

**Telescopes and Spyglasses**  
*Using Literary Theories In High School Classrooms*

Danielle Rains  
Bowling Green State University

Completed as Fulfillment of HNRS 4980/4990 Honors Project

## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. New Criticism	5
2. Psychoanalysis	9
3. Marxism	14
4. Feminism	19
5. Queer Theory	23
6. Structuralism	26
7. Post-Structuralism	29
Annotated Bibliography	32

## Psychoanalytical Criticism

### *What is Psychoanalytical Criticism?*

Psychoanalysis started as a medical practice, not a literary theory. Over time, theorists came to apply the assumptions of Psychoanalysis to literary criticism, to psychoanalyze characters in texts as if they were real people.

Psychoanalytic critics believe that there are core issues that define our beings in fundamental ways. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, came up with a theory of a tri-partite psyche. He believed that the human psyche was divided up between the Id, the Superego, and the Ego, which were constantly at war with one another. The Id was believed to be a reserve for our animal instincts, devoted to the gratification of prohibited desires, centering on instant gratification. The Superego, conversely, is our social programming, created by social values, expectations, and taboos, telling us what we should and do not do, centering on internalized morality we learn from our parents. The Ego mediates between the Id and the Superego; it mediates between the psyche and the real world, channeling the desires of the Id into actions acceptable to the superego.

Jung, a student of Freud, also believed that the self had three parts: the Shadow, the Anima, and the Persona. The Shadow, according to Jung, is everything we don't like about ourselves; our dark sides, which we refuse to accept as part of ourselves. The Anima is the part of ourselves we keep hidden from others; it mediates between our Ego and our inner reality, it decides how we act and what we do. The Persona, as defined well by Kate Chopin in her novel *The Awakening*, is "that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world." It mediates between our Ego and the outside, choosing which parts we show which people.

Lacan, a post-structuralist psychoanalytic critic (for more on Post-Structuralism, go to chapter #), believed our reality was divided into three orders. The first is The Imaginary. This order is marked by a sense of unity with the world around us; infants in this stage believe the world revolves around them, not recognizing that the entire world isn't an extension of themselves. The second order is The Symbolic. This order is marked by language and lack; we learn to understand the differences that make language and gender differentiation possible, allowing us to make sense of our reality, where we all lack wholeness because we have accepted the rules of our society and our culture. The third order is The Real, which is essentially unachievable and traumatic. Entering into The Real would require us to recognize our lack and our loss, making us even more fragmented than we were to start with. The Real is the space beyond signification; beyond ideology, language, and culture, there is nothing. Entering into The Real causes us to recognize this, an experience that is inherently traumatic.

Lacan believed that every person has to go through a period where they recognize their lack, which he referred to as The Mirror Stage. In the Mirror Stage, unformed subjects, often babies, see their own reflection and realize that they are separate from the outside world; they acknowledge that the reflection is both them and not them. This realization forces infants to lose their sense of unity and security they had when they felt connected to everything. It also creates the illusion of wholeness of self, because babies see their reflection as complete, like other objects they see in reality. The Mirror Stage is the process of the formation of the Ego, the shift

from primary narcissism and identification with the mother as self to identifying with others outside the mother/child dyad and therefore recognizing both the mother and the self as individuals. It deals with shifts in cathexis, the concept that a certain amount of psychical energy is attracted to something. In primary narcissism, the child cathects all of its libido onto itself; after the Mirror Stage, people are able to cathect their libido onto others unless they enter into secondary narcissism, the turning around of the libido onto the ego, which has been withdrawn from the objects it had previously been cathected to. After the Mirror Stage, the subject is aware that the concept of the coherent self is an illusion and enters into the Symbolic, needing language to mediate experience and shape reality; the illusion of unmediated experience is gone forever.

Psychoanalytic critics assume that psychoanalysis can interpret texts about human behavior. They do this through character analysis, which comes out of the driving force behind psychoanalysis as a medical practice: to understand motives and relationships and to explain our growth and development on the level of humanity as a whole. Lacan viewed the self as fragmented and broken because the unconscious is structured like a language. In the Post-Structuralist tradition, he saw the unconscious as a chain of signifiers, all leading to more signifiers without any signified that would give the whole system stability. As we develop, we develop our personality in a way to create an illusion of a unified self, which we can never achieve. Thus, we create a desire for pleasure and material things in an attempt to return to the state of unity we had as infants.

### ***How To Do a Psychoanalytical Reading:***

If you were my student, and I was explaining how to read through a psychoanalytical lens, I would show you how I would do the reading. For this section, I will continue my analysis of place in The Great Gatsby with a psychoanalytical approach.

