English 122

Fredericton High School

V. Marshall

**“On the Rainy River” - Critical Literary Theories**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **theory** | **application point** | **evidence from story – include quotation and page number** |
| **Marxist** | * the bourgeoisie and proletariat become symbols of struggle, oppression and aggression |  |
| **Feminist** | * women are marginalized voices in history and literature |  |
| **Ecocritical** | * characters interact with the environment in either a positive or negative way |  |
| **Archetypal** | * character type and meaning can be transferred from one text to another |  |
| **Deconstruction** | * value and assumptions must be put aside in order to gain new understanding of the text |  |
| **Structuralist** | * the SIGNIFIERS are the words themselves * the SIGNIFIED are the meanings associated with the words |  |

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| **theory** | **application point** | **evidence** |
| **Marxist** | * the bourgeoisie and proletariat become symbols of struggle, oppression and aggression | * “The draft notice arrived on June 17, 1968...It couldn’t happen.” (71) Those with power – the government/military – can dictate the actions of those without power. * “I was too good for this war…with a full ride scholarship for grad studies at Harvard.” (72) The narrator believes he is better than, or above, the war. He believes his social class should protect him. |
| **Feminist** | * women are marginalized voices in history and literature | * There are essentially no female characters in the story. Females were not included in the draft. Why? Not strong enough, not reliable, too emotional? Or…too precious, too valuable? The government deemed that women were not suitable for war. Whether this was a good thing or a bad thing, it served to marginalize women in society. * “My father asked what my plans were.” (72) * “borrow my father’s car” (73) |
| **Ecocritical** | * characters interact with the environment in either a positive or negative way | * When pushed to the emotional edge and feeling like he was in an emotional wilderness, O’Brien retreats to nature. “The land was mostly wilderness.” (75) * The river becomes a place of introspection and cleansing. The “wind coming off the river, the waves” (80) were harsh. He found his answer in the stark reality of nature. |
| **Archetypal** | * character type and meaning can be transferred from one text to another | * Elroy Berdahl’s character can be understood through the archetype of the wise old man. Centuries of ‘old men’ characters have proven to be wise, patient mentors. It is expected that these characters will be bring a resolution to the story. (Gandalf from Lord of the Rings, Dumbledore from Harry Potter, Mr. Miyagi from Karate Kid) * “He meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself.” (81) |
| **Deconstructionist** | * value and assumptions must be put aside in order to gain new understanding of the text | * We assume the war was wrong and that receiving the draft notice was a negative experience. However, the father does not seem to be concerned – “My father asked what my plans were.” (72) * Everyone, from O’Brien’s town folk to actor Gary Cooper, believes the right thing to do is answer the draft notice and serve your country. The narrator seems to be the only one who sees enlisting as a cowardly choice. Everyone else views it as bravery. “Everybody screaming from the sidelines – rooting me on” (82) |
| **Structuralist** | * the SIGNIFIERS are the words themselves * the SIGNIFIED are the meanings associated with the words | * The draft letter signifies injustice, inequality, unfairness.   + “It couldn’t happen…a mistake, maybe” (72) * Military service signifies bravery, loyalty.   + “I would not be brave.” (82) * Youth signifies strength, malleability. |
|  | OMIT THE CATEGORY BELOW – NOT STUDIED THIS SEMESTER | |
| **New Historical** | * interpretation of the text depends on social understanding of the time and place | * The Vietnam War produced feelings of anger and confusion. Americans were afraid of a communist take-over, but they were also afraid of corruption within their own government. They did not know who to trust. Individuals were mentally divided and the nation was ideologically divided. |