

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.

Cultural Criticism

✓ Cultural Criticism Explained

➤ Cultural criticism examines how different religious beliefs, ethnicities, class identifications, political beliefs, and individual viewpoints affect how texts are created and interpreted. What it means to be part of - or excluded from - a specific group contributes to and impacts our understanding of texts in relation to culture.

✓ Assumptions of Cultural Criticism

- Ethnicity religious beliefs, sexual identity and so on are crucial components in formulating plausible interpretations of text.
- While the emphasis is on diversity of approach and subject matter, cultural criticism is not the only means for understanding ourselves and our art.
- An examination or exploration of the relationship between the dominant cultures and the dominated is essential.
- When the reader looks through the text from a marginalized people, new understandings occur.

✓ Strategies for Cultural Criticism

- Identify the norms, values, and key traits of the culture and how they are depicted.
- Analyze the relationship between the various cultures, dominant and dominated. How are they depicted?
- Examine how stereotypes of cultures are used to perpetuate or diminish beliefs about a culture.