On page 2, Nick sets us up to look at difference in place by saying, “When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever...” If I were doing a psychoanalytic reading of this text for the first time, I would underline this statement because I recognize something Freudian about it. This desire for “moral attention” sounds like something the Superego would want. The language Nick uses here invokes a sense of military discipline, with phrases such as “in uniform” and “at... attention,” which, when applied to the world as a whole, sounds like something an over-extended Superego might say. It sets me up to think about psychoanalyzing Nick, as well as look for why this might happen to him when he is in the East. The fact that he is coming back and then writing this narrative calls my attention to the place too: what is it about the structure of New York that makes Nick’s subconscious unhealthy? It sets me up to use what I know about Freud, because it might be the most applicable approach for this analysis. I could use any of the concepts outlined above to conduct a psychoanalytic analysis, but the narrative seems to be pointing toward Freud.

As I go through the text, I would take note of some other times when I see Freud’s structure of the subconscious. I might take note of the difference between East Egg and West Egg. Perhaps the expectations of Old Money in East Egg are aligned with the Superego, and maybe the excessive partying and freedom in West Egg, and at Gatsby’s in particular, are aligned with the Id. I would continue taking notes that both confirm and deny this idea: for example, Tom is

prone to anger and is a compulsive cheater, signs that his Id may not be in check, and Gatsby, while throwing parties that are the pinnacle of reckless abandon, seems to be above all the drunken antics that exemplify the Id running unchecked.

I might also look at Gatsby's behavior, especially when it comes to Daisy. I might pay special attention to the moment when he meets Daisy again: the way he wants to cut Nick's grass and fill the house with flowers, and how he almost leaves multiple times, only coaxed back by Nick. He seems to be looking for someone he can use as a moral compass: he wants Nick there to justify his actions to himself.

Another spot I might pay attention to is when Daisy is reconsidering her impending marriage to Tom, in a flashback. She wears the string of pearls from Tom, throws them out when she gets a letter from Gatsby, then puts them back on to marry Tom. I might mark this spot in my book so I could come back to it later, because maybe it could lend some insight into Daisy's character, her thought processes, and the state of her subconscious.

### **How To Teach Psychoanalytical Criticism:**

- Create Videos
  - To help students understand the concepts, you can have them help teach them to the class by making a set of instructional videos.
  - Send groups of students out, with some background information, to make videos for each individual concept. These groups can then present and share them with the class to teach their classmates.
- Focus on Characters
  - *Internal Monologue:* The use of creative drama is a fun way to show students how to read between the lines and discover hidden narratives and drives. With four student volunteers, two students will have a conversation while the other two give internal commentary that may or may not align with the situation in "real life." This activity can be altered to a representation of Jung's self (6 students: the 2 Persona talk, the Animas and Shadows give commentary)
  - *Subconscious Arguments:* Again, with the use of creative drama, you can show students the way Freud perceives the subconscious. Students form two lines facing one another, one representing the Superego and one representing the Id (students should be aware of their roles). Each student will take a turn reading off a dilemma, and walking between the lines, each student member of the subconscious giving advice they believe is characteristic of their role. At the end, the student will make a decision, playing the Ego and making a compromise between the two sides.
  - *Stream of Consciousness:* In a writing activity, have students write constantly for five minutes without a prompt (this amount of time is supposedly long enough for their subconscious to take over). Then, have them go back through it and do a form of psychobiography, applying the criticism they are supposed to use as they read literature to their own writing. Have them explain what they found to a partner to prepare them to write a critical paper from a psychoanalytic perspective.

### **Writing Your Own:**

So, now that you've finished the book, taking notes about what you think is important, you have to go back through those notes to start writing your critical paper on The Great Gatsby. For me, I've decided that I want to focus on place and how it affects characters, the places being different portions of the Freudian subconscious.

In my paper, I'm making the claim that the East Egg/Superego v. West Egg/Id feud is manifesting itself in issues for the characters. As I determined in the earlier section, I will start by stating that the restrictions, standards, and expectations for behavior of East Egg make it a representation of the Superego, and that the endless partying, excessive freedom, and wildness of New Money gotten through illegal means in West Egg make it a representation of the Id.

