

Literary Theory

Psychological, Feminist, Social-Cultural, Critical Race and
Marxist

IS THERE A
SINGLE CORRECT
INTERPRETATION
FOR A BOOK OR
STORY OR IMAGE
OR SONG?

MINISTRY OF BC CURRICULUM'S BIG IDEAS FOR ENGLISH STUDIES

- PEOPLE UNDERSTAND TEXT DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON THEIR WORLDVIEWS AND PERSPECTIVES
- TEXTS ARE SOCIALLY, CULTURALLY, GEOGRAPHICALLY AND HISTORICALLY CONSTRUCTED

Social and Cultural Lens

- We live in Port Coquitlam, BC, Canada. How does this influence our perspective of literature?
- We live in a Western, liberal democracy. How does this influence our perspective of literature?
- We are alive in 2020. How does this influence our perspective of literature?
- What is our identified gender? Sexuality? Race? Socio-economic background? Our family situation? Our history?
- All of these questions, and more, influence the way the individual looks at literature.





My Papa's Waltz

BY THEODORE ROETHKE

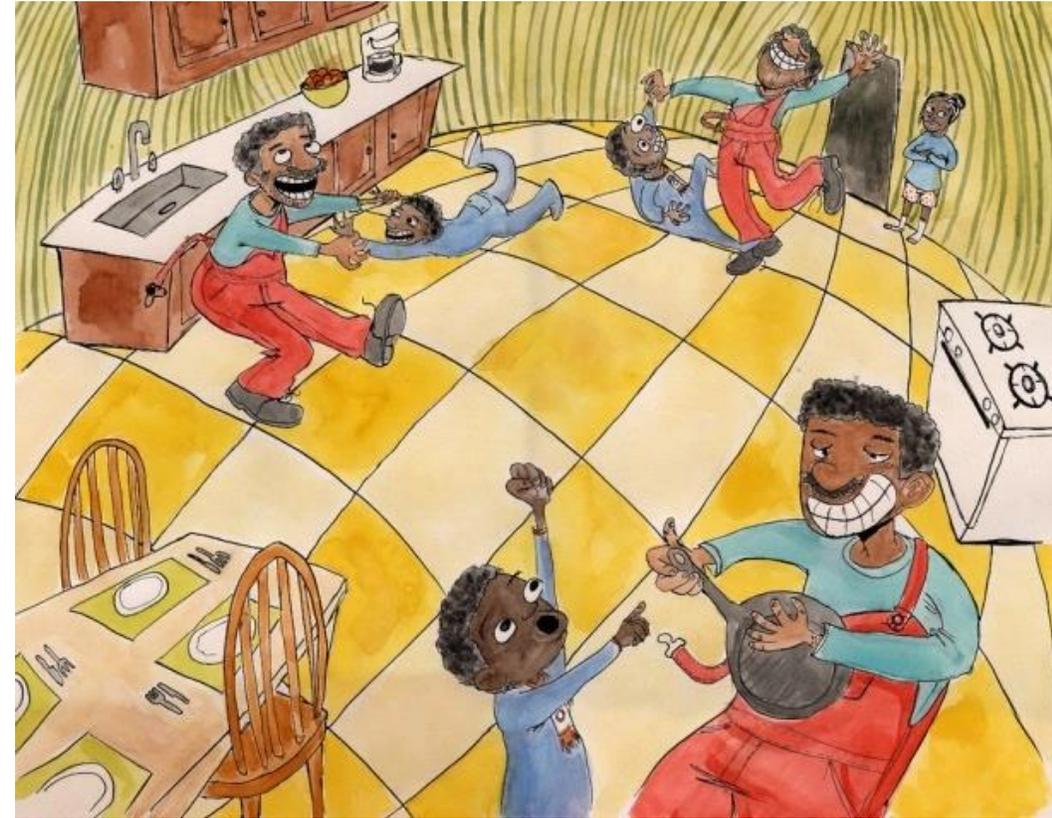
The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

There are many ways to interpret this poem. Is it about child abuse and alcoholism or family time at home? Would your personal perspective and identity influence your interpretation? Your gender? Social standing? Race?



