UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
ENGLISH 251B: CRITICISM II
WINTER 2015
(Wednesdays and Fridays, 10:00-11:20, Hagey Hall 336)

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Office Hours: Wednesdays and Fridays 9:30-10:00, or by appointment

COURSE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
This course aims to:
• acquaint students with some of the major schools of literary theory and criticism from 1910 to the present,
• provide students with a toolbox of critical methods that will be useful for their further work in literary studies,
• teach students to think critically and reflectively about their approach to the analysis of literary texts, and
• encourage students to consider the purpose and meaning of the study of literature.

By the end of the course, you will:
• have a basic understanding of the evolution of literary theory from 1910 to the present,
• be able to deploy a number of literary-theoretical concepts effectively and carefully in the study and critique of literary texts,
• be able to comment concisely and effectively on issues in literary theory, and
• be able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to literary criticism and analysis.

READINGS AND CLASSES
In this day and age it is possible to access an extraordinarily wide range of literary texts online. We therefore have no course reader. The theoretical texts and literary we will read will be available either on electronic course reserve at the library or as a .pdf on the course LEARN website.

Do the reading carefully and be prepared to read it more than once before class. When reading, jot down any terms or arguments you find confusing, interesting or provocative. At the beginning of class I will usually ask each student to provide, in written form, two questions about the reading.

ASSESSMENT
Midterm examination: 25%
Tasks: 25%
Attendance and participation: 15%
Final essay: 35%
**Midterm examination:**

*Form:* In-class exam. You will be asked to define some critical terms, to discuss theoretical matters, and to do a brief analysis of a text.

*Submission date and method:* Wednesday, February 25th.

*Grading criteria:* Knowledge of the theory studied to that point (which will be Formalism and Structuralism); ability to apply the theory in textual analysis; the quality, persuasiveness and sophistication of the analysis; lucidity and organisation.

**Attendance and class participation:**

*Form:* You are expected to attend every class, to participate in class discussion, and to come prepared with two questions about the reading for that class.

*Submission methods and dates:* Attendance will be taken for every class and class participation noted. If you have an excuse for missing a class, please email me or leave me a note. You can miss classes for medical reasons and for unforeseeable personal difficulties. Every excused absence must be documented.

*Grading criteria:* If you attend every class but say nothing, you will receive a 70 for this part of the assessment. If you have more than three unexcused absences, you lose 20% from this part of your grade; more than six classes, 40%, and so on (which means 3% off your cumulative mark for the course for 4 absences, 6% for 7 absences, and so on). Class participation is graded on how well and how often you contribute. Contributions to discussion should demonstrate that you have read the material carefully and will be assessed on their relevance, interest, and originality. If you come to class without your two questions, you will lose 5% of the grade for this aspect of the course.

**Tasks:**

*Form:* Six times over the term you will have to write something brief, which may take the form of a critical analysis or a discussion of some theory. These will be 500-1000 words long and will submitted to a dropbox on the LEARN site.

- **Task 1:** Find a cultural work (visual, literary, documentary, video, whatever) which you think defamiliarizes something and explain how it does this.
- **Task 2:** Explain the terms language/speech (as used by Saussure) and sign/signifier/signified. Provide two examples of signs and explain how they are constituted by their difference from other signs.
- **Tasks 4, 5 and 6 will be announced during term**

*Submission method:* To be submitted to the relevant dropbox on the course website.

*Grading criteria:* Level of detailed attention to the text; accuracy of the analysis; demonstration of knowledge of critical tools; intelligence and interest of the analysis. Tasks that are late will be penalised 50% for the first three days and 75% thereafter.

**Final essay:**

*Form:* An analysis of a single work using the theoretical terms and methods we have studied on the course. You will be given a choice of texts on which to write. The final essay should be 2800-3200 words long (excluding bibliography and/or notes). If you want preliminary feedback, please send me a list of points you wish to make (in bullet point form) at least one week before the final deadline.
Submission method and dates: The essay is to be submitted electronically, in the appropriate dropbox on the website, by midnight on April 24th. The choice of works will be given to you in the penultimate week of the term.

Grading criteria: Intelligence with which you use the tools we’ve studied; the sophistication, inventiveness and persuasiveness of the analysis; the lucidity and elegance of the writing; the organization and presentation of the argument. I won’t expect any secondary reading, but you are welcome to support your analysis with some historical background if that’s appropriate. Final essays that are late will be penalised 3% for the first day and 1% each additional day.

Lectures and PowerPoint
The lectures will almost always involve PowerPoint presentations, which will be put on the course website after the lectures.

Academic Integrity:
Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. 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.

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.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals.

Other sources of information for students:
Academic Integrity website (Arts) Academic Integrity Office (UWaterloo)

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:
Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, 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.
**WEEK-BY-WEEK:**

**Week 1: Introduction**
*Wednesday*: Introduction, Syllabus

*Friday*: No class. Please read Gerald Graff, ‘Disliking Books at an Early Age’

**Week 2: Why do literary theory?**

*Wednesday (Jan 14): We will discuss:*
B) William Wordsworth, ‘Nuns fret not’:
http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/183937

*Friday (Jan 16): We will discuss:*
What the word ‘literature’ means. Prepare by reading the entry on ‘Literature’ from the Oxford English Dictionary (on-line – available through Library)

**Week 3: Russian Formalism**

*Wednesday (Jan 21): We will discuss:*

*Friday (Jan 23): We will discuss:*

**Week 4: Structuralism**

*Tuesday (January 27th), 8 pm: Task 1 due (see above)*

*Wednesday (Jan 28): We will discuss*
Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974), read the following selections:
The Object of Linguistics (8-17)
Nature of the Linguistic Sign (65-70)
Linguistic Value (111-22)
Syntagmatic Relations and Associative Relations, (122-7)
The Language Mechanism (127-34)

Focus your attention on the following concepts: language [*langue*]/speech [*parole*], sign/signifier/signified, linguistic value, syntagmatic and associative relations, ‘difference’.

*Friday (Jan 30): We will continue discussing Saussure*
Week 5: Structuralism
Tuesday (Feb 3), 8 pm: Task 2 due (see above)
Wednesday (Feb 4): We will discuss

Friday (Feb 6): We will continue discussing Roland Barthes and apply his ideas to: Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’

Week 6: Deconstruction
Tuesday (Feb 10), 8 pm: Task 3 due (see above)
Wednesday (Feb 11): We will discuss:

Friday (Feb 13): We will discuss:


Week 7:
Wednesday (Feb 25): Midterm Examination

Friday (Feb 27): Politics and Theory, Commitment and Form

Week 8: Marxist literary theory
Wednesday (March 4): We will discuss:

Friday (March 6): We will discuss

Week 9: Feminist literary theory
Tuesday (March 10): Task 4 due
Wednesday (March 11): We will discuss

Friday (March 13): We will discuss:
How we might apply feminist theory to ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ and two other detective stories.

**Week 10: Psychoanalysis and sexuality**

**Wednesday (March 18): We will discuss**

Sigmund Freud, Third Lecture from Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis in *Two Short Accounts of Psychoanalysis* (London: Pelican, 1963), pp. 55-68

**Friday (March 20): We will discuss**

Text TBA

**Week 11: Foucault, Queer theory/Literature and imperialism**

**Tuesday (March 24), 8 pm: Task 5 due**

**Wednesday (March 25): We will discuss**


**Friday (March 27): Literature and imperialism**


**Week 12: Postcolonial theory**

**Tuesday (March 31, 8 pm): Task 6 due**

**Wednesday (April 1):**


**Monday (April 6): Review class – how to write a critical essay**