

## **English 9003A: Contemporary Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies**

Department of English & Writing Studies

Western University

Fall 2017

*Wednesday 3:30-6:30, LWH 2210*

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:30-11:30 and Thursday 1:30-2:30 (or by app't)

### **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, Queer and Trans Theory, Cultural Studies, Post-Colonial Theory, Thing Theory, Eco-Criticism, and Animal Studies. 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, and 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* (Blackwell)

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein* (Broadview)

*Available as a .pdf documents through dropbox*

Benjamin, Walter. “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting.” *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 2007. 59-68.

Bennett, Jane. "The Force of Things." *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 1-19.

Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations* 108 (2009): 1-21.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *The Object Reader*. Eds. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. London: Routledge, 2009. 139-52.

De Certeau, Michel. "The Practice of Everyday Life." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 1248-57.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1978. 351-70.

---. "The Animal That Therefore I Am." *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*. Eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton. London: Continuum, 2005. 113-28.

Fiske, John. "Culture, Ideology, Interpellation." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 1268-73.

Foucault, Michel. "The History of Sexuality." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 892-899.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar., "The Mad Woman in the Attic." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 812-25.

Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996. xv-xxv.

Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2190-2220.

---. "When Species Meet." *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. 3-42.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "The Culture Industry." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 1242-46.

Jenkins, Henry. "Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture." *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, Eds. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2003. 281-312.

Lacan, Jacques. "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'" *Ecrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. 6-48.

Latour, Bruno. "Where Are The Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts." *The Object Reader*. Eds. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins. London: Routledge, 2009. 229-54.

Marx, Karl. "Capital." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 665-72.

Moretti, Franco. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (2000): 207-27.

Morton, Timothy. "First Thread." *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Existence*. New York: Columbia UP, 2016. 3-59.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18.

Plumwood, Val. "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism." *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 3-27.

Stryker, Susan. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage." *The Transgender Studies Reader*. Eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle. New York: Routledge, 2006. 244-56.

Woolf, Virginia. "A Room of One's Own." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1021-29.

Zizek, Slavoj. "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New Edition. New York: Verso, 2008. 1-55.

### **Books On Reserve**

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Purloined Letter." *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. James A. Harrison. New York: AMS Press, 1965. VI: 28-52. ( PS2601.H37 1965 v.6)

### **Assignments and Grade Distributions**

Participation: 10%

Discussion Facilitation (twelve - fifteen minutes): 20%

Seminar (twenty - twenty-five minutes) and Seminar Report (2,500 words): 30%

Research Essay (5000 words): 40%

### **Discussion Facilitation**

The discussion facilitation has two objectives. The first will be to select from the previous week's readings some critical idea, concept, or term, and to provide for the class a brief review of its meaning and function. The second objective is to relate this idea, concept, or term to our core literary text, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. If, for example, the previous week's class took up the work of Jacques Lacan, one might choose to review the function of the mirror stage, and ask the class to consider how this psychoanalytic concept helps us to better understand Shelley's novel, and, in particular, how it may illuminate the creature's own early encounters with language. Does the creature accede to the symbolic order in the manner that Lacan suggests? If not, why not?

The discussion facilitation should not, however, be thought of as providing a fully developed reading of the text. Elucidate the theoretical term or concept in detail, including quotations as necessary, but its application to the literary text should be in the manner of identifying possible passages for closer examination, framing questions, and guiding the ensuing discussion. The idea here is to offer the class as a whole the chance to help participate in developing a reading. Successful assignments, in short, will provide ample opportunity for the free exchange of views, and look for ways not only to relate the theory to the text, but the text to the theory. *Please observe the twelve to fifteen minute limit with care.*

### **Seminar Guidelines**

The Seminar is an oral presentation of no less than twenty minutes in length. Its goal is to provide a *critical* introduction to the assigned reading for that week. A critical introduction differs from a conventional literature review in that the presenter offers not only a synopsis of the main thesis of the essay, and some explication as to how this thesis is subsequently developed, but also a sense of evaluation: what points do you find most convincing, which least convincing, and why? The Seminar should be presented in such a way as to engender class discussion: while presenting its own thesis and preserving its own critical perspective, it should provide opportunities for dialogue and exchange, raising questions as often as answering them.

One week after the Seminar, a written report is due. This report should not be simply a transcript of the oral presentation, but rather a formal essay in style and tone that shows clear indications of having taken up and developed the feedback you received in class.

