

Jungian Literary Criticism

The Essential Guide



SUSAN ROWLAND

Jung: The Essential Guides

Series Editor: Luke Hockley

“A forerunner of Jungian literary criticism, Susan Rowland has now provided here an updated volume of ambition and character with rigorous and brilliant attention to individual pieces of writing. She challenges the very necessity and notion of a Jungian approach to studying literature, and responds to that query with thoughtful but sweeping notice of commentary over centuries. This volume functions as an introduction for a new reader of the application of Jung’s literary analysis, and offers controversial perspectives on traditional readings for more experienced readers. Highly recommendable for its clarity and scope.”

- **Leslie Gardner, PhD**, Fellow, Department Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex

“This book teaches all of us to read again. Through a Jungian lens, Susan Rowland guides us through a familiar literary landscape and shows us how to see it as if for the first time. In an act of alchemy, her insights transform our understanding of literary relationships in the books themselves. Her expert advice also shows us how to experience the joy of reading, as we rediscover the page turning magic of making literary gold.

This book is a wonderful gift for students of literary studies, academics, and anyone who loves literature. You could not ask for a better guide to the Jungian literary, interpretive imagination.”

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“The most innovative aspect of this book is to consider transdisciplinarity as the most socially liberating framework both for Jungian studies and interpretation of literary texts. The key point is to take the transdisciplinary symbolic language as the royal way to open new avenues in the study of narratives, myths and active imagination. The symbolic language implies the intertwining of the included-middle and the a-logical and a-rational Hidden Third. The Hidden Third, which mediates the interaction between Subject and Object, allows describing the *unus mundus* of oneness and manyness, by taking into account both what is scientifically known with what is unknown forever. Susan Rowland offers to us a unique Jungian hermeneutics of literature, which rests upon a transdisciplinary foundation. Her book is not only a brilliant essay on Jung and literary criticism but also an invaluable textbook for students in literature.”

- **Basarab Nicolescu**, author of *From Modernity to Cosmodernity*



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Jungian Literary Criticism

In *Jungian Literary Criticism: The Essential Guide*, Susan Rowland demonstrates how ideas such as archetypes, the anima and animus, the unconscious and synchronicity can be applied to the analysis of literature. Jung's emphasis on creativity was central to his own work, and here Rowland illustrates how his concepts can be applied to novels, poetry, myth and epic, allowing a reader to see their personal, psychological and historical contribution.

This multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach challenges the notion that Jungian ideas cannot be applied to literary studies, exploring Jungian themes in canonical texts by authors including Shakespeare, Jane Austen and W. B. Yeats as well as works by twenty-first century writers, such as in digital literary art. Rowland argues that Jung's works encapsulate realities beyond narrow definitions of what a single academic discipline ought to do, and through using case studies alongside Jung's work she demonstrates how both disciplines find a home in one another. Interweaving Jungian analysis with literature, *Jungian Literary Criticism* explores concepts from the shadow to contemporary issues of ecocriticism and climate change in relation to literary works, and emphasises the importance of a reciprocal relationship. Each chapter concludes with key definitions, themes and further reading, and the book encourages the reader to examine how worldviews change when disciplines combine.

The accessible approach of *Jungian Literary Criticism: The Essential Guide* will appeal to academics and students of literary studies, Jungian and post-Jungian studies, literary theory, environmental humanities and ecocentrism. It will also be of interest to Jungian analysts and therapists in training and in practice.

Susan Rowland, PhD, is Chair of MA Engaged Humanities at Pacifica Graduate Institute, California, USA, and teaches on the doctoral program in Jungian psychology and archetypal studies. She is author of nine books on C.G. Jung, including *Remembering Dionysus* and *Psyche and the Arts* (both Routledge). Founding Chair of the International Association for Jungian Studies (IAJS), Susan also writes detective fiction.

