

**English 9003A: Contemporary Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies. Draft Syllabus.**  
**The final version of the syllabus will be handed out at the first meeting of the seminar.**

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Office Hours: Tu 10-11, Th. 10-12 (or by appointment)

### **Course Description**

This course will provide a survey of contemporary theory and its precursors in nineteenth- and 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, and Ecocriticism. 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.

### **Required Texts**

*Available in the Bookstore*

Rivkin, Julie and Michael Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Blackwell, 2004.

*Available as .pdf files in the course Dropbox folder*

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford UP, 1998. pp. 1-12.

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. pp. 127-86.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011. Pp. 1-49

Butler, Judith. “Critically Queer.” *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Pp. 223-42.

De Man, Paul. "Semiology and Rhetoric." *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*. New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979.

Derrida, Jacques, *The Animal that therefore I am*. Trans. David Willis. Fordham UP, 2008. Pp. 47-64, 119-36

Freud, Sigmund. "Fetishism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 vols. Translated by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. 21: 152-57.

Foucault, Michel. *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*. Trans David Macey. Picador, 2003. Pp. 238-63

Lacan, Jacques. "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" *Ecrits : The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. From *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, trans. C. Dieste. Cambridge, Cambridge U. P.: 1989.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. From *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia U.P., 1985.

### **Optional reading**

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Purloined Letter."

Hoffmann, E.T.A. "The Sand Man."

### **Assignments**

--A 5,000-word paper on a topic of your choice relevant to material covered in the course. This paper may for instance take the form of an intervention in a field of theoretical inquiry. Or it may take the form of a work of literary or cultural criticism in which you use and test one or more of the theoretical positions we have explored during the term in. Other alternatives are also possible. In any case, you should research and cite the relevant critical literature. I urge you to consult me during the term as you develop and refine your final paper topic. Unless you make other arrangements with me in advance, this paper is due one week after our final meeting, on Dec. 14. 45% final grade.

--A 2,000 word paper on a topic to be assigned. This paper will be due in class on **TBD**, depending on the topic you choose. 25% final grade.

--A fifteen-minute oral presentation to the seminar of a text on the syllabus. Texts available for

presentation are marked on the schedule with an asterisk; I urge you to choose your text as soon as possible as they will be assigned in the order I receive your requests. 20% final grade.

--10% of your grade will be determined by my evaluation of your participation in and contribution to the seminar. In determining this portion of your grade, I will consider the quality of your attention to and interventions in class discussion, and of your preparations for class. Further, this portion of the grade **will be forfeited by any student with more than two unexcused absences from class**. If medical or other circumstances affect your participation in the seminar, please discuss them with me. As circumstances warrant, I will excuse you from class and make whatever arrangements are possible to help you keep up with our work, without penalty to your grade.

In your papers, please use the MLA method of parenthetical citation. If you are unfamiliar with this method, I urge you consult a standard style guide such as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, which is available in the reference shelves of the D.B. Weldon Library.

## Reading Schedule

Readings marked *R&R* refer to Rivkin and Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell). All others will be made available as .pdf files. Please either print these files out, or bring them to class on a device that will make it easy for you to refer to them during our discussion.

September	14	Introduction
	21	<b>Marx</b> Marx, "Grundrisse" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 650-53); "The German Ideology"* ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 653-58); "Wage Labor and Capital" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 659-664); "Capital"* ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 665-72)
	28	<b>Psychoanalysis</b> Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 397-414); "Fetishism"*; "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 431-37); "The Uncanny"* ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 418-30) Companion Reading: Hoffmann, "The Sandman"
October	5	<b>Language and the Unconscious</b> Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 441-46); "The Instance of the Letter" ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 447-61); "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'"; Companion Reading: Poe, "The Purloined Letter"
	12	<b>Ideology and Artistic Production</b> Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"*; Zizek, <i>The Sublime Object of Ideology</i> ( <i>R&amp;R</i> 712-

- 24)\*; Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”\* (R&R 1235); Horkheimer and Adorno “The Culture Industry...” (R&R 1242); Williams “The Country and the City” (R&R 505)
- 19 **Historicisms & Counter-Historicisms** Nietzsche, from *The Genealogy of Morals*; Foucault, “The Archaeology of Knowledge” (R&R 90-96); Armstrong, “Some Call it Fiction . . .”\* (R&R 567-83); Greenblatt “Shakespeare and the Exorcists” (R&R 592-620)
- 26 **Structuralism and the Linguistic Turn** Culler, “The Linguistic Foundation” (R&R 56); Saussure, “Course in General Linguistics” \* (R&R 59-71); Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language” (R&R 76-80); Austin “How to Do Things with Words”\* (R&R 162).
- November 2 **Deconstruction**  
Derrida, “Différance”\* (R&R 278-99); “Of Grammatology” (R&R 300-31); Paul de Man “Semiology and Rhetoric.”\*
- 9 **Feminisms** Rubin “The Traffic in Women” (R&R 770-94)\*; Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”\*; Spivak “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (R&R 838-53); Sedgwick, from *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*\*; Butler “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (R&R 900-11)\* Optional: Gilbert and Gubar “The Madwoman in the Attic” (R&R 812-25)
- 16 **Queer Theory** Foucault, “The History of Sexuality” (R&R 892-99); Butler, “Critically Queer”\* from *Bodies That Matter*; Sedgwick “Epistemology of the Closet” (R&R 912-21)
- 23 **Post-Colonial Studies** Said, “Jane Austen and Empire” (R&R 1112-25); Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders” (R&R 1167-84)\*; Lawson, “The Anxious Proximities of Settler (Post)colonial Relations” (R&R 1210-23).\*
- 30 **Animal Studies and Biopolitics** Derrida *The Animal that therefore I am*, 47-64, 119-36, Foucault *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*. Pp. 238-63, Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 1-12.
- December 7 **Affect and Precarity** Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 1-49\*; Butler, *Precarious Life*\*; Edelman *No Future* 1-31\*.

As required by the University, I remind you that 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.

In my own voice, let me observe that we become scholars and critics by modeling ourselves on others. I urge you to read widely this term and to use your reading to find your own style and mode of theoretical argument. If when preparing an essay or presentation for this class you become in any way concerned about the question of plagiarism, please come and discuss the matter with me.