

Literary Criticism and Consciousness Raising

วรรณกรรมวิจารณ์กับการปลุกจิตสำนึกทางสังคม

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บทความนี้นำเสนออีกมุมมองหนึ่งของการวิจารณ์วรรณกรรมที่มีส่วนในการสร้างจิตสำนึกที่ถูกต้องทางสังคม ทฤษฎีวิจารณ์วรรณกรรมบางทฤษฎีเช่น มาร์กซิสต์ (Marxism) สตรีนิยม (Feminism) และทฤษฎียุคหลังอาณานิคม (Postcolonialism) มีบทบาทสำคัญในการขยายกรอบความคิดของผู้อ่านด้านการมองสังคม ควบคู่กับการทำความเข้าใจงานวรรณกรรมและชาวซึ่งในคุณค่าทางวรรณศิลป์ของงานนั้นๆ ทฤษฎีดังกล่าวนี้มีแนวคิดหลักที่คล้ายกันในการอธิบายลักษณะของสังคมว่าประกอบด้วยขั้วแห่งความแตกต่าง 2 ด้านของกลุ่มคนในสังคมซึ่งหมายถึงกลุ่มที่มีอำนาจและเป็นผู้กำหนดระบบการคิดของสังคม กับกลุ่มที่ไม่มีอำนาจและถูกรองรับทางความคิด ทฤษฎีมาร์กซิสต์อธิบายว่า ชนชั้นปกครอง และ นายทุน เป็น กลุ่มที่มีอำนาจทางสังคม เช่นเดียวกับทฤษฎีสตรีนิยมที่อธิบายว่า ผู้ชายเป็นเพศที่มีอำนาจและกำหนดแนวคิดในสังคม ในขณะที่ทฤษฎียุคหลังอาณานิคมขยายกรอบขั้วความแตกต่างของสังคมประเทศ ออกเป็นสังคมโลกที่มีกลุ่มประเทศผู้ล่าอาณานิคม เป็นกลุ่มที่มีอำนาจและกำหนดแนวคิดทางสังคมให้แก่ประเทศที่เป็นอาณานิคม ทั้งสามทฤษฎีอธิบายว่าระบบการคิดดังกล่าวเป็นจิตสำนึกที่ผิด (False consciousness) เพราะไม่สะท้อนความต้องการที่แท้จริงของสังคมที่ประกอบด้วยกลุ่มคนมากกว่าหนึ่งกลุ่มหรือชนชั้น หากเป็นระบบแนวคิดที่เอื้อให้เฉพาะกลุ่มที่มีอำนาจในสังคมให้มีโอกาสแสวงหาผลประโยชน์จากกลุ่มอื่น การอ่านหรือศึกษางานวรรณกรรมจากทฤษฎีวิจารณ์เหล่านี้มีส่วนกระตุ้นให้ผู้อ่านหรือศึกษาวรรณคดีรู้จักคิดวิเคราะห์ มองสังคมรอบตัวด้วยความเข้าใจและที่สำคัญปลุกจิตสำนึกที่ถูกต้องให้เกิดมีได้ในสังคม

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Abstract

This article presents one perspective of literary criticism in studying literature. The author believes that certain critical approaches - Marxism, Feminism, and Postcolonialism - play important roles in expanding readers' perception of society along with the study of literature. The three theories share common tenets in explaining a society in terms of binary opposition of people—the powerful group that imposes ideologies onto the society and the powerless who are suppressed by those ideologies. While Marxism explains that the ruling class and the capitalist are powerful in capitalist society, feminism indicates that men are dominant and control the system of thinking in patriarchal society. However, the binary concepts of postcolonialism extend to communities worldwide, dividing the world into colonizing and colonized nations. The three theories suggest that capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial ideologies are false consciousness because they do not represent the society as a whole. Studying literature through the lenses of these critical approaches provides students with critical eyes for seeing a society with true understanding as well as raising actual consciousness within the society.

Keywords : Literary criticism, Marxism, Feminism, Postcolonialism, Consciousness raising,

Introduction

Literary evaluation is concerned not only with literary works but also with literature as a cultural institution.

