

# Syllabus

## Introduction to Literary Theory NLIT4012

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### A. Overview of the Course

The rise of literary theory has been the most exciting development in the field of literary studies in the past half-century; yet it is also one of the most challenging, the most controversial, and the most poorly understood. This course seeks to give a map of the main currents of contemporary theory. Why did theory come about? Who was “for” it and “against” it? What kinds of texts does theory explain, and how does it explain them? Does theory diversify our view of literature or those who hate it? What does it say about whether literature is made “for” entertainment, philosophical edification, or both?

We will read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in casebook form, with essays on the novel from various theoretical perspectives (deconstructive, feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic). We will then read Shakespeare’s *Tempest* text whose reception history has mirrored the rise of historical and political criticism as a relevant cultural tool. We will then read essays by the seminal theorists—Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Edward Said—who have made theory the pivotal mode of humanistic discourse of the past couple of generations.

### B. Required Books

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Blackwell ISBN 978-1405106962)

Mary Shelley (Johanna Smith ed,) *Frankenstein* (Bedford Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism) ISBN 978-0312191269

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan, Bedford Case Studies in Critical Controversy, ISBN 9780312457525

### C. Assignments

Two medium-length papers followed by one long paper.

1, due February 20. Pick your favorite of the critical essays in the Frankenstein casebook and explain why it is an apt reading of the book. Or, if you do not like any, explain why. 5-6 pp

2) Due March 26. Which approach to the Tempest do you prefer, the traditional or postcolonial one? 5-6pp.

3) Due May 7. How is your sense of literature challenged by Derrida and/or Foucault? Are they simply provocative attention-getters or do they seminally reorient our approach to literature? Discuss this issue with examples from books you know well or that matter to you. 9-10 pp.

#### **D. Schedule of Classes**

Other than Frankenstein and Tempest, all readings are in Rivkin/Ryan.

Jan 23 Introduction

Jan 30 Frankenstein, essays in casebook

Feb 7 Frankenstein, Essays in Casebook

Feb 14 Tempest, essays in casebook

Feb 21 President's Day

February 28 Tempest essays in casebook. Paper 1 due.

March 5 Tempest essays in casebook

March 19 guest lecture by Nikolina Nedeljkov

March 26 Derrida. Paper 2 due.

April 2 Derrida

April 9 Foucault

April 16 Foucault

April 23 Irigaray

April 30 Butler. Paper 3 due.

May 7 Spivak

May 14 Conclusion

### ***E. Outcomes***

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

- 1) Approach any book you read with a sense of the possible critical theories that could be applied to it.
- 2) have a sense of how theory and criticism can help expand our sense of reading.
- 3) Have a sense of how theory is talked about in literature departments today
- 4) Write competent expository prose.

### ***F. Important Policies***

**Attendance** As a once a week class that will be run as a seminar, this course requires your attendance, ideally in every class. One understands that absences will occur, but the work missed during thme needs to be fully made up. Twwo absences (unless there are documentable medical reasons) will result in a grade reducion of one full letter; three mean you have failed the course

**Plagiarism** The New School adheres to a Zero Tolerance Policy regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism will result in an F in the course at the discretion of the instructor and in accordance with the University's policy on plagiarism (see Student Handbook). Students should purchase *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker, available at most book stores, for information on proper citation format.

**Incompletes** The grade of Incomplete "I" is not assigned automatically. It will be assigned only at the request of the student and only at the discretion of the instructor. Students who have not completed assigned coursework and have not requested Incompletes should either fail the course or receive a grade of WF. Incomplete grades cannot be given for Bachelor's students who are graduating seniors. The maximum time allowed for the completion of the work and removal of the "I" will be set by the instructor but may be for no later than the 7th week of the following semester for undergraduates and one year after the end of the class for graduate students. The instructor may set earlier deadlines.

Terms of the Incomplete should be agreed upon before the last class session. The grade of "I" is due and must be submitted at the same time as all other grades—one week after the last class session. An Incomplete for an undergraduate that is not changed to a grade through a Change of Grade form by the 7th week of the following semester will automatically be converted to a failing grade of a "WF" by the University Registrar's Office. The WF is factored into the student's GPA the same way a grade of F would be factored in.

Change of Grade forms can be printed from MyNewSchool and faxed to the Dean's Office at 212.229.6814. If you have any questions about the policy please contact Chrissy Roden in the Dean's Office at 212.229.5615 or at [rodenc@newschool.edu](mailto:rodenc@newschool.edu).

**Students with Disabilities** In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations should contact the office of Student Disability Services. All conversations will be kept confidential. Students requesting any accommodations will also need to meet with Jason Luchs in the office of Student Disability Services, who will conduct an intake, and if appropriate, provide an academic accommodation notification letter. Mr. Luchs's office is located at 79 5th Avenue on the 5th floor. His direct line is 212.229.5626 x3135. You may also access more information through the University's web site.