

English 614

“Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory”

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Office Hours: noon – 3 pm, W and by appointment

The goal of this course is straightforward. We will sample here – following a rudimentary chronology – some of the movements in thought that have shaped the study of literary and other cultural works. These movements have all been involved to a lesser or greater degree with some basic questions: What is a literary or cultural work? How does the specific medium in which it appears and the form that it takes become worthy of study? How is it to be studied? What is its relation to the world? What are its effects? How does it affect us? Of what use is theory and its study?

In short, this course is “meta” – it is meant to provide you with some thinking *about* literary and other cultural works that might then assist your study *of* it.

So at all times our goal will be to look out for how each movement that we study defines and understands the ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics of the literary and cultural artefact. Often the readings will seem to have little or no relation to a literary work, film or TV show but will seem like sociology, polemic, philosophy, political theory. Our task is to understand how such thought transforms our conception of the aesthetic domain and influences the methods through which we explore and invest in it.

Texts

PDFs and links to readings that I will post on BB (in 2-3 week chunks). If you need to know sooner what we are reading further down the road, get in touch with me. I follow this method since I like the flexibility of tailoring the readings to the pace and interests of the seminar.

Assignments

Presentations: These will go from Weeks 5-10 (2, sometimes 3 presenters, each class period). The goal of each presenter is to take one or two readings for that week and apply it to a study of a literary or cultural text of their choosing. We will workshop on Friday, Jan 16, what such an application sets out to do so that will give you one model for how you need to approach your presentation. The presentations will be 20 minutes each including 5 minutes or so for questions and discussion. It may include AV materials and handouts. I need a typed version of this presentation to provide feedback.

Abstract and Bibliography: An abstract and an annotated bibliography of your final project is due in Week 7. The bibliography should include 10 items including primary and secondary texts. The first 4 pages of your final paper (see below) are due Week 9. I will conference with each of you in person to give you feedback on this draft. There will be sign-up sheet available.

Final Paper: My hope, if we can accommodate this into our schedule, is to do a mini conference in Week 11 (March 18) when you will do a 15-minute presentation (7-page, less if you have clips) of your final paper. The final paper (12 pages) will be due on March 20.

Grading:

Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 80%

Schedule of Readings

Week 1 and 2: "New Criticism" and Close-reading workshop

Tate, Ransom, Brooks, Eliot, Wimsatt and Beardsley and two poems.

Week 3: "The Linguistic Turn: Structural Approaches"

Saussure, Beneveniste, Jakobson, Barthes

Week 4: "Marxist Cultural Theory: Structural Approaches"

Lukacs, Williams, Adorno, Jameson

Week 5: "Marxist Cultural Theory: Ideology and Superstructure"

Gramsci, Althusser, Ranciere, Balibar

Week 6: "From Subject to Subjection: Discourse and Power"

Foucault, Deleuze, D.A. Miller, Agamben

Week 7: "From Subjection to Subject: Postcolonial Theory"

Fanon, Said, Chatterjee, Chakrabarty, Schwarz

Week 8: "New Materialisms: The Question of Technology."

Benjamin, Kittler, Latour

Week 9: "After Representation: Affect 1"

Deleuze, Massumi, Marks, Shaviro

Week 10: "Politics as Bio-Politics: Affect 2"

Butler, Berlant, Ahmad, Ngai