of political minorities; the ways in which members of these groups have overcome these kinds of oppressive forces and worked together to build better lives for themselves and their communities; and the ways in which such struggles are represented in literature. Postcolonial concepts will thus enable you to combine and expand what you've learned from the critical theories you've used in preceding chapters. Don't be surprised, then, if you notice that some of the postcolonial interpretation exercises we do later overlap with some of our interpretation exercises from previous chapters. Although postcolonial concepts will often help us see a literary work from a perspective quite different from the perspectives offered by the other theories we've studied, postcolonial concepts will sometimes combine the insights offered by other theories in an effort to show us, for example, all of the cultural factors influencing characters' behavior or plot events. The term postcolonial literature refers to literary works written both by members of colonized or formerly colonized populations—for example, the works of Salman Rushdie (India), Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua, West Indies), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya)—and by members of the colonizing (white) culture in colonized or formerly colonized nations, such as the fiction of South Africa's Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink, and J. M. Coetzee. And as we noted earlier, because the experience of such ethnic political minorities as Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos/as, and Asian Americans has much in common with the experience of formerly colonized populations, postcolonial concepts can often help us interpret the work of these writers, too. Finally, given that the primary purpose of postcolonial concepts is to help us understand the complex experiences of being colonized by a culture other than our own native culture and of resisting that colonization, we can use postcolonial concepts to analyze the works of any author— regardless of her or his time and place of

birth—that we feel can help us understand something about those experiences. For as we'll see in the "Basic concepts" section later in the chapter, our consciousness—our sense of self, our sense of our own culture—can be colonized, can be "taken over," by a new culture without a single shot being fired. And the culture that colonizes our consciousness doesn't have to come from a foreign country. It can exist right within the borders of our own nation.

8.2. Basic concepts

8.2.1. Colonialist ideology

Colonialist ideology is based on the colonizers' belief in their own superiority over the colonized, who were usually the original inhabitants of the lands the colonizers settled in or invaded. According to colonialist ideology, the colonizers were civilized; the colonized were savages. Because their technology was more highly advanced, the colonizers believed that their

entire culture was more highly advanced, and they ignored or swept aside the religions, customs, and codes of behavior of the peoples they subjugated, often forbidding them to speak their own language or to teach it to their children. Children in colonized nations were taught the language, customs, and beliefs of the colonizers in schools set up for that purpose. While colonization by military force is generally a thing of the past, cultural colonization, often called cultural imperialism, has taken its place in many countries around the globe. For example, American fashions, movies, music, sports, fast food, and consumerism (or "shop-'til-you-dropism") have dwarfed other nations' own cultural practices or turned them into little more than tourist attractions, as is evident, for example, in parts of the Philippines, Japan, and Mexico. We can also see colonialist ideology operating within the borders of a single country. In the United States, for example, many white middle- and upper-class Americans believe the myth that people living in Appalachia are not only poor but stupid, dirty, and untrustworthy; that the homeless are lazy and lack willpower; and that Native Americans prefer welfare and petty thievery to gainful employment.

Othering—One of the clearest symptoms of colonialist ideology is the practice of othering: judging those who are different as inferior, as somehow less than human. For example, the colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper "self"; the peoples they conquered were different, "other," and therefore inferior, subhuman. Othering divides the world between "us"—the civilized, the moral, the intelligent—and "them": the "savages," the immoral, the unintelligent. The "savage" is usually considered evil (the demonic other). But sometimes the "savage" is perceived as possessing a "primitive"

beauty or nobility born of a closeness to nature (the exotic other). In either case, however, the "savage" is othered and, therefore, not considered fully human. Within the borders of the United States, for example, African American men are often treated as demonic others, who might "turn violent" without much provocation. Similarly, gay men are often othered as unscrupulous sexual predators. Americans who are sometimes treated as exotic others include, for instance, beautiful Asian American women.

