

## Subversive Bodies: Glossary of Key Terms & Concepts

### Major 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literary Periods and Concepts (explored in this class)

**Source:** *Advanced English Dictionary*; these are over-simplified definitions that we will complicate in our class discussions and readings of the assigned texts.

- **Modernism:** genre of art and literature that claims to make a self-conscious break with previous genres, intent on the quality of “making it new” (Pound); usually ascribed to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century works prior to the Second World War.
- **Postmodernism:** Post-war 20<sup>th</sup> Century literature, art, and architecture that claims to be in reaction against principles and practices of established modernism.
- **Subversion, or to subvert:** cause the downfall of (usually rulers, those in power or authority); corrupt morally or by intemperance or sensuality; hinder normal operations; destroy completely.
- **Transgression, or to transgress:** the action of going beyond or overstepping some boundary or limit; the violation of a law or duty or moral principle.
- **Grotesque:** distorted and unnatural in shape or size; abnormal and hideous; ludicrously odd
- **Carnival:** a festival marked by merrymaking and processions; a frenetic disorganized (and often comic) public disturbance; a temporary overturning of the social order and law; a travelling show

### Literary Studies/Theory

**Sources:** Greenblatt, Stephen (general editor). *Norton Anthology of English Literature, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2012), with some additional commentary by me and several definitions provided by the *Advanced English Dictionary*.

- **Allegory:** (Greek, “saying otherwise”); saying one thing (the “vehicle” of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory’s “tenor”). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in metaphor (“John is a lion”), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Process*: this second meaning is the dominant one.
- **Allusion:** a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or classical); related to **Intertextuality**, in which a text is in discourse (or conversation) with other texts through heavily referencing and alluding to other texts; building or constructing a text upon or out of other texts (e.g. *bricolage*: construction of something by whatever materials are available).
- **Canon:** (Greek, “rule”); the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author. Much of feminist and postmodern literature works to disrupt this notion of the canon and its authority or privileging within culture and the academy.
- **Discourse:** (Latin, “running to and fro”); broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme. Or, an extended communication (often interactive) dealing with some specific topic. Discourse is also understood to be what we say about certain practices, beliefs, norms, etc. and how we say it.
- **Fairy Tale:** an interesting but highly implausible story (not necessarily about fairies but usually referencing magical elements or beliefs); often told as an excuse or diversion; also called “Old Wives’ Tales,” typically a story told to amuse children.
- **Irony:** (Greek, “dissimulation”); a figure of thought and in broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and the context that undermines that statement. For example, “It’s a beautiful day” is un-ironic if it is indeed a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between the statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another (hence, perhaps its appeal to authors from oppressed groups). Irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means the opposite.

- **Metafiction:** a form of self-referential literature concerned with the art and devices of fiction itself; or, a fictional text that presents a commentary or exploration of its own artifice and construction as fiction.
- **Mimesis:** (Greek, “imitation”); a central function of literature and drama has been, though not always, to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality. Extending this to feminist theory and Luce Irigaray’s theory of mimesis, women are often forced into the act of mimesis to reproduce the gender roles constructed for them by patriarchy, or, to mirror the image constructed for them and thus revealing how gender is mimetic and not “real”; extended to women’s writing, women might mimic male discourses/voices, or the discourse of male philosophers, through an ironic mode that exposes the blind spots within hegemonic discourse and subverts its pretense of universal truth or reality.
- **Mis-en-abyme:** (French, for “cast into the abyss”); some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum (like an endless hall of mirrors). The effect achieved is called *mis-en-abyme*. For example, a text that represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man presents a sequence that threatens to become a *mis-en-abyme*.
- **Myth:** a narrative genre typically concerned with protagonists who have, or are subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. Carter and Winterson, however, would also define myths as lies or social fictions used to mask fundamental truths concerning our lived realities.
- **Parody:** a work that uses the conventions of a particular genre with the aim of satirically mocking those conventions, modes or forms.
- **Pastiche:** a work of art that imitates the style of some previous work or author, with the effect of creating or composing a mixture of styles.
- **Style:** In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. Thus, the manner of a literary work is its “style,” the effect of which is its “tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced through consideration of different elements of style, such as: diction (word-choice), syntax (word-order), figures of speech (metaphor, simile), figures of thought (irony, allegory, symbol), rhythm, form, point of view, etc.
- **Symbol:** Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. Whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed upon by convention, or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it, or implicit.

