English 251B–002: Criticism 2
T Th 4-5:20, ML 349

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Office hours: T 1-2, Th 2-3, and by appointment

THE COURSE:

An introduction to some theories of literature and theories of criticism. Focussing on the nature of representation, we will be concerned, first, with the ways in which “life” gets into texts (how life is represented) and, second, with the ways in which writers, critics, and readers make use of texts in personal, social, and political life. Along the way, we will be asking two related questions: What is literature or, more generally, what is art? and, since it is the primary medium of literary representation, What is language? The course is designed to acquaint you with the conversation about these questions, and to provide you with some tools to help you participate.

TEXTS:

Required
Raman Selden, ed. The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present, Longman
Gerald Graff, “Disliking Books at an Early Age” (handout)
Charles Bernstein, “Thelonious Monk and the Performance of Poetry” (on 1-hour reserve)
Dick Hebdige, “From Culture to Hegemony” (on 1-hour reserve)
Andrew Ross, “The Day Lady Died” (on 1-hour reserve)

Highly Recommended
M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms or similar text

NOTE: We will read literary texts on overheads and handouts that I bring to class.

SCHEDULE:

All readings are in The Theory of Criticism, except where noted.
Slight adjustments to the schedule may be made as we go: only regular attendance will allow you to keep in touch with the course as it unfolds.

Jan 4, 6        introduction; Graff, “Disliking Books at an Early Age” (handout); Arnold (494-501)
Jan 11, 13      Arnold continued; James (501-505), Lawrence (505-09); Wordsworth (86-88), (175-178), Mill (178-82); Keats (306-307); Plato (12-18), Yeats (31-35)
Jan 18, 20      Zola (51-56), Auerbach (56-59), Brecht (66-73)
Jan 25, 27      Pater (249-51), Huysmans (251-52), Wilde (252-54); Pound (307-310)
Feb 1, 3        Eliot (310-14), Shklovsky (275-77), Jameson (265-67)
Feb 8, 10       De Saussure (113-15), (351-53); Barthes (76-77) (318-20); TEST February 10
Feb 15, 17      Jakobson (367-71), Lodge (371-75); Genette (364-66)
**reading week**

Mar 1, 3 test questions distributed March 1; Austin (120-122), Charles Bernstein, “Thelonious Monk and the Performance of Poetry” (on reserve); Bernstein himself March 3

Mar 8, 10 TEST March 8; Freud (225-27), Lacan (236-38), Kristeva (238-41)

Mar 15, 17 Nietzsche (383-85), Derrida (385-90); De Beauvoir (533-37), Showalter (537-41), Cixous (541-43)

Mar 22, 24 Blake (457), Althusser (459-63) Brecht (66-70); Foucault (437-38); Benjamin (449-52)

Mar 29, 31 Hebdige “From Hegemony to Culture” (on reserve); Ross “The Day Lady Died” (on reserve)

Apr 5 ESSAY DUE; review

ASSIGNMENTS and VALUES:

test 1 (45 minutes): 10%
test 2 (one hour): 20%
group presentation (15-20 minutes): 10%

interview: 10%

essay: 20%

final exam: 30%

test 1: Thursday February 10
This test will consist of short essay answers

test 2: Tuesday March 8
You will one of several questions on a pertinent topic in theory distributed in class on March 1 and prepare an essay to write out during class on March 8.

Essay and interview: essay due April 6
You will choose a short primary text or excerpt (1) that has not appeared on the syllabus of any course in the department, and (2) that you can reproduce to accompany the essay. Your essay (about 1500 words in length) will develop a reading of the text that draws on the work of three theorists covered in the course.

The essay is worth 20%. You will also be evaluated (10%) for an interview with me during which you present your topic, thesis, and the general direction of the planned discussion. Ideally, you will use the interview to test your handling of text and theory and to advance the sophistication and point of your analysis. We will arrange these interviews as the due date approaches. All interviews must be completed by March 28.

