

An Introduction to Literary Lenses

Literary theories were developed as a means to understand the various ways people read texts and the world around them. Some lenses will be more appropriate for particular works than others at times and it is your job to discern when to use a particular lens. The following theories are just that, *theories*. Approach them as you would a scientist, without any emotional attachment to any particular one. You do not have to believe or agree with a theory to understand and correctly apply it. Your goal is to understand the literary theories below.

Biographical/Historical Criticism

- ✓ **Biographical/Historical Criticism Explained**
 - Meaning is drawn from the context of the material.
 - This context includes information about the author; his or her historical moment; the systems of meaning available at the time of the writing.
 - Interpretation of the work should be based on an understanding of its context (i.e. who wrote it, when it was written)
- ✓ **Example of Biographical Criticism**
 - "Tim O'Brien writes about a young man's misconception of war in "Where Have You Gone Charming Billy?" and specifically zeroes in on the terror the soldiers experienced during the Vietnam War. O'Brien, a Vietnam veteran, admits that much of his work is autobiographical and very much influenced by what he has experienced."
- ✓ **Strategies for Biographical/Historical Criticism**
 - Research the time of the writing/creation of work for significant events or persisting attitudes that might have affected the work
 - Research the author and compare biographical information seeking connections through the work