### Women’s Studies/Feminist Theory

**Source:** Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, 6th ed. McGraw Hill, 2013.

- **Culture:** The values, symbols, means of expression, language, artifacts, and interests of a group of people. The *dominant culture* includes the values, symbols, and means of expression, language, and interests of people in power in any given society.
- **Discrimination:** Differential treatment against less powerful groups (such as women, the elderly, or people of color) by those in positions of dominance.
- **Ecofeminism:** A philosophy that links domination of women with the domination of nature.
- **Essentialism:** The view that people have some inherent essence, or characteristics and qualities that define them. Some people argue, for example, that women are essentially more caring and nurturing than men.
- **Feminism:** An always expanding/shifting term, and one that means different things for different people and at different times and places, but broadly agreed to be a social, political, theoretical movement concerned with the liberation of women and girls from gender-based discrimination.

- **First-Wave Feminism:** Organizations and projects undertaken by suffragists and women's rights advocates from the 1830s to the 1920s.
- **Gender Roles:** The roles and behaviors considered culturally appropriate for men or women.
- **Gender Socialization:** The process of learning the attitudes and behaviors that are considered culturally appropriate for boys or girls.
- **Hegemony:** A dominant organizing principle or the permeation throughout society of the ruling elite's values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality. To the extent that people internalize this prevailing consciousness, it appears natural.
- **Heteronormativity:** Portrayal of the institution of heterosexuality, its norms and practices, as natural and inevitable; also referred to as "compulsory heterosexuality" (Adrienne Rich, 1986).
- **Heterosexism:** Attitudes, actions, and institutional practices that subordinate and discriminate against people on the basis of their gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender orientation and/or identification.
- **Ideology:** Ideas, attitudes, and values that represent the interests of a group of people. The *dominant ideology* comprises the ideas, attitudes, and values that represent the interests of the dominant group(s). The ideological role of the idealized nuclear family, for example, is to devalue other family forms or practices.
- **Internalized Oppression:** Attitudes and behavior of some oppressed people that reflect the negative, harmful, stereotypical beliefs of the dominant group directed at them. An example of internalized sexism is the view of some women that they and other women are inferior to men, which causes them to adopt attitudes and behaviors that reinforce the subordination of women.
- **Intersectionality:** An integrative perspective and analytical framework that illuminates how gender, class, nation, sexuality, race, age, ability, religion, and other categories of identity, power, privilege, and oppression interconnect to affect the lives of individuals and groups and social, economic, and political phenomena at community, societal, and global levels.
- **Liberal Feminism:** A philosophy that sees the oppression of women as the denial of equal rights, representation, and access to opportunities.
- **Liberalism:** A political theory about individual rights, freedom, choice, and privacy with roots in 17<sup>th</sup> century European ideas (e.g., the writings of political philosopher John Locke or proto-feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft).
- **Marginality:** The situation in which a person has a deep connection to more than one culture, community, or social group but is not completely able to identify with or be accepted by that group as an insider. For example, bisexual, mixed-race/mixed-culture, and immigrant peoples have connections with different groups and may find themselves caught between two or more social worlds.
- **Marginalization:** A process or phenomena by which dominant attitudes and behaviors relegate certain people to the social, political, and economic margins of society by branding them and their interests as inferior, unimportant, or both.
- **Misogyny:** Woman-hating attitudes and behaviors.
- **Objectification:** Attitudes and behaviors by which people are treated as if they were "things." One example is the objectification of women through hyper sexualized advertising images.
- **Oppression:** Prejudice and discrimination directed toward whole social groups and promoted by the ideologies and practices of all social institutions. The critical elements differentiating oppression from prejudice and discrimination are that it is a group phenomenon and that institutional power and authority are used to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systematic ways. Everyone is socialized to participate in oppressive practices, either as direct or indirect perpetrators or passive beneficiaries, or – as with some oppressed peoples – by directing discriminatory behaviors at members of one's own group or another group deemed inferior. Also see internalized oppression.
- **Paradigm Shift:** A complete change in one's view of the world.