Presentation:
About once or twice a week, starting around the third week of classes, a group of 3 or 4 students will present a reading of a primary text or excerpt drawing on the ideas of one theorist already covered in the course. The group may choose any text it likes (literary, visual, musical, etc.), with the exception of works on the syllabus of other English courses. The presentations as a whole have two aims: to provide the class with an ongoing review of theorists we have read, and to explore possible ways of linking theory and
interpretation experimentally and practically. Note that you must be able to present the text to us within the limits of the time and space of the presentation. The presentation should be about 15 minutes in length. Time for questions and discussion will follow. Please sign up by the end of the second week of classes. Your group must see me ahead of time for guidance and/or confirmation of what it plans to do.

The presentation will be graded for clarity and organization, the interest, surprise, and accuracy of analysis, and for the quality of your address to the class, including eliciting and handling of questions. Do not use overheads, except for showing your primary text or necessary illustrations. The substance of your presentation must be delivered orally. Normally, all members of the group will receive the same mark. However, at my discretion I will give extra marks to a student who presents with particular sharpness, insight, and point.

Final exam: two hours during the exam period
The exam will consist of a set of short essays (as in test 1) and one longer essay (as in test 2).

NOTES:

Please do not hesitate to see me about any aspect of the course, especially as you prepare your essays. I am free for discussion during my office hours, by appointment, and, at any other time that you happen to find me in my office unoccupied.

Tests must not be missed, and cannot be made up without documentation indicating positive and compelling reasons for absence. Likewise, the essay will not be accepted after the due date without documentation indicating positive and compelling reasons for lateness—except where extensions have been granted. If you want an extension of one or two days, you must contact me before the due date.

There will be no reason to use any secondary sources in this course. However, please be sure that you understand the concept of plagiarism. Note the following (the university’s plagiarism policy can be viewed complete online):

"Note on avoidance of academic offenses: All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p.1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean."
English 251B–Study Questions

The following is a list of questions that you might expect to find on test #2 and/or the final exam. They will likely seem opaque to you when the course begins. Keep them handy as the course proceeds and try to use them as a reference point for bringing class readings and discussion into focus around concerns that they highlight. Hopefully they will become transparent, one by one, as we proceed.

1. Write an essay on realism and various responses to it or extensions of it. In other words, discuss realism as it is generally understood and explain why some theorists have developed critiques of conventional realism and how they propose that literary representation should depart from it. Discuss three theorists.

2. Write an essay explaining various ways in which we might understand the relationship between artifice and “life.” If you wish, develop an analytic thesis about how we ought to understand that relationship. Discuss three theorists.

3. Structuralism marks a break with preceding theories, which are typically either author-centred or mimetic. Write an essay on how structuralism is different in its principles and how it changes the way in which we approach texts. (At least one of the three theorists you choose should not be a structuralist. Use contrast to highlight what is distinctive about structuralism.)

4. Althusser’s account of ideology has come to play a central role in literary theory, in part because of its power to explain how all kinds of representations produce meaningful effects. Write an essay showing in detail what Althusser meant by ideology, and explain two theorists who do not use the concept in terms of ideology.

5. Especially in the second half of the course, the question of authority will appear and reappear. Write an essay explaining why authority is a significant concept for thinking about literature, discussing some of the ways in which authority is conceived and produced. Discuss three theorists.

6. For Matthew Arnold “the rule” that should guide criticism “may be summed up in one word,—disinterestedness.” Write an essay on the nature and value of disinterestedness, first by discussing Arnold himself, and then by showing how two theorists either confirm or challenge (directly or by implication) the idea of disinterestedness.

7. Write an essay on the differences between tradition and the modern as starting points for theorizing literature (i.e. thinking about how it works, what is valuable, etc.) Discuss three theorists.

8. Many theories of literature have primarily social and/or political implications. Such theories may be concerned not just with how literature works or is valuable in the abstract, but how it should or ought to be meaningful in social contexts and for political ends. They may be concerned with reading and writing about literature not just as interpretation, but as a form of social criticism. Write an essay on these matters, paying close attention to three theorists.

9. Compare and contrast Arnold’s notion of culture and the notion developed by Dick Hebdige. Include one other writer in your discussion, suggesting how his or her work relates to these contrasting ideas of culture.