I would then go on to explain how the conflicts between these two portions of the subconscious within the text manifests itself in the unhappiness of the characters. The people who live in East Egg are dominated by their repressed Ids while the people in West Egg, specifically Gatsby, suffer because their Superegos have been overextended. I would discuss how Gatsby's fear at meeting Daisy again comes from a fear that he will never live up to her moral standards, as he comes from a land without any moral code whatsoever. I would also discuss Daisy's attachment to Gatsby as an element of danger and freedom, which she is drawn to because she comes from a land of excessive repression. Finally, I would discuss Nick's fragmentation as he looks back on his experiences of the previous summer; he was torn apart, trying to keep the balance between and the secrets of Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Myrtle, and Jordan. He felt an obligation to each of them, and it ended up tearing him apart. He tried to play the role of the Ego and was not up to the task; this led him to where he was at the end of the summer, retreating to the Midwest, his home, and thus the military discipline of the Superego, created by morality we pick up by watching our parents.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Freud:
  - Where do you find evidence of the Id, Ego, and Superego at work?
  - Does the character have any internal monologues or dreams? If so, what do you learn from them about the character that is not revealed by outward behavior or conversation?
  - Are there conflicts between what is observable and what is going on inside the character? Are there any revealing symbols in them?
  - Who is telling the story, and why does the narrator feel constrained to tell it?
- Jung:
  - What similarities do you find among the characters, situations, and settings of the text under consideration and those in other works that you have read?
  - Is the narrative like any classic myths you know?
  - Where do you find evidence of the protagonist's persona? Anima? Shadow?

- Does the protagonist at any point reject some parts of his/her personality and project it onto someone or something else?
- Lacan:
  - Where do you recognize the appearance of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and/or Real orders?
  - Is the character aware of the lack or absence of something significant in the self?
  - Are there objects that symbolize what is missing or lacking?
  - Do you find examples of the Mirror Stage of the developing psyche?

**Vocabulary:**

- **Tri-partite Psyche:** Freud's theory of the subconscious as being made up of three parts: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego
- **Id:** Psychological reservoir of instincts; devoted to gratification of prohibited desires of all kinds
- **Superego:** Social programming formed by social values, expectations, and taboos
- **Ego:** The conscious self that experiences the external world through the senses; plays referee between Id and Superego
- **Shadow:** The part of our personality that we have rejected
- **Anima:** The part of our identity that is hidden from others, our way of relating to our internal reality
- **Persona:** The part of our identity we construct for others, our way of relating to the outside world
- **The Imaginary:** The realm of the image; is characterized by illusion, narcissism, alienation, and aggressivity
- **The Symbolic:** The order of language and social law; characterized by death, absence, and lack
- **The Real:** What is outside language, symbolization, and signification; has an essentially traumatic character
- **The Mirror Stage:** Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject, through the recognition of one's image in a mirror and realizing that it is simultaneously "me" and "not me"
- **Primary Narcissism:** An early stage in which the child directs all its libido onto its own self
- **Cathexis:** The concept that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to something
- **Secondary Narcissism:** The turning around upon the ego of libido withdrawn from its previous attachments

## Marxism

### *What is Marxist Criticism?*

Marxism is a political, social, and economic theory, fathered by Karl Marx, that claims economics is the base on which the superstructure of social, political, and ideological realities are built. Marx believed that all societies will “evolve” toward a classless society with a socialist government, after the working class rises up against the dominant class.

Marxism believes that culture reproduces the class structure of society. Analysts look for ways the text reinforces capitalist, imperialist, or classist values, which can be done through form or content. The bourgeoisie, the ones who control the world’s economic, natural, and human resources, can manipulate the culture to maintain their position of power. These forms of entertainment glamorize the current state of society, whether or not the readers understand it is happening, therefore stabilizing their hold on the power. They also engage in conspicuous consumption, or consuming for the sake of consuming to impress others. In their insecurity as consumers, they are urged to compete with those within their class to maintain their status as members of the dominant group. The proletariat, or the majority of society who perform manual labor that essentially benefits the bourgeoisie, end up engaging in commodification, or relating to objects and even people in terms of anything other than their use value or utility. These other ways of valuing objects are their sign value, or ability to impress, or their exchange value, or value upon resale. The commodification of people rises out of alienated labor, in which laborers become dissociated from both their work and the products of their labor, and end up being seen as machines rather than human beings, because they do not directly profit from their work.