Jung: The Essential Guides

Series Editor: Luke Hockley

International Consultant: Susan Rowland

Accessing and understanding the work of C. G. Jung presents several challenges to readers who aren't formally trained in analytical psychology, from deciding which of his many volumes is most useful to them, to identifying and using the key concepts appropriately. The *Essential Guides* approach these challenges head-on. They offer those new to Jung an accessible and engaging introduction to the relevant theories and ideas in their discipline that are written by leaders in the field. The books also provide readers familiar with Jungian concepts with an insight into how his ideas can be applied outside the consulting room, to the arts, sciences and humanities.

Titles in the series:

Jungian Literary Criticism: The Essential Guide

Susan Rowland

Jungian Film Studies: The Essential Guide

Luke Hockley and Helena Bassil-Morozow

Jungian Literary Criticism

The Essential Guide

Susan Rowland

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This book is dedicated to all the students who have endured my efforts to introduce them to Jungian literary criticism, in particular those in the English Department of Greenwich University UK, and now at Pacifica Graduate Institute, California, USA. May we continue our transdisciplinary adventures!



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Of course I owe an immense debt to Jungian literary critics of the past and present, to whom this book is also a tribute. I apologise to those many Jungian literary scholars whose work is not mentioned by name in these pages. Your work is important and this book wants to support it. In addition, this book would not exist without the incomparable explorations of the post-Jungians whose research has taken Jungian psychology into the urgent concerns of the twenty-first century in arenas such as ecology, social justice, politics, history, social studies, philosophy and complexity theory. *Jungian Literary Criticism* owes a lot to the pioneering work of Andrew Samuels, Helene Shulman, Ginette Paris, Luke Hockley, Joseph Cambray, Terence Dawson, Matthew Fike, Leslie Gardner, Elizabeth Nelson, Inez Martinez, Rinda West, Evija Vestergaard, John Beebe, Jutta Schamp, Joanna Dovalis, John Izod, Fanny Brewster and many many more.

Special to this book is the vision of Basarab Nicolescu whose transdisciplinarity is, I believe, a wholly Jungian-compatible vision of academic disciplines making a real contribution to the ecological, political and cultural life of the planet. Transdisciplinarity can not only fulfil the epistemological promises of quantum science, but more importantly make a global culture to thrive in a twenty-first century of climate change and interconnectedness. For this reason, *Jungian Literary Criticism* evacuates the root of disciplinary divisions between two forms of knowing oriented to the creative imagination: Jungian psychology and literary studies, and finds them parts of a never to be fully assimilated whole.

This book is written for literary students who are intrigued by the psychology of Jung and for Jungians who want to extend their understanding of literature. It argues that Jung wrote a literary psychology for many of the same reasons that poets, dramatists and novelists produce psychologically radiant literature.

Both disciplines are marginalised by an epistemological and economic hierarchy that undervalues creativity; it is time for literary students and Jungians to make friends and alliances. In this spirit I am proud that *Jungian Literary Criticism: The Essential Guide* is part of the pioneering series edited by eminent Jungian Film Theorist, Luke Hockley. I owe him particular thanks for inspiration and support.

I owe so much to family and friends who have supported and consoled me during the writing of this book. I make special mention of my remarkable niece and nephew, Emma and Tom Rowland, now embarking upon their own university quests. Especial mention is made to the courage of loyal friends, Wendy Pank, Claire Dyson and Margaret Erskine.

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Getting started in Jung and literature

Overview

This is a book about a psychology of the creative imagination, that of C. G. Jung and Jungians, and how it might aid the study of literature. It is designed for those who want to use Jungian ideas to develop an understanding of literary texts. Therefore, this book's first audience is those readers new to Jung whose primary purpose to extend their knowledge of literary writing. Yet, there is a second readership for *Jungian Literary Criticism: The Essential Guide*, because the book and the work it sponsors go two ways. It also aims to help Jungian clinicians, scholars and therapists to explore literature as a means to developing their practice, either in writing or in the consulting room. Indeed, a key theme of this book is such reciprocity, that Jungians can aid the study of literature while literary critics can similarly inform Jungian psychology.

