

English 485
Fall 2002
Off Hrs: MW and TH 11-12

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LITERARY THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This course is designed with three central goals in mind. These goals are:

- To clarify the connection between modern theories of literature and the longer tradition of philosophical inquiry from which these theories emerged.
- To provide students with basic understanding of the range of theoretical perspectives that guide contemporary scholars of literature.
- To allow students to interrogate and ultimately, through writing and class discussion, to evaluate each of these theoretical perspectives.

Texts

Vincent Leitch, ed., *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Ed. Linda H. Peterson).
Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*

On reserve at Burrow Library:

Michael Chabon, "In the Black Mill"

Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory "

Course Requirements

Reading. Purely in terms of page numbers, the reading load in this class will be light when compared to other upper division English classes. I have made this choice partly because some of the material is difficult, but mostly because I expect a very high degree of critical engagement from you -- significant passages marked, questions and comments noted, etc.

Class Discussion. I expect to each of you to contribute comments and questions to every session of this class. If you haven't had much to say during a given class, you can anticipate being called on. But in addition to speaking, I expect you to listen to each other carefully, both with critical attention, and with a spirit of generosity and respect. Disagreements, debates, differing perspectives, divergent assumptions: these are the very substance of literary theory, and indeed of literature itself. If we cannot cultivate and explore differences among ourselves in this room, we can have little hope of learning in this field.

Writing. There will be 3 regular writing assignments for the course, and each will function as a take-home examination. These exams will involve essay writing only: no short answers, identifications, etc. In literary studies, and in other professions where critical reading and writing is necessary, there is little value accorded the skill of memorization. If you cannot recall Saussure's terms for the elements which make up a sign, you simply pull his book off the shelf

and look them up. It would be a rare situation indeed, even among professional literary critics, where one would need instant recall of terms and facts like this from literary theory.

The more valuable and broadly useful skills in this field are the higher-order skills of application and interpretation. These come into play only after basic facts and information have already been learned, and they involve synthesis, imagination, often creativity. They require you to combine what you know about a particular theoretical or philosophical perspective -- say that of Freud, or Edward Said -- with what you know about a given text or movement -- say Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, or contemporary French drama. In this class, I take it as a given that you will assimilate the basic facts and information conveyed in all the readings and lectures, like, for example what Matthew Arnold means by "science," or what Eve Sedgwick says about the term "homosocial." What I will ask for when you write will be for you to use these concepts, to employ them in a particular analysis, to interrogate, critique, and evaluate them.

Each paper/exam will offer you a choice of essay questions. For some you'll be able to write one essay of 5-6 pages; for others I'll ask you to write shorter essays of 2-3 pages each. These exercises will all be cumulative; that is, each may ask you to draw from everything we have read up until that point. Again, the point of these essays is to develop the critical imagination, not fact recall. It only makes sense that, in confronting a given problem or questions, you would draw from everything you know.

Along with these three papers/exams, you will turn in a 3-4-page essay developed from an in-class presentation, described below. These papers are due one week after the presentation.

Presentations

At least once during the semester, each of you will choose one major theoretical text to present in class. Eligible candidates for presentations are marked in the schedule of readings below. A good presentation should offer:

- A concise recap of what you consider to be the reading's major points.
- A sense of what in the reading is difficult, troubling, or confusing to you.
- A tentative evaluation of the reading. I don't expect you to take a definitive position yet, but try to give us some sense of how valuable you think this reading is. For example, point out places where the argument is persuasive where it's not, discuss how its ideas might or might not be useful, offer possible applications, examples, or counterexamples

Presentations should last at least 10 and no more than 20 minutes. Collaborative presentations are welcome and encouraged. Collaborative presenters will write individual papers.

Grades will be figured as follows:

Essay Exam I	20%
Essay Exam II	25%
Essay Exam III	25%
Presentation Essay	20%
Work in Class	10%

Schedule of Readings and Assignments*

Date	Work	Presentation?
9/3	Wordsworth (N), Rousseau (H)	Wordsworth
9/5	Arnold "Function of..." (N), Trench (H), Davis (H)	Arnold
9/10	Eliot "Tradition and..." (N), Brooks (N) Augustine <i>Christian Doctrine</i> Book 2, I-IV and <i>Trinity</i> (pp 192-4 only) (N)	Eliot Saussure
9/12	Saussure (N)	
9/17	Derrida from <i>Grammatology</i> "Exergue" (N), begin reading selection from <i>Dissemination</i> (N)	
9/19	Finish selection from <i>Dissemination</i> (N), Tennyson (H)	
9/24	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	
9/26	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	
10/1	<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	
10/3	Miller (WH), "What is Decon." (WH)	On both readings
Monday 10/7	Exam I due at 305 Palmer by Noon	
10/8	Marx <i>Capital</i> pp 776-783 only (N) Marx selections from <i>German Ideology</i> and <i>Grundrisse</i>	Eagl. & "What is M"
10/10	(N), Eagleton (WH), "What is M..." (WH)	
10/15	Freud, from <i>Interp. Of Dreams</i> (N)	Freud
10/17	Freud "Uncanny" and Chabon "Black Mill" (On Res.)	Both Readings
10/22	No Class: Fall Break	
10/24	Lacan "Mirror Stage" (N), from "Agency of the Letter" (N)	
10/29	Wion (WH), "What is Psych..." (WH)	Both readings
10/31	Homanns (WH), "What is Fem..." (WH)	Both Readings
11/5	Foucault from <i>History of Sexuality</i> (N) Sedgwick from <i>Between Men</i> (N), Zimmerman "What has..." (N)	Foucault Sedgewick or Zimmerman
Mon 11/11	Exam II due at 305 Palmer by noon	Williams
11/12	Williams "Base and Superstructure" (On Reserve)	
11/14	Fanon "Pitfalls of National Consciousness" (N)	Fanon

* N = Norton *Anth. of Theory & Criticism*; H = Handout; WH = *Wuthering Heights* volume; RES = On Reserve at Burrow Library

	Said <i>Orientalism</i> , Introduction (N)	
11/19	Armstrong (WH), "What is Cultural..." (WH)	Both Readings
11/21	Butler (N)	Butler
11/26	Gates (N), Hooks (N)	Both Readings
11/28	No Class: Thanksgiving Break	
12/3	Whitehead	
12/5	Whitehead	
12/10	Whitehead and wrap-up	
Essay/Exam III due during finals week, TBA		