(Nagavajara. 1996: 345)

Nagavajara (1996), a Thai scholar in literature, believes that great literature reflects the world and human life. Seeing literature as a cultural institution, the evaluation of literary works, therefore, does not limit to only the evaluation of literary works. The evaluation of literary works has expanded through many critical theories. In other words, the idea of representation of reality in literary works can be interpreted in different ways (Nagavajara. 1996: 357). Marx (1848), a German philosopher and thinker, sees that literature is a product of the dominant classes in society—the

ruling classes in feudalism and the capitalist in capitalism. Thus, literature reflects the ideology or the system of thinking imposed by the dominant classes in that society (Abrams. 1999: 147-151). Bressler (2003: 10) describes literary criticism as a work of art. He believes that it is a secondary world that imitates the primary world or the real world where the author lives and breathes. Bressler writes that literary criticism presupposes that a work of literature is made to be interpreted. Like artifacts displayed in a museum, literature has become a resource especially for English major students who study literature. Teachers can take literature as a content subject to provide students with various fields of knowledge such as history, sociology, economics and politics. In literature classroom, students read and practice criticizing and analyzing literary texts by employing critical theories to understand not only the literary elements of stories but also their relation to society. According to Marx, literature is believed to be written from the interests and for the benefits of the dominant classes. In other words, it is employed to reflect the ideology of the dominant classes, which suggests false consciousness of the unfortunate classes. In addition to Marx, critical theorists initially believed that critical theories could liberate people from false beliefs, or “false consciousness,” and in particular from ideologies that are served to maintain the political and economic status quo, by pointing out to them that they had acquired these beliefs in irrational ways (Horkheimer. 2011: Online). The purpose of this paper is to show how literary criticism can help raise the consciousness of the dominated and unfortunate classes in society. In order to reach the answer, we should start with an understanding of literary criticism, literature, and ideology.

What is literary criticism?

Abrams (1999: 49-50) defines the term literary criticism as “the overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature.” Other theorists explain that literary criticism is evaluation, analysis, description or interpretation of literary works. It is usually presented in the form of a critical essay that looks at the writing as a whole. It reflects an attempt by readers or critics to evaluate and understand creative writing as well as provides an opportunity for them to express their views or opinions on what the particular work means.

The history of literary criticism can be traced back as far as Plato (428 – 347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384- 347 B.C.) in the 4th century B.C. period. Both Plato and Aristotle, Greek literary critics, saw literature as an imitation or reflection, or representation of the world and human life (Abrams. 1999: 51). However, Aristotle explained that poets (who in that period referred to playwrights and epic writers) imitated other poets' works only when they saw that those works were valuable. Thus, imitation was seen as a form of acceptance of the works and poets. Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the function of literature was more than to entertain readers and that poets had power over people's thinking. Both Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* were considered as the first literary criticism in literary history. In later centuries, literary criticism developed both its literary side and its social side.

Earlier critical theory saw the notion of literary criticism as establishing and enhancing the proper aesthetic understanding and evaluation of literature. However, Habermas (2011: Online) explains that literary and social theories can be applied to analyze and understand the meaning implied in the texts. Critical theory in literary studies is ultimately a form of hermeneutics that is knowledge via interpretation to understand the meaning of human texts and symbolic expressions. Critical social theory is a form of self-reflective knowledge involving both understanding and theoretical explanation to reduce entrapment in systems of domination or dependence, obeying the emancipatory interest in expanding the scope of autonomy and reducing the scope of domination.

According to Habermas, a critical theory in literary criticism explores the meaning of works from within the texts while social theories suggest an investigation of literary works in relation to society. Social critical theories believe that literature is a reflection of society. Horkheimer (2011: Online) explains a critical theory used in social criticism that it is oriented toward critiquing and changing society. The core concepts of social theories are directed at the totality of society in its historical background and aim to improve our understanding of society by integrating all major social sciences, including economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology. Both literary and social critical theories therefore overlap in terms of literary criticism. In studying literature at present, the application of both literary and social critical theories brings not only the understanding of literary works but also the society.

Literature and ideology

Literary critics who apply social theories in studying literary works believe that literature is like mirror that reflects real society. From the lenses of Marxism, Feminism, and Post colonialism, societies are composed of two groups of people, the center and the periphery. The critics believe that literary works reflect the ideologies of dominant groups or classes who see themselves as the center of power. Because of their high status in politics and economics, the dominant groups take control of the society and impose rules, regulations, traditions and even rituals out of their interests regardless of other groups or classes who share the society. While such ideology provides the ruling class with opportunity to gain benefits, it drives the other groups or classes away to the periphery as well as suppresses them to inferiority in the society. Thus, understanding literary works through critical theories enables literature students to learn about ideology that is implied in literary works as well as functions in unveiling social injustice.