Marxist critics apply theory to literature through the belief that ideology is at work in all cultural productions. Critics look for places where the text is ideologically conflicted. According to Marxism, an ideology is a body of ideas that defend the status quo and actively promote the values and interests of the dominant group or society and pass themselves off as the natural way of seeing things. The dominant class manipulates those below it into accepting its ideology through a process called interpellation, where it pulls individuals into the ideology. We are all already interpellated into ideology. For example, we are all brought into the ideology of gender norms because, as soon as we are born, we are wrapped in either a pink or a blue blanket, noting our gender as feminine or masculine based on our biological sex (more on gender and gender binaries in chapter 5). Societies that claim democratic freedoms impose and reinforce a set of standards for cultural behavior through hegemony, a set of seemingly stable cultural rules people are supposed to follow that is perpetrated by all parts of society, especially the media. For example, women may be portrayed in the media as weak or staying in the home to serve the hegemonic function of keeping women dependent and out of the workplace (more on gender roles and the role of women in chapter 4). The ruling class is able to create cultural ideology that makes their system, the one that allows them to remain in power, appear logical and natural to the lower classes, making them think what they want them to think. In his theoretical essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser, a Poststructural Marxist theorist, claims that 1) ideologies are fictions we use to relate to reality and 2) institutions have rituals believers perform, which gives the ideology a material existence (for more on Poststructuralism, see chapter 7). However, not all ideologies are bad things: they can promote a better world for all, or they can perpetrate the repression of the system.



Marxist theorists believe that a literary work can only be understood in its full context. One way to apply this to texts is through the use of Historical Marxism, a materialist conception of history that claims that material circumstances, or the economic conditions of society, generate the historical circumstances, or the ideology of society. The historical context of a work and the ideology and circumstances of the author are just as important as the form and content. Works are written within the context of the group ideology and the times in which they are written.

Literary Marxist theorists also believe that everything is a product of circumstance. One way to apply this to texts is through the use of Dialectical Marxism, a concept of history that claims two opposing forces constantly in conflict because of material goods shape the course of events and changes throughout history. This tension is called dialectical materialism. The tension between opposing forces creates change by finally synthesizing and then finding a new force to oppose the new, synthesized force, the cycle of change continuing from there. Marxists believe that the economic structure shapes society, with the means of production as the base and the institutions created by the social, political, and ideological systems are the superstructure.

Another application of Marxism to literature is the belief that culture cannot be separated from the socioeconomic system that created it. Literary Marxist critics look for ways the works reflect the socioeconomic conditions of its origins. For example, if the work portrayed a capitalist system, the critic would look for instances of alienation and fragmentation created by the economic system. The dominant class is able to use forms of entertainment and culture to structure society to their advantage.

An alternative way to interpret texts in an analysis is to see literature as an active agent. Analysts look for ways a text critiques capitalism, revealing the contradictions inherent in a capitalist society and calling the proletariat to realize their oppression and rise up, calling for a change. They also look for ways the text might critique organized religion. Theorists who believe literature can enact social change claim that the working class can portray their own culture in literary works, creating a new superstructure and moving toward a change in the base.

### ***How to Do a Marxist Reading:***

If I had to explain how to do a Marxist reading of a text, I would continue my example analysis of place in The Great Gatsby. As I read, I would take note of times in the text where place and class were tied. For example, on page five, I would underline the sentence, “I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them.” I would pay close attention to the words “less fashionable,” “superficial,” and “bizarre and... sinister contrast.” These, together, highlight the class difference, even among the rich—and how seriously they take their distinction. I would continue taking notice of these divisions, and how they are portrayed using difference in place.

I would also look at instances where I notice specific Marxist themes, such as conspicuous consumption or commodification of the working class. I would take note of the way Myrtle conducts herself when in the city with Tom, putting on airs that signify money, affecting the attitude she thinks she should have. I would also underline the description of the Valley of

Ashes—“where ashes take the form...of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air”—looking at the way the language shows the commodification of the working class, blurring the lines between the workers and their surroundings.

### **How to Teach:**

- Literature Circles
  - While most works of literature can be analyzed using most lenses, you can make it easier for students by selecting works that are more applicable to Marxist criticism. One genre that fits this lens is utopia/dystopia.
  - To differentiate for your students, you can choose different dystopia novels, including both modern ones and classics based on the ability level of your students.
  - Literature circles work well with a unifying theoretical school driving the discussion because, while all students are reading different things, they are all analyzing them in the same way.
- Propaganda
  - To get students to read closely to determine the ideology behind a work, you can have them analyze advertisements
  - This will help them learn to identify hegemony and interpellation in works, and begin to think about what the works want them to think about the status quo, how it is working to maintain society as it is
- Creating an Unbiased Understanding
  - Because Marxism led to Communism as an economic and political system, many students may be resistant to it when applied to literature.
  - To achieve unbiased understanding of how it can be applied to literature—and to show them they don’t have to be Marxists to do a Marxist reading of a text—choose one less-threatening piece, like social class.
  - While, with the other theories, it is helpful to give students all the information at once, it will be helpful to give them the pieces of Marxist theory gradually, perhaps over the course of a week instead of one day. This will help them to understand what they are actually doing, allowing them to keep an open mind about the theoretical school as it applies to literature.