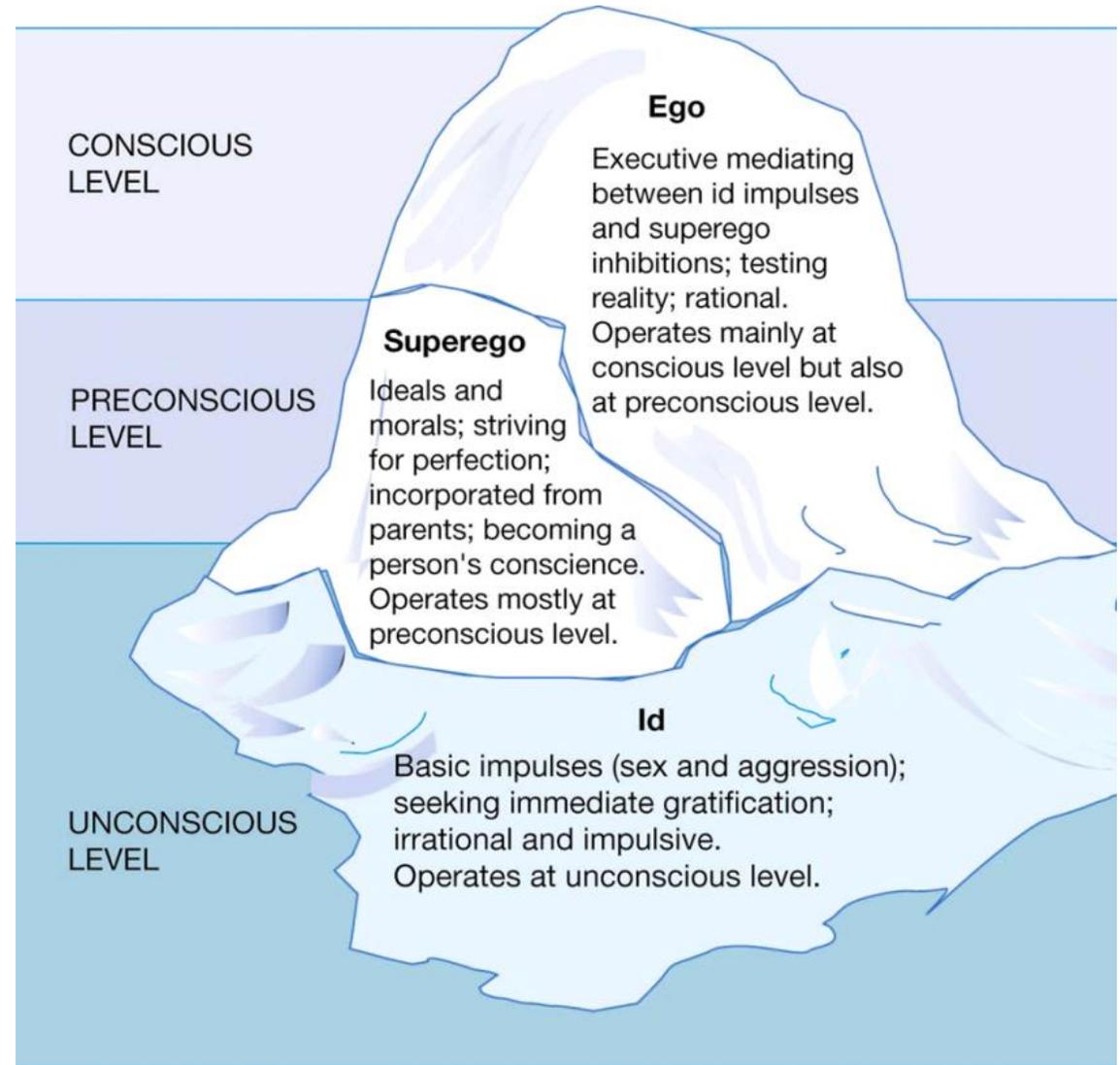
Types of Literary Theory

What is literary theory?