So why might Jung, a pioneer of the psychology of the unconscious (sometimes known as 'depth psychology'), have something to say to the diverse field of literary studies? Similarly, what can imaginative writing and its scholarship have to do with a psychology developed for psychotherapy (for the practical improvement of mental well-being by means of consultation)? The first two chapters set up the structure of the whole book, starting by tackling these fundamental questions in a thorough overview. Chapter 1 has a section exploring the definitions and consequences of key Jungian ideas and concludes with a summary of the key issues in three sentences, found in all subsequent chapters from Chapter 3. Chapter 2 shows how the Jungian and literary ideas find a home in literature by means of a case study of a significant literary work followed by looking at specific Jungian texts. Chapter 2 will also begin the introduction of significant aspects of Jungian literary criticism so far.

While following this basic structure, all chapters will also end in what I am calling 'the big questions', such as what happens to knowing – and the worldviews implied by them – when disciplines are combined? For the relationship between disciplines, which is what this book is about, proves to have important ongoing implications for more than the organisation of degree programmes. Ultimately, this book will suggest, how we treat our forms of knowledge in the twenty-first century affects more than the academy. It could be part of practical change to

help a troubled and ecologically stressed world. But first of all, let's begin with psychology in the distinctive approach of C. G. Jung.

Why Jung?

Jung is important for arguing that psychic creativity is the foundation of who we are, how we think, and the ways in which we connect to our world. To Jung, nothing is more influential in human life than this basic core of creativity, the capacity to generate something new. Whatever our personal or social circumstances, we have an inner power to change our lives and affect our surroundings. Indeed, this notion of fundamental creativity means that human existence has a goal or a purpose. We may not possess answers to our problems, but within us is an energy directing us towards a meaningful and fulfilled life.

Jung located this creativity in the power of imagination in the psyche, our inner being, and in particular in that hidden and mysterious part of it known as the unconscious. (For more on these notions see the 'Key definitions' section below.) As a psychologist, Jung was part of an early twentieth-century movement developing psychological therapy. After a difficult collaboration with the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (see 'Key definitions' section on 'libido'), Jung broke away from Freud's ideas because he felt that nothing should restrict the possibilities of unconscious creativity. It is for this championing of the intrinsic creativity of the psyche that Jung influenced many writers, artists and philosophers, as well as inspiring a range of subsequent therapies, including those using the arts to facilitate therapy.

So Jung is a *critical* thinker in three ways. Firstly, he is critically important as a major pioneer of working with the unconscious, a factor of crucial importance in the twentieth century and arguably even more significant in the twenty-first, in which a loosening of all kinds of boundaries allows the psyche to develop in new ways. Secondly, Jung is critical to literature because he has been acknowledged as an influence in the work of writers, artists and philosophers. Among such notable figures are D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Herman Hesse, Thomas Mann, John Fowles, Ted Hughes, Doris Lessing, Jackson Pollock, Anselm Kiefer; and filmmakers such as George Lucas, John Boorman and Derek Jarman.

Finally, Jung is critical in the sense of offering a way of meaningful criticism because his work provides a framework for analysing and evaluating creativity. Jung thereby provides an interpretative approach to the arts and humanities, those disciplines such as literary studies, philosophy, history and religion that are devoted to what it means to be human. Jung gives a distinctive way of knowing and valuing knowing, or epistemology. As this book will show, he offers a number of concepts and ideas that enable texts to be read *productively* for what they contribute personally, psychologically, socially, historically and cosmologically.

In this sense, Jung is also a textual critic, although the texts he preferred were typically dreams and neuroses. His textual practices on non-literary material do

manifest a hermeneutics, or a way of working with texts and theorising about that work. For example, Jung's potential for exploring reading and writing will be the focus of Chapter 3.

