

# What Is Critical Theory?

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# Criticism and Interpretation

- ★ Criticism is the act analyzing, evaluating, and judging the quality of a literary or artistic work.
- ★ Interpretation is explanation, explication, elucidation.
  - ★ Interpretation is the act of finding meaning in a work of art or literature.
- ★ Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation, originally the Bible, but now broadly defined to art and literature.
  - ★ Hermeneutics is interpretive theory.

# Theory

- ★ “A coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena” (*Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*)
- ★ A proposed explanation
- ★ A system of rules, principles, and methods of art, as distinguished from practice
- ★ Theory is the act of contemplating disciplinary systems methodologically.



# Literary Criticism vs Literary Theory

- ★ Literary criticism is a particular act of interpretation of a text.
  - ★ Literary criticism explains the text.
- ★ Literary theory is a hermeneutical method that proposes principles of textual analysis.
  - ★ Literary theory is *the* system that underpins a particular practice of criticism; literary theory systematizes literary criticism.

# Critical Theory

- ★ Critical theory, as opposed to specifically literary theory, embodies the methodological analysis of culture in general. Literary analysis is one component of a larger analysis of media, politics and ideology, socio-economic positions, and other subjectifying apparatuses.
- ★ Because the theories we're learning about can be applied across disciplines (not just interpreting literature), I will refer to them as types of critical theory.

# What We Will Cover

- ★ New Criticism (and Russian Formalism), close reading of the text itself, paying particular heed to its unifying tensions and analysis of internal form.
- ★ Psychoanalysis, the analysis of the psyche of the author, text, and culture
- ★ Marxism (and Cultural Studies), socio-economic historical and cultural analyses



# What We Will Cover

Concluded

- ★ Feminism and Gender Studies, analyses based on the the agency of women in the patriarchy as well as socially constructed gender identity.
- ★ Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Theory, analyses of the politics and poetics, consciousness and unconsciousness of (queer) sexuality and identity.
- ★ Postcolonialism, analyses of colonial ideology (oppression and othering) and postcolonial resistance.

# What We May Cover

Based on Student Group Selections

- ★ Cognitive Criticism, analyses of literature from the perspective of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology
- ★ Existentialism and Phenomenology, examines the self-conscious subjectivity and free choice of characters, creative writing as meaningful action, and the being of the literary work in the world.
- ★ Reader-Response Criticism, analyses based on the transactional, affective, subjective relationship between author, text, and reader.



# What We May Cover

Continued

- ★ Post-Structuralism (and Deconstruction and Post-Modernism), the analysis of a text's plays, slippages, and aporias of meaning
- ★ Structuralism (and Semiotics and Narratology), the analysis of signs and codes within linguistic systems
- ★ African American Criticism, analyses of African American (literary/aesthetic) history and heritage and the social construction of racial identity.

# What We May Cover

Concluded

- ★ Ecocriticism, analyses of literature from the ecological, environmental, and natural perspective.

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# **(Liberal Humanism) New Criticism (And Russian Formalism)**

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# Liberal Humanism

- ★ Before the rise of theory in the 1970s, the study of literature was non-political and non-theoretical.
- ★ Now, those who study literature and espouse neither a political (Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism, etc.) nor a theoretical (poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, reader-response, etc.) critical approach are called liberal humanists.

# Liberal Humanism

## Tenets

- ★ Literature is timeless and significant,
- ★ Transcending socio-political, literary-historical, and autobiographical context,
- ★ Thereby necessitating close reading in isolation,
- ★ In order to determine the transcendental meaning of the text, which coincides with some essential aspect of human nature,
- ★ Determined by interpreting the meaning of the text's characters, who are individuals, i.e., transcendent subjects.



# Liberal Humanism

Tenets, concluded

- ★ Literature enhances life
- ★ By unifying literary form with the content of human values
- ★ In a sincere, authentic manner
- ★ That shows rather than tells,
- ★ Thereby requiring a literary critic to mediate between the text and the reader.

# New Criticism

- ★ Influenced by I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis's practical criticism,
- ★ Eschews philological, biographical, and historical criticism
- ★ Strives to create an objective, formalist criticism that finds meaning in “the text itself”
- ★ Advocates close reading that analyzes tension and complexity of formal structure and meaning via ambiguity, irony, and paradox
- ★ Resolves tensions of text into harmonious organic unity that engenders a universal theme

# Russian Formalism

- ★ Considers the text to be an autonomous object.
- ★ Studies literary (as opposed to practical or conventional) language and the internal operations of works of literature, be they either narrative form in fiction or sound structure in poetry.
- ★ Literature evolves not because of external history but through revolutions of literary language.



# The Relationship

Between Liberal Humanism, New Criticism,  
and Russian Formalism

- ★ Liberal Humanism values literature as timeless and transcendent; New Criticism constitutes the formalization and systematization of this in America during the 1930s and 1940s against the backdrop of non-political, non-theoretical liberal humanism; and Russian Formalism of the 1910s to 1930s is American New Criticism's Russian cousin.

# The Question

## That New Critics Pose

- ★ What single interpretation of the text best establishes its organic unity? In other words, how do the text's formal elements, and the multiple meanings those elements produce, all work together to support the theme, or overall meaning, of the work? Remember, a great work will have a theme of universal human significance. (Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* 150)

# Cleanth Brooks

New Critic

★ Argues that “the formalist critic is concerned primarily with the work itself” (Rivkin and Ryan 16), the “involvement” of ideas (19), and the literary quality of the text, rather than the author or reader



# **William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley**

## **New Critics**

- ★ **Intentional fallacy:** the error of taking the author's intent for the meaning of the work
- ★ **Affective fallacy:** the error of taking a work's emotional effect for its meaning
- ★ **Affective criticism:** criticism that romantically looks at psychological effects of the work
- ★ **Cognitive criticism:** criticism that classically and objectively looks at the work

# Viktor Shklovsky

Russian Formalist

- ★ Distinguishes poetic and practical language via a literary work's defamiliarization techniques that challenge habitual ways of perceiving and using language, in order to allow the reader to see the verbal art object.
- ★ “Poetic speech is *formed speech*. Prose is ordinary speech. . . .” (Rivkin and Ryan 13)

# Sean O'Sullivan

Formalist

- ★ Argues that “serialized television drama . . . is a poetic enterprise” that necessitates formal analysis of its discreet parts.
- ★ Counters the conventional view that a television season of continuous, serialized episodes is like a novel chapter, and instead suggests that the early twenty-first century uninterrupted thirteen-episode season is sonnet-sequence.



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# Psychoanalytic Criticism

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# Psychoanalytic Criticism

Applies Psychoanalytic Theory

- ★ While the formalist approaches focus on the meaning derived from the literary text itself, the psychoanalytic approach applies psychoanalysis and focuses on psychological issues of literature and is derived from psychoanalytic theory.



# Classical Theory

## Freudianism

Psychoanalysis, as inaugurated by Sigmund Freud, analyzes the psyche, which, according to the theory, is a site of irrational and unconscious conflict between primal desires and traumatic realities. The following slides represent the core of Freud's theory regarding models of psyche, unconscious and repression, pleasure and reality, sexuality, basic disorders, and symptom and cure.

