

# Analyzing Literature through Multiple Lenses

Feminist Lens

Formalist Lens

Marxist Lens

Psychoanalytic Lens



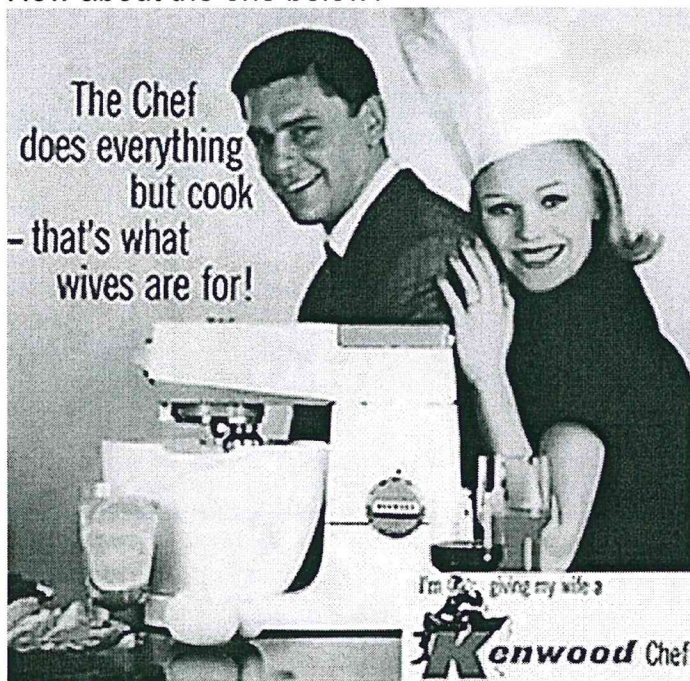
# The Feminist Lens



**You mean a woman can open it?**

What does the picture above imply about women and their role in society?

How about the one below?



Someone critiquing these pictures through the feminist lens would say these are sexist advertisements that marginalize women, portraying them as inferior to men. The main focus of the feminist lens is on how women are portrayed, how they function, behave, are limited/privileged for being women. However, we also examine how maleness defines roles & can limit men as well.

Information compiled from PowerPoint created by Mr. Shawn Jacob and the following ebook Hetzel, Cassidy. *Critical Lenses*. N.p.: Cast.org, n.d. Arvada High School. Web. 20 Sept. 2013.; Photos taken from "Feminism Sexist Ads from the 1950's." *Sexist Ads from the 1950's*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Sept. 2013.

### **Questions Feminist Critics Ask:**

1. To what extent are people's actions affected by the role they are supposed to play in society/culture?
2. What limitations are put on people or characters of a certain gender?
3. What privileges does a person of a certain gender have?
4. Examines these two statements:
  - i. A "woman" is/has \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective, image, trait, ability...)
  - ii. A "man" is/has \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective, image, trait, ability...)
5. Should we scrap our created gender roles and stereotypes?
6. How does an author's gender affect a piece of literature?
7. What are the social expectations of men and women in this piece of literature?
8. Are the social norms different for men and women?
9. How does society value men and women differently? What about men is valued? What about women is valued?

### **Key Terms in Feminist Literary Theory (Take Notes):**

Gender roles-

Patriarchy-

Hysteria-

Objectify-

Misogyny-

To Marginalize-

Biological Essentialism-

Sexism-



4. Are there social tensions between the classes?
5. Are the ruling classes happy? Are the lower classes miserable? Or, are the lower classes actually happier because they are not as oppressed by their upper/ruling class rigid rule system?
6. Are the lower/working classes taken advantage of?
7. Does the system care about its citizens who are helpless, hopeless, powerless?
8. Are characters given more/less freedom by their class?
9. Are any of the characters “suffocated” by their class rules, codes, & costs?
10. How do “uppers”/“winners” flaunt or exploit their wealth or power?

**Key Terms in Marxist Literary Theory (Take Notes):**

Proletariat-

Bourgeoisie-

Classism-

Class mobility-

Ideology-

Repressive Ideology-

False Consciousness-

Alienated Labor-

Exchange Value-

Sign-exchange Value-

Use Value-

Commodification-

Imperialism-

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# The Formalist Lens

The formalist approach to analyzing literature concentrates on the *form* of the literature itself. Formalist critics regard literature as a unique form of human knowledge that needs to be examined on its own terms.

## About the Formalist Lens

- It requires close reading
- There is no need for outside information such as historical or cultural context or biographical background of the author
- There is no need for the reader's response to the text
- It focuses on the analysis of literary elements used by the author; just analyze the text itself
- The Pros? timelessness of literature
- The Cons: ignores/discounts context; oversimplifies

Now, try analyzing Snow White OR, if you have seen it, Pleasantville, from a formalist perspective. What might a formalist critic say about the characters, literary devices used, and the theme of these films? What might they say about the use of symbolism in each?

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Snow White



*Snow White the Witch and the Apple.* N.d. Photograph. *The Disney Wiki.* Wikia.com. Web. 25 Sept. 2013.