- The different strategies used by writers in order to critically examine a text
- These ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature and even culture
- The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important

PSYCHOLOGICAL/ FREUDIAN THEORY

- EXAMINES THE SYMBOLS, CHARACTERS, AND AUTHOR FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CLASSICAL PSYCHOLOGY- SEEKING THE HIDDEN MEANING AND MOTIVATIONS OF THE CHARACTER AND AUTHOR
- [LITERARY THEORY YOUTUBE](#)
- [PSYCHOANALYSIS -YOUTUBE](#)



Id

I need to eat right this second!



Ego



SUPEREGO

You can't do that because you're in the middle of an important meeting.





Psychoanalysis

- **Psychoanalysis attempts to reveal the ways in which *repressed psychological conflicts* are the ultimate source of our experience.**
- What Psychological forces are motivating the character?
- Given their background, how believable are the actions?
- Are the characters recognizable Psychological types? (Ego, Superego, Id) Explain.
- How can a character's behavior be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example, regression, projection, fear of death, sexuality - as a primary indicator of psychological identity, or the operations of id, ego, superego?)
- What behaviors of the characters are unconscious ones? (Remember, the unconscious consists of repressed wounds, fears, unresolved conflicts, and guilty desires)
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of the author?

FEMINIST THEORY

- TO INTERROGATE THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE WRITING, INTERPRETATION, AND DISSEMINATION OF LITERARY TEXTS. ORIGINALLY CONCERNED WITH THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S AUTHORSHIP AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN LITERATURE, FEMINIST THEORY HAS RECENTLY BEGUN TO EXAMINE IDEAS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF DISCIPLINES INCLUDING FILM STUDIES, GEOGRAPHY, AND EVEN ECONOMICS.
- [FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM](#)



