

Core Questions that Concern Literary Theory:

- What is the relationship between “the world” and its textual “representation?”
- How does a literary text work?
- What is the relationship between the writer and the text? Reader and text?
- What are the roles of the “poet,” the critic, and the reader in civic culture?
- In what ways is literature ideological?

And

- Why do we read? Write?
- What do we do when we read?
- What do we get from literature that we don’t get anywhere else?
- In what ways is literature unique?
- In what ways is it like other forms of representation?
- How does literary study differ from other disciplines?
- How is it similar to other disciplines?

Some typical questions to ask when you approach a new theory or methodology:

- What is the theory’s attitude toward literature? According to this theory, what role does literature play in everyday life? In academic life?
- What does the theory take as its **object of study**? Individual texts? Literature as a whole? Language itself? Culture in general?
- What is the theory’s attitude toward a literary text’s social, historical, political, conventional context?
 - Does it seek to isolate the text from that context or to situate it within that context?
- What does the theory see as the function of literary criticism?
 - Explication?
 - Cultivation of “taste?”
 - Scientific enquiry?
 - Social Critique?
 - Political Agitation?
- Is the theory generally conservative (upholding the status quo, hegemonic) or is it more radical (challenging the status quo, counter-hegemonic)