

Close reading strategies and examples

Maya Angelou "And Still I Rise"

Poetry Foundation defines literary analysis using the Feminist Theory as “Feminist theory is an extension of feminism’s critique of male power and ideology that interrogates the role of gender in the writing, interpretation, and dissemination of literary texts.” Feminist Theory helps to examine how gender is constructed and says that it's not natural or innate, but that it is an illusion created by structures of society and language. Post-structural feminist Theory also has a political aspect. The political aspect's goal is to spread awareness of power imbalances between men and women in society. It helps to spread awareness and to tell how these inequalities came around and how they evolved over time. Another important aspect is giving opinions on how the inequalities should be changed to create a better environment for women and how to bring about social change. There are heavy implications of activism, and Feminism has been present in literature for as long as there have been inequalities.

The Feminist theory works well for this close reading because Maya Angelou is well known for her feminist works, and this one is no exception. She fills the poem with empowerment and critiques the social norms and inequalities towards women. This is perfect for feminist theory because there is plenty to critique in the way of “gender construct” and the aforementioned. One of the benefits of using a specific approach is that we can get a closer look

under a specific light to gain a better understanding of the text in different lights. For example, looking at this poem under the light of Feminism allows a better understanding of feminist issues and perseverance. If structuralism would be used, the examination would provide more knowledge of the literary structure and rules versus feminist issues. Each theory provides a different lens to learn about, which can be a good thing or a bad thing. Some theories are so specific that they do not work well with every text or are not paired with other theories. For this poem, using Queer theory wouldn't be as effective because it doesn't deal with sexuality.

"And I Still Rise " by Maya Angelou is filled with strong and empowering phrases about how even if you were to beat her down, she would still rise and come back better than before. It helps to spread awareness on feminist issues as well as empowerment for those struggling. In the poem, she says "Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you beset with Gloom? 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells pumping in my living room." She references "haughtiness" and "sassiness" and "sexiness" as things that would upset the patriarchy. Historically women being "haughty" or "sassy" are typically seen as unprofessional and off-putting whereas for men when they are being haughty it's described as being a boss or being powerful. Maya Angelou references these key "negative" traits as upsetting the society she's addressing and then says despite the fact that you are upset at her strength she will rise regardless.

This poem transcends societal trends because issues in feminism (while improving) are still around. The empowerment and strength in this poem can still be seen and is relevant today. That being said, this poem was written during 1978, which is the decade of the Equal Rights Amendment and specifically the year of the marches relating to it. This bill helped guarantee legal rights to anyone regardless of their gender. As a result, many works focusing on equality, especially gender, came to light. Angelou was most likely influenced by this important time and

the battle for rights to write this work. Literature is constantly affected by society and its trends. While the major issue at the time of writing this piece was the ERA now many activism pieces are on the protection of women and their reproductive rights. The topics in feminist rights evolve to fit the current society's issues.

Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (1847)

In Jane Eyre Mr Rochester is explaining to Jane how he ended up with an insane wife. and goes on to detail his road to marriage, highlighting a lot of issues and expectations that were put on men at the time of this story's writing, which is in 1847. Gender Theory studies what is understood as masculine or feminine in a given time or society. In this story, the time is 1847, and the societal standard is for men to marry into money to attain status. It is important to read and look for different instances of gendered expectations or gendered traits that could be analyzed.

Gender Theory is a good choice for analysis of Charlotte Brontë because of the fact that it focuses on the expectations of Mr. Rochester for marriage. It also focuses on how he was pushed to get married so fast that he didn't even know his wife. Because his dad wanted him to get married for wealth, so that he wouldn't have a poor man for a son. It also makes comments such as " they showed her to me" and "lavishly displayed" About the woman he marries, which allows us to further examine his thoughts on women or the society's thoughts on women and what they must do to win a husband as well. I feel that structuralism would also work for this

well because the writing structure is pretty interesting. It's written as if it's a conversation with someone else. or as if he's telling a really long-winded story at a party. alternatively I would probably not use reader response Theory because I don't think relying on the reader's interpretation fits as well as taking it as the author means it.

In “Charlotte Brontë” Mr. Rochester is speaking to Jane about his father's resolution to keep the property together. He says that his father did not want to leave him a fair portion because he did not want to divide the property. As a result, he was left with nothing as the property went all to his brother. He then says his father couldn't bear the idea that his son should be poor, so he would provide him with a wealthy marriage. shows that one of the standards put on men at the time was to be wealthy not only to provide honor for themselves but to their fathers as well. and it also shows that they either had to do this by having land or by having women, thus equating women on par with land or property. He then goes on to say that after college, he met a bride who was “ already courted for me”. This means that his wife essentially was already promised to him without any dating or wooing needed. He also describes this whole process as being a “ Folly so besotted by the idiotic rivalries of society, the prurience, the rashness, the blindness of youth.”. He sees it as silly and rash and describes himself as getting caught up in the whole situation and marrying a woman he never loved or knew. This was often the case with marriages where the husband and wife would not know each other very well or even court at all in some cases. Often, men and women were pushed to find the richest person they could and marry them before they could say no. This was the standard for men as well as for women in this time.

The story heavily relates to societal trends. The one in the year of 1847 was to marry for money and to secure their place in society. This entire story is about a man who followed societal

trends and proceeded to regret it. It is possible that the many works of literature like this, such as “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen, as well as many of the Jane Eyre stories, could have helped to make the General Public less enthused about the idea of marrying people you barely know. Now, many stories don't feature romance with this ideal, because the standard is to get to know someone before you marry them, and to date. Trends often affect how literature is perceived, as well as how it is appreciated, just as literature often affects the trends you see in society. If the movies, TV, media, and literature were all telling society that it was best to get married quickly to ascertain a higher level in society, then many people are going to begin to do that because they follow the Trends they see in society. alternatively if the media were telling you to wait, many people would wait. Literature heavily impacts societal trends, especially nowadays, when it's not only literature but also media such as social media and the internet.

Literary theory is extremely important to the interpretation of texts. The knowledge and understanding of the text obtained are vastly different depending on which theory you use. You may read a piece on trans-rights under the queer theory and learn about different issues in the trans communities and the queer community. You could also read the same piece under the structuralism theory and miss that entirely, instead learning about the structure and grammatical tools used in the text. The Theory chosen deeply impacts the ability to understand a piece of literature in different ways.

Works Cited

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