The term “ideology” refers to systems of thinking applied in one society. Marx explained that an ideology is “the product of the position and interests of a particular class” (Abrams. 1999: 148). Marx believes that the ideology in any historical era is set by dominant classes with an aim to serve the interests of the dominant economic and social classes. In feudalism, the system of thinking is set by the ruling classes such as kings, feudalists, or land owners which Marx named as “bourgeois”. In capitalist societies, the system of thinking is established by the capitalist class. Likewise, in patriarchal societies, the ideology is set by men. Such ideologies benefit these dominant classes—the ruling classes, the capitalist class and men—in a way that allows them to exploit the dominated classes, that is, the farmers, the working class and women. Further to Marxist perspectives, colonial ideology can be explained as the ideology of the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers, such as the British Empire, the Spanish Empire or the French Empire, set certain rules in the colonized nations solely based on their beliefs and interpretation. Apparently, such rules pave ways for the colonizers to exploit the colonized for benefits. The three critical theories allow us to see that society is governed by the ideology that is set by three dominant groups—capitalists, men, and colonizers. By reading literary works from the lenses of these theories, readers are able to see that

the ideologies place the unfortunate groups in a lower status in society. As a result, they are not entitled to call for equal rights or claim for any benefits. The theories allow readers to see that such ideologies do not reflect the consciousness of the unfortunate in society.

Ideology as False Consciousness

According to Marxism, capitalist ideology reflects false consciousness of the working class. False consciousness is a false belief of the working class that leads them to believe that the system of thinking in society, be it economics, politics, education or religious, is true for everybody born in that society. Such system of thinking makes them see themselves as inferior groups of people in the society because they are powerless people. They have to depend on the dominant and ruling classes for their survival. The capitalist ideology, according to Marx, reflects false consciousness of the working class because it alienates the working class from their rights, power, and 'selves'. As a result, it allows the capitalists to oppress and exploit them to the lowest condition of living. *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald (1925) illustrates two different social classes in American society caused by the capitalism flourishing in the 1920s. The portrayal of the contrasting lives of the rich people who spent money extravagantly on parties, cars and lifestyles and the poor life of Jay Gatsby, the main character and a farmer's son who struggled to be rich, suggests the disparity of American society that consisted of two different classes, the haves and the have-nots.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck (1936, 1939) shows how the migrant workers and fruit pickers lived in poor conditions, worked for long hours and got the lowest pay. The capitalist system of thinking makes the workers believe that they are powerless people because they are poor. Their labor cannot be compared to the capital that the monopolists own. As a result, they let the capitalist own their labor and abuse it for the capitalist's benefits. Finally, the workers have to work hard in exchange with very low income. Besides, they believe that they have no rights to bargain for any benefits. Such systems of thinking make the working class forget their actual needs and, most of all, their power of their labor. Both the migrant workers in *The Grapes of Wrath* and the fruit pickers in the novel *In Dubious Battle* accepted their destiny. What they could do was to move from one place to another for higher wages with the hope of having better lives.

The Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath* expected to go as far as California to pursue the American Dream like many American people. Their dream never came true because the wage they earned daily barely allowed them to survive. However, they always end up fighting against and competing among themselves to get any available job. Such conflicts paved the way for the monopolists to the workers' lower wages to the extent that the rich become richer and the poor are poorer.

In patriarchal societies, men are leaders in both domestic and social spheres. Abrams (1999: 89) explains the term "patriarchal" in relation to Western civilization and says that patriarchal society is male-centered and controlled. It is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic. According to Abrams, Western women are taught to internalize the ruling patriarchal ideology, both consciously and unconsciously, of male superiority. In the Eastern world, most societies, such as those in the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and the Far East, are patriarchal and men are leaders of the family. The ideologies in these societies are not different from, and in many cases even worse than, the West. According to the patriarchal ideology, women are taught to believe that the socially accepted traits of women are "passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional while men are active, dominating, adventurous, rational, and creative" (Abrams. 1999: 89). Such cultural construction leads men to impose certain values on women that put them under men's control. In 'No Name Woman,' a story in the book entitled *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston (1975) shows how Chinese wives were abused by the families of their husbands. The mistake that a wife made brought disgrace to both the husband's family and her own family in a way that it would never be forgiven. The story reflects how women are taught and trained to serve men's needs.