### **Writing A Marxist Analysis:**

Now that you’ve finished the book and taken notes on class difference, ideology, and oppression of the working class, you need to go back through those quotes to find similarities and an arguable point for your critical analysis of The Great Gatsby. I’ve decided to use my paper to argue that the separations between places represent the separations between the classes in society. I will highlight the class relations and how the lines are drawn by where they live: East Egg, West Egg, and the Valley of Ashes.

I would explain how East Egg is the “Old Money,” and thus the highest class, how West Egg is “New Money,” and thus the lower of the upper classes, and how the people of the Valley of Ashes are of a much lower class. Then, I would show the way Old Money and New Money interact with one another, focusing on the way Tom treats Gatsby. I would go on to show the

way the upper classes treat the members of the lower class. This portion would include Myrtle's conspicuous consumption and the commodification of the inhabitants of the Valley of Ashes. I would highlight times when people care more about things than other people or even themselves, such as when Myrtle tries to cover a tapestry when she is bleeding profusely or the time Nick discovers Gatsby's library of unread books.

A Marxist analysis needs to end with an interpretation of what all of this means: it cannot merely be a statement of class divisions, but needs to have an agenda. To that end, I would conclude my analysis by saying that the geographic lines drawn between the classes in the novel could be reflected in the geographic and class lines drawn in our society today.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Which group, the powerful or the powerless, are you encouraged to admire?
- Why do the powerful people have their power?
- From what is the power in the narrative derived? Is it inherited, based on money, a result of violence, etc.?
- What does the setting tell you about the distribution of power and wealth?
- Does the depicted society value things for their usefulness, for their potential for resale or trade, or for their power to convey social status?
- Where do you see characters making decisions based not on abstract principles, but on the economic system in which they live?
- Does the work criticize repressive systems?

### **Vocabulary:**

- **Bourgeoisie:** Those who control the world's economic, natural, and human resources
- **Conspicuous Consumption:** Consuming for the sake of consuming simply to impress others within society
- **Proletariat:** Majority of global population, often living in substandard conditions, who perform manual labor that benefits the rich
- **Commodification:** The act of relating to others or persons in terms of their exchange or sign value
- **Use Value:** The utility of a thing, what it can be used for
- **Sign Value:** The ability of a thing to impress others
- **Exchange Value:** What a thing is worth in terms of money or other things it could be replaced with
- **Alienated Labor:** Process by which workers become dissociated not only from their products but also from their labor because they do not directly profit from that labor
- **Ideology:** A body of ideas that defend the status quo and actively promote the values and interests of the dominant group or society and pass themselves off as the "natural way of seeing things"
- **Interpellation:** The way in which the dominant class manipulates those below it into accepting its ideology
- **Hegemony:** Manner in which societies that claim democratic freedoms impose upon and reinforce a set of standards for cultural behavior

- **Historical Marxism:** Materialist concept of history that claims material circumstances drive historical circumstances
- **Material Circumstances:** The economic conditions of society
- **Historical Circumstances:** The ideology of society at large
- **Dialectical Marxism:** Belief that history is the product of class struggles
- **Dialectical Materialism:** Two opposing forces that are constantly in conflict because of material goods

## Feminism

### **What is Feminist Criticism?**

Feminists in different countries respond to works from different perspectives, inspired by the influences of Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and a drive to understand a unique female experience.

British Feminists take a Marxist approach, drawing on the idea that women are an oppressed class in the patriarchy. They see Western culture as primarily patriarchal, creating a power imbalance between men and women, evident in all parts of the culture. Following in the tradition of Post-Structuralist Marxists like Althusser, they claim the ideology and hegemonic structures of society convince women that their inferior status is the “natural” way of things, thus getting them to accept this inferiority of themselves and their work. They study the power relationships between men and women and the relationship between class relations and gender relations to show how these power structures are dominated by males and are thus oppressive towards women. These feminists assume that an inequitable economic system is the base of the problem, causing inequality between men and women in the superstructure; they claim this can be seen at every level of society, and is most evident in the organization of the household and the family. (For more on Marxism, see chapter 3)

French Feminists take a Psychoanalytic approach, drawing on Lacan to focus on how the structure of language, specifically in the Symbolic Order, socializes women into accepting an inferior status. Irigaray responded to Lacan and Freud by claiming that female pleasure isn't characterized in patriarchy because it doesn't allow for multiplicity. This is because patriarchal societies are phallogocentric, basing their notion of objectivity on a male perspective. French Feminists such as Irigaray follow Mary Wollstonecraft's idea that women need to manipulate others to get things in their idea of mimicry, a subversive move in which women act according to the male ideals of femininity to thwart or undermine the traditional female role. Because they are taking a psychoanalytic approach, they also study and attempt to define the difference between the male and female subconscious, especially when it comes to voice in a narrative. (For more on Psychoanalysis, see chapter 2)

