

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 1
Part B
Introduction and Course Overview

To continue with our introduction, we will move on to Marxism and what it means particular with reference this course. So, Marxist criticism in its diverse forms grounds its theory and practice and the economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Marxist theory specially states that, the evolving history of human kind of a social groupings and relations of its institutions and of its ways of thinking are largely determined by the changing modes of its material production or its overall economic organisation for producing and distributing material goods. The Marxists believe that, it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being; but, their social being that determines their consciousness. So, Dr Vimal Mohan John will be your instructor for Marxism. He will explain the construct and key concepts related to the Marxist theory especially dialectical materialism, economic determinism. He will also talk about dance capital and then he will move on to look us and the novel and socialist realism, concepts of ideology, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and his concept of and his theory of hegemony.

You will also be introduced to the Frankfurt school especially that is related to Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. As you all know, the Frankfurt school of German Marxist; and, the major names associated with this theory are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. So, Sigmund Freud's writings on the unconscious mind were at defining moment for art and literature; the interpretation of dreams dealt with psychological complexity and the ideas of the fragmentation of the self. In Dreamwork, the author describes how dream content or images of dream are in reality; the quotes of latent dream content or dreams thoughts, Freud uses the terms: condensation and displacement, where the former is the process, where dream content contains multiple association; while the latter suggests the shift whether real subject of a narrative is outside the story.

Freud's most controversial concept, the deepest complex is the notion that, every child sexually desires a parent and wishes to be rid of its arrival, that is, the other parent

implicit in this is the theory of art and literature. Freud used the well-known example of Hamlet, whose so swift in killing Polonius and also Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are hesitant to kill Claudius. Freud's explanation here is that, Hamlet too desired his father's death; and, while he is striking at Claudius, he would be striking himself; controversial theory, but nevertheless something that has influenced literature in a very measure way. You will also be introduced to the theories of Jauques Lacan. Jauques Lacan's lectures are published as the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis. And, the key concepts in Lacan are phallogentric, mirror stage and the symbolic. Lacan identifies three name phases in the development of the child: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. He also draws on Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, where the infant passes through the seduction and primal and castration phases. You will also be introduced to the theories of Laura Mulvey and Zizek.

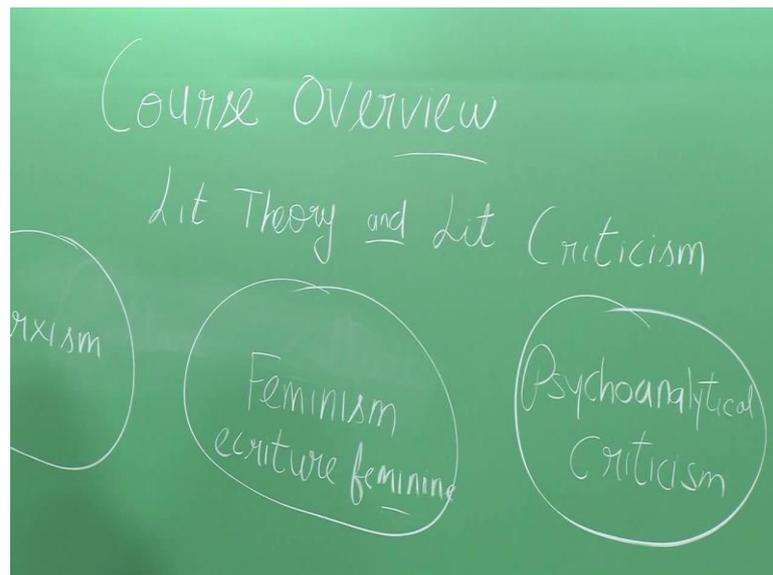
Next, we will move on to gender and queer theory. Dr Vimal John will introduce you to the key concepts of this theory. You will be introduced to Simone de Beauvoir and her – *The Second Sex* – a seminal work of feminist criticism published in 1949. Many of Beauvoir's ideas – you must know this such as the right to abortion and use of contraception for women were elaborated later on by Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics*. De Beauvoir's book also examine several myths, stereotypes and literary works; and, shows how these texts have helped to uphold misogynies and patriarchal ideals. Another key name in general theory especially in feminist theory is Betty Friedan and her – *The Feminine Mystique*. *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963. And, it grew out of a survey of college graduates. This survey was conducted by Betty Friedan. And, the female respondents reveal their unhappiness with problems – problems that did not have specific names. We are talking about an era, where lot of things were still unresolved. They still are that, they were not able to exactly name the problems that they were facing.

