

## ENGL-5110-M01 Literary Theory

Prof. Anne Dewey

Fall 2014

3 credits

Wednesday, 14:00-16:45

Office: San Ignacio Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Office 4

Office Hours: Monday, 9:30-12:00, Wednesday, 11-12, Friday 9:30-12:00

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to literary theory as a crucial tool of scholarly interpretation. Through its multiple perspectives on literature, theory enriches our ways of reading and heightens awareness of the implications that our critical choices have for understanding literature and its social and cultural function. We will study major theoretical movements since the emergence of literary theory c. 1900 as a criticism-oriented (as opposed to a practice- or craft-oriented) approach to literature (formalism, rhetorical and phenomenological criticism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, historicisms, structuralism and deconstruction, feminism, theories of race and ethnicity, gender/queer theory, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and the “end of theory”) to understand not only each theory in itself but also the way it develops within, responds to, and transforms a particular social and intellectual context. We will examine how scholars’ theoretical approaches generate dramatically different readings of literature and explore the productive potential of various theories in interpreting literary works from different periods and genres (Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September*, and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*).

Through seminar discussion, oral presentations, and a series of short papers, you will practice explicating and comparing different theories; identifying and critiquing other scholars’ critical approaches; and incorporating theory into their own writing about literature.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Michael Ryan and Julie Rivkin. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> or most recent edition, paperback (2<sup>nd</sup> edition = 2004, ISBN 978-1-4051-0696-2)

Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. 1603-04.

Bowen, Elizabeth. *The Last September*. 1929.

Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. 1990.

### COURSE POLICIES

**Requirements:** Class attendance and participation; completion of reading assignments; completion of class exercises; completion of all papers and presentations. Graduate class discussion should be driven by lively participation in scholarly dialogue, airing original insights and questions, sharing scholarly knowledge, and listening constructively to fellow students. Being a good listener is crucial to being a good colleague. It should go without saying that attendance is essential. Three “unexcused” absences signals that the student has chosen to withdraw from (or fail) the course. (Please let me know if you are going to miss class.)

**Academic Integrity:** Please inform yourselves of SLU's Academic Standards (in Graduate Education catalogue, especially those regarding Academic Integrity/Ethical Behavior (link to Graduate Education in on the SLU Madrid MA in English webpage). The *MLA Handbook* also has an excellent section on plagiarism, both scholarly standards and how to avoid plagiarism including unintentional or unconscious plagiarism through good note-taking practice.

**Students with Disabilities:** In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors (e.g., prior experience, study skills, learning disability), resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.

University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services, Disability Services) by visiting the Academic Dean's Office (San Ignacio Hall) or by going to [http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning\\_resources.html](http://spain.slu.edu/academics/learning_resources.html).

Students who believe that, due to a disability, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services at +34 915 54 58 58, ext. 204, send an e-mail to [counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu](mailto:counselingcenter-madrid@slu.edu), or to visit the Counseling Office (San Ignacio Hall). Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Course instructors support student accommodation requests when an approved letter from Disability Services has been received and when students discuss these accommodations with the instructor after receipt of the approved letter.

**Grading policy:** Your goal as graduate students is to develop the skills of literary criticism, research, writing, and oral presentation needed to become good scholars and teachers. Because much of what you do is "work in progress," I grade holistically with an eye to rewarding development and improvement. As a general orientation, class participation is approximately 15%, each short theory paper 10%, each article review 5%, the independent theory presentation 15%, and the final paper 25% of your final grade.

The shorter papers may be work in progress toward your final project.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS

**Class structure:** As part of class preparation, you will alternate presenting either 3 theoretically informed questions, a 2-3 page paper on *the previous week's* reading, or a summary and critique of an article. We will usually spend first part of class discussing the new theory reading and the second part discussing questions and interpretations you develop from the previous week's reading.