Patriarchal ideology brings false consciousness to women because the ideology serves only men's needs and leads men to exploit women for their benefits. The concept of feminism as extended by Marx's view shows that "the bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production and consequently exploits her like any other instrument of production" (Possony. 1954: xxxiv). In patriarchal societies, women are taught to be housewives, to reproduce children, to raise them and

to do house chores. They are taught and trained to be obedient daughters, honest housewives, and dedicated mothers. The Marxist feminist contends that patriarchal ideology alienates women from their “selves.” While the system of thinking values men’s work in the public space because it generates income, it does not value women’s housework at home. The ideology makes women believe that their labor is not valuable as it does not generate income to the household. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan (1989) portrays how Chinese women are treated as men’s servants after their marriage. The young bride was sent to her husband’s house to be trained as a good housekeeper. She was taught to be not only an obedient and hard working housewife but also to reproduce heir for her husband’s family.

In postcolonial period, the nations once colonized by Western powers such as the British, the Spanish, or the French Empires, share common suffering experiences of being exploited and oppressed by these powerful countries. Europe, seen as the center of civilization and power, allowed those empires to extend sovereignty over “uncivilized” nations in Asia, Africa, and South America for their own benefits. The hegemonic responsibility, on one hand, paves the way for the imperialist to educate the colonized with the knowledge and culture of the Western civilization. On the other hand, the colonial action serves to hide the real purpose of imperialism which is to exploit natural resources from the colonized nations. Postcolonialism suggests that colonialism was not just a simple suppression and exploitation of native people; it was also cultural domination of one by the other. Taken postcolonialism as an area of study, “Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin (1995) explain in their book entitled *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* that its subjects include universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation and resistance, feminism, language, education, history, place, and production” (Bressler. 2003: 201). Like Marxism and Feminism, Postcolonialism also suggests the binary opposition in colonialism that comprises two groups, the colonizers and the colonized.

Said (1978) sees that colonial ideology imposes Western consciousness on the colonized nations (8). Postcolonialism is a theory that deals with many social issues such as the dilemmas of developing a national identity in the wake of colonial rule, the attempt to articulate and celebrate

cultural identities of the colonized nations and to reclaim them from the colonizers, the ways the knowledge of colonized people has served the interests of the colonizers, and how the knowledge of subordinate people is produced and used. In literary criticism, the theory focuses on the ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the formation of images of the colonized as inferior. As a result, the analysis of literary works from a postcolonial perspective covers issues of race, miscegenation, complicity and ethnocentrism especially through the eyes of the colonized more than those of the colonizer (Kennedy; Gioia; & Bauerlein. 2005: 117). However, while some critics employ this approach as an act to liberate their nations from the colonizers, others might apply it to understand literary works in a similar way.

As a critical approach, postcolonialism deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. It also deals with literature written in or by citizens of colonizing countries that takes colonies or their peoples as its subject matter. In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) claims that Western writings depict the Orient or people in the Eastern world as the “other” who are irrational, weak, feminized, the image of which contrasts with the rational, strong, masculine West. Such contrast derives from the need to create “difference” between West and East. Said further explains that the relationship between the West or “Occident” and the East or “Oriental” is “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony (5).” Colonialism, according to Said, is seen as “cultural imperialism” of which the following issues can be focused on: the rejection of master-narrative of Western imperialism, a concern with the formation of the colonial subject by the Western colonizer, and the disestablishment of Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values. According to Said (1978: 7), the imperialists’ concept of “one” or the center allows them to rule the “non-European” people and reject the native cultures which they regard as backward.

Through the postcolonial lens, critics might examine the master-narrative of Western imperialism in literary works as a means to reject false perception of the colonized natives. Abrams explains that master-narrative of Western imperialism refers to the imperialists’ use of the language that subordinates, marginalizes and deletes cultural agency of the colonized. Such narrative was

aimed to replace the culture of the imperialists in the colonized nations (Abrams. 1999: 236). Regardless of geographical and historical differences, the master-narrative in the literary works of the imperialists plays an influential role in portraying how uncivilized the colonized countries are. It, in the meantime, makes the colonized believe that Western culture, knowledge, and religion is civilization of mankind. The master-narrative is, more or less, essential in convincing the readers especially in colonial period to understand the imperialist action on colonization. It, however, almost destroys the consciousness of the colonized regarding the perception of their own culture, knowledge and religion, which is no less civilized than Western civilization.