Friedan also wrote an article about her findings. And interestingly, in those days, especially during the 50's, it was rejected by all the editors, who received it. Frieden decided to rework and expand the article into a book. And, that book was *The Feminine Mystique*, which explored the role of women in post war industrial societies and in particular the role of full-time home maker. The book also attacked the popular notion that women could only find fulfilment through child bearing and housework. Frieden

located her analysis in post war middle class suburban communities. In this lecture, you will also become familiar with the theories and ideas of Helene Cixous, Laura Mulvey and Julia Kristeva. Another key author and her concept of gynocriticism; I am talking about Elaine Showalter; and, gynocriticism, which is associated with Elaine Showalter. So, gynocriticism essentially refers to a shift in feminist attention away from the readings of male writers' misrepresentation of women and towards the more historical study of women writers in terms of their notions of patriarchy. The recovery of a till then neglected tradition of women's writing and analysing those features of women's experience historically undervalued by the predominantly male critics.

Well-known works of the 70's in this category include Elaine Showalter's – A literature of their own; and, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's – The Madwoman in the Attic. You will also become familiar with Virginia Woolf and her – A room of her own, which was published in 1929, where Woolf spoke out for women's liberation. In the first part of the book, Woolf's narrative is its Oxbridge, a fictional university college. And as she walks around the ground contemplating the relations between women and fiction. She is briskly shooed off the grass by the college wheedle since only male scholars are permitted on the lawn. Having lost her the train of thought, the narrator subsequently decides to visit the library upon opening the door. However, she is asked to leave by the librarian, who insists that women cannot enter unaccompanied. Woolf's ideas are very accessible; and, the point she tries to make is very simple; that is, if a woman is to write, she needs a stable income and a private room.

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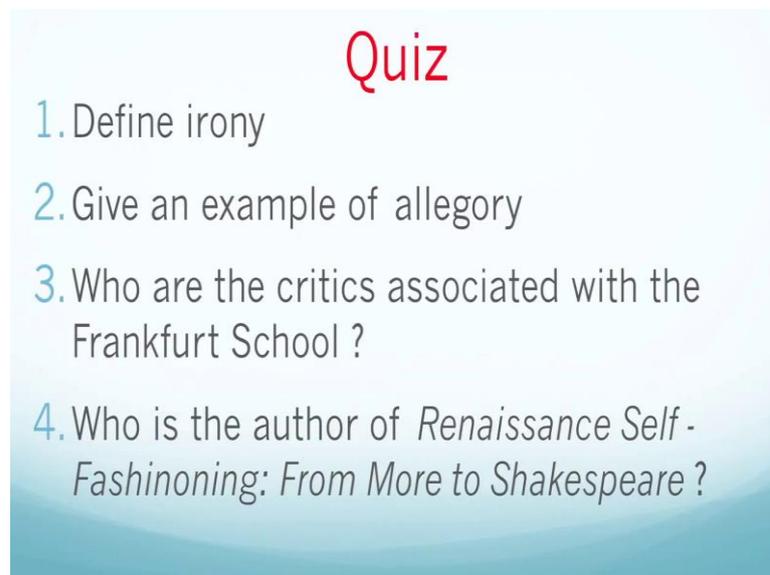


And, at this level, she anticipates French feminist discussion of *écriture féminine*; female writing – *écriture féminine*. Another influential work of this theory is by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and their – The Madwoman in the Attic, which was published in 1979. So, this work alludes to Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, which was published in 1847. And also, to its hero – Mister Rochester, who has a so-called mad wife locked up in the attic. Those of you have read the novel you know you are talking about Bertha. So, for Gilbert and Gubar, Bertha Rochester is an embodiment of two characters. She is the oppressed woman of history, who was declared mad when she rebelled at another level. Bertha is

also the raging flutist that, Jane has been surprising like a man; all her lives rendering her a unit at least symbolically.