Moreover, there is a second dimension to Jung as a source of interpretation, which returns us to his key notion of creativity as the essence of being human. Since creativity comes *first*, meaning that it is more endemic to Jung than anything else, so then nothing can be allowed to limit the possibilities of the imagination. Whatever Jung's theory does must liberate rather than limit creative, artistic and imaginative work. No exception is made, even in Jung's own account of the psyche.

So Jung is a critical thinker who places imagination above ideas, even his own ideas, as we will see in this book. His prioritising of imagination extends into his own writing. Since creativity is so uniquely valuable, it must be allowed to inhabit, play, even guide, Jung's own expressions. Jung is a critical thinker with many psychic voices striving to come to life in his writing. He is therefore a powerful resource for evaluating texts of all kinds. Indeed, his works meet many criteria for literature itself as we will see.

Ultimately, in Jung for literary criticism, his study of the human psyche incorporates three trajectories. These are firstly, exploring personhood or individual being; secondly, the role of interconnectedness or how we are who we are through relationships; and finally, treating culture through seeking what is lost, marginalised or yet to come into being. In fact, Jung could be placed appropriately as a figure in the academic study of the humanities for his focus on what it means to be human, as an individual, through such forces as sexuality, family and social roles, and as a member of cultural and national groups.

Significant here is that his approach to culture enacts his fidelity to the creativity of the psyche in remaining 'open', as in never absolute, finished or complete. No psyche is ever fully knowable (because of the existence of its unconscious), no person is ever unable to grow or change, no culture is ever complete or perfect. Seeking what is lost, marginalised or yet to come, Jung believes in re-connecting with psychic resources consigned to the past, as well as becoming more aware of what is being banished from the present, and also remaining open to an as yet unknowable future potential. In this and in other ways, Jungian psychology joins some of the most potent properties of that cultural body we call literature.

Why literary criticism?

Literature is variously described as artistic or imaginative writing. Such terms disguise the fact that the definition of literature, both as an object for study and in its long cultural history, has been vigorously contested. Perhaps it is worth noting that literature is a creature of historic contraction. Pre-history suggests to us oral communities where literature lived in memories and recitation. We know this literature by those few surviving works that were eventually written down. Such evidence indicates that much of the culture of the tribe, its history, religion, laws

and practices, were contained in long narrative poems. Literature *was* culture; almost all of it.

In the later ages of writing and latterly of printing, literature was ‘valued writing’, which included religious, philosophical, scientific and historical texts. Such a category remained effective until the divorce between science and religion provoked a revival of interest in the imagination in the era called Romanticism in the 1750s to the 1830s (Eagleton 1983: 17). After Romanticism, ‘literature’ rapidly contracts to signify imaginative and fictional works in the major genres of poetry, novels and plays.

Whether literature covers *all* such publications from pulp fiction of the city streets to esoteric experimental poetry, from music hall sketches to serious drama, from the major entertainment modes of the people to elite art, this debate has infused the academic study of vernacular literature from its setting up as a degree programme in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the role of new technologies for imaginative productions in film, television, and internet texts is also open for exploration under the heading of literary studies. Fortunately, the recent publication of the comprehensive *Jungian Film Studies: The Essential Guide* means that this book can focus on the written word (Bassil-Morozow and Hockley 2016).

Whatever may get included in the category ‘literature’, the literary does possess some agreed-upon characteristics. Literature demonstrates the role of creativity and imagination in writing; it has a particular history of development with specific forms and genres, and, it has played a social role in the transmission of stories, ideas, themes, codes and tropes in societies. In this latter mode, literature participates in social power in its ability to influence behaviour and to fulfil a society’s expectations. On the other hand, literature can also be a space in which norms are tested and new ideas emerge; it can be subversive of conventions. Above all, in its reliance upon the creative imagination, literature both requires and reveals the workings of the human psyche. And by psyche we mean all the experiences of being, including those unknown and intimated through the body, and encounters with the world beyond.

One crucial issue for literary criticism and this book has already been alluded to. While literature itself, however disputed as a category, extends back into prehistorical times, the investigation of literature as an academic degree subject is a relatively recent phenomenon. How literature is typically studied both affects and is effected by the range of theoretical approaches brought into the discipline and constituting it. That there are issues and problems of knowing and being for both Jungians and literary critics will be an explicit part of this book, beginning in this chapter. It is first necessary to consider how and why literature became academic. Why was literature subjected to higher education, becoming a degree subject in its own right?

Literature in higher education

By the end of the nineteenth century, the demand for new types of education could no longer be checked. Demand grew both in terms of expanding degree subjects

and through admitting a greater range of students to universities. These places of higher learning began as training academies for priests, lawyers, and those male elites who required some sort of education to be employed in governing. With the post-Renaissance growth of experimental science and accompanying philosophies, power over knowing in Western universities polarised between the various natural sciences and philology, the study of language in written forms. Philology was then a combination of what later became the disciplines of literature, history and linguistics. It was devoted to establishing the reliability of historical sources, language variations and their interpretation.

Of course, literature had long possessed an undisputed place in the education of the male elite in the form of Classics, the study of major works from Ancient Rome and Greece *in their original languages*. Literature in one's own language was to be perused by any cultivated gentleman. It did not belong in the classroom. During the Renaissance, grammar schools, first established for the education of boys not destined for the Church taught Latin and Greek grammar. Education as culturally understood revolved around the finer life of the Classics because their references to ancient works were the foundations of scripture and law.

Education as such was a minority pursuit. It could not survive the effects of the nineteenth century's Industrial Revolution, which created a more diverse and complex culture. For example, in America there was a post-Civil War demand for social change accompanied by the diversifying of employment in a rapidly developing urban society. During the later nineteenth century, a progressive movement emerged to call for education to be extended beyond the upper classes. It desired that learning should be oriented to what was socially useful. There remained ambiguity about whether the ultimate aim was social change or maintaining existing classes and political interests. Consensus could be reached however, that studying dead languages was frivolity, compared to the utility of science and technology (Wilson 2002: 65).

Such historical movements promoted the social capital of experimental science to pre-eminence. In mid-century, after the controversy over the theory of evolution, the sciences became more and more accepted as providing a true picture of reality. This gave science a corresponding rise in status as economically valuable as well as dominance in producing 'truth'. Science continued its pre-eminence to the extent that it began to colonise areas previously occupied by humanities, such as the study of social groups, the past, and even the imagination. So was born new academic disciplines called the 'social sciences' that would use those evidently superior methodologies of the physical sciences to examine human beings and the functioning of their societies.

Philology's emphasis on historical documents was therefore rejected in favour of adopting the methods of the natural sciences for the same intellectual fields. The emerging social sciences included the new discipline of psychology, and marked the triumph of empiricism, the notion that all knowledge is derived from actual experience, and positivism, the standpoint that reality is intrinsically independent of consciousness (Saban 2014: 35). If what is actually 'real' is separate

from our senses, is ‘out there’, instead of being part of our perceptions, then it can be known objectively, as an object. However, such ‘objective knowledge’ cannot take account of human desires, feelings and motivations, whether known or unknown.

Evidently, in this new world where utility was to be an important goal for education, Classics was doomed as an economically viable contributor to the new industrialised world. And yet, there persisted in education two overlapping demands: that there be one or more university subjects devoted to preparing elites for social power, and also a learning for taste, moral and cultural values, criticism and sensibility in a truly educated person. While supplying these, the study of literature in *one’s own language* would additionally satisfy some progressive impulses towards what is ‘useful’ by claiming to transmit concrete experience rather than abstract ideas.