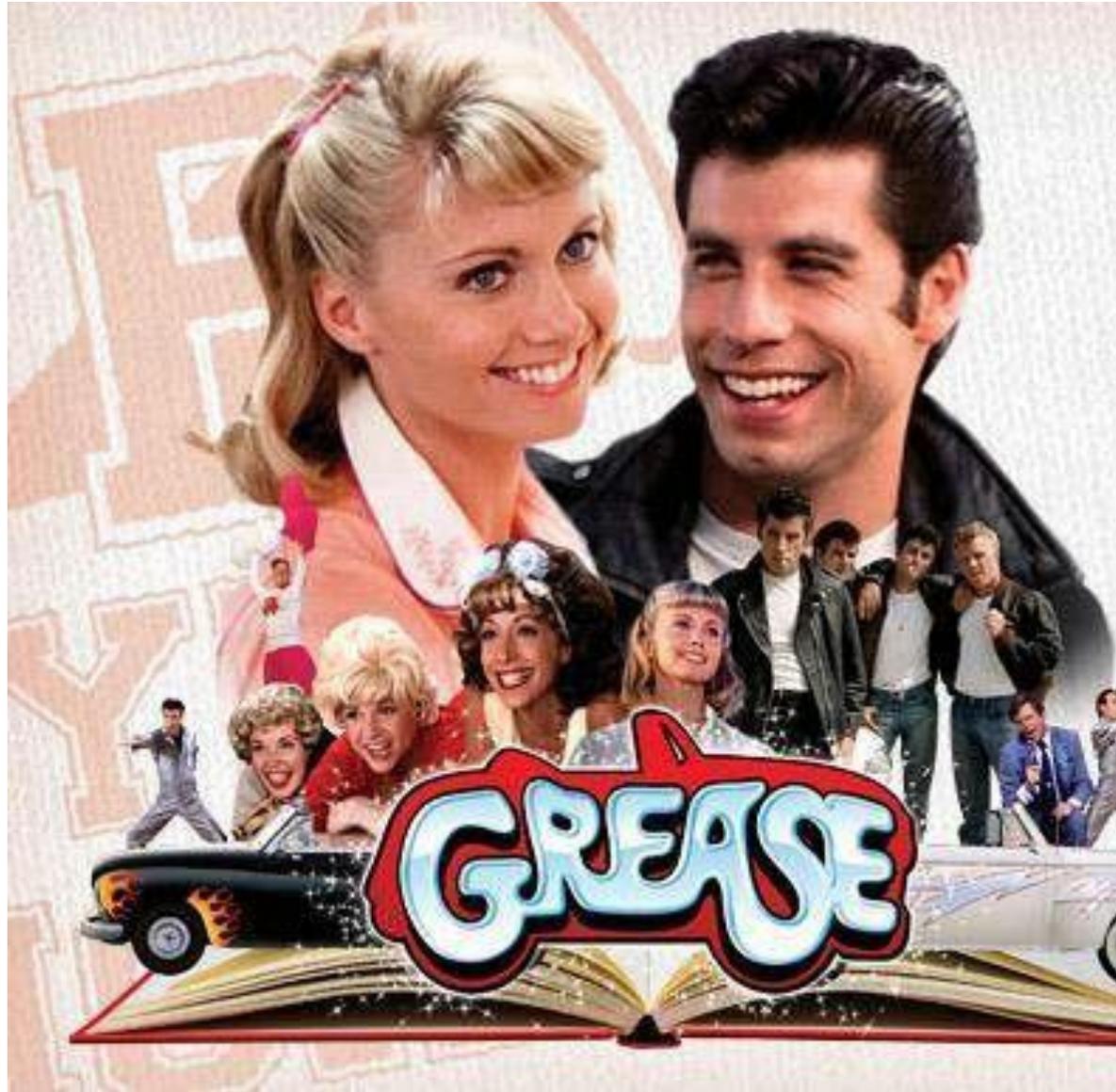
Feminist Theory

- **Feminism attempts to reveal the ways in which patriarchal gender roles are the ultimate source of our experience.**
- What does the text reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy? How are women portrayed? How do these portrayals relate to the gender issues of the period in which the novel was written or is set? In other words, does the work reinforce or undermine a patriarchal ideology?
- What does the work suggest about the ways in which race, class, and/or other cultural factors intersect with gender in producing women's experiences?
- How is the work "gendered"? That is, how does it seem to define femininity and masculinity? Does the character's behavior always conform to their assigned genders? What seems to be the text's attitude toward the gender it portrays? For example, does the work seem to accept, question, or reject the traditional view of gender?
- What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operations of patriarchy? Has the literary work been ignored or neglected in the past? Why? Or, if recognized in the past, is the work ignored or neglected now? Why?

Feminist Theory

- What are the power relationships between men and women?
- How does the text undermine or reinforce gender stereotypes?
- Do characters take on traits from opposite genders? How so? How does this change others' reactions to them?





**DEFEND THE
WORKING CLASS**



**CLASS STRUGGLE
DIVIDES**

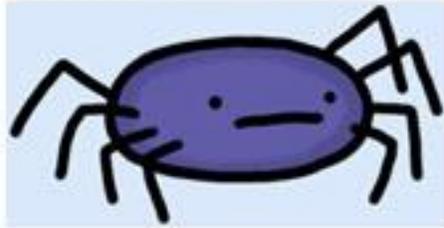
MARXIST/CLASSIST

- BASED ON EXAMINING A PIECE OF LITERATURE TO SEE HOW IT REVEALS CLASS CONFLICT, THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROUPS AND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND THE SPIRITUAL
- ASSUME THAT THE WAY PEOPLE THINK AND BEHAVE IS DETERMINED BY BASIC ECONOMIC FACTORS
- THE WEALTHY EXPLOIT THE WORKING CLASS
- LITERATURE IS A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONFLICT
- [HOW TO APPLY MARXIST THEORY TO LIT](#)