Gilbert and Gubar's work has far-reaching implications, because it privileges women academicians to re-read works by and on women. The post is structuralist, feminist attention to language and materiality, which has given rise to a renewed concern for the maternal, has also provoked and extended debate over the meanings of gender and sexual difference. For example, is Teresa de Lauretis and her work – Technologies of Gender. And, here she assures that, sexual difference constraints, feminists, critical thought within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition, which makes it difficult if not impossible to articulate difference among and within women. De Lauretis prefers to privilege the term – gender, which for her is not only a classificatory term in grammar, but also a representation of a relation that is ongoing social construction. In this lecture, you will also gain familiarity with the concepts of rational and liberal feminism, performativity by... Especially, this is a term given by Judith Butler and her gender trouble and theories of masculinity and queerness. Here I would conduct a small quiz. And, here are the questions that you should be attempting.

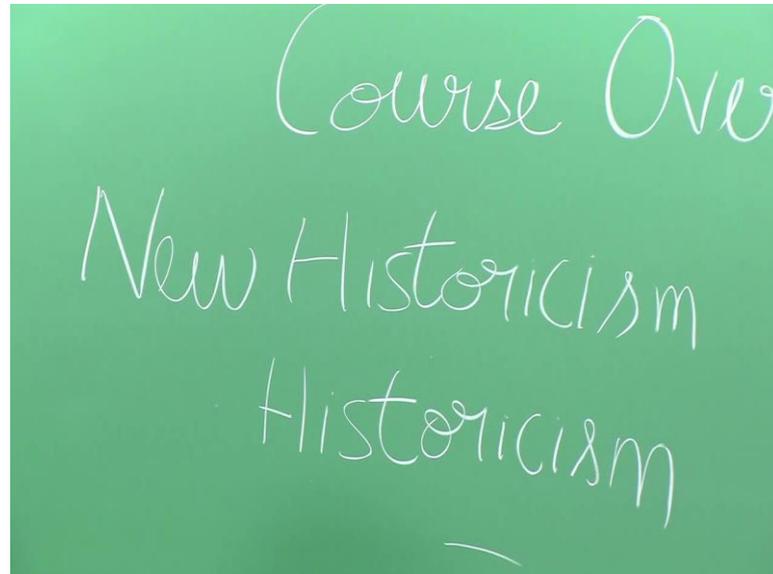
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So, please take a close look at this particular slide. Question 1 – define irony. Question 2 – give an example of allegory. Question 3 – who are the critics associated with the

Frankfurt School; who is the author of Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare?

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So, what is meant by new historicism? To have something like new historicism, we have to have historicism as well. So, therefore, here I have written on the board historicism and new historicism. Now, new historicism is a general term given to a wide variety of theories and methodologies that are historicist in origin. New historicism is generally regarded as one of the most accessible of recent critical theories. One key influence on new historicism is Nietzsche – Friedrich Nietzsche – the German thinker – Nietzsche; his work on the uses and disadvantages of history for life. You can make a note of it on the uses and disadvantages of history for life; where, he urges us to employ the strength to break up and dissolve apart of the past.

Now, these are heavy ideas and I would suggest that, you please take a look at Nietzsche's work, which is freely available on the internet. So, you can take a look at it on the uses and disadvantages of history for life; it will take perhaps multiple readings for you to understand the gist of what he is trying to do. But, there are plenty of resources available, which explain the gist of the essay and a gist of that particular writing and you should be able to understand and apply it to historicism and the concepts of new historicism. Now, new historicism also has Marxist leanings and it is also

informed by certain aspects of poststructuralism. So, poststructuralism is another theory that we will be looking at in this course.

