

The Theory

Feminist literary criticism wishes to examine, among other things:

- *how* women and men are and are not represented in a given work
- *how* and *why* certain gender archetypes, paradigms and stereotypes are either written into our stories or undermined by them
- *what effect it has* on a culture when an author does or does not appear to recapitulate conventional ways of understanding patriarchy, destructive or limiting gender definitions, and ingrained sexism in literature

Feminist theory sees the different modes of literary production (stories, poems, songs, plays, essays) as “sites” upon which we project certain problematic cultural paradigms of what it is to be a woman or a man. It also sees literary works generally as the places from which both destructive *and* liberating ideas of sex and gender originate. Our literary works help “create” us, but they also reflect us.

Your Essay

Using *any* of the resources I’ve provided this unit (i.e. your course texts, the Greer interview, additional resources and models provided on the course website), make an argument about something you see happening in the language of *King Lear* – something that concerns how women are represented in the language of the play. Use those points in the play to help you make an argument about the work that’s in line with the major principals and concerns of feminist literary critique outlined above and in *Texts and Contexts*. Make a single, important point about a specific element in the play or aspect of the writing, some particular characterization of women or entrenched stereotype you see being reinforced or overturned in the language of the play. Reference only one principal, emblematic scene from the list above to help you support and illustrate your point about the play and the writing – do not try to write about the whole play. Make a single assertion about the work, bend it around feminist theoretical concerns, and support your analysis by citing the play and your chosen secondary texts in your discussion.

The Structure of the Thing

Your opening paragraph should combine a brief summary introduction to the play *and* your chosen scene, along with a thesis statement that’s developed from the question set I will assign to you in class at the start of the exam. Follow that opening paragraph with a second paragraph that fully introduces and summarizes feminist criticism for your ignorant reader. The textual analysis in your “body paragraphs” to follow should then focus on a specific aspect or bit of language from your chosen scene in the play that helps you more fully explore and address your thesis contention about the storytelling, the characterizations of women and men, the language patterns, or statements about sex, gender and patriarchy you see embedded within the work.

You should be able to write an effective response to this prompt in 5 well-developed paragraphs – the minimum number required for this exam. Use academic voice and language (present tense, 3rd person, no slang speech) as you have been throughout the term, and follow the 75/25 rule: three quarters of your body discussion work should be your own words and ideas while the remaining quarter may be cited material, either paraphrased or quoted. Plan, draft, and proofread your work very carefully: you will have no rewrite opportunities this time around and I will be looking for strong thesis and paragraph development, confident use of the text(s) for support and elaboration of your ideas and, most importantly, excellent sentence control and consistently error free language in order to pass your work.

Good luck and don’t panic: you can do this, just as long as you keep your thesis clear, your focus narrow, your citations frequent, and your sentences clean and correct.

You will find the question sets and the list of available scenes for focused analysis on the reverse of this sheet.