Leonowens (1870) writes in *The English Governess of the Siamese Court*, which is her original memoir¹, describing her life and experiences in Siam from her personal understanding. Leonowens was hired by King Rama IV to teach English to his children in the Siamese court. In his study on *A Reproduction of Orientalist Portrayal of Siam in the film Anna and the King*, Inson (1999) finds that the film reproduction presents ambivalent attitudes and images of Siam, now Thailand, as belonging to an Oriental land which was wild and risky and needed to be “civilized” by the Occident. The study shows that Leonowens applied her Western logic when she encountered the Siamese culture. She set the wholly new world in Siam and gained acceptance from the King. According to the study, Leonowens’ “wholly new world” suggests how she viewed Siam as an uncivilized nation and should be replaced by her “world.” Further to Inson, Tripasai (2006: 5) writes in ‘*Debating Anna: The Textual Politics of English Literature Teaching in Thailand*,’ that “Siamese people are portrayed as primitives who need to be educated by Anna– the preacher of English culture”.

Leonowens’ memoirs are convincing enough to make the world believe that it was she who played an influential role in civilizing the Siamese court. Even though Thailand has never been colonized politically, reading the novel from a postcolonial perspective might provide Thai readers

¹There are two versions of Miss Leonowens’ memoir, one is *The Original Anna and the King of Siam*, which is believed to be recorded by Miss Leonowens herself and was published in 1870. The other memoir was rewritten by Margaret Landon in 1943 under the title, *Anna and the King of Siam*. The second memoir became a famous novel after it was adapted and has been produced as plays and films in several versions under the title *The King and I*.

with Leonowens' master-narrative of the imperialist. The depiction of Leonowens as having an influential role in the Siamese court enforces the Western concepts that the West knows what is best for Siam and other Eastern nations.

On seeing that literature is a mirror that reflects life and society we live in, literary criticism in the twenty-first century, therefore, does not limit its scope to only literary and linguistic approaches. It intertwines social theories to analyze and criticize literary works in a manner that expands readers' horizons of expectation. Theories on Marxism, Feminism and Post colonialism; for example, help readers see the binary opposition in societies; the superior and the inferior that cause injustice in society. Therefore, in studying literary works, common key concepts suggested in these three theories namely oppression, exploitation, and alienation can be applied to explain how the consciousness of one group can be falsified by the other.

Literary criticism and consciousness raising

The presentation in literature of binary oppositions of people—the capitalist and the working class in capitalism, men and women in patriarchy and the colonizer and the colonized in colonialism—results in the reflection of false consciousness of the dominant ideology in the society.

Marxism and class consciousness

Marxist critical theory, influenced by Karl Marx's beliefs, explains that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (Marx. 1848: 13). According to Marxist critics, works of literature or art are the products of historical forces that can be analyzed by looking at the material conditions in which they were formed. To criticize literary works from a Marxist angle, one has to understand that Marxist ideology is a system of thinking that contends that capitalist ideology is false and focuses on the clash between the capitalists and the working classes. Capitalism entices particular social and political systems as it brings about false consciousness of the working class and other marginalized groups including women. It inevitably leads to exploitation by the capitalists, oppression of workers, class conflicts and other features of capitalist society.

Keywords such as, exploitation, oppression, alienation, capitalist, and working class, are employed throughout when looking into literary works from a Marxist perspective. In John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, the stories depict how the monopolists who are seen as the capitalists in Marxist perspective exploit the farm tenants and fruit pickers by forcing them to work day and night for very low pay. The oppression of the workers is seen through their squalid living condition and this affects readers' mindsets in seeing what lies behind the struggle between the two classes. Tom Joad and Jim Nolan, the protagonists in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* respectively, are portrayed as a messiah that helps not only the migrant workers but also the readers to realize the power of labor and how it is alienated by capitalism. In the study entitled *A Marxist Analysis of Populist 20th Century Thai and American Fiction: Steinbeck, Saowaphong and Herbst*, Aimchoo (2005) explores the communist influence in the American proletarian novels and the Thai "literature for life"² novels. The study shows the influence of Jim Nolan and his communist comrades in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* in making the fruit pickers realize their power and how it is alienated by capitalist system. Unlike Steinbeck's novel, *Pisaj*, one of the Thai "literature for life" novels written by Saowapong (1953) does not directly present the communists as a catalyst of social change. The presentation of Sai, the protagonist, and his colleagues as a group of progressive people who see an aristocratic and bureaucratic system as a cause of class differences as well as social problems in Thai society, however, reflects the influence of communism. The rising of Sai against the discrimination of the aristocrat class is seen as a "Pisaj" that haunts the society. Sai's rising suggests the unfortunate class to realize their "selves" in a way that allows them to see their places in the society. *Pisaj* also reflects how the unity of the country people helps them fight against the injustice of the system. The novels of both writers show how the progressive young people (in Saowapong's *Pisaj*) and the communists (in Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*) act as catalysts that raise the consciousness of the unfortunate people to realize the power of their labor and unity.