The new historicists tend to question labels and titles. They do not take things at the face value. They constantly interrogate the relationship between history and literature, rather than making blanket assertions. New historicism is associated with research being conducted in two periods. This is particularly true in the research that is being conducted in the English speaking world. So, they focus their attention on the renaissance and the romantic period. And, in the same reign, one of the most influential new historicist's interpretation is to read Steven Greenblatt's work on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I have already mentioned that, how influential Steven Greenblatt is for the entire theory of – an entire discussion on the new historicism. So, here Greenblatt offers a subversive critique of imperialism and a Noble Caliban. Now, I am sure that you remember who Caliban was. He is one of those darker spirit that is enslaved by Prospero in the tempest; and, as opposed to aerial the so-called good spirit. And, Caliban's protest is that, the island that is now ruled by Prospero originally belong to him and his mother. So, that is Greenblatt's interpretation of the play that, how a Caliban is the colonized; and, Prospero become the white coloniser. So, new historicism assumes that, historical phenomena can be read like a text. These are important terms – textualities, histories. And, these are very important in the entire theory – an entire discussion of new historicism.

Now, this interesting theory – it was much to the works of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz for whom local knowledge is a readable cultural practice; so, local knowledge of a particular place. And, he gives example of a Balinese Cockfight. And, he says that this kind of a cultural practice give us a good introduction to local knowledge. Now, key figures and key personalities associated with new historicist theory – Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, and H. Aram Veenser. So, Dr Vimal John when he does this lecture with you, he is going to talk in detail about these figures. We will also be doing ecocriticism in this course. And, Dr Vimal Mohan John will be handling that area. What is ecocriticism? Now, we know what is ecology and we also know what is ecofeminism; we know what is ecofriendliness; we come across these terms very often. So, ecocriticism as it now exists in the English speaking word particularly in the USA, it takes literary bearings from three major nineteenth century American writers whose works celebrate nature and nature as the life giving force and the wilderness travel as

manifested in America. So, who are these writers? Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau.

Now, those who are interested in literature, particularly those who have a background in English literature; they would know these people as the transcendentalists – Emerson, Fuller and Thoreau. So, they were the people who influenced the way studies of ecocriticism is done. So, we all know they were all members of a group of new England writers, essays and philosophers; collectively they were called the transcendentalists. Transcendentalism was the first major literary movement in America to achieve cultural importance – cultural impact that the natural world had. For Emerson, it was important that, the American writers achieve independence from European models. And, one of his first book – it was a short book; it was called Nature, which was a reflective essay on the impact that the natural world had on him.

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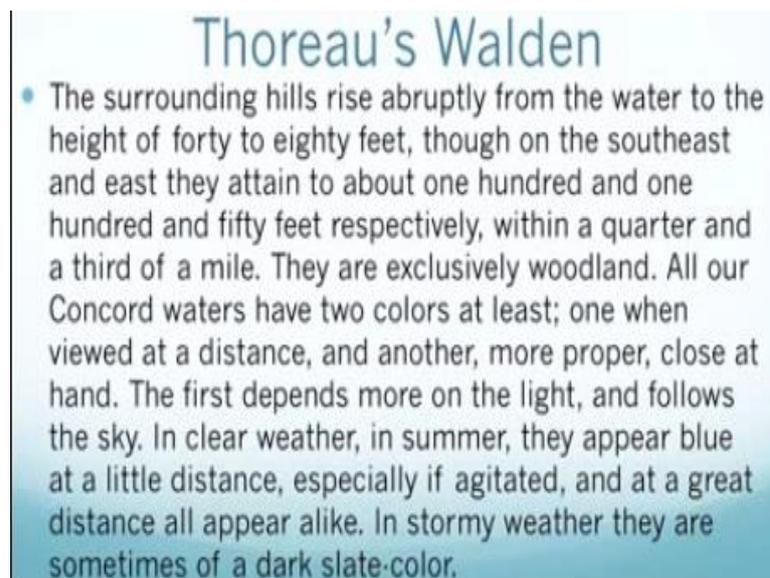
Walden

- The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about sixty-one and a half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except by the clouds and evaporation.