- **Patriarchy:** A family, social group, or society in which men hold power and are dominant figures. Patriarchal power [in western cultures] plays out in the family, economy, media, education, religion, law, and electoral politics.
- **Positionality:** How a person is situated or positioned in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, national origin, etc.
- **Power:** The ability to influence others, whether through persuasion, charisma, law, political activism, or coercion. Power operates informally *and* through formal institutions at all levels.
- **Prejudice:** A closed-minded prejudging of a person or group as negative or inferior, even without personal knowledge of that person or group and often contrary to reason or facts; unreasonable, unfair, and hostile attitudes toward people.
- **Privilege:** benefits and power from institutional inequalities. Individuals and groups may be privileged without realizing, recognizing, or even wanting it.
- **Racism:** Racial prejudice and discrimination that are supported by institutional power and authority. For example, in the U.S. and in its present-day form, racism is based on the ideology of white (European) superiority and is used to the advantage of white people and the disadvantage of peoples of color. In the past and in some places still, white people of racialized ethnicities have experienced similar prejudice and discrimination.
- **Radical Feminism:** A philosophy that sees the oppression of women in terms of patriarchy, a system of male power and authority, especially manifested in sexuality, personal relationships, and the family, and carried into the male-dominated worlds of work, politics, education, religion, media, and the law.
- **Relativism:** The view that all “authentic” experience is equally valid and cannot be challenged by others. For example, according to this perspective, White Supremacist views of Klu Klux Klan members are seen to be equally as valid as those held by antiracist activists. From this viewpoint, there are no external standards or principles by which to judge people’s attitudes and behaviors.
- **Reproductive Economy:** This domestic labor includes biological and social reproduction, mainly done by women, to maintain daily life, raise children, and care for elders, and so on. It is often considered unproductive because it is unwaged, but it is fundamental to the ability to do waged work. Also see social reproduction.
- **Reproductive Justice:** A perspective that links health and reproductive rights to broader issues of social and economic justice. It offers a view of holistic wellness for individuals, communities, and the wider society based on the eradication of inequality, oppression, and injustice.
- **Second Wave Feminism:** Feminist projects and organizations from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s that campaigned for women’s equality in all spheres of life and, in some cases, argued for a complete transformation of patriarchal, capitalist structures. See also liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism.
- **Separatism:** The process of creating a separate life-space, often for political purposes, such as white lesbian separatists in the 1970s who chose to live exclusively in community with other women, to work with women, and to support women’s projects. Some people of color may also advocate separatism from white people, institutions, values, and culture and decide to put their energies only in support of other people of color.
- **Sexism:** Attitudes, actions, and institutional practices that subordinate individuals because of their gender.
- **Sexuality:** Another term not easily defined and often fluid in its various meanings, expressions, practices, orientations, and identifications. Sexual attitudes and behaviors vary from society to society and across historical time. Sexuality is *both* instinctive *and* learned from our families, peers, sex education in school, media and popular culture, negotiations with partners, and listening to our own bodies. Over the course of our individual lives, sexuality may take different forms and take on different degrees of significance.

- **Social Constructionism:** The view that concepts that appear to be immutable, universal, and often solely biological, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation, are defined by human beings and can vary, depending on cultural and historical contexts. According to this view, for example, heterosexuality is something learned – socially constructed – not innate. The “normalcy” of heterosexuality is systematically transmitted, and appropriate attitudes and behaviors are learned through childhood socialization, life experiences, and reinforced through institutional norms, policies, and laws.
- **Social Control:** Attitudes, behaviors, and mechanisms that keep people in their place. Overt social controls include laws, fines, imprisonment, and violence. Subtle ones include ostracism and withdrawal of status, affection, and respect.
- **Social Institutions:** Institutions such as the family, education, the media, organized religion, law, and the government.
- **Social Reproduction:** Everything needed to reproduce everyday life, much of which is unpaid work done by women. Also see reproductive economy.
- **Socialist:** Someone who believes that work should be organized for the collective benefit of workers rather than the profit of managers and corporate owners, and that the state should provide for human needs.
- **Socialist Feminism:** A view that sees the oppression of women in terms of their subordinate position in a system defined as both patriarchal and capitalist.
- **State:** Government institutions, authority, and control. This includes the machinery of electoral politics, lawmaking, government agencies that execute law and policy, law enforcement agencies, the prison system, and the military.
- **Subjectivity:** A form of understanding in which knowledge and meaning are grounded in people’s lived experiences; also being the subject rather than object of theorizing. Since powerless groups have historically been treated as objects of “objective” knowledge production, feminist assertions of subjectivity are also assertions of objectified groups’ claims to the subject position (that of actor and agent of action), their ability to create knowledge, and, therefore their agency in knowledge production.
- **Subjugated Knowledge:** Knowledge generated from positions of subordination.
- **Theory:** An explanation of how things are and why they are that way; a theory is based on a set of assumptions, has a perspective, and serves a purpose.
- **Third Wave Feminism:** Feminist perspectives adopted in the 1990s, often by younger women (typically following generation of Second Wave feminists) with an emphasis on personal voice and multiple identities, intersectionality, ambiguity, and contradictions.