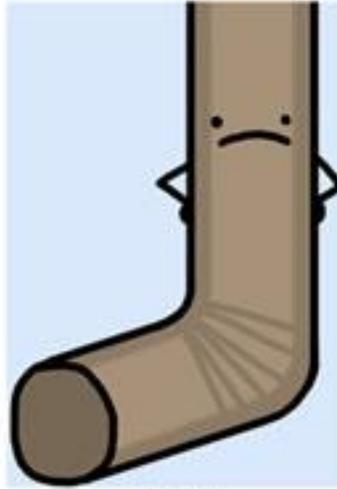


Parasite

The Itsy Bitsy Spider: An Analysis.



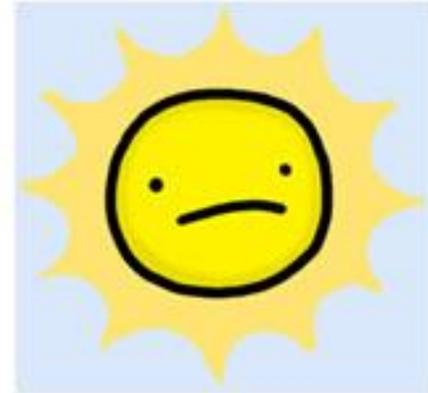
THE SPIDER:
The spider symbolizes the proletariat, and his ongoing struggle against the bourgeoisie.



THE WATERSPOUT:
The waterspout is the myth of equality and the American Dream. The spider continues to doggedly scale it's heights, only to be denied the fruits of his hard work.



THE RAIN:
The rain is the bourgeoisie, impeding the progress of the spider, and standing between him and his ultimate goal of true freedom and equality. The rain also embodies man's inhumanity to man.



THE SUN:
The sun is the easing of difficult living and working conditions. It provides false hope for the spider, prolonging his struggle.

Marxist Lens

- **Concerns itself with class differences, economics, and the implications and consequences of the capitalist system on the author, characters, plot, etc**
- How might the work be seen as a critique of capitalism, imperialism, or classism? That is, in what ways does the text reveal, and invite us to condemn, oppressive forces? If a work criticizes or invites us to criticize oppressive socioeconomic forces, then it may be said to have a Marxist agenda
- Does the work reinforce (intentionally or not) capitalist, imperialist, or classist values? If so, then the work may be said to have a capitalist, imperialist, or classist agenda, and **it is the critic's job to expose and condemn this aspect of the work or the author**
- How does the author's background influence the message of classism in the book?