At this point, I would like to draw your attention to this particular passage from Henry David Thoreau's classic book Walden. I will read out this lengthy – rather lengthy passage for you; and, perhaps this will give you a clue into what the origins and how this entire theory of ecocriticism started; so, the origins of ecoliterature, ecocriticism and interest in it. So, here I go quoting from Thoreau's Walden – the scenery of Walden is on a humble scale; and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concerned one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is

so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about sixty-one and half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except the clouds and evaporation.

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He goes on – the surrounding hills rise abruptly from the water to the height of 40 to 80 feet though on the southeast and east they attain to about 100 and 150 feet respectively within a quarter in a third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland. All are Concord waters have two colours at least; one when viewed at a distance and another, more proper, close at hand. The first depends more on the light, and follows the sky. In clear weather, in summer, they appear blue at a little distance, especially if agitated, and at a great distance all appear alike. In stormy weather, they are sometimes of a dark slate colour. So, what are we looking at? Immense reverence for nature; immense interest in nature; and, this great desire to become one with everything that surrounds us. So, that is what the philosophy of the transcendentalist was all about. Henry David Thoreau – as you know, he actually practiced what it taught, and he built himself alive in the wilderness. And, that is all – all that has been immortalized in his great book Walden.

So, having talked about ecocriticism, let us move on to two joint lectures that I will be doing with Dr Vimal Mohan John. So, the first one is on poststructuralism. Now, here we will be considering the writings of the Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jauques Lacan,

Baudrillard, Kristeva and Roland Barthes. We will also give you an overview of Umberto Eco's – the open work. And, we will get familiar with things with concepts such as deconstruction, which is so important to the study of poststructuralism to the poststructuralist thought.

Now, what is poststructuralism? Let me give you a very quick overview and understanding of what is meant by this theory called poststructuralism. So, this theory posits that, meaning is inherently unstable; whereas, a structuralist would believe that, an explanation is conceivable. So, that is the major difference. Poststructuralism believe that, meaning for a text is inherently unstable; whereas, the structuralists believe that, it is possible. So, the main aspect of poststructuralist theory used in literary practice is deconstruction; I have already told you – this is a concept associated with the Jacques Derrida. And, another key figure of poststructuralism in Julia Kristeva. So, Kristeva in her grade book – *La Revolution Du Langage Poetique*, she discusses the relationship between the ordinary and rational, and the heterogeneous irrational, between the conscious and unconscious, and the normal and the poetic. So, these are the writers we will be looking at. We will also get an understanding of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* – the concept of difference; and also, understand the key ideas as given by Paul de Man and Hillis Miller.

The next joint lecture is on postcolonialism. We will be introduced to the theories of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhaba, Chinua Achebe; we will be getting familiar with the concepts of subaltern, liminality and hybridity. We will give you an overview of *The Wretched of the Earth*, that is, Fanon's work and Said's *Orientalism*. I suggest that, you read the first opening pages from Edward Said's *Orientalism*. We will also acquire an understanding of Bill Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* and what is meant by colonial mimicry. So, that is about it. The last lecture for this course would be post theory and then we will have conclusions. So, I have just tried to give you an overview of what this course is going to entail, what we have got to offer you. We will be giving you regular assignments and quizzes and we would like you to be very prompt in your submission of the assignments and quizzes online. As you know, there will be a proctored exam conducted at the end of the course. And, once you have cleared all these, you will be given a certificate for this course. So, I look forward to having you with me on this course. So, Dr Vimal Mohan John and I welcome you for

this course. So, the next lecture would be on key concepts in literary theory and literary criticism. See you then.

Thank you so much.