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Course Description  
Literary criticism has changed dramatically over the last 40 years or so, and the aim of this course is to introduce you to the ideas and techniques that have emerged in this time. These new ideas and techniques haven’t just refined, or improved, the inherited method of literary criticism: they have challenged it outright. Literary debate since the 1960s has questioned the very basis and purpose of literary criticism, to the extent that it has even thought aloud about whether there really is a definable category of written works that deserves to be fenced off as “literature”. In this course we’ll concentrate on three central areas of debate: whether there is such a thing as “literature” and how we decide what belongs to it and what doesn’t; the replacement of attention to words with attention to “signs” and “signification”; the debate over whether political questions have a role in the analysis of literary texts. Thought much of the discussion will be fairly abstract and general, we’ll strive to always bear in mind how these questions might affect the way we do literary criticism in the most ordinary, concrete sense.

Aims and outcomes  
This course aims to

- Acquaint students with some of the major debates taking place in literary theory and criticism from 1945 to the present.
- Introduce students to the work of several of the most important literary critics in this period.
- Encourage students to think critically about the purpose and meaning of the study of literature.

By the end of the course, you will

- Have a basic knowledge of literary critical debate from the end of the second world war to the present.
- Understand the significance these debates have for the way we approach the study of literature.
- Be familiar with a number of concepts drawn from recent literary theory.
Readings and Classes
The course is divided into three sections. The readings for the first and third sections will be available either on-line (if they are journal articles) or on reserve at the library. For the second section of the course you should purchase Terence Hawkes' book *Structuralism and Semiotics*.

Assessment
There are four kinds of assessment. The reading responses are due throughout the course. Each other assessment takes place at the end of one of the three sections of the course. The assessments are weighted as follows:

Reading Responses: 20%
Canon project: 25%
Signs examination: 25%
Politics and Criticism essay: 30%

Reading Responses: You will be expected to submit 6 of these over the course of the term. I'll drop the lowest mark when making the final calculation for this element. Responses are due at midnight before the relevant class. In each case you will be responding to the reading assigned for the following day. Responses should be 300-400 words long. Responses are due for the classes on January 15, January 24, February 26, March 4, March 13, and March 20.

Canon-building project: In the first section we ask what defines "literature" and explore recent controversies over what belongs and doesn't belong to the canon of works we study. As the assessment for this part of the course, you will, as part of a group, construct a canon of works that ought to be studied on an undergraduate degree in English. You may list the works, in appropriate categories, on one or two pages, and should append a rationale of five pages explaining your choices. These canons will be due at 5:00 pm on Wednesday January 30; they will be discussed at the class on January 31.

Examination on section two (signs): There will be an in-class exam on the material covered in section two on March 6.

Politics and Criticism essay: The final essay should be 6-8 pages long (excluding bibliography). It will be a discussion of a topic relating to the material covered in Section 3 of the course. This essay will be due on April 14.

Policy on late submissions and plagiarism
Late reading responses will receive only half-credit (i.e., I'll mark them on a scale of 0-50). Late final essays and other work will be penalized 3% for the first day late and 1% every day thereafter.

The University policy on plagiarism is as follows.

*Note on avoidance of academic offenses:
All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity,
to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. When the commission of an
offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic
Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult
the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at
www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). If you need help in learning what constitutes an
academic offence; how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission; how to follow
appropriate rules with respect to “group work” and collaboration; or if you need clarification of aspects of the
discipline policy, ask your TA and/or your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the
discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.”
“Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to
Policy #70, Student Grievance, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm.”
For further information, see:
http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Statement on accommodation for students with disabilities

“Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), 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 OPD at the beginning of each academic term.”

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

FIRST SECTION (JANUARY 8 - JANUARY 31): WHAT IS LITERATURE? WHY STUDY IT?
HOW TO BUILD A LITERARY CANON.

January 8-10
Tuesday: Introduction

Thursday: What is Literature? I
Reading: “Literature” entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (online in Library Reference).

January 15-17
Tuesday: What is Literature? II
Raymond Williams, “Literature” in Keywords; Terry Eagleton, “What is Literature?” in Literary

Thursday: What is a Canon?
3-15.

January 22-24: Building a Canon
Response due

January 29-31
Tuesday: Class time for Canon-building

Thursday: Discussion of Group Canons.

SECOND SECTION (FEBRUARY 5 – MARCH 6): WHY SIGNS, RATHER THAN WORDS, ARE WHAT WE STUDY.

February 5-7
Tuesday: Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-19 (Introduction and first two parts of “Linguistics and Anthropology”)

Thursday: Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, pp. 19-43 (on Lévi-Strauss)

February 12-14
Tuesday: Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, pp. 44-69 (Formalism, Jakobson)

Thursday: NO CLASS

February 26-28:
Tuesday: Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, pp. 69-86 (Greimas and Todorov)
Reading response due.

Thursday: Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, pp. 86-99 (Barthes)

March 4-6:
Tuesday: Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, pp. 100-133 (Chapters 4 and 5)
Reading Response due

Thursday: Examination on Sections Two

THIRD SECTION (MARCH 11 – APRIL 3): THE PLACE OF POLITICS IN LITERARY CRITICISM

March 11-13: Writing and Commitment

March 18-20:
Tuesday: Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary”, in *Resources of Hope* (London: Verso 1989)


March 25-27
Tuesday: Selections from Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Thursday: YBA

April 1-3: Should Criticism be Political? Can it avoid being Political?
Tuesday: Gerald Graff, “When is Something ’Political’?” in *Beyond the Culture Wars* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), pp. 144-70.

Thursday: Review session