Marxist and Feminist Theories

Literary Criticism Lecture #3
Marxist Theory
Marxism

✨ Leading Theorists:

✨ Karl Marx (1818-1883)
✨ Friedrich Engles (1820-1895)
Karl Marx

- Born in Germany
- Rejected Romanticism in favor of **Dialectical Materialism**
- Criticized capitalism
- Writings include *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*
- The root of all our struggles is money
Marx’s Beliefs

- Bourgeoisie vs. Proletariat
  - Thrown together into relations of production
  - Locked in opposition
- Result of this relationship is revolution
Base vs. Superstructure

- **Base**
  - Foundation of the society
  - Economy and the means of production

- **Superstructure**
  - What is built from this foundation
  - All other parts of society (culture and education)

- Therefore, the base determines the superstructure
Base-Superstructure Model

Superstructure

Base (USA)

Base (Congo)
Marxist Class System

- Proletariat
- Bourgeoisie
- Land Owners
- Lumpenproletariat
- Farmers and Peasantry
Classism

プリンセス

Class Consciousness

Social control is maintained by:

- The ruling class (powerful)
- Determining the ruling class’s best interests
- The use of **propaganda**
I WANT YOU FOR U.S. ARMY
NEAREST RECRUITING STATION

FACE IT COAL IS FILTHY
Classism

❖ Exploitation

\[ \text{Profit} = \text{Value of Product} + \text{Wages for Labor} \]
Materialism

- Social class is *determined* by a person’s relationship to production
- Social class is *asserted* through **materialism**
  - Commodification
  - Conspicuous Consumption
The Big Ideas

✦ Focuses on the representation of class distinctions and class conflict in literature

✦ Focuses more on social and political elements than artistic and visual elements of a text
Marxism and Holden

- How does Salinger’s social and economic class show through the work?
- Does the novel support the economic and social status quo, or does it advocate change?
- What role does the class system play in *The Catcher in the Rye*?
- What is the Salinger’s analysis or critique of class relations?
Marxism and Holden

- How do characters overcome oppression?
- What does the work say about oppression; or are social conflicts ignored or blamed elsewhere?
- Does the work propose some form of utopian vision as a solution to the problems encountered in the novel?
- In what ways does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo; or does it try to undermine it?
- Does the literature reflect Salinger’s own class or analysis of class relations?
Feminist Theory
Feminism

Leading Theorists:

- Mary Wollstonecraft
- Sojourner Truth
- Simone de Beauvoir
- Betty Friedan
Biological Determinism

- **Sex** is biological
- **Gender** is socially defined
Traditional Gender Roles

- Socially constructed based on gender and sex
- Upholds the **patriarchy**
  - Can only exist with a **binary**
Who is good and who is bad?
Who is good and who is bad?

I’m pretty; therefore, I must be good.

We’re hideous; therefore, we must be bad.
### Other Binaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✤ Strong</td>
<td>✤ Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Rational</td>
<td>✤ Emotional</td>
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<tr>
<td>✤ Industrious</td>
<td>✤ Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✤ Objective</td>
<td>✤ Subjective</td>
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<tr>
<td>✤ Independent</td>
<td>✤ Codependent</td>
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Who is disregarded or oppressed?
Waves of Feminism

- First Wave Feminism
- Second Wave Feminism
- Third Wave Feminism
Ideas to Consider

- Compare and contrast the roles of each sex in nature with those in humankind.
- Compare and contrast the roles of each sex in a polytheistic society with those in a monotheistic society.
Ways Sexism is Revealed

- Language
  - Androgynyst Poetics
- Media
- Motherhood
- Sexuality
Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically

In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values

While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine)
Feminism and Holden

- How is the relationship between men and women portrayed?
- What are the power relationships between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?
- How are male and female roles defined?
- What constitutes masculinity and femininity?
- How do characters embody these traits?
- Do characters take on traits from opposite genders? How so? How does this change others’ reactions to them?
Feminism and Holden

- What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy?
- What does the work imply about the possibilities of sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy?
- What does the work say about women's creativity?
- What does the history of the work's reception by the public and by the critics tell us about the operation of patriarchy?
- What role does the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition?