The following passages are excerpted directly from Purdue OWL’s page on literary theory, and from an AP website for the School of the Arts in Rochester. I have condensed where possible to provide you with only a brief overview of these six schools of criticism. Purdue quotes The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends, 1998, edited by David H. Richter, and from Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide, 1999, by Lois Tyson. 

**#1: Moral Criticism**

Moral criticism originates with Plato. Richter provides a nice summary of this point: "...poets may stay as servants of the state if they teach piety and virtue, but the pleasures of art are condemned as inherently corrupting to citizens..." (19). Plato argues that literature (and art) is capable of corrupting or influencing people to act or behave in various ways. Sometimes these themes, subject matter, or the actions of literary characters undermine religion or ethics, he warns. Aristotle and Horace both believed that literature can instruct as well as corrupt. So care must be taken when writing or reading. This idea is picked up later by Samuel Johnson and Matthew Arnold who see literature as a good way to teach morality and probe philosophical ideas. The underlying principle then is whether or not the text can be seen as A) moral, and B) practical or useful.

Questions:
- Maturity, sincerity, honesty, sensitivity, and/or courage become important criteria in determining the worth of literature and art. Is the author and his/her treatment of subject (both character and theme) mature, sincere, honest, sensitive, or courageous? How so, and how does knowing this help us approach the text in a meaningful way?
- Does the text seek to corrupt or negatively influence the reader? How so and/or why?
- What moral lesson or ethical teaching is the author presenting in the text/or through character, plot, or theme?
- How do characters, settings, and plot events represent or allegorize moral or ethical principles?
- Does the work in question pose a pragmatic (practical) or moral lesson, or a philosophical idea? Explain.

**#2: Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Sigmund Freud

Psychoanalytic criticism builds on Freudian theories of psychology. While we don't have the room here to discuss all of Freud's work, a very brief overview is necessary to explain psychoanalytic literary criticism.

*The Unconscious, the Desires, and the Defenses*

Freud began his psychoanalytic work in the 1880s while attempting to treat behavioral disorders in his Viennese patients. He dubbed the disorders 'hysteria' and began treating them by listening to his patients talk through their problems. Based on this work, Freud asserted that people's behavior is affected by their unconscious: "...the notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware..." (Tyson 14-15).

Freud believed that our unconscious was influenced by childhood events. Freud organized these events into developmental stages involving relationships with parents and drives of desire and pleasure. These stages reflect base levels of desire, but they also involve fear of loss and repression: "...the expunging from consciousness of these unhappy psychological events" (Tyson 15).

Tyson reminds us, however, that "...repression doesn't eliminate our painful experiences and emotions...we unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us to 'play out'...our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress" (15). To keep all of this conflict buried in our unconscious, Freud argued that we develop defenses: selective perception, selective memory, denial, displacement, projection, regression, fear of intimacy, and fear of death, among others.

*Id, Ego, and Superego*

Freud maintained that our desires and our unconscious conflicts give rise to three areas of the mind that wrestle for dominance as we grow from infancy, to childhood, to adulthood:

- **id** - "...the location of the drives" or libido
- **ego** - "...one of the major defenses against the power of the drives..." and home of the defenses listed above
- **superego** - the area of the unconscious that houses Judgment (of self and others) and "...which begins to form during childhood"
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Questions:
- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work?
- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example...fear or fascination with death, sexuality - which includes love and romance as well as sexual behavior - as a primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)?
- What does the work suggest about the psychological being of its author?
- What prominent words in the piece could have different or hidden meanings? Could there be a subconscious reason for the author using these words? Explain.

#3: Marxist Criticism

Whom Does it Benefit?

Based on the theories of Karl Marx (and so influenced by philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel), this school concerns itself with class differences, economic and otherwise, as well as the implications and complications of the capitalist system: "Marxism attempts to reveal the ways in which our socioeconomic system is the ultimate source of our experience" (Tyson 277).

Theorists working in the Marxist tradition, therefore, are interested in answering the overarching question, whom does it [the work, the effort, the policy, the road, etc.] benefit? The elite? The middle class? And Marxists critics are also interested in how the lower or working classes are oppressed in everyday life and in literature.

Marx asserts that "...stable societies develop sites of resistance: contradictions build into the social system that ultimately lead to social revolution and the development of a new society upon the old" (1088). This cycle of contradiction, tension, and revolution must continue: there will always be conflict between the upper, middle, and lower (working) classes and this conflict will be reflected in literature and other forms of expression - art, music, movies, etc.

The Revolution

The continuing conflict between the classes will lead to upheaval and revolution by oppressed peoples and form the groundwork for a new order of society and economics where capitalism is abolished. According to Marx, the revolution will be led by the working class (others think peasants will lead the uprising) under the guidance of intellectuals. Once the elite and middle class are overthrown, the intellectuals will compose an equal society where everyone owns everything (socialism).

Questions:
- Whom does it benefit if the work/Brave New World is accepted/successful/believed?
- What is the social class of the author?
- Which class does the work claim to represent?
- What values does it reinforce?
- What values does it subvert/undermine the principles of/seek to overthrow?
- What conflict can be seen between the values the work champions and those it portrays?
- What social classes do the characters represent?
- How do characters from different classes interact or conflict?
#4: Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism is concerned with "...the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson). This school of theory looks at how aspects of our culture are inherently patriarchal (male dominated) and "...this critique strives to expose the explicit and implicit misogyny in male writing about women" (Richter 1346).

Common Space in Feminist Theories

Though a number of different approaches exist in feminist criticism, there exist some areas of commonality. This list is excerpted from Tyson:

1. Women are oppressed by patriarchy economically, politically, socially, and psychologically; patriarchal ideology is the primary means by which they are kept so
2. In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is other: she is marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values
3. All of western (Anglo-European) civilization is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology, for example, in the biblical portrayal of Eve as the origin of sin and death in the world
4. While biology determines our sex (male or female), culture determines our gender (masculine or feminine)
5. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by prompting gender equality
6. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not (91).

Questions:

- 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?
- 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 the work play in terms of women's literary history and literary tradition? (Tyson)


#5: Post-Colonial Criticism

Post-colonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonized. Post-colonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonizers controlling the colonized). Hegemony = leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others.

Questions:

• How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression?
• What person(s) or groups does the work identify as “other” or stranger? How are such persons/groups described and treated?
• What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance?
• What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference - the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity - in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live?
• How does the literary text reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonialization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples? (Tyson 378-379)

#6: Jungian Criticism

Jungian criticism, (originating from the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung) closely related to Freudian theory because of its connection to psychoanalysis, assumes that all stories and symbols are based on mythic models from mankind’s past.

In literary analysis, a Jungian critic would look for archetypes (a typical example of a certain type of person or thing) in creative works. When dealing with this sort of criticism, it is often useful to keep a handbook of mythology and a dictionary of symbols on hand. You can find some Jungian archetypes here to get you started: https://www.psychologistworld.com/cognitive/Carl-jung-analytical-psychology.php

Questions:

• How do the characters in the text mirror the archetypal figures? (Great Mother or nurturing Mother, Wise Old Man, Lover, Destroying Angel, The Hero, The Innocent Youth, The Mentor, The Scapegoat, The Villain, etc.)
• How does the text mirror the archetypal narrative patterns? (The Journey, The Initiation, Good vs. Evil, The Fall)
• What are some of the symbols in the text? What do they symbolize?
• How does the protagonist reflect the hero of myth?
• Does the “hero” embark on a journey in either a physical or spiritual sense?
• What trials or ordeals does the protagonist face? What is the reward for overcoming them?