American Feminism centers on gynocriticism, a movement that examines the distinctive characteristics of the female experience. These feminists look at the way culture has internalized stereotypes about women, causing women to internalize this sexism and accept their lesser status as the truth. One way they see this is through the three trajectories for women in literature: marriage, death/suicide, and madness. They claim women seeing these storylines play out constantly in culture will eventually internalize them, thinking these are their only options in the real world. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also critique the binary between the “angel in the house” and the “madwoman in the attic.” The angel is submissive, childlike, virginal, chaste, completely selfless, has no story of her own, and only lives to care for her husband. The madwoman, on the other hand, chooses to reject this storyline and is seen as sexually voracious, refuses to stay “in her place,” and has both her own story and female autonomy. They say that these stereotypes, perpetuated by male authors, are destructive to women. Similarly, in film, Mulvey claims that women are created for the “Male Gaze,” which is scopophilic, an erotically-charged pleasurable looking. The Male Gaze comes in two forms and is always oppressive to women: in the voyeuristic look, a controlling, sadistic gaze, women are not aware of the looking;

in the fetishistic look, an erotic gaze that is compensation for something, the woman is the fetish object and stops the action.

### ***How to Do a Feminist Reading:***

If I were doing a Feminist reading of The Great Gatsby, I would pay close attention to the women in the story, primarily Daisy, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle. Because of the focus on class in the novel, I might take a Marxist Feminist approach and look for differences between the way Myrtle acts and the way Daisy acts.

But first, while I'm reading, I would look for any moments when the women appear to be responding to or going along with society's ideas of femininity and what it means to be female. For example, I would pay attention to Nick's one-on-one conversation with Daisy at the beginning of the novel, especially when she says "She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool'" on page 17. I would write that passage down to return to later when I was writing my analysis.

I might also, as I read, look at the way the male characters treat the women: the way Tom treats Myrtle compared to how he treats Daisy, the way Gatsby treats Jordan and the way he treats Daisy, and the way Nick treats all three women. I might use this method to take a Psychoanalytic Feminist approach in my analysis, looking for how the women use mimicry to get what they want from the men.

### ***How to Teach:***

#### 1. Complexity of Texts

- For students to begin to grasp Feminist criticism, they need to be encouraged to embrace and interpret ambiguous, complex, and contradictory texts. By being forced to confront what they see as a natural order, students will be given the opportunity to renegotiate how they view texts and the world, opening up alternatives to what they previously thought.
- However, you need to know your student population when choosing texts. Feminist literature may be threatening to your students; this may allow them to create a binary between what they see as "normal" or "acceptable" literature and the feminist literature you have them read. Have them apply the same methods of analysis to classic literature as well to avoid this binary and to mitigate the threats of Feminist analysis with familiarity of literary form.

#### 2. Case Study

- To facilitate the analysis of female experience in traditional literature, you may have students view a situation from the story or novel as a case study. Students should choose a situation that involved or impacted a female character, then analyze the actions of all characters involved, propose alternative ways of acting in the situation, and the potential outcomes of these actions.
- This can be recreated as a process drama exercise, with students acting out situations that affect women, defining where the actions of individual characters

were unhelpful or problematic, and then reimagining the situation in question by changing the actions of a character or set of characters

### 3. Acknowledge the Politics

- Feminist literary criticism is inherently political. One way to engage this in the classroom is to have students read nonfiction works by Feminist writers: articles, blogs, etc. to help familiarize themselves with the issues they will be looking for in the works of fiction they are critiquing. NOTE: when choosing these texts, analyze them first yourself for credibility; there are many angry feminists on the Internet with blogs who are not representative of the group as a whole. Using their work in the classroom will not help your students understand the issues at hand or the aims of the group at large.

### **Writing a Feminist Analysis:**

In outlining how I would write a Feminist analysis of The Great Gatsby, I will continue my focus on place in the novel, here combined with a Marxist approach, claiming that the different social structures in the different classes, defined by the different neighborhoods, create different ideals for femininity at different levels of social status.

For my analysis, I would focus on the different expectations for Myrtle and for Daisy. The reader sees Daisy as foolish, ditsy, and fairly impulsive, something she has said to Nick is the ideal for a woman. Daisy has always played into, and perhaps internalized, society's expectations for a young woman of her social status, culminating in the three separate times she chose other men of her class, or the possibility of them, over Gatsby, a man she loved but wasn't a member of her more prestigious social status.