By being directed to imaginative writing in the vernacular, literature or English (as it came to be known), could claim to be a replacement for Classics as the vehicle for moulding aesthetic taste, promulgating great ‘truths’, and communicating imaginative realities (Wilson: 67). On the other hand, the attempt to usurp Classics by being more practical came to back to haunt literature departments as they immediately began to lose ground to the scientifically oriented social sciences. Learning now needed to show that it connected to something real in positivistic terms; and, as a result, could be offered as being pragmatic in a maturing industrial and capitalist society. No wonder that eminent literary critic John Crowe Ransom felt compelled to proclaim, in *The World’s Body* (1938), that the arts *are* real, and reveal as much ‘fidelity to the phenomenal world as history has’ (Ransom: 132, quoted in Wilson: 76).

Fortunately, a particularly disturbing body of new students at the end of the nineteenth century could be foisted onto a literary degree as the only route to graduation suitable for their weaker brains. These new creatures were, of course, women, and the feminisation of the degree, and its subsequent backlash in the need for a truly *muscular* theory of literature to sustain it, has been too little researched.

With a contested beginning, together with the rise in epistemological capital of the social sciences, perhaps it was inevitable that the new degree immediately required new theories of literature to defend itself. Literature had already seized the ground formerly occupied by Classics as the cultivation of criticism and discernment, rather than the tradition of philological and historical attention to authenticating texts. Yet in the era succumbing to the notion that education was for social utility and economic advancement in a world framed positivistically as objective, literary criticism badly needed new ways to assert that it had a concrete grasp of reality.

Literature, or English, needed to be a real *discipline*, a vigorously defended field of epistemology, not just a finishing school for the elite. Here we might pause to note the prevalence of the field metaphor for academic study. The ‘field’ (of a type of writing) in literary studies is not the same turf as the ‘field’ in psychology, which is of a type of being – a distinction that makes both fields

possible, but also produces difficult issues in bringing them together, as we will see. English generated modern *literary* theory that would seek, to this day, an ontology and epistemology, a way of being and knowing that would constitute literature as a field with cultural value. Unlike the wilderness of literature as a trans-historical human practice, English, literature, or the English Literature BA, learned to be disciplined.

Disciplining literature in theories

This is not the place to offer a sufficient history of the literary theories animating the study of literature in anglophone universities since the degree programmes began. There are numerous excellent introductions to modern literary theory and a number of rich anthologies. However, for the sake of future research in Jungian literary criticism, I want to mention a few relevant movements in literary studies that continue to influence the subject today. These are germane to the structuring of this book around how directions in literary studies can be met by possibilities in Jung and vice versa. Later chapters will develop the theoretical directions identified below in order to show how Jungian ideas can contribute to them, or be critiqued by them.

In the first place, literature degrees were dominated for their first 50 years by what was known as ‘New Criticism’, consisting of a set of interrelated theories and practices that sought to institutionalise what was later rejected as impossible: an objective study of literature. New Criticism emphasised contemporary and dominant empiricism and positivism by insisting that literature transmitted human experience unmediated by abstract philosophies. Crucially, New Criticism constructed literature as inherently separate from the consciousness observing it. Literary works were ‘organic wholes’, which could be evaluated objectively as objects (Eagleton 1983: 31–33).

Indeed, American New Critics W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks devised two critical heretical errors known as the ‘affective fallacy’ and the ‘intentional fallacy,’ to be avoided at all costs by the true literary critic (Wimsatt and Beardsley: 1954). The affective fallacy refers to the heinous error of considering that literature is about how it makes one *feel*, while the intentional fallacy is to mistakenly locate meaning in the conscious intentions of the author. Neither the best-laid plans of the author nor the subjective being of the reader were to contaminate such objectively pure criticism.

What the New Critics did was to instigate a practice of reading which they named ‘practical criticism’, and is now called ‘close reading’ (Federico 2016). For the New Critics this meant utmost respect for the borders of the poem (they mainly thought in terms of poems) and minute attention to the language and syntax within it. After New Criticism waned, later literary theories kept the unnatural focus on the text, which could always provoke new and unconventional interpretations. However, most subsequent approaches jettisoned the notion that literary works are wholly discrete objects possessing sufficient ontology, or being, to generate their own knowledge as separate from everything else.