Subaltern—Colonialist ideology always creates a social hierarchy—a system of social status—in which members of the colonizing culture occupy the top rungs of the ladder. Subalterns are those persons who occupy the bottom rungs of the colonialist social ladder, whether their inferior status is based on race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or any other cultural factor. The word subaltern thus gives us a way to refer to any person at the bottom of a society's status system. Subalterns are othered by members of the colonizing culture and are deprived both of equal opportunities to better their lives and of equal justice under the law. Subalterns include, for example, individuals othered by racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and/or religious discrimination (such as anti-Semitism, or the hatred of Jews, and Islamophobia, or the pathological fear and loathing of Muslims). Among the most visible examples of

subalterns in the United States are the homeless of any race, Native Americans, and economically distressed people of color.

8.2.2. The colonial subject

Because there is enormous pressure on subalterns to believe that they are inferior, it should not be surprising that many of them wind up believing just that. Subalterns who internalize, or "buy into" the colonialist belief that those different from a society's dominant culture are inferior are called colonial subjects— they have a colonized consciousness—whether the dominant culture in question is that of a foreign power or that of their own country. Examples of the latter include women who believe they are, by nature, less intelligent or capable than their male compatriots; people from any non-white race who believe their race makes them less attractive, intelligent, or worthy than their white compatriots; LGBTQ people who believe their sexual orientation means they are sick or evil in ways their heterosexual compatriots are not; and poor people who believe, no matter how hard they work or how ethical they are, that their poverty means they are less worthy as human beings than their financially successful compatriots.

One can be oppressed by colonialist ideology economically, politically, and socially without being a colonial subject as long as one maintains an awareness that colonialist ideology is unjust and that people who belong to the dominant culture are not naturally superior. In other words, one is a colonial subject only when one's consciousness is colonized. Colonial subjects usually practice **mimicry** and experience **unhomeliness**.

Mimicry—Mimicry is the imitation, by a subaltern, of the dress, speech, behavior, or lifestyle of members of the dominant culture. Mimicry is not intended to mock members of the dominant culture. On the contrary, it reveals a subaltern's desire to belong to that culture. Mimicry thus results from having a colonized consciousness, from believing that one is inferior because one does not belong to the dominant culture. For example, during Britain's control of India, some Indians adopted

British attire, hairstyles, and the like because they wanted to be considered "as good as" their British oppressors. Analogously, working-class and middle-class people in the United States sometimes make purchases that endanger their financial security because they want to resemble the upper-class members of their own country, whom they consider superior to themselves. In contrast, if one imitates members of the dominant culture without believing that one's own culture is inferior—for example, in order to keep one's job—then one is not practicing mimicry in the postcolonial sense of the word. Sadly, mimicry often includes othering members of one's own culture. That is, in order to feel that one belongs to or has the approval of the dominant culture, one adopts that culture's prejudices against the members of one's own culture.

Unhomeliness—Unhomeliness is the feeling of having no stable cultural identity— no real home in any culture—that occurs to people who do not belong to the dominant culture and have rejected their own culture as inferior. Thus, unhomeliness, too, results from having a colonized consciousness. Being unhomed is not the same as being homeless. Unhomeliness is an emotional state: unhomed people don't feel at home even in their own homes because they don't feel at home in any culture and, therefore, don't feel at home in themselves. For example, unhomeliness can be experienced by individuals who feel torn between the culture into which they were born and the culture in which they live as adults. A person born in poverty who has become wealthy may feel uncomfortable both with his wealthy friends and with his parents, of whom he's now ashamed, because he doesn't feel he fits in either world. Similar experiences of being unhomed can occur to individuals who grew up in communities of working-class ethnic minorities—for example, in Asian American, African American, or Chicano communities—but who now live in, say, a suburban community most of whose members are upper-class or upwardly mobile middle-class white people of Western European ancestry.

8.2.3. Anti-colonialist resistance

Anti-colonialist resistance—the effort to rid one's land and/or one's culture of colonial domination—can take many forms. Anti-colonialist resistance includes such activities as the formation of underground (secret) groups who might engage in armed raids, perform acts of sabotage, rescue individuals unjustly imprisoned by the colonialist regime, attempt to gain the support of neutral foreign powers, or raise international awareness of colonialist abuses. Of course, anti-colonialist resistance can take the form of an organized, armed rebellion against a colonialist regime, such as occurred in Cuba when followers of Fidel Castro ousted US-backed Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Or it can take the form of organized, non-violent resistance to colonialist oppression, such as occurred in India when followers of Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi ousted the British in 1947. However, even when political resistance is, for the most part, impossible because the forces of colonialist oppression are so overwhelming, anti-colonialist resistance can occur on the psychological level. That is, even when colonized peoples have been completely subjugated to a foreign power over the course of many generations and no longer have access to their own language or their own cultural past, many oppressed individuals manage to keep their minds free of the colonialist ideology that tells them they are inferior.

