

English 9003: Contemporary Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies.

Matthew Rowlinson, UC 2415

E-mail: mrowlins@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Wed and Fri 10-12 (or by appointment).

This seminar takes place on the traditional lands of the Attawandaron people (also known as the Neutral), associated with the various treaties of the Anishnabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapewak.

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*. 3^d ed. Blackwell, 2017.

Available as .pdf files in the course Dropbox folder

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0ynqzyrzwai26so/AAAAd24mXauTKtv7mTWr6oXAa?dl=0>

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.

Benjamin, Walter: “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.”

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" and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 vols. Translated by James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. Random House, New York: 1978.

----- *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,'" "The Instance of the Letter," *Ecrits : The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006.

Levine, Caroline. From *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*.

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

Marx, Karl. "Wage Labour and Capital; selection from *Capital*. David McLellan, ed. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. 2nd ed. Oxford UP: 2000.

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

Rancière, Jacques, "The Politics of Literature."

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

Optional reading

Austin, J. L. "Performative Utterances"

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 1,500 word paper on the topic below. This paper will be due in class on **October 18**. 25% final grade.

--A fifteen-minute oral explication of a passage from a text on the syllabus. Texts available for explication 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. In this assignment you should choose a passage to explicate for the class; it should be a paragraph or so in length, or maybe a page. Choose a passage you find especially hard to understand, ambiguous, or problematic. In your presentation, your job is to help the class understand the passage—you should explain any technical or foreign terms; you may want to consider the passages' original audience and context of publication; you should explain how the passage fits into the overall argument of the piece, and draw out any implications it has for critical practice. A good presentation in this genre should lead to questions and discussion to follow; you will be evaluated on your understanding of the passage you choose, on the clarity of your exposition, and on your handling of questions and other responses. 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 6 Introduction
- 13 **Marx**
Marx, “The German Ideology”* (*R&R* 730-35); From “Wage Labour and Capital”; From *Capital* “The Fetishism of Commodities.” *
- 20 **Psychoanalysis**
Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams” (*R&R* 575-91); “Fetishism”*; “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 597-605*; “The Uncanny”* (*R&R* 592-614) Companion Reading: Hoffmann, “The Sandman”
- 27 **Structuralism and the Linguistic Turn**
Culler, “The Linguistic Foundation” (*R&R* 134); Saussure, “Course in General Linguistics” * (*R&R* 138-44, 167-74); Barthes, “Mythologies” (*R&R* 196-204)*.
- October 4 **Deconstruction**
Derrida, “Différance”* (*R&R* 474-95); “That Dangerous Supplement”* (*R&R* 496-517); Paul de Man “Semiology and Rhetoric.”*
- 18 **Language and the Unconscious**
Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” (*R&R* 618-23)*; “The Instance of the Letter”*; “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”; Companion Reading: Poe, “The Purloined Letter”
- 25 **Ideology and Artistic Production**
Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”*; Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility”*; Louis Montrose, “New Historicisms,” (*R&R* 809-31).
- November 1 **Feminisms** Rubin “The Traffic in Women” (*R&R* 901-924)*; Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”*; Spivak “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” (*R&R* 1147-62); Sedgwick, from *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* 1-27*; Butler “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (*R&R* 955-62)*
- 8 **Queer Theory** Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality* 36-49*; Sedgwick “Epistemology of the Closet”* (*R&R* 1014-23)*; Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public” (*R&R* 1034-49); Muñoz, from *Cruising Utopia* (*R&R* 1054-65)*. Companion reading: J. L. Austin “Performative Utterances.”

- 15 **Post-Colonial Studies** Achebe, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (R&R 1137-46); Said, “Orientalism” (R&R 1107-36)*; Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (R&R 1191-1201).*
- 22 **Animal Studies and Biopolitics** Derrida *The Animal that therefore I am*, 47-64, 119-36*; Foucault from *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975-76*, 238-63; Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (R&R 792-808)*
- 29 **Politics, History, Form** Brooks, “Keats’s Sylvan Historian” (R&R 21-28)*; Foucault, “What is an Author?”* (R&R 217-30); Rancière “The Politics of Literature;” from Carolyn Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*.

1500 word paper topic: Derrida describes *différance* as something that "makes the presentation of being-present possible," but "never presents itself as such" (R&R p. 478). In the work of Derrida and one or two other theorists we have read, compare and contrast the accounts of something that does not 'present itself as such.' Must presentation or representation always exclude something? Under what (if any) circumstances might a total representation be possible? Due October 18.

As required by the University, I remind you that 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_gra_d.pdf

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.