On the other hand, the reader sees Myrtle as fooling no one but herself with her conduct. When we see her in the New York apartment, we know she's trying to act the way she believes society expects rich women to act, but we also know that she's trying too hard. She is trying to conform, but her class keeps peeking through. Under a Marxist Feminist assumption, because she's of a lower class, she is closer to being on equal footing with her poor husband, since he doesn't have the money, and therefore the power, to really control her. When she is with Tom, she doesn't know how to act: she hasn't been prepared to take on the submissive, inferior, ditsy ideal of a wealthy female persona.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Does the voice sound characteristic of a male or female writer? That is, it is personal or impersonal, subjective or objective, implicit or explicit?
- Where do you find an imbalance of power among the characters?
- What divisions of labor exist between men and women in the work?
- Are there images of motherhood or references to goddesses that suggest creativity and power?
- Do you find the female characters conforming to expected norms? Are they nurturing, giving, passive, emotional?
- According to this work, what does it mean to be female?
- What stereotypes of women do you find? Are they oversimplified, demeaning, untrue?

- What are the roles of women in the work? Are they minor, supportive, powerless? Or are they independent and influential?
- Is the narrator a character in the narrative? If so, how does the male or female point of view affect the reader's perceptions?
- Do the female characters play an overt role in decision making, or do they work behind the scenes?

**Vocabulary:**

- **Phallogocentrism:** The notion that objectivity is viewed from a male perspective
- **Mimicry:** A subversive move in which women act according to male "rules" of femininity to thwart the traditional female role
- **Patriarchy:** System of social organization in which men are given the power, including that to govern women
- **Gynocriticism:** Form of Feminist critique that focuses on the unique female experience
- **Angel in the House:** Ideal woman who is submissive, childlike, virginal, chaste, completely selfless, and has no story of her own
- **Madwoman in the Attic:** The demonic woman who is sexually voracious, refuses to stay "in her place," and has both her own story and female autonomy
- **Male Gaze:** A phenomenon, primarily in film, where the audience is made to look at the women portrayed through the eyes of men, in a way that is always oppressive to women, both in the nature of the look and in the fact that female audience members are being asked to take on the role of a man
- **Scopophilia:** The erotically-charged pleasure of looking
- **Voyeuristic:** Controlling, sadistic gaze when the woman is not aware of the look
- **Fetishistic:** Erotic gaze that is compensation for something; the woman is the fetish object that stops the action



## Queer Theory

### *What is Queer Theory?*

Queer Theory is an approach that rose out of the Feminist movement to focus the interest more on gender and widened the critical lens to include a discussion of sexuality. Queer Theorists approach literature and cultural productions, including sexual and gender identities, sexual practices, and types of masculinity and femininity that exist outside assumed norms.

Traditionally, these concepts are considered inherently linked, a concept called biological essentialism. Queer theorists make an essential claim that sex and gender are not the same thing. To these theorists, sex is the biology; sex is simply the male or female genitalia and the XX or XY chromosomes. Gender, however, is the identity of an individual; it is the socially accepted set of behaviors that have come to embody masculinity and femininity. According to Judith Butler, gender identities are performative. We perform our gender identities by presenting ourselves according to socially and culturally constructed ideas of what masculinity and femininity are. These constructed ideas are manifest in learned behaviors; for example, giving boys toy cars and action figures and giving little girls dolls and dress-up clothes.

Butler complicates our perceptions of gender not only by claiming that masculinity and femininity are not innate traits that come with being male or female biologically, but also by claiming that there is no normative masculinity or femininity. By this she means that there is no real, tangible cause for these identities; identity is a product of possibilities based on the way people act at different times in different places.

These claims are also applied to human sexuality. Queer theorists believe that human sexuality is experienced on a continuum. Traditionally, sexuality has been seen as a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality, with heterosexuality being the norm and homosexuality being the deviancy. Queer theory claims that sexuality is actually a set of diverse possibilities on a spectrum containing heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. In this spectrum, sexuality isn't stable and static, but fluid, dynamic, and unstable. The expression of these identities are also performative, created by the learned behaviors and socially and culturally constructed ideas of what these sexual identities are.

Queer Theorists use many of the techniques of Post-Structuralism to show that gender identity and sexual orientations aren't fixed. Queer theorists claim that all identity categories rely on one another to create the illusion of a stable system. For heterosexuality to be the norm, it has to be privileged over "queer" orientations, a practice called heterosexism. It also has to be conceptualized through the definition of each gender as stable entities that rely on sexuality. To create this imagined stability, and connection to biological sex, society uses compulsory heterosexuality, a concealed system that produces gender norms so that bodies will "line up" and reproduce. Queer Theorists also use the techniques of Post-Structuralism to work against heteronormativity, the idea that the norm is to be heterosexual, and homophobia, a fear of queer people that leads to the Othering of them.