This kind of anti-colonialist resistance, which exists on the psychological level alone and might be termed psychological resistance, is perhaps the most important kind of resistance, for without it it is unlikely that other kinds of resistance would ever occur. Examples of anti-colonialist resistance in the United States are numerous. To cite just a few, there have been the Underground Railroad, which helped slaves escape to the north before they were freed by the American Civil War; the Women's Suffrage Movement, which got women the vote in 1920; the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s; the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers Organizing Committee to help Mexican American migrant laborers; the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), which fought the federal government's

refusal to fund AIDS research; and the American Indian Movement (AIM), begun in 1968 to obtain civil rights and legal justice for Native Americans.

8.3. The Practice to Interpret "A Rose for Emily"

As we saw in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, one of the tasks postcolonial concepts help us perform is to analyze the ways in which human experience results from a combination of cultural factors that are not easy to separate. For our personalities develop in response to a variety of cultural influences that interact together. It's important to understand how such cultural factors operate in helping to form us because our cultural background strongly influences what we think and how we behave. And an understanding of cultural influences in our lives helps us see how complex individual identity is. Too often, however, we forget the importance of understanding the complexities of individual identity and tend to view people largely according to the cultural categories by which society defines them. In other words, we must remain aware of the complexity of individuals' cultural makeup and be careful not to start seeing people only as cultural categories—for example, "poor white male factory worker," "wealthy black male musician," "unmarried Chicana inner-city schoolteacher," "black female fundamentalist preacher," "middle-class white housewife," and the like—rather than as human beings. William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1931) illustrates just how thoroughly, and how negatively, an over-reliance on cultural categories can influence human relations.

Set in the southern town of Jefferson during the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century, Faulkner's tale tells the story of Emily Grierson. Born to an upper-class white family and isolated from the rest of the town by a dominating father, Emily learns, upon her father's death, that most of the family fortune has been lost. Although fallen into relative poverty, she still keeps a black manservant and maintains her disdain for those beneath her family's social class. The one exception to her refusal to mix with "common" folk is northerner Homer Barron,

foreman of the work crew hired to pave Jefferson's sidewalks, whom Emily allows to court her. Presumably because Homer refuses to marry her (the reader never really learns what goes wrong between the couple), Emily poisons him and sleeps with his dead body, the remains of which are discovered by the town only after Emily's death. Even this basic plot summary of "A Rose for Emily" indicates that cultural categories play an important role in the story. As we'll see in the text that follows, without the cultural classifications upon which all of the characters depend in deciding what to think and how to behave, we wouldn't have a story at all.

Specifically, Faulkner's tale illustrates the harmful effects of basing our treatment of people on the cultural categories in which society places them, which is why "A Rose for Emily" can be considered an anti-colonialist story. For colonialist ideology determines people's worth based entirely on the cultural categories by which the dominant culture defines human beings. To see how the story accomplishes this task, we'll examine the role played by cultural categories: (1) in the treatment of Emily by her father, by Homer Barron, and by the town of Jefferson; (2) in Emily's perception of herself and others; and (3) in the town's response to its African American citizens.

The role of cultural categories in the treatment of Emily Is young Emily afraid of her father? Would she like to date some of the boys from Jefferson? Is the aging Emily lonely? Why does she allow Homer Barron, a man whose lifestyle is so alien to her own, to court her?

Apparently, questions like these—questions about Emily's thoughts, feelings, and hopes—do not greatly influence people's treatment of her. That is, Emily the human being is not as important to the people of Jefferson as Emily the cultural category: an unmarried upper-class white female who has lost her financial standing but retains her status as the last representative of Jefferson's "aristocracy," the last of those Jefferson families who had been wealthy plantation owners before the Civil War. To see the influence of this cultural category on people's treatment of

Emily, collect the textual evidence required to respond to the following questions.

