

English 9003A: Contemporary Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies

Joshua Schuster

jschust@uwo.ca

Office: UC 2422

Office hours: Thurs 10:30-1:00, or by appointment

Room: UC4415

Course hours: Wed 3:30-6:30

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

Grading

60% final essay

15% oral presentation

25% class participation

Essay: The essay is a research paper of 20 pages on a topic pertaining to the course. A one-paragraph abstract will be due on November 13.

Oral presentation: The presentation is a 15-minute overview of the key issues of a chosen text. I want you to generally structure your presentation by highlighting **three** important concepts or terms from the reading and explicating these terms one by one. Please point to specific quotes in the text. Throughout the presentation, you should be raising questions for the class and outlining how you think we can get the most out of this reading.

Statement on 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/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Graduate Course Health and Wellness: As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health- related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. Information regarding health- and wellness- related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

Statement on Student Accessibility Services: Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counseling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. For more information, see <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/>

Western University Land Acknowledgment: Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Required Texts:

Vincent Leitch, et. al. eds., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Third Edition*.
Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008)

I will provide digital copies of essays marked with an “x” in a dropbox folder. It is preferable to print them out and bring them to class. Computers are not recommended in class.

September 11 – Structuralism and Formalism

Ferdinand de Saussure “Course in General Linguistics,” Roman Jakobson “Linguistics and Poetics,” Cleanth Brooks “The Well-Wrought Urn,” W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley “The Intentional Fallacy”

September 18 – Deconstruction and Post-Structuralism

J. L. Austin “Performative Utterances,” Paul de Man “Semiology and Rhetoric,” Jacques Derrida “Différance” (x), Jacques Derrida “Signature, Event, Context” (x), Roland Barthes “Reality Effect,” Recommended: Barbara Johnson “Translator’s Introduction to *Dissemination*” (x)

September 25 – Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud “Interpretation of Dreams,” “The Uncanny,” “Fetishism,” Jacques Lacan “The Mirror Stage,” “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Christopher Bollas “Paranoia” (x)

October 2 – Feminism

Virginia Woolf “A Room of One’s Own,” Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar “The Madwoman in the Attic,” Laura Mulvey “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Donna Haraway “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”

October 9 – **no class**

October 16 – Queer Theory

Michel Foucault “History of Sexuality,” Adrienne Rich “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Judith Butler “Gender Trouble,” Eve Sedgwick “Epistemology of the Closet,” Judith Halberstam “Trans*” (x)

October 23 – Marxism

Karl Marx “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” selections from “Capital, Vol. 1,” Louis Althusser “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Slavoj Žižek “How Marx Invented the Symptom” (x), Raymond Williams “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” Mark Fisher “Capitalist Realism, Ch. 1” (x)

October 30 – Historicisms

Fredric Jameson “The Political Unconscious,” Peter Stallybrass “Shakespeare, the Individual, and the Text” (x), Franco Moretti “Graphs, Maps, Trees,” Dipesh Chakrabarty “The Climate of History: Four Theses” (x)

November 6 – **fall break**

November 13 – Critical Race Theory, Post-Colonialism, Indigeneity

Franz Fanon, “Black Skin, White Masks,” Toni Morrison “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Ania Loomba “Situating Postcolonial Studies” (x), Lee Maracle “Oratory: Coming to Theory” (x), Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” (x)

Due: essay abstract

November 20 – New Formalisms, Aesthetics, Affects

Sianne Ngai “Ugly Feelings,” Rita Felski “After Suspicion” (x), Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, “General Introduction,” “Section 1: Genre Theory,” *Lyric Theory Reader* (x), Jonathan Culler “Lyric, History, and Genre” (x), Recommended: Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best “Surface Reading”

November 27 – Environmental Humanities

Timothy Morton “The Ecological Thought,” Rob Nixon “Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,” Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer “Introduction to the Energy Humanities” (x), Patricia Yaeger “Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources” (x), Stephanie LeMenager “The Humanities after the Anthropocene” (x)

December 4 – Human/Animal

Derrida “The Animal that Therefore I Am,” Recommended: Rosi Braidotti “Post-Humanism”

Final essay due Dec. 13