

Syllabus

Introduction to Literary Theory

LLSL 3170

Spring 2011

MW 10-11:40

Nicholas Birns

The rise of literary theory has been the most exciting development on 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 does it impose a monolithic prism? Is theory for those who love literature or those who hate it? What does it say about whether literature is made 'for' entertainment, philosophical edification, or both?

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To gain a mastery of the major features of recent literary theory (for instance the thought of Derrida and Foucault)
- 2) To understand how theories can be applied to texts
- 3) To understand what is at stake in the critical reading of literature
- 4) To write an expository prose sufficiently agile to respond meaningfully to the above questions,

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at Barnes and Noble, 5th Avenue and 18th St.)

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

George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* 978-0156186001

Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil* Marion Boyars, 978-0714503462

Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* . Chicago, 978-0226065588

Percy Lubbock , *The Craft of Fiction* 978-144321941

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

R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the Rs* (Kaya.Muae) 978-1885030030

RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED

Nicholas Birns, *Theory after Theory* , Broadview 978-15551119335; will also be put on reserve at Fogelman.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Four five-page papers

- 1) Picking your favorite (or any interesting) work of fiction, apply either Booth's or Lubbock's theories to them and explain how they illuminate the work. Due February 18.
- 2) Of the readings of *Frankenstein* in our casebook, which is the 'best' or 'most productive' in your view. Due March 8.
- 3) Choosing either Foucault or Derrida (as represented in the Rivkin/Ryan book) give an elementary overview of their thought. Due April 20.
- 4) Starting from any essay we do after Bourdieu in Rivkin/Ryan, discuss how, and if, the theories are either one are useful for any aspect of contemporary literature, culture, or life, and, if they are, pick an example of how they might be useful. Due May 11.

UNITS

1. Theories of Fiction
2. The Applicability of Theory
3. The Development of Theory
4. What Now?

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Boldface denotes in Rivkin/Ryan book, (parenthetical assignments in Birns book indicate recommended background reading),

Mon Jan 24 Introduction

UNIT 1

Wed Jan 26 Orwell, Politics and the English Language

Mon Jan 31 **Barthes**, Mythologies

Wed Feb 2 Orwell, Why I Write

Mon Feb 7 **Brooks**, Language of Paradox

Wed Feb 9 Booth, Part One, Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (read online)

Mon Feb 14 Booth, part II (Birns preface)

Web Feb 16 Booth Part 3, Paper 1 due.

Mon Feb 21 president's Day no class

UNIT 2

Wed Feb 25 Frankenstein, case studies

Mon Feb 28 Frankenstein, Case Studies

Wed Mar 2 Frankenstein, case studies

Mon march 7 Bataille, Bronte to Blake

Wed March 8 Bataille, Sade to Genet. Paper 2 due.

March 14, 16 Spring Break

UNIT 3

March 21 **Derrida**, Difference

March 23 **Derrida**, of grammatology

March 28 Showing of Derrida movie (Birns Chapter 2)

March 30 **Foucault, Archaeology of knowledge**

April 4 **Foucault, Discipline and Punish** (Birns Chapter 1)

April 6 **Bourdieu**

April 11 **Bhabha** (Birns Chapter 5)

April 13 **Butler** (Birns Chapter 6)

Apr 18 **Cixous** (Birns Chapter 3)

April 20 **Gates** (Birns Chapter 4). Paper 3 due.

UNIT 4

April 25 Linmark

April 27 Linmark

May 2 **Benjamin**

May 4 **De Certeau**

May 9 **Hebdige**

May 11 Where Next? Why Next? (Birns chapter 8).