In fact, the major period of New Criticism, from 1910 to 1960, was haunted by a formalism which argued that literariness was enshrined in specific linguistic qualities designed to defamiliarise the everyday world to the reader. Formalism was and was not part of New Critical practice. For formalism went against the New Critics' tendency to liberal humanism in which literature plays a role in transmitting a shared humanness that transcends social, historical, racial, gender, economic and political differences between people. Liberal humanist literary critics wanted to see literature conveying universal human experience while by contrast, formalism argued that literary tropes and forms were independent structures that could be directed to particular social meanings.

It was the beginning of a pervasive, recurring tension in literary criticism between literary works as conveying historical specificity (this unique expression from this precise moment), and the possibility that the social context is not wholly determining (not entirely contingent). Here New Critics were unambiguously against social context as source for interpretation. A poem, play, novel, is what it is because it is. The work exists for, and of, itself. It may have had an author with a particular historical purpose, but that does not affect the unique ontology of its being. To New Critics it was anathema that literature was 'political', while to a lot of later literary criticism it was axiomatic that literature is built out of the same material, and for similar ends, to structures of power and influence.

Marxist literary theory and its successors in cultural materialism, New Historicism and postcolonialism all insist that literature is produced by, and continues to affect, the social processes and felt experience of power. To Marxists, social class and the economic engines of society are a major determining factor in the making and consuming of literature. Believing broadly that consciousness is produced by social forces largely beyond individual influence, Marxists see literature as wholly ideological, meaning embedded in power. Cultural materialism was a subsequent more nuanced development of Marxism that saw cultural values as more complexly constructed (see Chapter 6).

Postcolonialism is similarly preoccupied with literature's relationship to power and to resisting it. These critics took political drives from the Marxist tradition, but saw the Western domination of the globe through colonisation as most significant. Either literal invasion of countries, as in the nineteenth century's carving up of Africa by European nations, or the economic colonialism of in later centuries, became the shaping influence on literature.

Another variety of political literary criticism, New Historicism, can be summed up by the resonant motif, 'the textuality of history, the historicity of texts' (Montrose 1989/1997: 242). This approach adopts the Marxist notion that literature is socially produced by power because we do not make or control our individual conscious, and combines it with potent aspects of political criticism's main twentieth-century rivals, structuralism and post-structuralism, or deconstruction.

The tension referred to above, between regarding recurring structures in literature as largely independent of context or as wholly produced by it, comes into

New Historicism to reveal history and culture as tricky negotiations of divided modes of being. Structuralism and post-structuralism shared aspects of the earlier formalism in concentrating on literature as specialised language and downplayed any strong connection to historical culture and power. Structuralism took much of its theory from the early twentieth-century linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who suggested that language was its own coherent system not intrinsically connected to the objective world depicted by positivism (see above) (Saussure 1916).

Language is, rather, made up of two parts: formal written or speech patterns, known as the ‘signifier’, for the individual word, and its meaning, the ‘signified’. From this it follows that culture and its arts, made up of signifiers as words, dabs of paint, musical notes, etc., are also systems of meaning, codes, or signs. Literature, with its known genres and mutations, fits beautifully into the notion that it possesses an ordering charge in the creation of social meanings while existing as essentially separate from the world it helps to organise.

Structuralism was deposed later in the twentieth century when the philosopher Jacques Derrida declared that structuralism’s so-called stable foundations in the reliability of structure itself was in fact a series of social fictions (Derrida 1970/1993). There is no God holding in place all structural systems, including that of language. Rather there are ‘god-terms’, words we puny humans assign supreme meanings to, like Truth, Law and Democracy, that pretend to stop meaning from slipping. For post-structuralism, or as it is also called, deconstruction, the signifier refuses to stick to the signified: it slides just as words lead only to an endless chain of signifiers, as when we look them up in a dictionary or thesaurus.