*Theoretically informed questions:* Explore how a theory illuminates new aspects of a literary text by:

1. Formulating 3 questions about one of our primary texts that emerge from one or more of the previous week's critics' theoretical approaches to literature
2. Identifying 2-3 passages or formal aspects of the text (e.g., passages, plot structures, narrative voice...) from which to develop discussion of this question. Consider, for example, the way a theory leads you to read a specific passage, calls attention to a structure in the text, might raise questions about how to

interpret any other element in the work (character, narrative voice or perspective, structure, imagery, diction...).

*Theoretically informed papers:* These papers are relatively informal, 2-3 pp. experiments “applying” theory to interpret our primary texts, to be presented (read) in class. How does a critical concept or perspective open new questions and insights into literature? Develop an interpretive argument that uses a concept or reading technique from a theory we have read to find new meaning in the literary text. Be sure to clarify your understanding of the theoretical concept on which you draw using evidence from the theoretical text(s) and to support your interpretation with textual evidence.

*Papers on a given theory are due the class after we have discussed his/her work.*

*Article/book reviews:* This “review” is essentially a 1-2 pp. summary and critique, to be presented in class. It gives you the opportunity to identify and analyze in depth the theoretical approach of one critical article, ideally one important to your views as a critic and/or your project. Evaluating this article helps you to articulate your own position in relation to it.

1. The summary should be synthetic, identifying briefly the critical perspective(s)/ grounding theoretical assumptions from which the article is written and how its fundamental argument develops from these assumptions.
2. The critique characterizes and contextualizes the article’s contribution in a community of knowledge/inquiry you define by identifying differences in approach, method, and conclusions from other scholarship in the field. In developing your critique, assess the kind and adequacy of the evidence and method(s) of analysis used.

*Independent Theory Presentations:* Research and prepare a 10-15 minute presentation that introduces the class to an area of theory not covered in the syllabus. Your report should include:

1. Origin of this theory in a particular historical/intellectual context and previous theories, considering its “genealogy,” reaction against the past, response to historical, social, cultural events influencing thinker
2. Characterization of the main ideas, in general and/or through the ideas of key thinkers
3. Example of how this approach illuminates a work of literature
4. Problems or challenges you find in the theory, if you have them

Areas to consider and some interesting books: affect theory (Lauren Berlant on sentiment, Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, Brian Massumi...), biopolitics (Giorgio Agamben), disability studies (various), new lyric studies (Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery*; special issue on lyric of *PMLA*), celebrity studies (special issue of *PMLA*), comparative racialization (Caroline Rody, *The Interethnic Imagination*; special issue of *PMLA*) ecocriticism (Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*), disability studies (many books in library: Garland-Thompson, Lennard, Quayson...) ethnographic approaches to literature, posthumanism (Dominick LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*), transnational studies (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Paul Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*; Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*), trauma theory (Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*)

*Final interpretive paper:* A theoretically informed, 6-8 pp. analysis one of the literary texts we have read or your own theoretical essay. In either case, the paper should place your work in relation to scholarly thinking to date on the issue and articulate clearly your critical approach and its contribution.

## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

**September 3**                    **Introduction**  
**Reflection on your theoretical assumptions**

**September 10**                **Formalisms: Russian and New Criticism**  
Rivkin and Ryan Introduction (RR 3-6), Shklovsky (RR 15-21), Brooks (RR 28-39), Jakobsen (RR 76-80)  
Matthew Brown, "Strange Associations: Elizabeth Bowen and the Language of Exclusion." *Irish Studies Review* 20.1 (2012): 3-24. (e-journal)  
Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, Chapters 1-6  
Bowen questions and papers 1

**September 17**                    **Structuralism, Linguistics, Narratology**  
Rivkin and Ryan Introduction (RR 53-55), Culler, de Saussure, Propp, Barthes (RR, 56-75, 81-89)  
Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, Chapters 7-12  
Jed Esty. "The Last September and the Antidevelopmental Plot." *Modern Fiction Studies* 53.2 (2007): 257-75.  
Bowen questions and papers 2

