

too hastily. He lets the single disillusioning experience of his nightmare govern his entire outlook on others, and thus he fails his test and turns his entire life into darkness.

Second Example: Jackson's "The Lottery," page 139

Shirley Jackson's story "The Lottery" is a powerful indictment of tradition for its own sake. The narrator/resident of a small town explains how a yearly lottery is held to determine who among its citizens is to be stoned. Apparently the purpose of this ritual has generally been forgotten, but the rules governing its execution are known in great detail. The plot is given resonance and predictability by following two structurally determined elements—the basic outline of a tragedy and the outlines of a contest. Like a traditional tragedy the story begins in apparent innocence and happiness and ends in definite calamity. It is a "sunny" day when the lottery is about to begin, "the flowers . . . [are] blossoming profusely," and the town folk are in a jovial mood. The tension builds with the "drawing" from the black box, and the story ends with the stoning and presumed death of the victim. The horror of the story is not to be found in an individual but rather in the collective, slavish acquiescence to a shockingly anachronistic ritual. As in tragedy, the end is the inevitable outcome, for once we know that the people accept the rules of the town lottery, the end is predictable. The townspeople do not know why they must stone someone, but they know that when they partake in the lottery and follow its rules, someone will "win" the contest and meet his or her doom. Understanding the basic elements of tragedy and reading "The Lottery" as a contest or game gives the story a comprehensible and predictable form.

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Feminist Criticism/Gender Studies/Queer Theory

Feminist criticism/gender studies/queer theory displays divergent interests drawing insights from many disciplines. It is a still evolving and rich field of inquiry. Feminist criticism had its genesis in the women's movement of the 1960s, shares many of its concerns, and has applied them to the study of literature. One of the early aims of feminist critics was to question the traditional canon and claim

a place in it for neglected women writers. Writers such as Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, Kate Chopin, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—three of whom are represented in this book—have been given great critical attention as a result. Feminist critics also delineate the ways both male and female characters are portrayed in literature, looking at how societal norms about sexual difference are either enforced or subverted, and focusing partly on patriarchal structures and institutions such as marriage. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf questioned whether there was a feminine/masculine divide in writing styles, a contentious subject among feminist critics to this day. Feminist critics are also interested in how interpreting texts differs between the sexes. For instance, in *A Map for Rereading* (1980), the critic Annette Kolodny analyzes how men and women read the same stories differently.

Gender studies, a more recent critical approach, brings attention to gender rather than to sexual differences. Gender studies critics see the masculine/feminine divide as socially constructed and not innate. Drawing partly on the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) such as *The History of Sexuality* and *Madness and Civilization*, which explore the way powerful institutions organize our society and way of thinking. Such critics apply Foucault's ideas to understanding patriarchal structures and their representations in literature. Many studies have also built on the insights of psychoanalysis and deconstruction (see below), questioning Freud's male-oriented categories and seeking insights into the way language is constructed and the way it affects our thinking. In the essay *Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), Hélène Cixous applies deconstructionist insights about binary oppositions to a study of discourse about women, showing how it disparages women. Thus, while men's discourse in relation to women's may highlight such separate ways of thinking as logic/inconsistency, it is the traditional patriarchal way of thinking that values male over female experience.

A more recent critical orientation, which came to prominence in the early 1990s, is *queer theory*, which also appropriates many of the insights of deconstruction, particularly its understanding that binary oppositions are relative and that thinking about matters such as sexual orientation is partly ideological and partly social. Many queer theorists see the heterosexual/homosexual divide as less distinct than has commonly been believed. Queer theorists are interested in how homosexuals are portrayed in literature and whether they write or read literature differently from heterosexuals. Queer theory has brought attention to recent literary works, dealing explicitly with lesbian and gay themes, along with attention to sometimes "veiled" references to the same themes in writers whose works make up the standard canon. Much of queer theory is theoretical; one example, applied to reading a particular work, is Jonathan Crewe's essay, "Queering 'The Yellow Wallpaper'?: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Politics of Form" (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 14.2 [1995]: 273–93).

Example: Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown"

At the beginning of "Young Goodman Brown," Brown's wife, Faith, is seen only peripherally. In the traditional patriarchal spirit of wife-as-adjunct, she tells her new husband of her fears, and then asks him to stay at home and take his journey at some other time.

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Hawthorne does not give her the intelligence or dignity, however, to let her explain her concerns (or might he not have been interested in what she had to say?) and she therefore remains in the background with her pink hair ribbon as her distinguishing symbol of subordinate inferiority. During the mid-forest satanic ritual, she appears again and is given power, but only the power to cause her husband to go astray. Once she is led in as a novice to the practice of demonism, her husband falls right in step. Unfortunately, by following Mrs. Brown can conveniently excuse himself from guilt by claiming that "she" had made him do it, just as Eve, in some traditional views of the fall of humankind, compelled Adam to eat the apple (Genesis 3:16-17). Hawthorne's attention to the male protagonist, in other words, permits him to neglect the independence and integrity of a female protagonist.

Second Example: Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," page 306

"The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin is about a woman who is told that her husband has died in a train accident. Rather than feeling devastated by this news as her family and friends expect, she feels strangely free and happy to pursue a life for herself. While the story's plot suggests obvious themes of interest for feminist critics, a closer look at many details reveals how language, institutions, and expected demeanor suppress the natural desires and aspirations of women. The protagonist of the story is referred to as "Mrs. Mallard" while her husband is called by his name, Brently Mallard, which has nothing to do with his marital status. Assuming that because of a heart condition Louise Mallard might not survive the bad news, she is told by her sister indirectly "in broken sentences:" of her husband's fate. At first she reacts predictably by weeping "with sudden, wild abandonment." Soon, however, Louise finds herself resisting a feeling that is finally identified as "freedom." In her last few moments of solitude, she imagines a life devoted only to herself and not to being molded by the will of another. Her resistance indicates the pull of societal norms, while her anticipation of possible liberation is a sign of her true inner self. When, at the end of the story, Louise sees her husband appear, perfectly safe and unharmed, she dies of a heart attack, which is diagnosed by attending doctors as a result "of joy that kills." Since there is no indication that Brently Mallard was anything but a good husband, we may assume that it was freedom from the bonds of marriage itself and the overpowering will of a man that turned a supposedly tragic event into a liberating one. "The Story of an Hour" is a powerful commentary on the institution of marriage as it suppresses the natural desires and pursuits of women.

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