Grading will take into account both oral and written versions of the seminar equally. Successful seminars will demonstrate a thorough knowledge not only of the readings under consideration, but of the critical school to which they belong. They will, moreover, possess a strong sense of critical engagement with the assigned text, pointing out both strengths and weaknesses of its major theses, and a willingness to explore beyond the assigned material to discover connections between it and other materials discussed (or not yet discussed but still pertinent) in the class.

### **Essay Guidelines**

The research essay is your opportunity to provide a sustained examination of one of the major critics or critical schools of thought from the syllabus. The essay may touch on literary texts, but should not be a conventional "reading" of them, that is to say, an essay in which theory is simply

“applied” to a poem, play, or novel, in order to produce an interpretation of its thematic contents. The emphasis should fall, rather, on the critic or the critical school in question, with the aim of examining both the possibilities and limitations of its underlying assumptions and methodological principles. The essay may not repeat or extend material already presented in your seminar. As a research essay, you will be expected to engage with whatever secondary criticism that is relevant to your thesis, including both articles and monographs on the topic. You are strongly encouraged to discuss your essay ideas and topics with me early in your research process.

All bibliographic notation will employ the MLA method of parenthetical notation and a works cited page. A good online guide to the MLA method can be found [here](#).

### Academic Offences

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/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

### Lecture and Reading Schedule

Readings marked *LTAA* refer to Rivkin and Ryan. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Blackwell). Companion Readings are on reserve in Weldon Library. All others are available as .pdf documents through dropbox.

September	13	Introduction
	20	Structuralism & Post-Structuralism  Lecture: Saussure, “Course in General Linguistics” ( <i>LTAA</i> 137-77); Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” “Différance” ( <i>LTAA</i> 474-95), “That Dangerous Supplement” ( <i>LTAA</i> 496-17)
	27	Psychoanalysis  Lecture: Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams” ( <i>LTAA</i> 575-91), “The Uncanny” ( <i>LTAA</i> 592-614); Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” ( <i>LTAA</i> 618-23)  Seminar: Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” Companion Reading: Poe, “The Purloined Letter” (reserve)

October	4	<p>Marxism</p> <p>Lecture: Marx, "Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts" (<i>LTAA</i> 717-29), "The German Ideology" (<i>LTAA</i> 730-35), "Capital"</p> <p>Seminar: Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (<i>LTAA</i> 768-77)</p> <p>Seminar: Zizek, "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?"</p>
	11	Reading Week
	18	<p>Feminism</p> <p>Lecture: Woolf, "A Room of One's Own"; Gilbert and Gubar, "The Mad Woman in the Attic"; Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"</p> <p>Seminar: Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs"</p>
	25	<p>Post-Colonialism</p> <p>Lecture: Achebe, "An Image of Africa" (<i>LTAA</i> 1137-1146); Said, "Orientalism" (<i>LTAA</i> 1107-36); Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (<i>LTAA</i> 1191-1201)</p> <p>Seminar: Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" (<i>LTAA</i> 1147-62)</p>
November	1	<p>Queer and Trans Theory</p> <p>Foucault, "The History of Sexuality"; Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality" (<i>LTAA</i> 925-39); Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (<i>LTAA</i> 955-62)</p> <p>Seminar: Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet" (<i>LTAA</i> 1014-23)</p> <p>Seminar: Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein"</p>
	8	<p>Cultural Studies</p> <p>Lecture: Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Culture Industry"; de Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life"; Fiske, "Culture, Ideology, Interpellation"</p> <p>Seminar: Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's <i>Star Wars</i>? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture."</p>

November	15	<p>Eco-Criticism</p> <p>Lecture: Marland, “Ecocriticism” (<i>LTAA 1507-28</i>); Plumwood, “Nature, Self, and Gender;” Glotfelty, “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis”</p> <p>Seminar: Morton, “The First Thread”</p>
	22	<p>Thing Theory</p> <p>Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”; Brown, “Thing Theory”; Latour, “Where Are the Missing Masses?”</p> <p>Seminar: Bennett, “The Force of Things”</p>
	29	<p>Animal Studies</p> <p>Lecture: McDonnell, “The Animal Turn” (<i>LTAA 1471-85</i>); Haraway, “When Species Meet,” Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am.”</p> <p>Seminar: Lee, “Eating Things” (<i>LTAA 1529-46</i>)</p>
December	6	<p>Reading: Close, Distant, Surface</p> <p>Lecture: Brooks, “Keats’ Sylvan Historian” (<i>LTAA 21-28</i>); Beardsley and Wimsatt, “The Intentional Fallacy” (<i>LTAA 29-41</i>); Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”</p> <p>Seminar: Best and Marcus, “Surface Reading”</p>