**September 24**                    **Rhetoric, Phenomenology, Reader Response**  
Rivkin and Ryan Introduction (RR 127-130), Kant, Austin, Fish ("Interpretive Communities"), Bourdieu (RR 131-136, 162-176, 217-221, 237-253)  
Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, Chapters 13-18

**October 1**                        **Post-structuralism and Deconstruction**  
Rivkin and Ryan Introduction (RR 257-261), Derrida ("Différance"), Johnson, Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari (278-299, 340-354, 378-386)  
Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*, Chapters 19-end  
Bowen article reviews

**October 8**                        **Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan**  
Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Freud ("Interpretation of Dreams," "The Uncanny," "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"), Lacan ("The Mirror Stage") (RR 389-396, 397-414, 418-437, 441-446)  
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Acts I and II  
Derrida on *Hamlet* from *Specters of Marx* (handout)  
Freud on *Hamlet* from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (handout)  
Shakespeare questions and papers 1

**Week 15****Psychoanalysis: Further Developments**

Lacan (“The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious”) (RR 447-461)  
Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time” and from *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (handout)  
Fanon, “The Negro and Psychopathology” (RR 462-469)  
Van der Kolk and McFarlane, “The Black Hole of Trauma” (RR 487-502)  
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Acts III and IV  
Shakespeare questions and papers 2

**October 22****Historicisms**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Foucault, Armstrong (RR 505-507, 549-583,)  
Greenblatt, from *Hamlet in Purgatory* (“Imagining Purgatory,” “Remember Me”)  
Leslie Dunn, “Ophelia’s Songs in *Hamlet*,” handout  
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V  
Shakespeare article reviews

**October 29****Political Criticism: Marxism to Cultural Materialism**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Hegel, Marx (“The German Ideology”), Gramsci,  
Althusser, Zizek, Sinfield (RR 643-649, 673, 693-702, 712-724, 743-762)  
Walcott, *Omeros*, Chapters 1-14  
Walcott questions and papers 1

**Thursday, October 30****Last day to drop a class and receive grade of W****November 5****Feminism**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Rubin, Irigaray (“The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine”), Spivak, Lorde (765-798, 838-859)  
Walcott, *Omeros*, Chapters 15-27  
Walcott questions and papers 2

**November 12****Gender Studies**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Foucault, Butler, Sedgwick, Moon, Halberstam (885-956)  
Walcott, *Omeros*, Chapters 28-41  
Walcott article reviews

**November 19****Colonial and Postcolonial Theory**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, Loomba, Said, Bhabha, McClintock, Lawson (1071-1074, 1100-1125, 1151-1184, 1197-1209)  
Stephanie Boeniger, “‘I have become the Sea’s Craft’,” *Contemporary Literature* 52.3 (2011): 462-92 (E-journals)  
Walcott, *Omeros*, Chapters 42-55  
Walcott questions—everyone

**November 26****Independent Theory presentations**

**December 3****Ethnic and Critical Race Theory**

Rivkin and Ryan Introduction, López, Fishkin, Gates, Morrison, Anzaldua, Lowe (RR 959-1030)

Walcott, *Omeros*, Chapters 56-end

Stephanie Boeniger, “ ‘I have become the Sea’s Craft’,” *Contemporary Literature* 52.3 (2011): 462-92 (e-journals)

Proposal for final paper due, 2-3 pp. plus 5-source bibliography; include description of topic in response to current criticism, thesis or thesis question, and any organizational or developmental writing of use to you (outline, brainstorm, significance of key passages or critics, etc.)

**December 10****After Theory?**

De Man, “The Death of Theory” (handout)

Eagleton, from *After Theory*, (handout)

Troubleshooting on final paper—prepare intro, prospectus/outline/draft, and 5-minute presentation of your research that describes your approach and your questions/challenges

**December 17, 19:00**

**Final paper due, 6-8 pp.**