² Thai literature for life is a literary sub-genre written between 1940s – 1950s. Marcel Barang, a French writer on Thai literary history, writes that in these decades there was a group of writers who were influenced by the communist movements in Southeast Asia (qtd. in Aimchoo. 2005: 14). The literary sub-genre, also known in Thai as Wannakan phue chiwit, has its clear purpose in revealing injustice in Thai aristocratic society. The language used is simple and the meaning is easy to understand

In *The Great Gatsby*, the novel portrays American city life in the 1920s where two distinct classes, the capitalist and the working classes, confront each other with suspicion. The rejection of the working class by the higher social status people pushes Jay Gatsby, the protagonist, to elevate himself to the level of the rich people in American society. Gatsby was born into a working class family. Because of his love for Daisy Buchanan, a woman of high social status, he allows himself to be trapped by false consciousness of capitalist ideology. He runs an illegal bootlegging business as a means to make him rich in a short period of time and to pave the way for him to live in the affluent areas of Manhattan Island, closer to Daisy. He even makes up a story of himself in order to gain acceptance of those from high social status. Nick Caraway, a character and narrator of the story, is told that “he [Gatsby] was an Oxford man” (Fitzgerald. 1925: 49). Gatsby also tells Nick that he is the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West but they all died and left him lots of money (65). Gatsby’s belief in capitalism results in the alienation of him from his working class background. He chooses to take a shortcut to wealth rather than to maintain integrity of a man. While Gatsby enjoys his luxurious life, the readers see him living an unhappy life with fear and deception among the capitalist class people. His life is eventually ruined and ends tragically. The fall of Jay Gatsby allows readers to see that capitalism does not benefit the working class. Instead of providing an equal opportunity to be successful in capitalist society, the system drags the unfortunate like Gatsby down.

Feminism and consciousness of women

A Feminist critical approach regards society as dominated by patriarchal ideology that makes it the role and responsibility of women to serve men’s needs. Like the Marxist critical approach, keywords such as oppression, exploitation, and alienation are widely used to explain how women’s false consciousness leads them to restricted lives. Feminism explains that society is divided into two spheres, private or domestic and public. Because of their physical differences, women are confined within the private sphere doing household chores, raising children and being housewives. Women, regardless of their social classes, have been taught for centuries to be obedient daughters, honest wives and dedicated mothers. Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* represents

typical women of the upper class who are dependent and looking for rich husbands to enjoy a wealthy lifestyle. The image of American women like Daisy can be seen up until 1960s as described Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, written according to the author's study on American women's role and status, Betty Friedan explains that American women in the 1960s were not happy and they did not know the cause of their unhappiness. The book reveals that, "A century earlier, women had fought for higher education, now girls went to college to get a husband" (Friedan. 1963: 16). Women went to school not because they wanted to educate themselves but to look for educated husbands to settle down with. The book stresses that women's places are confined within the private sphere; taking care of her husband, cooking, and raising children. Friedan writes that such routine life led American housewives in those decades to suffer with problems they were unable to identify. They simply found that they were useless and their lives were not worth living. 'The Problem that Has No Name,' the first chapter of *The Feminine Mystique* (2010: Online), demystifies women's secret doubts about their roles and, at the same time, raises questions on their actual abilities and "self" in society. Friedan attempts to prove that the feminine mystique denies women the opportunity to develop their own identities, which can ultimately lead to problems for women and their families. While 'The Problem that Has No Name,' implies invisible roles and status for women, Friedan's writing puts forward the ideas that women's problems should be heard and that women should realize their rightful place in society in a way that is no less inferior to men especially in a way that their living can be fulfilled on a natural basis.

