Introduction to Literary Theory

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Introduction
What is literary or critical theory?

What do you mean by “critical perspective”?
What is literary or critical theory?

What do you mean by “critical perspective”?

The terms “literary theory” and “critical theory” refer to essentially the same fields of study. They both address ways of looking at literature beyond the typical plot-theme-character-setting studies.
Just as a PERSPECTIVE is a way of looking at something, a CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE is a way of criticizing or analyzing literature. Your CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE is the view you bring to the literature you read.
How and why did literary theories develop?
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We all know that different people will experience the same event differently. It follows, then, that different people will approach the same literary text differently.
One person may be offended by a character’s actions, while another finds them comic.

One reader is energized by a story’s political implications, while another is awed by the same story’s philosophical bent.
Literary theories emerged as ways to explain different people’s views and responses to literature. Rather than insisting that one view is the best or correct view, literary theory attempts to find value in all views that are based on a careful study of the literature.
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- Studying a work from more than one view gives you a deeper understanding of the author’s work and a better appreciation for the richness of it.
What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives involve?
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Essentially, all you have to do to study a work from more than one critical perspective is to put your own view on hold and entertain the other view. Although you may be a staunch green-thinker, you now ask yourself, “What would a yellow-thinker see in this work?”
What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives *not* involve?
What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives not involve?

First and foremost, studying a work from multiple critical perspectives does not require that you agree with any of the perspectives you study. You are not being asked to become a yellow-thinker, only to consider—without criticism and judgment—what a yellow-thinker would see in the text.
What does studying a work from multiple critical perspectives not involve?

Second, studying a work from multiple critical perspectives does not require that you blend or merge two or more perspectives into a single interpretation. Some of the points of some of the theories are actually mutually exclusive and cannot be reconciled. While examining a work from the feminist perspective, you do not need to take into account what a Marxist would find. You would examine each perspective independently.