

English 9003
Contemporary Theory
in Literary and Cultural Studies
Fall 2014

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Office Hours: Tues. 10-11, 2-3, Thurs. 10-11
(or by appointment)

Arts and Humanities 3G12
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Course Description

This course will provide a survey of contemporary theory and some of its precursors in twentieth-century thought. It will focus on several distinct though often related critical schools or movements, including Structuralism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, New Historicism, Queer Studies, Cultural Studies, Post-Colonial Theory. The readings for the course have been chosen to introduce some of the terms and concepts that have become critical touchstones for many scholars in literary and cultural studies, while the assignments will provide students with the opportunity to study theory as an object of analysis in its own right, and to apply its insights to a core group of literary texts and cultural texts. In so doing, we hope to question the assumed distinctions between “primary” and “secondary” literature: to what extent, we will ask, can theory be read as literature, and literature as theory?

The course assumes no specialized knowledge of the field. For some students, it will serve as an introduction to the significant influence that theory has had on the ways in which we read and interpret literature and culture, for others it will be a chance to renew and deepen their knowledge of particular critics and approaches. Throughout, our goal will be not only to provide students with some of the basic methodological tools that they will need in graduate studies, but to foster a spirit of self-reflexive inquiry into what we read and how we read it.

Assignments

Final Paper (50% of final grade; due December 19)

5,000 words. The final essay for the course should engage critically with one or more schools or theorists on the syllabus or with a theorist or field of theory not covered in class. Consult me before deciding on the topic, in any case, but all the more so if you plan to select a topic not covered in class. The essay might invoke some literary precedents or implications of the theory you discuss, but it must not be a reading of a literary text. Rather, it should attempt to read the theory under discussion, to explore its stakes, implications, limits. I encourage you to explore a field you have *not* taken up in your seminar; should you do so, however, the final paper must not only expand upon, but diverge substantially from, the seminar. The essay should be thoroughly researched and refer to the relevant literature on the topic you cover.

Seminar (25%)

20-25 minutes. The seminar will take up a text assigned for the week’s reading. The point of the seminar is not to rehearse the argument of the text but rather to engage with it critically, to

explore its context, for example (in the author's work, in its relation to broader trends in theory). How, for example, does Lacan take up and respond to Freud? The seminar might explore also blind spots in the text under discussion, as well as probe its possibilities and limitations.

One week after the seminar, you are to submit a written version of the seminar. This should not merely be a transcript of the seminar, but rather its rewriting into a short essay, complete with proper documentation.

Response Essay (15%; due in class October 28)

5 pages. In this essay, you should engage critically with one text on the course, taking a position in relation to it.

All written assignments must be documented according to MLA style.

Participation (10%)

The participation grade will assess the quality of your engagement in and contribution to the seminar. As such, it is not a measure of loquacity but rather of preparation, thoughtful and helpful interventions in class, attention to and engagement with the seminars and to class discussion more generally. Should you miss **more than 2 classes** without documented illness or compassionate grounds, you will forfeit this portion of the course grade.

Scholastic Offenses

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Academic Handbook, Exam, Course Outlines Page 4

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Required Texts

All texts for the course will be available as photocopies. There are a number of reliable guides to the theoretical movements and figures covered in the course. I strongly encourage you to consult them alongside the weekly readings.

Schedule of Classes:

September 9: **Introductions**

September 16: **Formalisms**

Shklovsky, "Art as Technique"; T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "Hamlet and his Problems"; Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," "The Heresy of Paraphrase."

September 23: **Structuralism and the Linguistic Turn**

Saussure, "Course in General Linguistics"; Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language"; Austin "How to Do Things with Words"

September 30: **Deconstruction I**

Nietzsche, "Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense"; Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"; from *Of Grammatology*.

October 7: **Deconstruction II**

Derrida, from *Spectres of Marx*; de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," "Semiology and Rhetoric," "The Resistance to Theory"

October 14: **Psychoanalysis I**

Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, "The Uncanny," "Mourning and Melancholia," "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"

October 21: **Psychoanalysis II**

Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," "The Agency of the Letter," "The Purloined Letter"

October 28: **Feminisms**

Gilbert and Gubar, "The Madwoman in the Attic"; Wittig, "One is not Born a Woman," Sedgwick, from *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*; Mulvey

“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

November 3: **Gender Studies**

Foucault, “The History of Sexuality”; Butler “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”; “Critically Queer”; Sedgwick “Epistemology of the Closet.”

November 10: **Marxism and Ideology**

Marx, “The German Ideology,” “Grundrisse,” “Wage Labor and Capital,” “Capital”; Althusser, “Ideology and State Ideological Apparatuses”

November 17: **Cultural Theory**

Horkheimer and Adorno, “The Culture Industry”; Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”; de Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life.”

November 25: **Historicisms**

Foucault, from *Discipline and Punish*; “The Archeology of Knowledge”; Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the Exorcists.”

December 2: **Postcolonialism**

Said, from *Orientalism*; Bhabha, “DissemiNation”; Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”