Many post-structuralist critics were excited by this radical theory’s potential to be used subversively. After all, if nothing is holding the existing order in place, then literary works are neither completely con-structive or de-structive. Rather they de-construct, both make and unmake the social, and even personal, meanings we live by. Literature is in this way becomes supremely unstable in meaning. It is a series of fictions that are truly *fictions* that falsify the illusion that we have any type of reality to hold onto at all. Literature pretends to be fictional to disguise the sombre fact that all attempts at truth, even that of highly regarded philosophy and empirical science, is doomed to deconstruct itself.

Hence, for many politically driven literary critics, post-structuralism *goes too far* in eroding any stable meaning at all. It is useful for taking down long-lived systems of power, like the ideologies of monarchy in Shakespeare, but has real limits when a critic wants to argue for the authentic being of the marginalised, whether the lower classes, the colonised or women. Put another way, a criticism motivated to support people traditionally regarded as inferior will find that deconstruction leaves ground secure enough from which to challenge oppression. A post-structuralist may delight in seeing fictions of coercion and hegemony dissolve in their literary bodies, only to discover that no meaning is left stable enough to nurture those most suffering from it. That these disempowered groups include people of colour, women, other sexualities, the colonised and the non-human, leads to other important literary critical movements.

Feminism needs to be added to the political criticism of the second half of the twentieth century. Cutting across historical differences, early feminist literary theory, from the 1960s and 1970s, tended to regard women as a homogenous subordinated group. All women were treated as inferior by patriarchy or 'rule of the father'. Later feminism was forced to recognise those significant differences between women of colour, ethnicity, sexuality and class, and more. For example, is the biological fact of being a woman a more telling factor on identity and on the literature she produces and reads than being a person of African descent born in the United States? Like postcolonial critics and many New Historicists, later feminist literary critics found post-structuralism a useful tool but an unhelpful guide. It was a tool to deconstruct or undermine modes of marginalisation, while being unable to build emancipated identities unless endemic instability could be tolerated.

More recently, queer theory has provided a major reorientation in revealing the role of literature in normalising heterosexuality and certain historically recent family types. Queer theory embraced post-structuralism for its project to undo the cultural binary erected for centuries that suggested that people are 'naturally' heterosexual or dysfunctional. There is a good, acceptable side of the binary and a bad, unhealthy side just as in previous centuries to be male was to be fully human, to be female was to be deficient. To resist the culturally coercive binary, Queer theory proposes a liberation of sexualities and genders to embrace all and any, including transgender persons as whole and authentic.

Hence, the fluid and un-doing capacity of post-structuralism continues to find relevance in literary studies, whether in being used to take apart ideologies of political dominance such as monarchy or colonialism, or to challenge gender bias or heteronormative attitudes. Moreover, post-structuralism fosters such terms as the post-human, as literary studies considers the sculpting of the human subject in relation to its demonic 'Other': e.g., technology, in yet another binary of so-called 'natural' human versus what the human constructs. Infiltrating and included in the post-human is ecocriticism, which takes the study of literature beyond anthropocentricity as the sole source of meaning. After all, what is a human being without other living beings to define herself against? What do we make of culture without its other 'nature' in the persistent binary that does so much to organise how we see the world?

Of course, it is long past time to look at binary thinking itself as that which haunts modernity in the framing of our disciplines of knowing. That sense of the 'Other', in a foundational binary world constructed in the paradigm of self/Other, stalks and limits both literature as a trans-historical practice and literary studies as a degree subject. For example, New Criticism was determined to treat literature as a series of independent objects capable of some sort of scientific scrutiny. It too was relying upon the binary in knowledge bestowed by positivism: that of subject (of knowing the knower) versus object (of knowing, that which is real enough, has ontology enough to generate knowing or epistemology).

After New Criticism, the idea that literary works were wholly discrete objects fell away, *but not the accompanying idea that literature, however defined, has*