

Literary Theory
CLC/Ger/Spa 2205F, Winter 2010

Lectures and tutorials: Wednesday 10:30 – 11:30; Friday 9:30-11:30; U.C. 224

Instructor: Călin Mihăilescu (cmihails@uwo.ca; tel. 661-2111 ext. 85862)

Teaching Assistants: Matthew Godfrey (mgodfre5@uwo.ca) and Brendon Langer (blanger@uwo.ca)

Office Hours:

Călin Mihăilescu – UC 361, Th. 12:30-3:30 (or by appointment)

Matthew Godfrey – UC 208, W. 11:30-1:00 (or by appointment)

Brendon Langer – Somerville House 2331, Tu. 2:00- 4:00 (or by appointment)

Your final grade in this course will be based on the following:

Class activity	25%
Research paper	20%
Class presentation	15%
Final exam (3 hours)	40%

Shopping list *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Vincent B. Leitch, Gen. Ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001 (or subsequent editions; available in the Comparative Literature and Culture section at the University Bookstore)

Course Description *The short version:* we will learn how to think better when reading literature, and writing and/or talking about it. *The long one:* we will be exploring together a wide range of theoretical discourses whose chief aim is to situate literature and its languages. Among the somewhat unusual elements which populate this course are: the idea that a good theory is the most practical things; that literary theory invites salient readings and molds the mind to imagine spectacular imaginary worlds, rather than being used as a shield against literature

Course Content and Aims The course aims to introduce students to major theoretical takes on literature. While the material is predominantly French, German and North American (all texts are available in English translation), attention will also be paid to Russian, Italian and Spanish theoretical texts. Constant reference to the literature of Western Europe, Anglo- and Latin America, and Asia will keep you informed and, hopefully interested. Among the theories discussed will be those grouped under structuralism, New Criticism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, social thought, and postcolonialism, to mention only these isms. The course aims at having you think even as you read and write. It is a tall order; a promise, too.

Learning Outcomes By the end of this course the students will have become acquainted with some of the major discourses relevant to literary theory, improved critical alertness, familiarization with various methods of literary analysis, increased awareness of the relationships between language and literature, the ability to connect literary phenomena with their social, political and technological environments, and a more flexible usage of theoretical discursive features will be expected. Students will improve their ability to express themselves on these and other related topics, both orally (through in-class presentations) and in writing (in the form of essays).

Course Guidelines Students are expected to attend all lectures and to complete all required

readings before coming to class. Class presentations (which are not to be longer than 15 minutes) should be articulate, informative and provide personal analytic touch. Essays must be submitted within the deadline.

Plagiarism “Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of a text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate, and by proper referencing such as footnotes and citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). The University of Western Ontario uses plagiarism checking software. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.”

Syllabus

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are from *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (hereafter NATC).

- Jan. 6 **Introductory** Theory: why, what, how and when?
Jan. 8 **Language in literature** Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” NATC 1258-65
Jan. 13 **Language in literature** Saussure, “Nature of the Linguistic Sign,” NATC 956-77
Jan. 15 **Historical traces** Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, Nietzsche; read as much as you can from NATC 33-85; 90-117; 135-54; 870-94
Jan. 20 tutorial; presentations # 1 & 2
Jan. 22 **Authorship** W.K. Wimsatt & Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy” & “The Affective Fallacy,” NATC 1374-1403
Jan. 27 **Authorship** Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” NATC 1615-36
Jan. 29 **Authorship** Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” & “From Work to Text,” NATC 1466-75
Optional reading: Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” (from *Basic Writings*)
http://books.google.ca/books?id=kVc9AAAAIAAJ&dq=heidegger+basic+writings&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=Wc4SUYNvFG&sig=dWYHQQ-tqPIT-CzP11S2qZaKA4&hl=en&ei=MC5GS5-tJoh8QbLxdX6Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0OCBEQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Feb. 3 tutorial; presentations # 3 & 4
Feb. 5 **Creation** Northrop Frye, “Sequence and Mode” & “Concern and Myth” (from *Words with Power*)
http://books.google.ca/books?id=eI4CX_62qFoC&dq=Words+with+power&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=NSQG18qhB8&sig=6GQyGp8l0fy7gqhNyCd3lw9Qc9E&hl=en&ei=oC1GS59z0ZnwBuiTzPcC&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CCQQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Feb. 10 **Myth** Ernst Cassirer, “The place of language and myth in the pattern of human culture” (from *Language and Myth*)
http://books.google.ca/books?id=rxbQwhhRKygC&dq=language+and+myth&printsec=frontcover&source=bl&ots=opE5GAelOT&sig=Opqp4DINDhssdzsl3yM0rVqlxxM&hl=en&ei=1C1GS62xLMWU8AbmkiIHAW&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=&f=false
Feb. 12 **Narrative** Mikhail Bakhtin, excerpts from *Discourse in the Novel*, NATC 1186-1220
Feb. 17 & 19 **Reading week; no classes**
Feb. 24 tutorial; presentations # 5 & 6
Feb. 26 **Psychoanalysis** Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “The Uncanny,” and “Fetishism” & Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” NATC 913-956; 1285-90
Mar. 3 tutorial; presentations # 7 & 8

- Mar. 5 **Feminism** Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" & Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," NATC 2035-56; 2012-21
- Mar. 10 tutorial; presentations # 9 & 10
- Mar. 12 **Deconstruction** Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," NATC 1830-76
- Mar. 17 **Deconstruction** Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," NATC 1509-26
- Mar. 19 **Politics** Hayden White, "The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact," NATC 1712-29
- Mar. 24 tutorial; presentations # 11 & 12
- Mar. 26 **Politics** Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductibility," NATC 1163-86
- Mar. 31 **Postcolonialism** Edward Said, from the Introduction to *Orientalism*, NATC, 986-2012
- Apr. 2** **Good Friday; no class**
- Apr. 7 tutorial; presentations # 13 & 14
- Apr. 9 **Race** Henry L. Gates, Jr., "Talking Black," NATC 2424-32
- Conclusions**

Course Requirements

A. Class Participation (25%)

As part of the grade for participation, students are expected to attend the lectures and the tutorials, participate in class discussions and complete possible on-the-spot quizzes.

Notes on attendance: Attendance will be taken at the *beginning* of each class. If you have a legitimate reason to miss class (sickness, family crisis, religious holiday), please contact me beforehand so that we can arrange for you to make up any missed material. Missed classes and/or lack of class participation can add up and adversely affect your class participation grade.

B. Class Presentation (15%): 10-15 minutes, delivered orally, to be followed by class discussion. You are not required to hand in a written version of your presentation.

C. Paper (25%): 6-8 pages, due in class on March 31st.

The paper is to be written on a topic of your choice. All students are expected to have their topics approved during office hours or via email. It would be a good idea to begin thinking about the final paper as early as possible in the semester.

D. Final Exam (40%) will consist of identification- and essay questions.