

Western University, Department of English and Writing Studies
English 2210G: Contemporary Theory and Criticism.
Section 001 January 2015
Tu. 11:30-1:30; Th. 11:30-12:30

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Office hours: Tu. 1:30-2:30, Wed. 10-12 and by appt.
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Course Website: <http://matthewrowlinson.wordpress.com/english-2210-course-outline/>

Course Description: This course will introduce major texts in contemporary theory and criticism. We will discuss approaches crucial to the definition and study of literature throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, as well as the causes and consequences of the rise of theory. Part of our concern will be to situate certain schools of theory such as structuralism, deconstruction, Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonialism, in relation to one another. One of the aims of the course will be to produce theoretically informed readings. But we will not read theory merely to glean some model to "apply" to literary works. Rather, we will read theory critically, examining the kinds of claims and gestures theorists make in articulating their theories. And we will also read literary works both in order to test theory against them and to interrogate the very distinction between literary and theoretical writing.

Required Books:

Leitch, Vincent et al eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2nd ed. 2010.

Reference and further reading:

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997)

Waugh, Patricia, ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* (2006)

The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism: <http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/>
(online version available only through UWO site license)

Literary sources—theory: (links) <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Lit/theory.html>

Schedule: Students are to complete the assigned reading before the class in which it is to be discussed. If changes are needed in the following schedule, they will be announced in class.

Jan 6 Introduction

Jan 8 No class

Jan 13 Three English profs with theories. Cleanth Brooks, “The Heresy of Paraphrase” (1217-1229); Northrop Frye, “The Archetypes of Literature” (1304-1315); Stanley Fish, “Interpreting the *Variorum*” (1974-1992). **Response paper #1**

Jan 15 Three English Profs continued. Recommended: Gerald Graff “Taking Cover in Coverage” (1961-1970)

Jan 20 Two theories of language. Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics* (850-866); **Response paper #2**

Jan 22 J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances” (1289-1301).

Jan 27 Psychoanalysis. Freud. From *The Interpretation of Dreams* (814-824); *The Uncanny* (824-841); **Response paper #3**

Jan 29 “Fetishism” (841-845).

Feb 3 Lacan, from “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious” (1169-1181);

Feb 5 “The Signification of the Phallus” (1181-1189). Further reading: “The Mirror Stage . . .” (1163-1169).

Feb 10 Marx. From *The German Ideology* (655-656); From *The Communist Manifesto* (657-660); from *Capital, Vol 1* (663-671). **Response paper #4**

Feb 12 From *Grundrisse* (661-662); From *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (662-663).

Week 7—Reading week

Feb 24 Marxisms. Walter Benjamin “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” (1051-1071); Althusser from “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1335-1361); **Response paper #5**

Feb 26 Fredric Jameson “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1846-1860).

Mar 3 From Materialism to Discourse Analysis: Williams “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” (1423-1437), Foucault “What is an Author?” (1475-1490). Recommended Barthes “The Death of the Author” (1322-1326)

Mar 5 Anderson, From *Imagined Communities*, “The Origins of National Consciousness” (1916-1923).

Mar 10 Deconstruction. Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (online); from *Of Grammatology* (1688-1697);

Mar 12 De Man “Semiology and Rhetoric” (1365-1378). **Response paper #6**

Mar 17 Feminisms. Gilbert and Gubar from *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1926-38); Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (2084-2095). **Special class led by Christine Penhale.**

Mar 19 Sedgwick from *Between Men* (2466-2470)

Mar 24 The history of sexuality and queer theory. Foucault from *The History of Sexuality* (1502-1521)

Mar 26; Sedgwick from *Epistemology of the Closet* (2470-2477); Butler from *Gender Trouble* (2540-2553). **Response paper #7**

Mar 31 Post-colonial theory. Said from *Orientalism* (1866-1888).

April 2 Spivak from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (2114-2126); Babha “The Commitment to Theory” (2353-2372).

April 7 Conclusions: Poems—“So we’ll go no more a-roving” (George Gordon, Lord Byron), “In the Waiting Room” (Elizabeth Bishop)—online distribution. **2000-word paper due.**

Assignments:

--Complete the reading assignments listed above by the dates specified. **Come to class prepared to ask and answer questions about the assigned readings.**

--During the course of the term I will assign seven response questions, each based on the reading you will be doing that week. Please write a paper answering the question. Your response papers **must not exceed 2 double-spaced pages** in length, and are due at the beginning of the classes marked on the schedule above. You may if necessary turn them in earlier by email, though I would prefer to have hard copy. **Late submission of response papers will not be allowed.**

--A **2000-word** paper on a topic in criticism or theory. I will suggest topics for this paper; you may also devise your own topic in consultation with me.

--There will be a three hour final examination, during which you will be allowed to consult the assigned texts for this course.

Please submit your papers double-spaced, in a 12-point font, on 8.5 x 11” paper. Use 1” margins. You should use the citation format of either the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. These manuals are available on the reference shelves of Weldon library; if you are unfamiliar with the protocols of scholarly citation, please ask for assistance.

Grading: Your response papers will be graded on a letter scale (D – A+); the aggregate of your **three best marks** will determine 25% of your final grade.

The final paper will determine 25% of your final grade.

There will be a final examination, which will determine 35% of your final grade.

15% of your final grade will be determined by your participation in the class. In assigning this mark, I will principally consider your contributions and alertness during our meetings; you will also receive credit for the quality of your contributions to the course’s online discussions. This portion of your grade will be affected by chronic lateness or unexcused absence from class.

Students must pass **both** term work and the final examination in order to pass the course. Students who fail the final examination will automatically fail the course.

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies, who will assign a penalty in consultation with the instructor. A proven case of plagiarism may be penalized by failure of the course or other penalty to be assessed by the Department.

Requests for relief: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The necessary form and further information regarding this policy can be found at the Student Services website:
<https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm>.

The full policy is set out here:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf>.

Prerequisites: English 1020E, 1022E, or 1024E. Students who do not have the prerequisites for this course will be removed. There will be no appeal from this decision. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Objectives: To explain key terms and concepts widely used in current criticism of literature and culture and to provide different perspectives on the purpose and methods of criticism.

Response paper #1: “Any proposition asserted in a poem is not to be taken in abstraction but is justified, in terms of the poem, if it is justified at all, not by virtue of scientific or historical or philosophical truth, but is justified in terms of a principle analogous to that of dramatic propriety” (Norton 1224). What is this principle? Explain with reference to the analogy between poetic and dramatic unity that Brooks makes here and on the following page of “The Heresy of Paraphrase”. 2 pp. due Jan. 13.