Pleasantville



"Pleasantville." Web log post. *English@kkc.* Katikati College, 23 Oct. 2010. Web. 25 Sept. 2013.

### **Questions Formalist Critics May Ask**

1. What is the theme/main message of the piece of literature?
2. How is the piece structured or organized? How does it begin? Where does it go next? How does it end? What is the work's plot? How is the plot related to its structure?
3. What is the relationship of each part of the work to the work as a whole? How are the parts related to each other?
4. Who is narrating the work? How is the narrator, speaker, or character revealed to the reader? Why was this type of narration chosen? How does it add to the work as a whole?
5. Who are the major and minor characters, what do they represent, and how do they relate to one another?
6. What is the setting? To what extent is the setting symbolic?
7. What kind of language does the author use to describe, narrate, explain, or create the piece of literature? In other words, what images, similes, metaphors, symbols, etc. appear in the work and what is their function? What message do they convey?

### **Key Terms in Formalist Literary Theory (Take Notes):**

Irony-

Ambiguity-

Tension/Suspense-

Figurative Language-

Images/Imagery-

Symbols-

Narrator/Point of View-

Allusion-

Setting-

Setting-

Theme-

Structure-

Diction/Tone-

Foreshadowing-

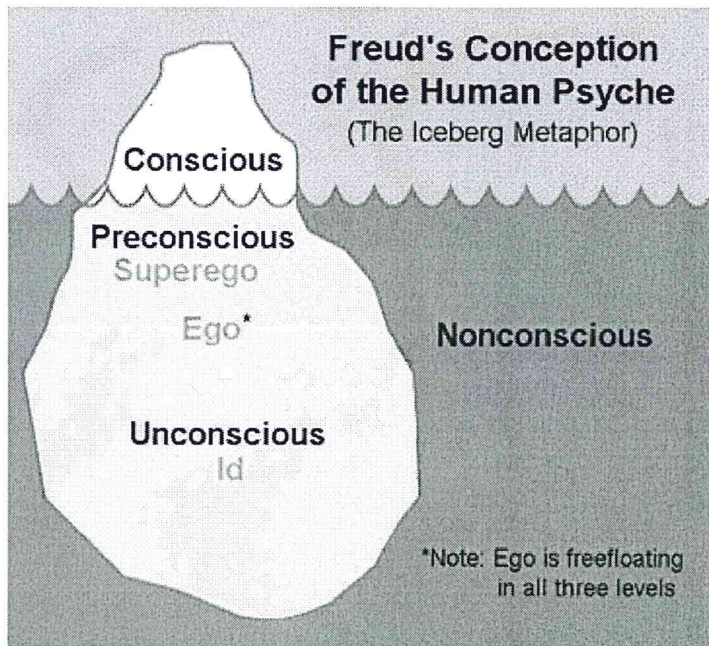
Characterization-

# The Freudian Psychoanalytic Critical Lens

This lens helps us examine how inner workings of the brain influence every aspect of a piece of literature.

## What Freudian/Psychoanalytic critics believe/do:

- A. Belief that each individual has a psychological history
- B. Belief that patterns of behaviors are usually due to the unconscious mind.
- C. Belief that the repetition of destructive behaviors is a reflection of psychological difficulties that have not been identified and/or resolved
- D. Belief that we are driven by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts even though we may be unaware
- E. Examine how each character attempts to re-achieve the narcissistic (selfish) bliss we get to experience as babies; (Tied in with the Id)
- F. Look for a possible “Oedipal complex,” the unconscious desire to marry one’s parent of the opposite sex, in any parent-child type of relationship (this need not be biologically related characters; any mentor-protégé relationship may be analyzed like this)
- G. Examine how each character attempts to re-achieve the ordered predictability and familiarity of childhood (this familiarity might be chaos, as in the case of the Joker of The Dark Knight—he is familiar with chaos, so he continually seeks disorder and creates mayhem). Some characters do things that make them miserable, as if they are determined to be miserable (the sympathy they acquire from other characters and the readers is what they have been seeking all along).
- H. In the Freudian tradition and manner, psychoanalyze all people involved in the piece of literature- assign meaning behind why characters do and say what they do.



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## **Questions Freudian/Psychoanalytic Critics Ask:**

1. Is the id, the childish part of a person's unconscious that is selfish (the me, me, me part), winning in any character?
2. Do any characters represent the id, the superego (the critical, conscience that makes a person want to do what they have learned is just and moral), or the ego (the part of a person's thoughts that regulates and balances the desires of the Id and the superego)?
3. Are any of the characters repressing any of their true urges, dreams, or goals?
4. How are the characters seeking narcissistic (selfish) bliss?
5. What is going on in the mind of any character in a piece of literature?

## **Key Terms in Freudian Theory:**

The Unconscious

Id-

Superego-

Ego-

Oedipal complex -

Defense mechanisms-

Selective Perception-

Selective Memory/Repression-

Denial-

Avoidance-

Displacement-

Projection-

Anxiety-

Fear of Intimacy-

Fear of Abandonment-

Low Self-Esteem-

Fear of Betrayal-

Gender Confusion-

Death Drive-

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