

English 372, Contemporary Literary Theory, Fall 2003

Pat Day, Rice 114 Office Hrs: TH 2:30-4:30 & by Arrangement

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Week/ Day	Readings	Supplemenatry Readings
Week 1 Sept. 2	ERes: "The Dehumanization of Art" by Ortega Y Gasset "Tradition and the Invidual Talent" T. S. Eliot "The Heresy of Paraphrase" by Cleanth Brooks On Blackboard: William Wordsworth "Tintern Abbey" Samuel Taylor Coleridge "Kubla Khab" John Keats "Ode on a Grecian Urn"	Samuel Taylor Coleridge selections from <u>The Biographia Literaria</u> William Wordsworth Preface to <u>Lyrical Ballads</u> Matthew Arnold "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" I. A. Richards "Communication and the Artist" W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. & Monroe C. Beardsley "The Intentional Fallacy"
Week 2 Sept. 9	"The Object of Study" & "The Nature of the Linguistic Sign" by Sausurre "Polemical Introduction" by Northrop Frye "Literary Genres" by Tzvetan Todorov ( "Structuralism & Literature by Gerard Genette	Sigmund Freud "The Uncanny and The Dreamwork" Jean Piaget "Introduction and Location of Problems from <u>Structuralism</u> " Joseph Campbell "Myth and Dream" from <u>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</u> Claude Levi-Strauss "The Structual Study of Myth"
Week 3 Sept. 16	tructure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"& from Of Grammatology by Jacques Derrida, "The Insistance of the Letter in the Unconscious" by Jacques Lacan "What is an Author?" by Michel Foucault	
Week 4 Sept. 23	<u>Housekeeping</u> by Marilyn Robinson	"The New Sentance" by Ron Silliman
Week 5 Sept. 30	The Death of the Author" & The Pleasures of the Text by Roland Barthes, "Sorties" & "The Laugh of the Medusa" by Helene Cixous	"Against Interpretation " by Susan Sontag
Week 6 Oct. 6	W-F "Interpreting the Variorum" by Stanley Fish, "Race, Gender & The Politics of Reading" by Michael Awkward	Wolfgang Iser "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach. " V. N. Voloshinov : "Social Interaction and the Bridge of Words"
Week 7 Oct. 13		

Week 8 Oct 20 Break Week	<b>Fall break</b>	
Week 9 Oct. 27	<u>The Handmaid's Tale</u> by Margaret Atwood	
Week 10 Nov. 3	"Geneology, Nietzsche, History" by Michel Foucault, "Orientalism" by Edward Said, "Literature, History, and Politics," by Catherine Belsey, "Against Tradition: Towards a Particularized Theory of Literary History" by Marilyn Butler	Georg Lukacs "The Ideology of Modernism" Hans Robert Jauss, from <u>Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory</u>
Week 11 Nov. 10	'Salem's Lot by Stephen King	
Week 12 Nov. 17	"The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," by Frederic Jameson "Manifesto for Cyborgs" by Donna Haraway, "Simulation and Simulacrum" by Jean Baudrillard	Gregory Ulmer "The Miranda Warnings: An Experiment in Hyperrhetoric"
Week 13 Nov. 24 Thanks giving	M & W: <u>Without You, I'm Nothing</u> , produced by Jonathan Krane, dir. John Boskovich, written by Sandra Bernhardt & John Boskovich	
Week 14 Dec. 1	M: "The Post-Modern Prometheus" produced, directed, and written by Chris Carter W: "These Laocustrine Cities" by John Ashbery F <u>The Man in The High Castle</u> by Philip K. Dick	Draft of final essay due this week.
Week 15 Dec. 8		

All these readings are available in Eres, except where noted. A hard copy of each should also be available in the reserve room. For secondary readings available only in hard copy, see the end of the syllabus

### **Mechanics of the Course.**

1) I assume valuable things happen in class sessions. I take attendance; I expect you to keep track of your attendance too, because "I didn't realize I'd missed that many classes" is not an excuse. We only have 39 classes, less than 39 hours over the semester. More than 4 absences will affect your grade. The issue is not why you are absent but that you have missed class, which is an essential part of the course; missing class sessions is no different than not handing in written work. In the economy of your existence, some things may seem more important to you than attending class; I recognize that and don't take such choices personally, but you need to understand there are consequences to such decisions. You may get sick or have family emergencies, but the best way to deal with that is to make sure you come to class, so if those things happen, illness and emergencies won't affect your grade.

This also means showing up on time. I'm aware that things happen, but regularly strolling in 5 minutes after class starts is a very bad idea.

2) You have to participate in the class. Participation doesn't mean talking a lot, it means being engaged in the interchange among the members of the class: asking good questions, responding to other people's questions, thinking before you talk. In order to prepare you should before each class, take some time to write about the topic/assignment for the day; even a short paragraph is enough. You should also write down questions you would like to raise. I'm not going to collect these pieces of writing, but I expect you do do this because this will help you get more out of the course.

Talking in groups such as a class is a skill, every bit as much as writing is. It's a skill worth having, because in fact a lot of work in all institutions gets done in that way. Being able to talk effectively in a group is, as they say, an important "self-empowerment." I know that a number of people have trouble speaking up in class. You should feel as free to consult me on strategies and methods for doing that as you'd to consult me about your writing.

At the end of the semester I may ask you to write a brief report and self-evaluation on your participation.

3) You have to form, with other members of the course, a discussion group that meets outside of class once a week. Some groups prefer to meet before discussions and/or lectures, other prefer to meet after. That's up to each group to decide. Groups should be 4 people, 5 maximum. Each week I want each group to hand in a question/comment you've come up with together to be posted on Blackboard.

### **Incomplete Policy**

Academic or emergency incompletes are yours to take if you want, as long as you are in good standing in the course. You don't need to tell me the story, unless you want to; I trust that you wouldn't take an incomplete without a good reason. "Good Standing" means that you have completed all the work assigned for the first module and at least some of the work for the second

### **The Honor Code**

It should go without saying that I expect you to hand in your own work, not somebody else's. Thus obvious cheating--buying papers off the net, using somebody else's essay from another course, lifting unacknowledged sections from other people's writing--is plagiarism. You simply can't learn anything from this sort of thing,

But having a real intellectual life does not mean hiding from other people's thoughts in hopes of staying "original" but instead responding imaginatively and creatively to the influence of other people's ideas. I expect you to read each other's writing and talk to each other about your ideas. If you find suggestions, comments or observations by someone in the class, or even someone you know outside the class, particularly important to your thinking and writing, you can acknowledge them in the text or in a note.

According to the rules, each piece of written work must be accompanied by the Honor Pledge ("I have adhered to the Honor Code in completing this assignment.")

### **Writing Assignments**

- \* Written work must be handed in on time.
- \* Late essays will be accepted at the discretion of the instructor
- \* All work must be handed in in order to get credit for the course.
- \* Hard copy must be typed, double-spaced, stapled, pages numbered.
- \* Backs of previously used paper is fine for drafts; final version should be printed on both sides of the sheet.
- \* Essays must have a title, though they don't have to have a cover sheet.
- \* References should be in the following form: (Wordsworth, "Preface" p. 2) with full citation in end notes

### **Short Assignments**

I'll assign each of you 2-4 days on which you have a short essay due. Essays should be about 600 words..

### **The Final Essay**

A 3000+ word (10-12 pages) essay on a topic of your choice. The essay will be developed over the course of the semester in five stages. I am open to proposals for

different kinds of final projects, though they will require a proposal, a progress report, and a final report/ reflection on the project. The assignment are on line on this course's Blackboard pages.

#1. A 750 (3-4 pages) word essay explaining why you're taking the course and what specifically you want to get out of it.

#2. Midterm essay, 1200 words. (5 pages) This essay will take the form of a reflection on what we have done in the first half of the semester. You may revise or reflect back upon your first essay, or you can write something totally new. Due the week before Spring Break

#3 Proposal. A brief 500 word explanation of what you think you want to write about and why you think this is important. due week 11

#4 First Draft. Due week 13. I'll read and comment on this draft. It should be as complete as possible, but I don't expect a "finished" product.

#5 Final Draft.