# Repression and the Unconscious

- ★ Two interrelated concepts underly all of Freud's work
  - ★ Repression: the procedure by which the conflicts and realities which the psyche cannot rationally deal with are put out of one's conscious, waking mind
  - ★ Unconscious: the part of the psyche into which conflicts and traumas are repressed

# Two Models of Psyche

## I. Id/Ego/Superego

- ★ Id (it): instinct or drive, the bodily and biological basis of all psychic processes
  - ★ Most id drives like sex are repressed; however, the id does not equal the unconscious.
- ★ Ego (I): the self, which originally develops out of the id, but is tested by reality and influenced by people in reality
  - ★ The ego manages the demands of 1) the libido and id, 2) external reality, and 3) super-ego.
  - ★ Overwhelmed by super-ego or reality, the ego represses prohibited drives or trauma.



# I. Id/Ego/Super-ego

Concluded

## ★ Ego, continued

★ Anxiety and psychic unrest signal the breakdown of the ego's management of its various relations.

## ★ Super-ego (over-I): family and societal influences, voice of authority

★ The super-ego represents the ideal of higher humanity (you ought to be like this--like your father) and the reaction-formation against prohibition (you may not be like this--like your father).

★ Paradoxically, the super-ego's prohibitive idealism can give pleasure; thus the libido can become fused to its own negation, causing neurotic desire, for instance.

# Two Models of Psyche

## 2. Unconscious/Pre-conscious/Conscious

- ★ Unconscious: the site of conflict and trauma, what one has repressed, what one cannot know without analytical help (It's not that one doesn't know she is obsessively washing her hands, but rather that she can't explain why)
- ★ Pre-conscious: what one is not thinking, but could if one chose to (short and long-term memory)
- ★ Conscious: what one is presently aware of



# Pleasure and Reality

- ★ Pleasure principle: originally simply a tension derived from a unsatisfied drive of an erogenous zone, but as the psyche develops memory and fantasy, pleasure is coded into non-genital action of primary process, imagination, dreamwork, and wish-fulfillment
- ★ Reality principle: the secondary process thought of reason and judgment which rivals and supersedes the pleasure principle, thereby installing the unconscious of repressed desires



# Pleasure and Reality

## Continued

- ★ Eros vs Thanatos: undergirding the pleasure and reality principles, which exist in the order of the ego, are primal instincts, which exist in the irrational realm of the id.
- ★ Eros: the life instinct, pleasure derived from creation, love and affection
- ★ Thanatos: the death instinct, pleasure derived from (self-)destruction, hate and aggression

# Pleasure and Reality

Concluded

- ★ Art: a reconciliation between pleasure and reality principles, a sublime working through of Eros and Thanatos.
- ★ Sublimation: the fulfillment of basic bodily drives via transformation into something “better,” civilized and artistic

# Sexuality

- ★ Freud theorizes that humans pass through four stages of sexuality as they grow from infants to sexually active adults.
- ★ These stages seek to 1) localize desire from polymorphous perversity to genital pleasure and 2) transfer auto-erotic pleasure to others in the cause of heterosexual reproduction.
- ★ If a conflict or trauma in one of these stages is not resolved, then neurosis, psychosis, or perversity could result.



# Sexuality

## Continued

- ★ 1) oral, in which the mouth is the site of satisfaction,
- ★ 2) sadistic-anal, in which biting and excretion afford pleasure,
- ★ 3) phallic, in which the child undergoes the Oedipal complex of desire for the mother, rivalry with the father, and appropriate super-ego guilt taught through castration anxiety which causes the child to desire others outside the family; and the period of sexual latency which follows
  - ★ (Note: just because you don't remember your Oedipal complex doesn't mean it didn't happen. You were a toddler, and guilt veils or represses memory.)
- ★ 4) genital, green light for heterosexual reproduction

# Three Basic Disorders

- ★ Neurosis: overwhelmed by reality and super-ego, the ego flees reality by suppressing id, desire, conflict, or trauma it cannot manage
- ★ Psychosis: with no support from the super-ego, the ego forecloses upon and remodels reality according to unchecked id, desire, conflict, or trauma
- ★ Perversion: due to a founding trauma which it disavows the reality of, the ego gives up real sexual pleasure for a symbolic substitute



# Symptom and Cure

- ★ Everyone represses, but those for whom the unconscious causes debilitating suffering seek treatment with a psychoanalyst.
- ★ Symptom: manifest expression of unconscious conflict or trauma, a return of the repressed in somatic and agential form
- ★ Talking cure: the purpose of psychoanalysis is to reveal to the conscious mind, through analytical discourse, the unconscious underlying symptoms
- ★ Active Reversal: once an analysand realizes her unconscious conflicts, she can consciously seek to reverse them through new ways of being toward self, others, and the world



# Neo-Freudianism

## Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Three Orders or Realms

- ★ **Imaginary:** Initiated by the Mirror Stage in which the infant, feeling fragmented and inchoate, derives a sense of self and wholeness by looking at an image such as her primary caregiver or her reflection in a mirror, the Imaginary Order constitutes the pre-verbal realm of images in which the child feels complete and unified with the Desire of the Mother.

# Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Continued

★ Symbolic Order: Inaugurated by the Name-of-the-Father, i.e., the father's prohibition in language ("No") that breaks the dyadic bond of child and mother, the Symbolic Order is the realm of metonymic desire for the other, for the subject is always searching for the little lost object of desire, *objet petit a*, but only discovers a chain of signifying representations of it in the Big Other, the social rituals, cultural rules, and language system that...

# Lacanian Psychoanalysis

## Symbolic Order, continued

★...can only offer symbolic substitutes for the (primal maternal) presence which it lacks because it lost it via its entrance into language. The Symbolic Order splits the subject into conscious language and unconscious trauma over the castrated loss and subsequent desire for fullness.



# Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Concluded

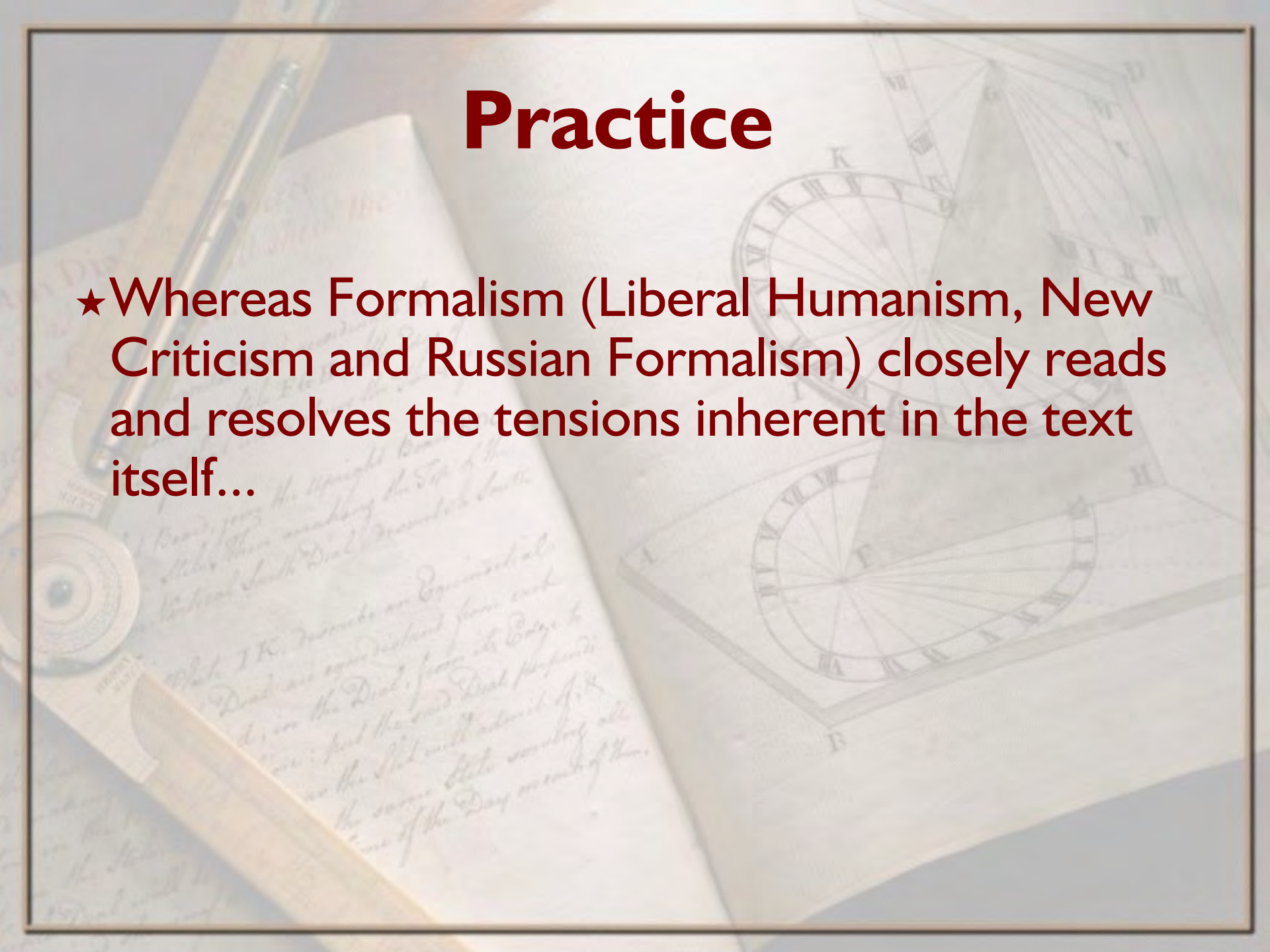
- ★ Real: Alternatively, that realm which exists beyond or outside both Imaginary being and Symbolic meaning; or that moment of subjective destitution in which one sees through the chain of signifiers of the Symbolic Order and the ideology of the Big Other and is traumatized by the hollow kernel of nothingness, deprived of Symbolic meaning and bereft of Imaginary being.

# Object Relations Theory

- ★ Focuses on Freud's concept of the ego and deemphasizes Freud's notion of psychosexuality commencing with the Oedipal complex.
- ★ Theorizes how the self interacts with the world, founded by the child's ego's relations with its objects, especially the mother.
- ★ The child's ego uses illusion fantasy to sort through its destructive and creative feelings (bad objects and good objects) and it uses objects of first possession (transitional objects) to adapt to the world.

# Practice

★ Whereas Formalism (Liberal Humanism, New Criticism and Russian Formalism) closely reads and resolves the tensions inherent in the text itself...





# Practice

Concluded

- ★ Psychoanalytic literary criticism, using the principles of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, looks at the unconscious psyche as well as the anxieties and desires of a literary text's
  - ★ Narrators or Characters
  - ★ Author or Culture
  - ★ Form or Genre
  - ★ Reader or Society

# Theorists



- ★ Sigmund Freud
- ★ Jacques Lacan
- ★ D. W. Winnicott
- ★ Julia Kristeva
- ★ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari
- ★ Lisa Hinrichson

# Sigmund Freud

- ★ Argues that dreams are a substitutive thought-process which rework memories and experiences from either 1) the id as disguised expressions of repressed wish-fulfillment or 2) the ego as problem-solving expressions of deep-rooted or everyday life conflicts and traumas.
- ★ Dreams may be interpreted by breaking down the manifest content, which operates according to rules of condensation and displacement as well as conditions of representability and intelligibility, in order to glean the latent content of what the dream really means.



# Sigmund Freud

Continued

## ★ Dreams, continued

- ★ The goal of dream interpretation is to work through rational, conscious secondary process thought to know the irrational, unconscious primary process thought that undergirds it.
- ★ Argues that the uncanny constitutes a familiar yet unconscious knowledge (for instance, of death and mortality), which had been concealed and repressed but which is now returning (for instance by looking at dolls; refer also to the uncanny valley in contemporary animation).

# Sigmund Freud

## Concluded

- ★ Argues that subjects emotionally bond with other subjects through a process of identification, such as in the Oedipal complex when a boy identifies with his father as his ideal.
- ★ Sometimes the ego identifies with an object in a neurotic manner that introjects the desired object into the ego; in such situations, object-choice has regressed to object identification.



# Jacques Lacan

★ Argues that the ego is created in the mirror stage when the infant, who is uncoordinated and inchoate, looks at a caregiver or mirror and internalizes that coherent image as the support structure of his identity, thus inaugurating the self as a fictional, alien, and othered ideal construct designed to contain formlessness and the self's primary desire to live up to the demands of the (Other) man in the mirror.



# D. W. Winnicott

- ★ Argues that babies use transitional objects like blankets and dolls that are, from the babies' perspective, neither inside themselves nor outside themselves, to help them adapt to external reality.
- ★ Distortions and maladaptatives of transitional objects can lead to addiction, fetishism, and pseudologia fantastica and thieving.
- ★ Suggests that transitional phenomena in children can help us adults understand artistic creativity.

# Julia Kristeva

★ Argues that poetry constitutes a revolutionary breakthrough of the chora, the maternal non-expressive totality of drives which precedes figuration and underlies signification, into the symbolic, the patriarchal realm of relational and representational, thetic and ideational language. The resulting semiotic engenders figuration marked by the unconscious.



# Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Continued

- ★ Argue that books should be read as plateaus of unrestrained and (contra Freud's Oedipal complex) unbounded, deterritorialized and destratified desire that neither rests nor climaxes, but simply becomes and flows.
- ★ Meaning is rhizomatic; it breaks free of the bounded root system and flies into an a-centered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying, root network that shatters linear unity and semantic meaning.



# Lisa Hinrichson

- ★ Connects contemporary trauma studies, which in part define trauma in a Freudian manner as an external assault on the psyche that breaks the internal workings of the ego and raise defense mechanism such as denial and and dissociation, first to post-structuralist aesthetics of narrative disruption and representability crisis, and second to traumatized historical collective memory of the racial and economic violence of the U.S. South depicted in its literature.

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# **Historical Criticisms: Marxist Criticism, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism**

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# Marxism

## Theory

Marxism, named after economic, political, and cultural philosopher Karl Marx, is a school of thought that examines how politically endorsed economic systems structure societies (organized communities) and cultures (the beliefs and values of communities).

# Society

According to Marxism, societies are composed of two elements.

- ★ **Base: economics**

- ★ the material modes of production

- ★ **Superstructure: sociopolitical ideology**

- ★ the culture such as education, philosophy, religion, government, arts, and science

# Class

Within a society, people are divided into classes.

