

ENG 310: HISTORY OF LITERARY THEORY & CRITICISM

MARIA MARGARONI

SPRING SEMESTER 2018

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

This course offers an introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory, giving you the opportunity to explore some of the concerns and debates that have remained central from Aristotle to the present. The main questions around which the course is structured are the following:

- What is the politics of English as a cultural institution and a discipline?
- What are the function and role of the Humanities today?
- What is the distinctiveness of "Literature" as an aesthetic category?
- Is "theory" parasitic over literature? How is the relation between the two to be re-imagined?
- How is literary value to be determined? How has the literary canon been formed?
- What is the relation between a literary work and the historical/institutional frame that encloses/defines it as such?
- If a literary text can always travel beyond the distinct local, historical borders that have shaped it, how can we conceptualize its worldliness?
- Is the relation between a literary work and its creator one of filiation?
- Does the author have *authority* over the text(s) s/he produces?
- In what ways is the concept of the "author" the product of particular historical coordinates?
- Are texts gendered? Are they racialized?
- Is meaning the destiny/destination of a text? If so, do texts always arrive at their destination?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)

- Develop a historically-informed understanding of the key developments in the wider field of contemporary literary theory and criticism;
- Appreciate the institutional politics of English as a discipline;
- Reflect critically on one's own experience of reading and discussing literary texts;
- Investigate the connections between aesthetic form, literary value, the socio-political functions of ideology and cultural power;
- Examine the central concerns and debates in post-1960s literary theory; develop the ability to comparatively discuss and evaluate different positions in these debates.

Key Skills (Practical Component)

- Apply the critical and analytical skills required in scholarly research to reflect on and evaluate the bibliography studied;
- Acquire the ability to put forward a theoretically-informed argument in a well-written academic essay;
- Debate the validity of different arguments and compose informed responses to the competing theoretical perspectives examined in the course;
- Develop effective presentation and argumentation skills.

GRADING

The final grade for this course will be based on:

- a) the completion of assigned reading *before* each meeting;
- b) *regular* attendance and *active* participation in class-discussions;
- c) a presentation on one of the theoretical texts studied in the context of the course and a position paper on this text (to be submitted two weeks after the presentation; 1500 words);
- d) an extended essay focusing on one or more of the key concerns/questions/debates discussed in class; the essay needs to draw on the theoretical material examined in the context of the course and to put forward a clear, coherent argument (up to 3000 words).

Please note that academic honesty is absolutely required: **plagiarism is unacceptable** in any form and will automatically lead to your failure in the course.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All primary texts are included in your course-packet.

USEFUL SECONDARY MATERIAL

Sean Burke, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern. A Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

T. S. Dorsch, trans., *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965).

Stathis Gourgouris, *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory for an Antimythical Age* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000).

Ann Jefferson & David Robey (eds), *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction*, 2nd edition (Batsford, 1986).

Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, trans. *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

David Lodge, ed., *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London & New York: Longman, 1972).

David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London & New York, 1988).

David Richter, *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000).

David Richter, ed., *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998).

Raman Selden & Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Harvester, 1993).

Ronald Schleifer & Robert Con Davis, *Criticism and Culture: The Role of Critique in Modern Literary Theory* (Longman, 1992).

Patricia Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Bennett, Andrew and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 2nd edition (Prentice Hall, 1999).

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

WEEK 1: *Introduction to the course*

David H. Richter, "Introduction: Falling into Theory," in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (New York and Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). 1-11.

Watch: "The Sixties – The Years that Shaped a Generation" (2005)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUc2eLe-rul>

"1968 Riots in Paris, French Strikes" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ersgPFNOonQ>

The Last Romantics, directed by Jack Gold (1992) Part I <https://vimeo.com/22791057>

The Last Romantics, Part II <https://vimeo.com/22791604>

WEEK 2: *What Is Literature?*

Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry," in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. T. S. Dorsch (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965). 31-41, 43-45, 49-52.

P. B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 337-356.

WEEK 3: P. B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (cont.)

Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965). 3-24.

WEEK 4: Stanley Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). (267-278).

Terry Eagleton, "The Rise of English" in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). 48-59.

WEEK 5: *The Subject of (in) Literature*

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 495-503.

Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," in *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London & New York: Longman, 1972). 35-42.

WEEK 6: Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London & New York, 1988). 166-172.

Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London & New York, 1988). 196-210.

WEEK 7: Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (cont.)

Virginia Woolf, from "A Room of One's Own," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 548-559.

WEEK 8: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference it Makes," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 1575-1588.

WEEK 9: ***Literature and Value***

F. R. Leavis, from *The Great Tradition*, in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 599-607.

Lillian S. Robinson, "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon" in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). 152-166.

WEEK 10: Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998). 1231-1253.

WEEK 11: Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Value" in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). 147-152.

Literature and the World

Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," in *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*, ed. David H. Richter, Second Edition (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000). 188-198.

WEEK 12: Edward W. Said (cont.)

Ranjan Ghosh, "More than Global," in *Thinking Literature Across Continents* by Ranjan Ghosh and J. Hillis Miller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016). 111-133.

WEEK 13: J. Hillis Miller, "Globalization and World Literature," in *Thinking Literature Across Continents* by Ranjan Ghosh and J. Hillis Miller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016). 134-152.

Debate Session