

Syllabus
LLSL 3110 A
Spring 2012
History of Literary Criticism

Nicholas Birns
birnsn@newschool.edu 6464693124

T-Th 12-1:40

A. Overview of the Course

This course provides a tacit history of ways we have thought about literature, and lets us meet such provocative literary personalities as Oscar Wilde and Madame de Staël. It also gives a fly-over of some of the major European philosophers, who we see in their often-overlooked role as literary thinkers (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Burke, Nietzsche). Understanding the history of Western literary criticism is to also gain insight into millennia of European cultural and social history.

The main text used will be *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, second edition, ISBN 978-0-393-93292-8 (the first edition, which is much cheaper now, is also acceptable), supplemented by these **primary texts**: Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Folger, ISBN-13: 978-0743482851, Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurias* (*Ten Plays* translated by Paul Roche, ISBN 9780451527004) *Ausonius: Three Amusements*, tr. David Slavitt, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 978-0812219531) and Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*.(Penguin, 978-0140424621)

B. Rationale and Outcomes of the Course

Today, we see literary criticism as largely comprised of book reviews for general-interest periodicals and academic articles and books written by and for scholars. Yet these forms only arose relatively recently as vehicles of literary criticism. It was only in the nineteenth century that the book review began to take hold as a regularly practiced form—before then there were not journals with the regularity or rapidity of circulation to effectively review books—and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that book reviews began to include that detailed focus on plot and style that today's readers expect from them. Literary criticism as an academic field began even later. It is always bracing to remember that the first professorship of English in the United States, held by Francis Andrew March of Lafayette College, was only instituted in 1857, and the first organization in the world oriented towards study of the modern languages, the US-based Modern Language Association, was founded in 1883, then spearheading what was a very new discipline. George Saintsbury, in this era, was the first notable individual to be a professor of English, in the modern sense, anywhere in the world. Before then, literature

in English was to be enjoyed, debated, discussed in general society; but it was not an object of academic study. What was studied in universities was classical and Biblical languages, philology, theology, science, as the nineteenth century went on certainly history, but not literature. That the English or Literature Department is such a late arrival in the university is probably part of the cause of the continuing anxiety about the role of literary criticism, its uneasy perch between the academy and the common reader. We are still uncertain, indeed, about just what literary criticism is. Is it judgment—whether a book is good or bad? Disinterested description? Appreciation of writing one finds sympathetic? Scholarship about the author's life or background? Explorations of abstruse philosophical or theoretical implications of certain strands in the work under discussion? Analysis of the structure of language itself? Is its goal to embody the complexity of the texts it scrutinizes? Or should it strive to explain them clearly and simply? All of these have been imagined and practiced as literary criticism. None have yet conclusively claimed the mantle even of the ordinary-language definition of the term.

At the end of this course you should be able to:

- 1) Have a grasp of the major figures in the history of literary criticism
- 2) Have a more ramified sense of what literary criticism is and how it manifests itself in relation to primary texts and to work in other disciplines.
- 3) Have the historical background necessary to address current literary debates
- 4) Write competent expository prose.

D. Lang Academic Fellow

Ruthie Dreyer, a senior at Lang, will be assisting me with this class as a Lang Academic fellow. This is an appointment done through a rigorous process and is highly competitive. She will be available for consultation and feedback on student writing and as a general advisor and mentor in the class. Her e-mail is dreyr194@newschool.edu

E. Schedule of Classes

Readings in **bold** are not in the *Norton Anthology* and are to be purchased at Shakespeare and Company, 726 Broadway, or anywhere you wish. Everything else refers to the writings under that author's name in the Anthology.

Jan 24 Introduction

January 26 Plato, *Ion*

January 31, Plato, *Phaedrus*

February 2, Aristotle, *Poetics*

February 6, Aristotle, Poetics

February 8, Euripides Iphigenia

February 13 Euripides Iphigenia

February 15 Horace, Ars poetica

February 20 **Ausonius**; Paper 1 due,

February 22 Augustine

February 27 Dante

February 29 **Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra***

March 6 ***Antony and Cleopatra*** with Corneille

March 8 **Antony and Cleopatra** Paper 2 due.

Spring Break

March 20 De Stael

March 22 Burke

March 27 Wordsworth

March 29 Coleridge

April 3 **Lyrical Ballads**

April 5 Arnold

April 10 Pater

April 12 Nietzsche

April 17 Wilde

April 19 T S Eliot. Paper 3 due .

April 24 Woolf

April 26 Derrida

May 1 Derrida

May 3 Derrida

May 8 Foucault. Paper 4 due.

F. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The class is a seminar and students should feel free to ask any questions any time and be proactive in setting the agenda. We will sometimes address controversial material on which people will harbor different opinions so please respect your colleagues and the academic community of which we are all a part.

Please do not leave the room during class unless it is absolutely urgent. You can bring drinks to class but not food.

G. Assignments

Paper 1-Due February 20. What does Aristotle mean by ‘catharsis’? Picking one work of your own choosing, show how catharsis; can be said to operate in that work. 6 Pages.
Due February 21

Paper 2 Defend Shakespeare’s departure from the Aristotelian unities—or, if you believe otherwise, defend the unities. Who is right, the tradition or Shakespeare? And if Shakespeare s right, why did the tradition feel otherwise? 6 pages. Due March 20

Paper 3—of the four ‘prophets’ of the late nineteenth century who offered a solution to the crisis of criticism—Pater, Nietzsche, Wilde, Arnold—who offered the ‘best or at least ‘most convincing; solution. 6 pages. Due April 19.

Paper 4—are people right to fear theorists such as Derrida or Foucault? Or can they help the way we read literature? 3 pages. Due May 8

h. IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Absences and Lateness

- Absences may justify some grade reduction and a total of four absences mandate a reduction of one letter grade for the course. Three cases of tardiness in excess of 7 minutes counts as one unexcused absence.
- More than three absences mandate a failing grade for the course, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as the following:
 - an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician (with documentation)
 - a family emergency, e.g. serious illness (with written explanation)

The attendance and lateness policies are enforced as of the first day of classes for all registered students. If registered during the first week of the add/drop period, the student is responsible for any missed assignments and coursework. Students failing a course due to attendance should consult with an academic advisor to discuss options.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work (EITHER PUBLISHED OR UNPUBLISHED) as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Citing material from online databases such as Project Muse or JSTOR without giving full credit to the original author is considered plagiarism, as is lazy paraphrasing of material on the internet without substantial rethinking and recasting of it. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, Internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. Procedures concerning allegations of plagiarism and penalties are set forth in the Lang catalog.

Disabilities

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Jason Luchs or a designee from that office will meet with students requesting accommodations and related services, and if appropriate, provide an Academic Adjustment Notice for the student to provide to his or her instructors. The instructor is required to review the letter with the student and discuss the accommodations, provided the student brings the letter to the

attention of the instructor. This letter is necessary in order for classroom accommodations to be provided. Student Disability Services is located at 80 Fifth Avenue - 3rd Floor. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/student-services/disability/>