- ★ (Socio-)economic class: a group of people categorized by a particular relationship to economic and social power, i.e., its relationship to the base and superstructure
- ★ The two basic classes in classical Marxism:
  - ★ bourgeoisie: in a capitalist system, those who own and control the base and implement the superstructure
  - ★ proletariat: in a capitalist system, those who manage (but neither own nor control) the base and are programmed by the superstructure



# Class

## Continued

- ★ In contemporary America, the classes are more complicated than the bourgeoisie and the proletariat:
  - ★ Lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, upper class
  - ★ Working class, middle class, affluent professional, executive elite (from Jean Anyon)
  - ★ Working poor
  - ★ Intellectual class (from Antonio Gramsci)
  - ★ The 99% and the 1%

# Types of Societies

Marxism predominantly looks at three kinds of societies.

- ★ **Capitalism:** a free-market economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods
- ★ **Capital:** Money used to make more money, either by purchasing goods or labor to make goods and selling for profit
- ★ The bourgeoisie own the capital while the proletariat hire their bodies for wages (wage labor).

# Types of Societies

Continued

- ★ **Socialism:** the stage after the proletarian revolution when a society is changing from capitalism to communism
- ★ The people control the means of production and operate it based on fairness rather than free-market.



# Types of Societies

## Concluded

- ★ **Communism:** the political theory in which all property and wealth is owned in a classless society by all the members of a community
- ★ Although the former Soviet Union and the present China and Cuba, for example, call themselves communist, they are oligarchies (government by a small group of people) and dictatorships (government by one ruler).
- ★ Although communism is the goal of Marxism, many (Marxists included) consider it a utopian dream, and instead focus on achieving at least class consciousness in the culture and socialism in the government at best.

# The Dialectical Materialist View of History

- ★ Materialism: focus on the physical world (for example, wealth and possessions), based on the belief that the mind follows the body
- ★ History: study of the past and how the past progresses into the present and future



# Dialectical Materialism

Concluded

- ★ Dialectic: the progressive process by which two opposing thoughts, thesis and antithesis, become combined in a unified whole or synthesis
- ★ Dialectical materialism: the historical process by which opposing forces such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat or the material reality and a culture's consciousness of its material reality perpetually struggle to bring about a justly organized and self-reflective society
- ★ Praxis: method by which theory is put into practice



# Commodity Value

## ★ Three Types of Value

- ★ Use Value: the utilitarian value of a commodity based on its use (the value of an iPad to an individual user)
- ★ Exchange Value: the market value of a commodity based on its raw material, labor, and production costs (the value of an iPad based on design, material, labor, production, and shipping costs)
- ★ Sign Exchange Value: the value of a commodity based on its status (the value of an iPad based on the coolness, hipness, and hype of Apple iDevices)

# Commodification

- ★ **Commodification:** treating objects and people for their economic or social status rather than for their aesthetic or human value
- ★ **Commodification of Desire:** humanity's wants and needs become entangled in conspicuous consumption and commodity fetish such that the ruling class does not need to physically oppress the classes that are under them if those classes purposefully sacrifice themselves as wage-slaves in order to acquire the stuff that the ideology programmed them to fixate on
- ★ **Reification:** the alienating way that commodification reduces social relations, ideas, and people to things



# Ideology and Consciousness

- ★ Ideology: in classical Marxism, a belief system brought about by cultural conditioning that portrays arbitrary structures of existence as natural and innate ways of being, such as capitalist ideology or Marxist ideology
- ★ However, in contemporary Marxism, the term has come to mean (because of Althusser) in many instances how the culture blinds an oppressed class to its material conditions of existence by erecting an illusion; common ideologies that operate in the service of American capitalism and those who hold power under capitalism are the American dream, patriotism, religion, individualism, and consumerism.



# Ideology and Consciousness

Continued

- ★ Interpellation: from Althusser, the ideological and economic system reproduces itself by implicitly hailing us as subjects who passively and unconsciously support the dominant social assumptions
- ★ Alienation: originally from Marx, meaning the estrangement from one's own labor
  - ★ However, the term now also suggests the estrangement from self and society, and the feeling of not belonging to and subsequent withdrawal from the world.

# Ideology and Consciousness

Concluded

- ★ Hegemony (from Antonio Gramsci): domination of one social class over others through the use of cultural power and influence that creates the consent of the masses
- ★ Organic Intellectuals: leaders who rise from within the masses to use civil society to speak for the people
- ★ Class consciousness: awareness of the (alienating and commodified) socioeconomic conditions of one's class
- ★ False consciousness: the lack of awareness or ideological illusions of one's conditions of existence



# Marxist Literary Criticism

- ★ While New Critics closely read the text to find its universal theme,
- ★ While psychoanalytic critics interpret how the unconscious conflicts of the psyche influence the author, characters, or readers of the text,
- ★ Marxist literary critics approach a text either as detached scholars examining economic and class issues both inside and outside of the text or as cultural advocates revealing the text's ideological or revolutionary forces, or as both.



# Marxist Literary Criticism

## Inside the Text

- ★ The objective Marxist critic looks “inside” the content of the text (for example, at the character and plot) for issues, ideas, and themes relating to the materialist history of capitalist socioeconomic class struggle.
- ★ The supportive Marxist critic interprets how the work of literature *either* exposes and challenges *or* manifests and reifies class ideology.

# Marxist Literary Criticism

## Outside the Text

- ★ The objective Marxist critic looks “outside” the text at the author’s class, the literary genre and period, the readers’ social assumptions, and the literary form’s politics to determine how the class of text derives from and/or reifies its society’s dominant mode of production.
- ★ The supportive Marxist critic evaluates whether the form employs realism or experimentation, and then she evaluates whether the realist or experimental form serves ideological or revolutionary ends.



# New Historicism

## Theory

- ★ Like Marxism, New Historicism is interested in the ideological apparatuses and power structures of society and history; unlike Marxism, it does not focus on economics and class, it does not believe in a dialectical view of history, and it does not advocate for a particular economic/political goal like communism.



# New Historicism

## Theory

- ★ Unlike traditional historical study, New Historicism does not believe objective analysis of linear, causal, progressive history is possible; rather history is a discontinuous narrative--filled with competing discourses and ideologies--that is interpreted by the current culture to fulfill ideological needs.

# New Historicism

## Literary Criticism

- ★ New Historicism interprets the the literary text as a cultural artifact that embodies the conflicted discourses and opposing ideologies of its time. The critic not only incorporates into her analysis the documented conversations of the time but also exposes their ideological concerns--as well as her own position within history.

# Cultural Materialism

Part of the Historical Criticism Family

- ★ Theorists who think of Cultural Materialism as political often pair it with Marxism; those who conceive of it as cultural pair it with New Historicism; many Cultural Materialist theorists themselves define it as its own theory.
- ★ Marxism, New Historicism, and Cultural Materialism are in the same family of historical criticisms.



# Cultural Materialism

## Similarities with Marxism and New Historicism

- ★ Akin to the poststructuralist, ideological version of Marxism as represented by Louis Althusser as well as discursive power structure version of New Historicism as represented by Michael Foucault, cultural materialism examines the underlying ideology of culture.

# Cultural Materialism

## Different Emphasis from Marxism

- ★ While classical Marxism is interested in the conflict between the capitalists and the proletariat, cultural materialism looks at all forms of culture (from high to middle to low) and uses Marxism, feminism, and other political theories to oppose the status quo and to advocate for the oppressed.

# Cultural Materialism

Different Emphasis from New Historicism

- ★ While New Historicism emphasizes the restraints of the system, resulting in political pessimism, cultural materialism emphasizes points of resistance, resulting in political optimism.



# Cultural Materialism

## Literary Criticism

- ★ Cultural materialism examines the enculturated behavior and value systems as well as the social structures and social understanding invoked by the literary and mass culture work in not only its characters but also its readers; and it often looks at the experience of the culturally marginalized.