### **How I comment on your written work.**

The comments on your writing will be, as one former student put it, "ambiguous." I don't do much "this is good, that's bad" commenting. The comments I make will be directed to making you think about what you're writing about, raising issues you may want to consider in revising, or writing about in the next short essay. I do this because you need to develop the ability to judge your own work, rather than to always expect to be told whether it is good or bad by someone else. Thus, I may not always comment on your short essays.

For specific advice on how to revise, what to do with a particular argument, etc., we should set up a conference.

### **Grading**

Though you will get comments and responses to your work, you won't receive any grades over the course of the semester. This isn't because the grade is unimportant (if it was unimportant we wouldn't give it, would we?) but because the work in the course is part of a process, rather than a sequence of discrete units. If I am trying to encourage you to use your writing to be experimental and speculative, leading to your final essay, it makes little sense to grade it along the way.

I also think that micro-evaluation becomes overbearing and keeps people from learning how to realistically evaluate their own work, which I think is a major goal of liberal arts education.

If you want a sense of how you're doing, you should feel free to come and speak to me about your work. I will be able to tell you if you are making what I see as reasonable progress, what things you may want to work on, what things you seem to be doing best. I won't be able to be extremely precise about a grade equivalent, however.

Occasionally students will ask about a response to an essay or a final grade by saying "I worked very hard on this essay." I assume, absent clear evidence to the contrary, that *everybody* works hard. I can't evaluate anything but what I can see and hear--the things you write, what you say in class, etc. The grade in a course can't really evaluate how hard you worked, just as it doesn't directly reflect what you have learned. It reflects my professional evaluation of the work you produced. This doesn't seem at all unfair to me--it is simply built into the grading system as it exists.

On a rough scale, though, I would say that if you are doing intelligent analysis of the works we consider and are able to state your own views clearly, that is C- to C+ work. If you are able to interpret the material we are working with, discuss not only what is "said" but what its significance might be, you would be in the B- to B range. If in addition you can demonstrate a capacity for self-reflective critical work (thinking about your own way of thinking and what it means to think as you do) you would be in the B+ to A range. So these are the kinds of mental activity you will be doing in the course: analysis & response, interpretation, and self-reflection.

I don't have any grade quotas--if everybody in the course does A work, I have no problem giving everybody an A. But I want to make clear that I consider B- or B to be a perfectly good grade; if you think that anything lower than a B+ is unacceptable to you, maybe you should consider taking another course.

## Secondary Readings on Reserve

**Structuralism and Since**, edit by John Sturrock. Bio-critical essays on the “Big Five” Structuralism & Post-Structuralism—Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault.

Three Short (@100 pages) on major influences on contemporary theory

Heidegger by **Michael Inwood**  
 Freud by **Anthony Storr**  
 Nietzsche by **Michael Tanner**

Primary Works by these writers.

Heidegger **Basic Writings**  
 Freud Civilization and its Discontents  
 Nietzsche The Genealogy of Morals

Critical essays applying “theory” to a particular work

Frederick Karl, "Introduction to *Danse Macabre*: Conrad's **Heart of Darkness**"  
 (biographical/historical)

Adena Rosmarin, "Darkening the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism and **Heart of Darkness**"

Johanna Smith, "Too Beautiful Altogether: Patriarchal Ideology in **Heart of Darkness**"  
 (feminism)

J. Hillis Miller, "**Heart of Darkness** Revisited" (deconstruction)

Brook Thomas, "Preserving and Keeping Order by Killing Time in **Heart of Darkness**"

Warren Montag, "The Workshop of Filthy Creation: A Marxist Reading of **Frankenstein**"

Lee Heller, "**Frankenstein** and the Uses of Cultural Criticism"

**Writing Assignment #1 Due via email on Thursday, Sept. 4 by 6 pm**

It's useful for people in the course to get an idea of why other folks are here. It's also useful for you to clarify for yourself why your taking a particular course and what you expectations are. It's also important for this course to get used to the idea of writing as public communication rather than either private reflection or an address exclusively to the instructor.

In this essay of about 750-900 words (around 3 pages in hard copy) try to explain what you think "theory" is about and why you want to spend a semester studying it. You may want to think about how you imagine this course fitting into the other courses you've taken here. This account will by necessity be intimate but need not be personal; that is, rather than an autobiographical narrative, you're communciating the ideas you've arrived at on this subject more than the route by which you got there.