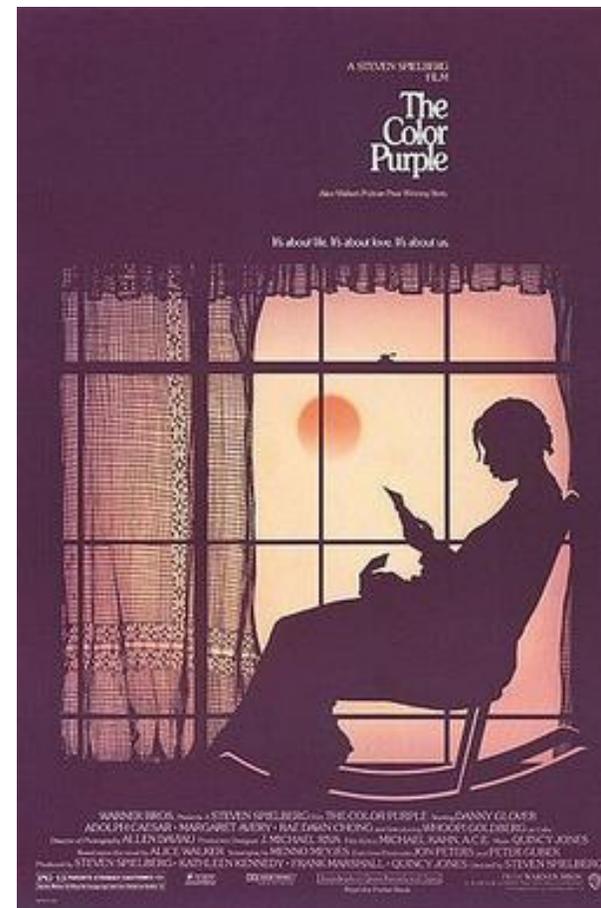
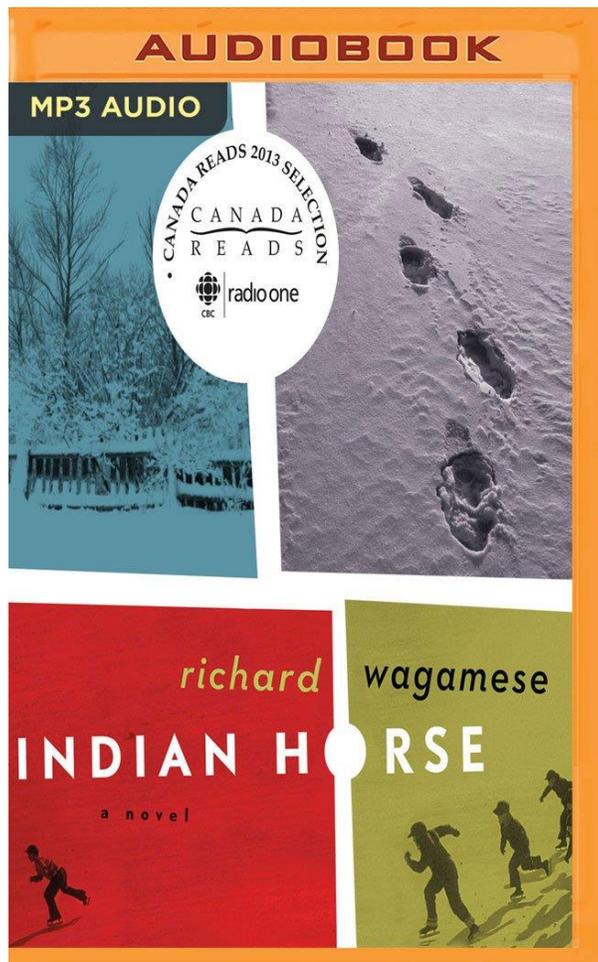
Marxist- cont'd

- What is the social class of the author?
- What values does it reinforce? What values does it undermine?
- What social classes do the characters represent?
- Does the story address issues of economic exploitation? What role does money play?
- Can the protagonist's struggle be symbolic of a larger class struggle?

Critical Race Theory

- **Institutionalized racism**- racial inequalities are deeply imbedded in institutions
- **White Privilege**-the various advantages white individuals experience in contrast to non-whites
- **Intersectionality** –individuals can claim membership to a variety of categories (race, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, etc)





CRT-Critical Race Theory

- Is this book (plot, theme, etc) good for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) people? Why or why not?
- Where do you see instances of privilege or lack of privilege based on social systems and hierarchies?
- How do the characters words, actions, and thoughts demonstrate the effects of institutionalized racism?
- Where, in what ways, and to what extent does race appear in dominant culture and shape the way we interact with one another?
- How does this piece reflect the dominant culture's perception of race?

The Hero and the Outlaw



HARNESSING THE
POWER OF
ARCHETYPES TO
CREATE A
WINNING BRAND



Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson

MYTHOLOGICAL/ARCHETYPAL

- BASED ON THE IDEA THAT EVERY STORY IS A RETELLING OR REFLECTION ON ONE OF THE GREAT STORIES FROM THE “COLLECTIVE” CONSCIOUS, OR THE COMBINED KNOWLEDGE OF HUMANKIND, SUCH AS THE BIBLE AND ANCIENT MYTHS.