# Historical Criticisms

## Theorists

- ★ Karl Marx, Marxist
- ★ Walter Benjamin, Marxist
- ★ Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Materialist
- ★ Louis Althusser, Marxist
- ★ Michel Foucault, New Historicist
- ★ Louis Montrose, New Historicist

# Karl Marx

★ From *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: In capitalist production, the worker is estranged from the object of her labor and “sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities.” Two classes develop, property-owners and propertyless workers.



# Karl Marx

Continued

★ From *The German Ideology*: Human consciousness is derived from material activities and social relations of human beings. Ideologies such as morality, religion, and metaphysics disregard the actual means of production and social relations of men and create a false consciousness of history and real life.

# Walter Benjamin

★ Criticizes historicism that mythologizes history as universal (not of particular classes) and making symbolic progress, and advocates for an historical materialist conception of history that sees history as a dangerous, if not revolutionary, struggle of the oppressed classes against the ruling classes who would exploit the myths of history to conserve their power.



# Pierre Bourdieu

- ★ Defines *habitus* as “a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures,” or dispositions, that not only unconsciously limit free will (freedom is conditioned on the habits of mind) through inertia and convention but also reproduce social structures without the need of rule of law because revolutionary thought is impossible.
- ★ Defines hysteresis as “the incapacity to think,” to reflect upon historical crises of the past and act on historical opportunities to change the present and future.



# Louis Althusser

- ★ Defines ideology as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”
- ★ Argues that Ideological State Apparatuses interpellate individuals as subjects (with illusory understanding of their lives) so that external, repressive power is unnecessary because subjects submit freely to the State and accept their subjugation.

# Michel Foucault

★ Argues that modern societal institutions deploy techniques of biopower to administer, regulate, and discipline bodies, for instance in the area of sex and sexuality. Institutions dominate and control subjectivity through the use of power-knowledge, in which power shapes knowledge in order to reproduce itself, similar to Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* and Althusser's idea of ideological state apparatuses.



# Louis Montrose

- ★ Associates New Historicism with cultural poetics, cultural materialism, feminism, and poststructuralist Marxism.
- ★ Sees New Historicism blurring literary and historical interpretation, text and context; and reads individual characters and authors within the context of social and literary background.
- ★ Argues that history is discursively constructed and our interpretation of it is ideologically positioned, yet, unlike Foucault, sees a path of resistance to social control due to the contradictions among the discourses, networks, and ideologies that we are subject to.



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# Feminism and Gender Studies

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 3900

5 October 2017

<https://alexablazer.com>

# Comparing the Theories

- ★ While New Criticism closely reads the organic unity that composes the universal theme of the text,
- ★ While psychoanalysis interprets the unconscious conflicts of character, author, and reader,
- ★ While Marxism looks at the relationship between socioeconomic reality and ideology in advance of productive and conscious change,



# Comparing the Theories

Continued

- ★ While New Historicism analyzes the literary text as a cultural artifact that embodies the conflicted discourses and opposing ideologies of its time,
- ★ Feminism criticizes patriarchal ideology in literature and advocates for women's shared creative and communal valorization, and
- ★ Gender Studies deconstructs essential and hierarchical gender oppositions and sees gender as a cultural performative practice.

# Patriarchy

★ Patriarchal ideology blinds both women and men to the unequal yet equally debilitating socially constructed realities of gendered experience that not only conserve male power but also oppress, objectify, and other women through traditional, hierarchical, and binary gender roles.

# From Feminism

★ All feminists believe that

- ★ 1) Women are oppressed and
- ★ 2) othered (objectified and marginalized) by
- ★ 3) patriarchy, which is ensconced--established and concealed--in Western civilization, and that
- ★ 4) culture, not biology, determines gender, and that
- ★ 5) literature portrays gender issues, and

★ And all feminists

- ★ 6) are activists for gender equality



# To Feminisms

- ★ However, different feminists focus on different aspects of and assert different causes of gender disparity.
- ★ For the purposes of this lecture, there are three broad types of feminism:
  - ★ Anglo-American,
  - ★ French, which includes materialist and psychoanalytic feminisms, and
  - ★ Multicultural

# Anglo-American Feminism

- ★ The Anglo-American branch of feminism is less theoretically oriented, like liberal humanism, and focuses on the portrayal of women in literature and advocates for equality, rights, and status.

# French Feminism

- ★ The French branch of feminism is more theoretically oriented (particularly applying post-structuralist psychoanalysis, cultural materialism, and New Historicism) and focuses on how language, representation, and psyches in literary texts are derived from gendered social/ideological power relations.



# Materialist Feminism

★ Like Marxism, materialist feminism looks at consciousness constructed from life, reality. While Marxism focuses on class struggle, materialist feminism analyzes how the patriarchy oppresses women by controlling economic conditions, for instance, how division of labor within the family leads to woman being othered-locally by the family and culturally by the patriarchal institutions. With no shared collective experience, history, or tradition, women's bodies are objectified and their labor is appropriated.

# Psychoanalytic Feminism

★ Following Lacan, psychoanalytic feminism theorizes the relationship between the (patriarchal) symbolic order of language and psychosexual existence. Psychoanalytic feminism looks at patriarchal binary thought (such as active/passive, self/other, head/heart, culture/nature, sun/moon), phallogocentrism (privileging the male phallus in the construction of meaning), and the male gaze (the male subject looks at the female object of desire).



# Psychoanalytic Feminism

- ★ Two possible ways of resisting patriarchal language are
  - ★ 1) *Écriture féminine*: Following Hélène Cixous, language and literature, written from the body rather than the mind, that undermines patriarchal binary thinking by being fluid and associative and joyous and liberating.
  - ★ 2) Semiotic Language: Following Julia Kristeva, originating in the semiotic chora of bodily drives as opposed to the symbolic language of words and meanings, semiotic language breaks the boundaries of the social machine by virtue of being outside the predetermined binary oppositions of symbolic (male) logic.



# Multicultural Feminism

★ While liberal feminism focuses on female equality, materialist feminism focuses on patriarchal socioeconomic conditions, and psychoanalytic feminism focuses on the consequences of the phallogocentric psyche, multicultural feminism charts the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, and other cultural factors, for instance by combining feminism with African American criticism or Chicana criticism, lesbian or Marxist criticism.

# Gender Studies

★ Though technically not feminism because it does not advocate political change, gender studies' deconstruction of the fixed, binary, hierarchical gender oppositions (male/female, sex/gender) reveals a performative and decentered fluidity of gender identity and sexuality that coincides with feminist readings and goals.



