Literary Theory and Criticism

Course Description

This course is an introduction to literary theory and criticism. It will “enhance understanding of the many different emphases, values, and priorities critics bring to literature, and the many available perspectives on what constitutes literature’s significance.” This section of English 251 will focus in particular on developing your ability to read literary theory with in-depth understanding. We will pursue this goal along two main avenues: (1) practice in the close reading of a selection of important and influential works of literary theory and criticism and (2) careful and sustained attention to key issues and questions in literary theory and criticism (issues and questions that are both historically resonant and immediately relevant).

Literary theory and criticism entail enquiry into the nature of literature; that is, enquiry into how literature is constructed, what literature seeks to accomplish, and what impacts literature has. As a component of Western thought, over the millennia literary theory has engaged a host of exciting ideas and questions, probing what makes literature good; the nature of the beautiful; the social role and value of creative writing; the nature of a text, genre, or work; the role of real and imagined readers; the motives and means of the writer; the relation between fiction and reality; the importance of different media; the connexions between literature and group identity; and so on. There is something for everyone to enjoy in the study of literary theory and criticism.

So far, most of you will have encountered literary theory only indirectly, through your practical training as good readers. In this course, we will look at some primary texts of literary theory and make explicit some things about your own reading practice that you would otherwise experience only implicitly. A key aim is to help you become a careful and astute reader of literary theory and criticism. After this course, then, you should have developed a new level of conceptual sophistication, a new set of concepts, and a new way of reading, all of which you can fold into your ongoing studies.

It will also introduce you to some key questions in literary theory and criticism, and give you an opportunity to explore their implications with the rest of the class.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students will:
1. Have an in-depth grasp of some key questions and concepts in literary theory and criticism.

2. Understand some of the principal developments in literary theory and criticism.

3. Be familiar with a range of ways to read and understand works of literary theory and criticism, both individually and in groups.

4. Construct insightful, well-evidenced, and clearly-written arguments about literary theory and criticism, and respond thoughtfully to the arguments of classmates.

5. Communicate verbally ideas and insights about literary theory and criticism clearly and effectively in class and group discussions.

6. Develop skills in critical analysis.

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Logistics

Office: Hagey Hall 267, ext. 33359
Office hours: Tues. 4:00-5:00 pm, Thurs. 11:00 am to 12:00 noon, or by appointment
Email: easton@uwaterloo.ca

Required Texts


Assignments

Attendance and active preparation for and participation in class discussions and exercises (10%); your best two out of three short assignments (5% each; 10% total); two short position papers (10% each); in-class midterm essay or 15-minute presentation (your choice = 20%); and a final examination (40%).

Students must prepare course readings ahead of the relevant classes and will actively participate in class discussions and exercises. Class exercises may include short written or spoken responses to the texts we are studying. Presentations, for those who choose to deliver one, will begin in the third week of classes; they will take the form of an explication of one of the works in Leitch that is not already on our syllabus.

For those who choose to write it, the midterm will be held on February 14. The short assignments will be due at the start of class on January 24, February 12, and March
12. The position papers will be due at the start of class on February 26 and March 28. Papers and assignments will be returned in class and at the final examination.

**Course Expectations**

**Participation and Attendance:**

Attendance and active participation are required for this course. To receive full marks for attendance, you will need to come to class. If you must miss a class due to illness or a family emergency, you will need to provide formal documentation such as that offered via Health Services or Counselling Services.

To receive full marks for participation in this course, you will need to engage actively in class discussions and activities. Keep in mind that in most workplaces, as well as in academic contexts, it is common to work in teams to craft communications or to speak to large or small groups on various matters—so these academic activities in class are relevant to your success right now on co-op terms as well as to your future working life. Nevertheless, if you feel anxiety about formal or informal public speaking, please meet with your instructor in the first week of class to discuss accommodations. Generally speaking, such accommodations may include weekly goals for increasing participation over the course of the term and alternative forms of participation. Failure to participate without having arranged for accommodations or without meeting the requirements of your arranged accommodation will result in deductions to your grade.

**Electronic Devices**

Use of electronic devices is not permitted during class meetings in this course. Phones and tablets must be turned off and stowed, and laptops must remain closed. Any accommodations for the regular use of electronic devices in this class must be requested in the first week of classes.

**Course Text**

The required text for this course *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 3rd ed. (2018). It is an outstanding one-volume collection of literary theory’s “greatest hits” and comes with excellent introductions to each theorist and solid explanatory notes. We’ll be using Leitch’s anthology as our exclusive textbook because of its excellence, its accuracy, and its scholarly notes and explanations. We also need to have a set anthology in order to have reliable course texts and uniform translations, uniform selections, and uniform page references for our in-class discussions and close analysis of our readings.

**Late Policy**

Barring a serious medical reason that is formally documented by Health or Counselling Services, all late assignments will be penalized 5 points for the first day, and
2 points for every day thereafter, including weekend days and holidays, and uncompleted or missed assignments will be graded 0 points.

Paper Format

Papers must follow MLA format, be typed, double-spaced, printed out on one side of the page, and fastened with a staple (DO NOT use plastic report folders or other fasteners or covers); please do not use right justification. Papers must follow the format for paper presentation, quotations, and references set out in the *MLA Handbook, 8th ed.*

Note: Please keep a copy of every assignment you submit to me, and NEVER hand a paper or any other assignment in by sliding it under (or sticking it to) my office door.

Plagiarism

Students must follow at all times both University and Faculty regulations on plagiarism (see especially Policy 71). Note, in particular, that all work must be your own, and the words and ideas of others must appear within your work inside quotation marks and with complete references. Demonstrated instances of plagiarism in your work for this course will be subject to academic penalties. (See below for more information on academic integrity.)

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Additional Information

**Academic Integrity and Discipline**

*Academic Integrity:* In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity webpage](https://www.uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity) for more information.

*Discipline:* A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. Check the [Office of Academic Integrity](https://www.uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](https://www.uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](https://www.uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity).
Grievance and Appeals

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

**Note for students with disabilities:** The AccessAbility Services office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.

Mental Health Support

All of us need a support system. The faculty and staff in Arts encourage students to seek out mental health support if they are needed.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 ext. 32655
- **MATES:** one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- **Good2Talk:** Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Phone: 519-749-4300 ext. 6880
- **Here 24/7:** Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- **OK2BME:** set of support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 extension 213
Full details can be found online on the Faculty of Arts [website](#).
Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources (PDF)](#).
Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information.

**Territorial Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

For more information about the purpose of territorial acknowledgements, please see the [CAUT Guide to Acknowledging Traditional Territory (PDF)](#).