1. Mr. Grierson's treatment of Emily: a. How is Emily's sex responsible for Mr. Grierson's treatment of Emily?. i. How is Emily's virginity an issue in a way that it wouldn't be if she were a boy?. ii. Why would it be easier for Emily to run away from home or stand up to Mr. Grierson if she were a boy? iii. Who would have to provide a dowry and probably pay for the wedding if Emily were to marry (problems that would not arise if Emily were a boy)?; b How is the Griersons' social class responsible for Mr. Grierson's treatment of Emily?. 2 Homer Barron's treatment of Emily: a. Why is Emily's social class probably an attraction for Homer Barron, who is treated as a social inferior by many of Jefferson's middle-class citizens? (And Emily apparently has little else to offer him besides her social class.); b How does the fact that the Grierson fortune no longer exists probably lead Homer to believe that Emily might accept his attentions?

8.4. Summary

The questions that follow are offered to summarize postcolonial approaches to literature. Keep in mind that most postcolonial analyses, regardless of the issues on which they focus, will include some attention to whether the text is colonialist, anti-colonialist, or some combination of the two, that is, ideologically conflicted.

- How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? Special attention is often given to those areas where political and cultural oppression overlap, as it does, for example, in the colonizers' control of language, communication, and knowledge in colonized countries.
- What does the text reveal about the problematics of postcolonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?

- What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance? For example, what does the text suggest about the ideological, political, social, economic, or psychological forces that promote or inhibit resistance? How does the text suggest that resistance can be achieved and sustained by an individual or a group?
- What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference— the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity—in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live? Othering might be one area of analysis here.
- How does the text respond to or comment on the characters, topics, or assumptions of a canonized (colonialist) work? Following Helen Tiffin's lead, examine how the postcolonial text reshapes our previous interpretations of a canonical text.

Depending on the literary work in question, we might ask one or any combination of these questions. Or we might come up with a useful question not listed here. These are just some starting points to get us thinking productively about literature from a postcolonial perspective. Keep in mind that not all postcolonial critics will interpret the same text in the same way, even if they focus on the same postcolonial concepts. As in every field, even expert practitioners disagree.

Whatever ways we may choose to apply postcolonial criticism, our goal in using this approach is to learn to see some important aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without this theoretical perspective; to appreciate the opportunities and the responsibilities of living in a culturally diverse world; and to understand that culture is not just a fixed collection of artifacts and customs frozen in time but a way of relating to oneself and to the world, a psychological and social frame of reference that necessarily alters in response to cross-cultural encounters, whether those encounters occur in our community or on the pages of a literary text.

"A Rose for Emily: The townsfolk's treatment of Emily: a How are Mr. Grierson's race, class, and gender responsible for the townsfolk's failure to intervene in the slightest way in what they believe is his mistreatment of Emily? (Apparently, no one says a word to Mr. Grierson; not even the minister offers a hint that perhaps such complete isolation of a young girl is not good for her.). b. How are Emily's race, class, and gender responsible for Colonel Sartoris' decision to remit her taxes? Would he do the same for a white man, a white working-class woman, or a man or woman of color?. C. How is Emily's social class responsible both for the permissive treatment she receives in Jefferson (think, for example, of the druggist's response to her) and for the townsfolk's resentment of her?. D. How do the townsfolk's objection to Homer's courtship of Emily reveal that they define the couple solely in terms of their cultural categories: northern.

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Author's Biography

Suci Suryani is the lecturer of English Study Program, Faculty of Social and Cultural Sciences, University of Trunojoyo Madura. She has some year experiences in teaching the subject named Literary Criticism. She has also experience as the writer and co-writer of literary criticism article published by several journals, proceedings, and books. The experiences are very interesting and challenging since those may increase her insight of many theories and skill of how to analyze literary works based on critical theory. The experiences lead her to design a compilation teaching material for the subject of Literary Criticism. The instructional objective for each chapter is meet the curricula of English study program University of Trunojoyo Madura. The material for every chapter is chosen to meet the need of the literary critic task and job vacancy so that it will be useful for the students after they will have graduated from the university. The questions for discussion are formulated to lead the students understand and practice the knowledge of literary criticism.