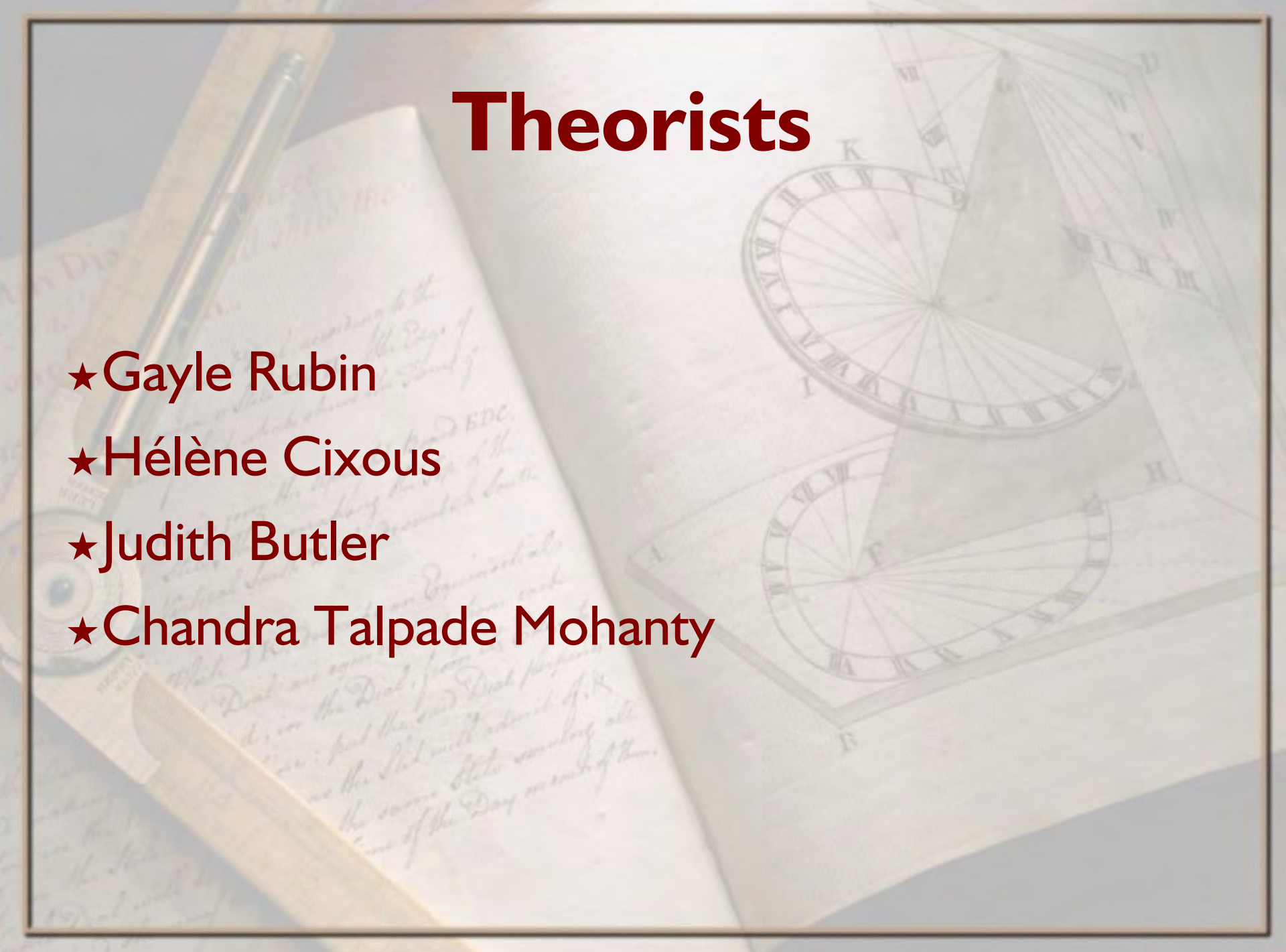
# Feminist Literary Criticism

★ Similar to how Marxist literary criticism analyzes how the work reinforces or resists capitalist ideology, feminist literary criticism examines how the text reifies or undermines patriarchal ideological operations, how it creates or portrays a female community, how it encompasses an intersection of forces (race, class, etc) acting on gender, how it portrays or establishes women's creativity, consciousness, and literary tradition, how its style of writing is gendered, and how it is received or rejected by its culture based on gender issues.



# Theorists

- ★ Gayle Rubin
- ★ Hélène Cixous
- ★ Judith Butler
- ★ Chandra Talpade Mohanty



# Gayle Rubin

★ In order to conceptualize the oppression of women in the sex/gender system and thus argue for political action and change of the social system of gender roles, Rubin combines 1) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's Marxist comparison of the relations of production with the relations of sexuality with 2) Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology of kinship and the incest taboo that shows how, across cultures, women are used as gifts to be exchanged by men...

# Gayle Rubin

Continued

★and with 3) Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis that shows how both male and female sexuality is conventionalized by family and society but, through a double standard, female desire is tamed into passivity and masochism and female identity is often rendered hysterical and prohibited healthy narcissism.



# Hélène Cixous

★ Hélène Cixous, in a feminist version of deconstruction that renders the gender binary a fiction, argues for *l'écriture féminine* that vibrantly overflows with meaning as it writes beyond the bounds of the phallogocentric machine. The writing of the body liberates the self from the boundaries of symbolic logic.

# Judith Butler

★ Argues that there is no proper, natural, inherent gender; instead, gender is a social construct that is naturalized and reproduced by “imitation for which there is no original,” in other words, gender is a performance of conventional practices, and the idea that there are

# Chandra Talpade Mohanty

★As a Marxist, internationalist/globalist, and liberal feminist, conceptualizes the intersection of class, gender, race, and nationality (especially immigrant status) regarding how global capitalism's systems of exploitation and domination femininize women's labor and render it invisible.



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# Lesbian Criticism, Gay Criticism, and Queer Theory

Dr. Alex E. Blazer

English 3900

19 October 2017

<https://alexablazer.com>

# Theory

## General

★ Just as Marxism and feminism looks at the status of class and women under capitalism and patriarchy, lesbian, gay, and queer theory examines the standing of lesbian, gay, and nonstraight people in homophobic, heterosexist, and/or heteronormative society, in other words, in a culture where fear and/or institutional othering of gays is the ideological and compulsory norm.



# Theory

Continued

★ Just as New Historicism and Gender Studies are related to Marxism and Feminism in their interest in examining ideological networks but do not necessarily advocate a political agenda regarding class and gender, Queer Theory is often more philosophical than political regarding the subject of sexuality.

# Lesbian Criticism

## Theory

- ★ Like feminist criticism, lesbian criticism advocates for the political and literary empowerment of women--specifically lesbians--over against patriarchal and heterosexist power.
- ★ A lesbian can be defined as *either* a woman whose sexuality exists on a continuum of sexual desire for women *or* as a woman who identifies with women.

# Lesbian Criticism

## Practice

- ★ Lesbian literary critics analyze
  - ★ 1) the lesbian subtextual coding of supposedly straight stories,
  - ★ 2) the work of lesbian authors,
  - ★ 3) female homosociality or women-identified women in heterosexual texts, and
  - ★ 4) the lesbian literary tradition.



# Gay Criticism

## Theory

★ Just as lesbianism is often defined on a continuum, so too gay and homosexuality. While lesbianism looks at either the axis of sexuality or the axis of homosociality, gay criticism examines either the axis of sexuality or the axis of culture via the gay sensibility, existing outside the mainstream culture, for instance, through campy artifice and theatricality.

# Gay Criticism

## Practice

- ★ Like lesbian criticism, gay criticism interprets
  - ★ 1) gay poetics,
  - ★ 2) gay coding of straight texts,
  - ★ 3) the gay literary tradition,
  - ★ 4) the gay sensibility in literature,
  - ★ 5) sexual/gender politics, and
  - ★ 6) heterosexual/-ist ideology.

# Queer Theory

★ Just as gender studies theorizes a continuum of gender constructions beyond the traditional two (by deconstructing the hierarchical binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity), queer theory deconstructs the heterosexual/homosexual opposition to show how sexuality is not only unstable and fluid but also subject to shifting social constructions. Queer theory looks at sexuality that transgresses or exceeds the typical hetero-/homo- poles.