### *How to Do a Queer Theoretical Reading:*

If I were doing a reading of The Great Gatsby using Queer Theory to guide my analysis, I would focus on the construction of gender identities, especially masculinity. I would take note of the

way the different male characters address one another and how they perform their gender identity. I would look at the way Tom presents himself, with his sports trophies and his cheating, and also the way he treats Gatsby, especially in the scene when they all go into the city. I would also look at the way Gatsby presents himself to Nick and how others perceive him, with his suits, his consciousness of his appearance, and his garish displays of wealth.

### **How to Teach:**

- Use Books Already in the Curriculum
  - Students can do queer readings of texts that do not have queer issues and characters at the forefront and are not written by queer authors by using a more general queer approach, deconstructing and disrupting presumed norms presented in the texts. Students should be taught to look for ways the structures that create identity categories are being complicated over the course of the text. (for more on deconstruction, see chapter 7.)
- Include Works Containing Characters, Issues, and Authors from the Gender, Sexuality, and Romantic Minority (GSRM)\* Community
  - While there may be resistance or censorship surrounding these texts, if you feel your students are mature enough to approach these texts, use them. These will provide the best representation of the experience of people within the GSRM Community for your students
- Role Play
  - Have students portray an identity that is not their own while other members of the class try to guess their identity. Slips with identities should be handed out to the class before the activity begins. Students will write a list of ways this identity is performed, according to the portrayal of people and characters with these identities in the media. During the performance, students will write what they believe the identity being performed is and why on sheets of paper. These performances may simply be reading off the list of performance characteristics if your class is not particularly outgoing. After each individual performance, the class should vote and list what factors contributed to their decision. NOTE: This activity is meant to play on stereotypes perpetrated by the media and culture; students should be aware of this beforehand.
  - This activity can be followed by a character sketch activity, where students are asked pointed questions about a character with their assigned identity. They can use this character later for a writing activity, or simply another exercise to use to talk about performative identities. Questions for this activity can be found online, but examples are:
    - Where does your character go when he/she is angry?
    - What is your character's biggest fear? Who has he/she told? Who would he/she never tell it to? Why?
    - Your character is doing intense spring cleaning. What is easy for her/him to throw out? What is difficult to part with? Why?

### **How to Write a Queer Theoretical Analysis:**

If I were writing an analysis of *The Great Gatsby* guided by Queer Theory, I would compare the definition of masculinity performed by Tom to the one performed by Gatsby. I would use my analysis to argue that the presentation of gender in the text is much less stable than the normative version of gender identity. I would focus this analysis on the different performances of masculinity made by Tom and Gatsby, including how Tom is rattled by Gatsby's more flamboyant performance of heterosexual masculinity, and how the use of two characters with the same perceived identity, who perform it in such different ways, complicates the established narratives for identities in our society.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Does the work challenge traditional ways of viewing sexuality and identity?
- What ranges of male and female identity do you find in the text?
- If the self is assumed to be constructed, what performative acts construct a character's identity?
- Does the work complicate what it means to be homosexual or heterosexual?
- Does the work depict human sexuality as more complex than the essentialist terms *male* and *female* suggest?

### **Vocabulary:**

- **Biological Essentialism:** The belief that gender and biological sex are one and the same, that biological sex determines gender
- **Sex:** The biological male and female, determined by genetics
- **Gender:** The socially and culturally created set of behaviors and characteristics that have come to embody "masculinity" and "femininity"
- **Performative Identity:** The belief that identities are tied up in the way we portray them to others
- **Normative:** Regulated and consistent across the society or culture; what it "should be"
- **Sexuality:** Identity based on sexual attraction to others
- **Heterosexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of the opposite gender or biological sex
- **Homosexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of the same gender or biological sex
- **Bisexuality:** Sexual attraction to people of both genders or biological sexes
- **Asexuality:** Lack of sexual attraction to others, regardless of gender or biological sex
- **Heterosexism:** The privileging of heterosexual people over people who identify as anything other than heterosexual
- **Compulsory Heterosexuality:** A concealed system that creates gender norms so that bodies will "line up" and reproduce, based on the belief that the norm is to be heterosexual
- **Heteronormativity:** A cultural belief that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise
- **Homophobia:** A fear of people who identify as "queer"

\*This term defines an umbrella community including LGBTQ+ community as well as others.