Feminism explains that the concept of "name" and "women" do not seem to correspond to each other in patriarchal society. While Friedan reveals that women's problems cannot be named, Kingston (1975), a Chinese-American writer, also suggests that Chinese society rejected women who disgraced their families by erasing their names out of the family. The writer's mother told Kingston not to "tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name" (Kingston. 1975: 15). The "no name" woman is the writer's late aunt who got pregnant during the time when her husband worked in America. Her illicit pregnancy brought doubt and shame to her

husband's family so much so that she finally killed herself on the day she knew that her baby was not a boy. The story of 'No Name Woman' highlights the voiceless position of a woman who did not have a chance to defend for her pregnancy. Kingston expresses that she even doubts if her aunt had been raped by or forced to have sex with someone in the village or from outside. According to Chinese tradition, such guilt follows her even after death where she must be left as a hungry ghost, excluded from annual worship from the descendants. The portrayal of the suffering of the no-name aunt brings about awareness of women's rights in defending themselves from unjust accusations. The shameful family story suggests Kingston's exploration of woman identity amidst the existing patriarchy in Chinese society.

Postcolonialism and consciousness of the colonized

Like Marxism and Feminism, Postcolonialism explains that the colonial ideology imposes false consciousness in the colonized nations as a means to keep the natives under their control. Such system of thinking operates on the same basis as capitalism and patriarchy in a way that empowers the imperialist as superior over the native people.

Through the post colonial critical approach, key concepts such as exploitation, oppression and alienation can be viewed from the narrative which the critics claim as master-narrative. In *The English Governess at the Siamese Court*, Leonowens (1870) describes 'Chow Phya Sri Sury Wongse, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Siam' when she first arrived in Bangkok and was met by him on board of the ship with unfavorable tone. "Half naked as he was, and without an emblem to denote his rank, there was yet something remarkable about this native chief, by virtue of which he compelled our respect from the first glance,—a sensibly magnetic quality of tone or look. With an air of command oddly at variance with his almost indecent attire, of which he seemed superbly unconscious, he beckoned to a young attendant, who crawled to him as a dog crawls to an angry master (9)". Leonowens' perception of the Thai premier reflects master-narrative that suggests an uncivilized native person regardless of the fact that he is a high-ranking official in the royal court. Being 'half naked' and without an 'emblem' of the Thai Lord is devalued as 'indecent attire.' Anna employs imperial discourse such as 'oddly,' 'unconscious,' 'crawled as a dog,' and 'an angry master' to imply the opposite of the civilized traits of the West.

Describing Siam as an “Oriental” nation, Leonowens conveyed master-narrative that placed “Oriental” as the scene of “heartless, arbitrary insolence on the part of my [Oriental] employers (10).” This resulted in false perception of both the native Thais and the Westerners. Despite the fact that she had experienced Oriental ways of living in India and Singapore before moving to Siam, Leonowens still found herself in Siam “homelessness, forlornness, helplessness, mortification, indignation, on mine (10).” Leonowens’ imperial discourse implies insecurity caused by the maltreatment of the colonized natives and reflects the division of thoughts that the colonizer imposed on the colonized. In her article on ‘Anna Leonowens and Imaginative Coloni[s]ation of Thailand’, Tripasai (2006: Online) writes that Leonowens’ “representation of the Siamese meets her [Leonowens] Western readers’ expectation and imagination of the “real” Siam.

The depiction of Siam as an uncivilized nation with strange traditions and of her emergence to save the kingdom from being invaded by the West creates endless controversy and discontent among the Thais. The writer’s interpretation of the Thai natives, Thai culture and traditions that is based on her Western understanding might result in forming the distorted images of the Thais and Thai culture among other nations. Criticizing the story of Anna and the King of Siam through the post colonial lens encourages readers of this century to compare the historical facts or accounts in other novels with that written in Leonowens’ memoirs. This practice may result in a reconsideration of “real” Thai values and reclamations of the true image of the Thais among the West.

In summary, teaching literature nowadays is not limited to aesthetic appreciation or linguistic analysis. Readers have more ways to read and understand literary works. Many social theories such as Marxism, feminism and post colonialism allow students to see binary oppositions of people in society. In literature classrooms, teachers will find it interesting in making students relate the concepts found in literary works to something close to the students’ experiences, things that can serve as guidelines for students to learn about and understand real life situation, and most of all to raise their consciousness of rights and powers.

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