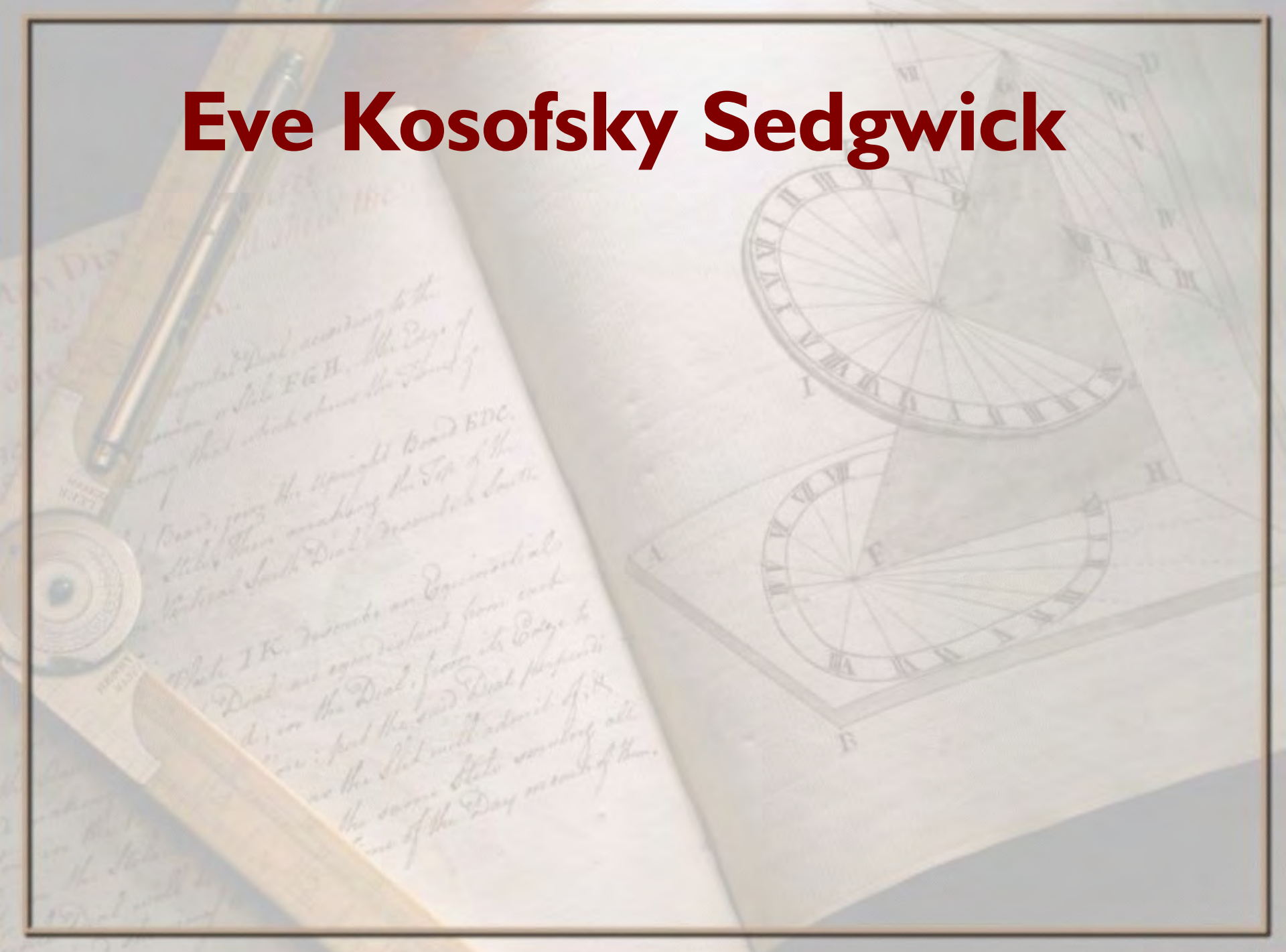
# Theorists

- ★ Adrienne Rich, lesbian criticism
- ★ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, queer theory
- ★ Jasbir Puar, poststructuralist/feminist lesbian and gay criticism
- ★ José Esteban Muñoz, gay criticism and queer theory

# Adrienne Rich

- ★ Argues that the patriarchy deems lesbian experience as deviant or renders lesbian experience invisible through the ideological practices of compulsory heterosexuality, which assumes women to be heterosexual, sexually available to men, and in sexual service of men.
- ★ Advocates woman-centered relationships to separate from and resist male domination.

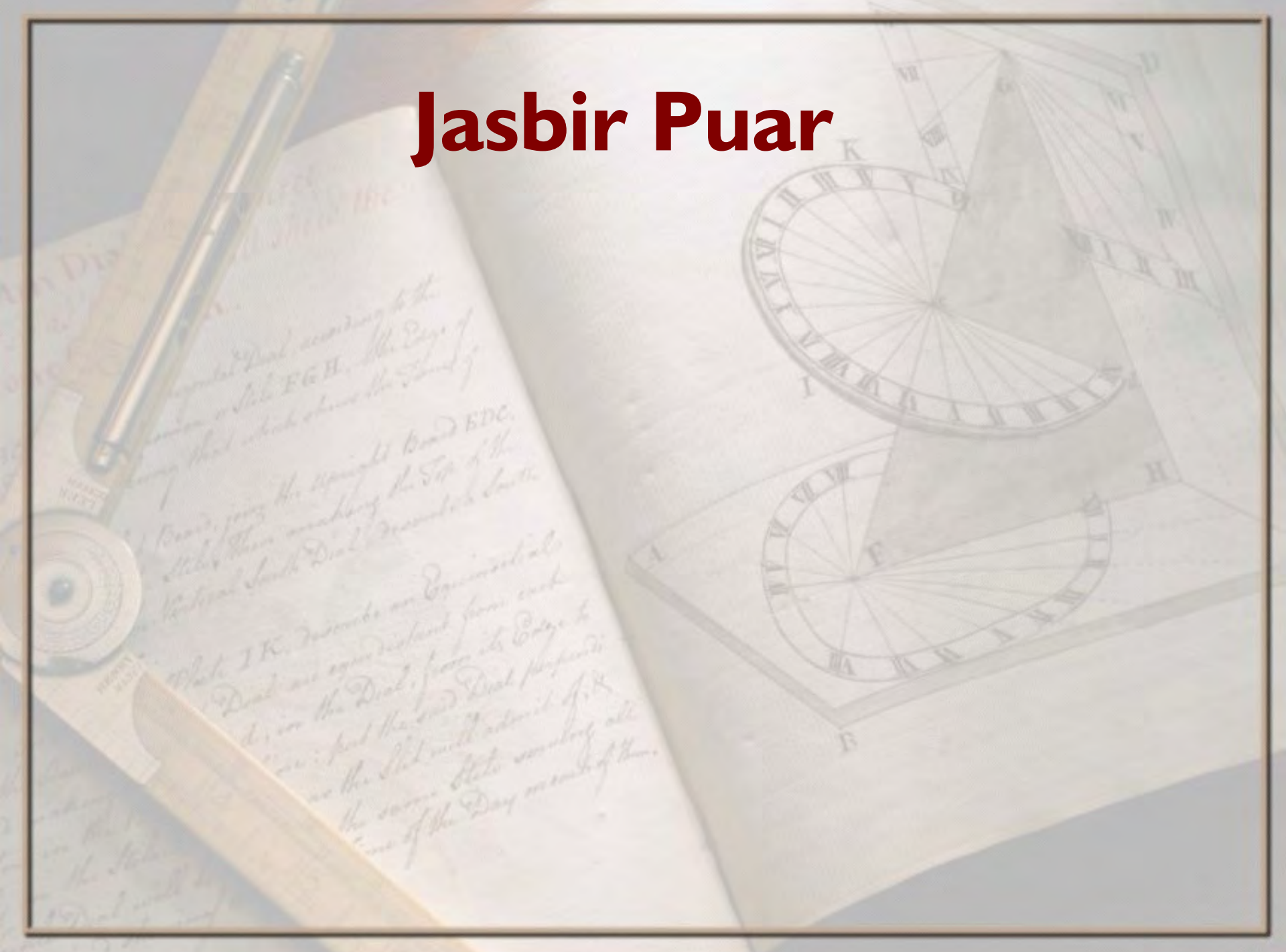
# Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick



Vertical Dial, according to the  
position of the Edge FGH. The Edge of  
the Dial which shows the Face of  
the Dial, being the upright Board EDC.  
The Dial being made by the Top of the  
Vertical South Dial, marked with  
the Equinoctial  
Dial, are equidistant from each  
other, in the Dial, from its Edge to  
the other Edge, perpendicular  
to the Dial perpendicular  
the same Plate, showing all  
the Face of the Day in each of them.



# Jasbir Puar



... of the Dial, according to the  
... of the Edge of  
... that which shows the Face of  
...  
... the upright Board EDC,  
... the Top of the  
... South Dial, marked with  
...  
... in Equinoctial  
... from each  
... from its Edge to  
... Dial Perpendicular  
... all  
... of the Day consisting of them.

# Jóse Esteban Muñoz



Horizontal Dial, according to the  
position of the Edge EGH. The Edge of  
the Dial which shows the Face of  
the Dial, being the upright Board EDC.  
The Dial being made by the Top of the  
Vertical South Dial, marked with  
the Hours, I K, describe an Equinoctial  
Dial, as equidistant from each  
other, in the Dial, from its Edge to  
the other, as the said Dial, perpendicular  
to the same Plate, whereby all  
the Hours of the Day may be  
found.

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# Postcolonial Criticism

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2 November 2017

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# Postcolonialism

## Theory

★ Postcolonialism brings together Marxism's concept of ideology, feminism's idea of woman as othered by patriarchal culture, and New Historicism and Cultural Studies' approach to cultural discourse to show how colonial cultures not only have been subjugated by imperialist discourse but also have been interpellated by the colonizers' ideology that alienates, others, and ultimately unhomes and hybridizes their sense of self--even after political imperialism has ceased.



# Colonized Peoples

- ★ While Marxism emphasizes class conflict between those in power and those who aren't, and feminism illustrates patriarchal power, postcolonialism focuses on how colonized people are economically, politically, and culturally dominated (aka, cultural imperialism) such that they no longer feel at home in their native land and often have to give up their mother tongue (and much of their cultural heritage) upon being forced to use the colonizers' language. Colonial subjects have been interpellated by colonialist ideology to unconsciously yet nonetheless willingly subjugate themselves because they now conceive of themselves as inferior to the colonizers--a demonic, exotic, or oriental other rather than a self.



# Colonized Peoples

Continued

★ The First World refers to Britain, Europe, and the United States; the Second World to white Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa; the Third World to developing nations in India, Africa, and South America, and Asia; and the Fourth World to indigenous populations like Australian aborigines and Native Americans surrounded by white nations. Postcolonialism looks at Third and Fourth World populations politically and culturally imperialized by First and Second World nations.

# Postcolonial Literature

- ★ Postcolonial literature explores
  - ★ the natives' encounter with the colonizers,
  - ★ the outsiders' journey into the native wilderness, colonial othering and oppression,
  - ★ political liberation and self-definition,
  - ★ the reclamation or return of the native, pre-colonial past,
  - ★ the tension with colonizers' language and culture,
  - ★ the reconstruction of native cultural identity, and/or
  - ★ the construction of cultural hybridity, i.e. a double consciousness of the native and imperialist cultures.



# Postcolonial Literature

Continued

- ★ Postcolonial literatures evolve through three stages.
  - ★ They adopt the colonizers' language and culture, for instance European literary genres and models.
  - ★ They adapt the colonizers' forms to their people's subject matter.
  - ★ They become adept in their hybrid literary forms and become culturally independent.



# Postcolonial Criticism

★ Just as Marxism raises class consciousness and advocates for economic justice by questioning if the work of literature critiques or indulges in capitalist ideology, postcolonial literary criticism raises colonial consciousness and asks if the work of literature participates in colonialist or anticolonialist ideology.

# Postcolonial Criticism

Continued

- ★ How does the the work of literature portray colonial domination, postcolonial identity, and cultural resistance?
- ★ Does it condone or criticize othering?
- ★ How does it portray cultural hybridity and polyvalency?
- ★ More broadly, does it participate in Eurocentrism that assumes European and American culture is the universal against which other cultures are foils?

# Theorists

The background of the slide is a composite image. On the left, there is a notebook with a silver pen resting on it. The notebook has handwritten text in cursive, including the words "Dis", "according to the", "the Page of", "Board EDC.", "the Top of the", "south", "from each", "to", "perpendi", "all", "of the Day". On the right, there is a technical drawing of a sundial or similar instrument, showing a circular dial with Roman numerals and various lines and points labeled with letters like A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.

★ Chinua Achebe

★ Edward Said

★ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

★ Arjun Appadurai

★ Stuart Hall



# Chinua Achebe

- ★ Questions Western blindness to African humanity in general.
- ★ Condemns Joseph Conrad's Eurocentric racism that others Africans by negating their civilization and mythologizing Africans as immoral, mysterious, and/or exotic.
- ★ Criticizes "bleeding-heart" liberalism that would portray Africans as little brothers or inferior kin who require white, Western help.
- ★ Calls for scholars to psychoanalyze Conrad's (and Western critics) need to project his (and their) racist needs and imagination onto African characters and setting.

# Edward Said

★ Argues that the relationship between the West and the East is one of power in which Western cultural hegemony dominates the East and produces an Eastern knowledge and history through a system of stereotypical and mythological representations.



# Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

- ★ Criticizes liberal feminism that focuses on female individualism for ignoring the elements of race and colonialism and resulting in a cultural imperialist ideology that represents colonized women of color as inferior animals.
- ★ Advocates a postcolonial feminism that focuses on, first, ways in which female subjectivity is oppressed and, second, ways in which feminine cultural identity can be developed.



# Stuart Hall

- ★ Uses postcolonial criticism to advocate for Cultural Studies that sees cultural identity not as an underlying essence (a static being) but rather a series of positionalities, ruptures, discontinuities, and differences (the process of becoming) due to the trauma of colonialism and othering. Cultural identity is a destabilized and hybridized meaning, mediated by the play of power.

# Arjun Appadurai

- ★ Applies principles of postcolonial criticism to the debate between global cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.
- ★ Argues that global culture is fractured and flowing due to the growing disjunctures between the movement of ethnic peoples, the fluidity of technology, the unpredictability of global finances, the rise of media narratives of cultural reality, and state political ideologies.

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