

**Literary and Cultural Theory:  
An interdisciplinary introduction**

Spring 09

K20.1314/M-W 11-12:15

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Theory: Gk. *theoria*; a looking at, viewing, contemplation, speculation...also a sight, spectacle...

*"I believe that theory begins to supplant philosophy (and other disciplines as well) at the moment it is realized that thought is linguistic or material and that concepts cannot exist independently of their linguistic expression."* Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms For Theory?"

*Description:* This course functions as a form of introduction, aspiring to depth as well as breadth. We will be examining some of the dominant theoretical trends that have shaped and continue to shape work in the humanities and social sciences. We hear about 'theory' and we hear an array of names associated with it— Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, Adorno, and so on—very often. That which falls under the broad (and often ill-defined) rubric 'theory' has helped scholars develop the kinds of questions that get asked, the kinds of topics that get investigated, in a variety of disciplines today. Literary and cultural theory, in fact, underwrites in large measure the very notions of the interdisciplinary. All too often, however, the work of theoreticians themselves seems difficult to access and hard to read. In this course, we will examine several questions that arise for those of us interested in the relation of theory to interdisciplinary study. What is theory anyway? How does it help us to develop approaches and questions for study? What are some influential theoretical schools and theoreticians? What do they say and how might they be related to one another?

In this course, we'll work to acquire knowledge of the genealogy of contemporary literary and cultural theory; to acquire a degree of proficiency in using one or more central approach in order to read texts; and by attending to some of the conflicts raised around and within contemporary theory, to raise questions about the status of the theoretical in framing knowledge, in helping us think about what constitutes knowledge in the humanities and in some of the social sciences.

**Texts:**

Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory*, second edition

Barry, *Beginning Theory*

Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

Essays to be made available via Blackboard or photocopy

**Requirements:**

*Written assignments:* There will be one response paper, of roughly a page or two, due each week. There will be four papers of 5-7 pages each across the semester in which you will theorist or a specific approach.

*Attendance:* You must be here. More than three absences will affect your grade negatively. More than five will cause you to fail the course.

*Punctuality:* Once in a very great while, one is unavoidably detained by acts of nature or technology. Habitual lateness, however, is very problematic. Please be on time.

*Participation:* This course is predominantly run as a seminar. That means that a lot of it depends on your engagement. You should come to class having read the assigned material carefully and well; you should be ready to discuss.

## Schedule

[please note: this schedule is subject to emendation as we along, depending on class interests, etc]

January 21: ...speculating, theorizing, thinking. Introductions.

January 26: Northanger Abbey. Response Paper.

January 28: Structuralism[s].

Saussure, fr. *A Course in General Linguistics*

Culler, "The linguistic foundation;" Storrock, "Language"

February 2: Levi Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth;" \* Storrock, "Social Sciences"

February 4: Barthes, fr. "Mythologies;" Storrock, "Literature"

February 9: Post-structuralism

Heidegger, "Identity and difference;" Derrida, "Differance"

Rivkin and Ryan, "Introductory Deconstruction;" Barry, chapter 3; Storrock, "Post-Structuralism"

February 11: Derrida, cont'd.

February 16: Presidents' Day

February 23: Foucault and his friends: Foucault, fr. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

February 25: Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in the Extra-Moral Sense"\* [fr. *Untimely Meditations* ]

March 2: Foucault, "What is an author?"

March 4: TBA

March 9: "The Subject and Power"

March 11: Foucault, cont'd: "Technologies of the Self."

March 16-22: Spring Break

March 23 : Psychoanalysis from Freud to Lacan [or vice versa]

Freud, fr. *The Interpretation of Dreams*

March 25: "Narcissism: An introduction"

March 30: Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I'"

April 1: Freud/Lacan cont'd.

April 6: The Frankfurt School: Mass culture, modernity, and the question of critique

Horkheimer, "Traditional and critical theory" \*

April 8: Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Culture Industry"

April 13: Cont'd.

April 15: Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" \*

April 20: Gender and Governmentality: The Curious Case of *Northanger Abbey*

Readings TBA.

April 22:

April 27:

April 29:

May 4: Last class: Wrap up.

May 9: All final papers due.