

ENG 3010, Section 3A31

The Theory and Practice of Modern Criticism *Theory, Literature, and the Art of Reading*



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Monday (10:40-11:30 a.m.)
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One of the primary goals of an education in the humanities has been to teach us how to be more effective readers, not only of literature, but of all kinds of cultural productions, and even the world we inhabit everyday. The problem of reading is also at the heart of the great intellectual endeavor of the last century now known as *theory*. However, the aim of theory has never been to describe in its “real truth” the nature of reading, but rather to heighten our awareness of what we already do when we read, and then to develop new strategies that will enable us to read otherwise. As one of the most significant theorists of the twentieth century, the French scholar Michel Foucault, puts it, theory involves “the effort to think one’s own history,” the engrained expectations and assumptions that we bring to any everyday activity such as reading, in order potentially, to “free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.” In this course, we will examine the ways that some of the most important theoretical movements of the last century interrogated and thought differently both what we read and how reading takes place. After beginning with an excerpt from Jonathan Culler’s *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* and a reading of Pierre Bayard’s *How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read*, we will turn our attention to the work of some of the last century’s most significant theorists, and explore the various ways they have posed the inseparable questions of literature and reading, as well as the suggestions they offer as to how we might begin to read, and think, differently.

Readings

Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Book You Haven’t Read*

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies, The Complete Edition*

Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*

Essays in Canvas files

As we will be engaging in a good deal of close analysis in class, I strongly advise that you get copies of the editions ordered for this class. Please note that while electronic editions are also permitted, you will be expected to have the readings physically present in class for each meeting they will be discussed, and will be required to refer to, read from, and discuss specific passages during the class meeting. All additional and supplemental readings will be made available on Campus or in other forms; again, a copy of the week’s readings will be required to be present in class.

Aims and Methods

1. One of the central aims of this course is to expand your horizons to encompass new approaches and new questions. However, for such a journey to have any meaning, you first need an intellectual home, a disciplinary base, from which to begin. This means there are some basic requirements for participation in this course. This is an *upper-division* English major course, and thus assumes you have completed, at least, the requirements for a lower-division composition *and* English major courses. During the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate, in both your oral *and* written contributions to the class, proficiency in the kinds of critical, analytical, writing, and reading skills expected of advanced literary and cultural studies majors. The readings themselves are drawn from a range of different national traditions and disciplines, and they will offer a number of different kinds of challenges. You will be expected to keep up with them, and to respond to them in a variety of oral and written forms. Finally, I require on the part of each and every student an open-mind and a willingness to carefully and seriously engage with the works we will be discussing: this means cultivating the readerly stance that has been described in a number of different traditions as *deep listening*, bracketing aside assumptions, opinions, and judgments and demonstrating an openness to the voices addressing you, even, and especially, if these offer challenges. If you have any questions about whether this course is right for you, please come and speak with me soon.

2. Readings should be completed before the class meeting in which they are to be discussed. This means that from our first meeting, you should be reading continuously, getting well ahead of our discussions. Moreover, I do expect lively participation on everyone's part in the class discussion. If conversation lags, expect occasional quizzes or other short in-class writing assignments.

3. Attendance and participation in class discussion are indispensable parts of our work. It is vitally important that you arrive on time and attend the entire course meeting. If you will have any difficulty in doing so, or have an obligation that will force you to miss, be late, or depart early from any class meeting, I ask that you come and speak with me. Repeated non-emergency or non-medical absences, not cleared in advance, will result in a lowering of the final course grade. Moreover, if you miss an excessive number of class hours, whatever the reason, you will have been considered not to have completed the requirements of the course, and hence will not receive a passing grade. Finally, late arrivals and/or early departures from class meetings will be counted as absences. Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

4. Students may use computers or other electronic platforms for accessing readings and/or taking notes. However, Wi-Fi connections should be turned off unless

otherwise instructed, and students are not allowed to surf the web, work on other assignments, read novels, play games, view other pages, or engage in any other such activities during course discussion. Cell phones also should be turned off or silenced as soon as class begins. Violations of this policy will be counted as unexcused absences for that class meeting. If you have any questions about appropriate use of these devices please come and see me.

5. Readings should be completed before the class meeting in which they are to be discussed. This course will require you to do a good deal of reading, some of which you may find challenging in that they may lead to questions about deeply ingrained assumptions and uninterrogated “common sense” expectations. If you approach these works with an open mind, a spirit of adventure, and a willingness to expand your horizons, I think you will find the effort required well worth it. However, this will also mean that you need to work on developing in your reading skills new levels of attentiveness, concentration, and listening. The first step in becoming a stronger critical reader is to become a more active, engaged one. If you do not already do so, start reading with a pencil or pen in hand, marking passages that seem especially important or intriguing to you, and jotting insights and questions in the book’s margins or on a near-by note pad. At the same time, you should try as much as possible to inhabit the intellectual and cultural contexts of the work’s author. Ask yourself these questions of the readings: What are the writer’s goals? What things does she or he challenge or call into question? What are the writer’s own expectations and assumptions? How does she or he work to achieve both their stated and implicit goals? And most importantly, in what ways does this work enable you to think in new ways?

6. Throughout the semester, I will be asking you to prepare short written responses to questions we will address in class. These responses will be picked up at the beginning of the meeting and may be used by me to help open up our conversation. You may also find it useful to keep a reading journal where you jot down your thoughts and questions, and where you indicate passages that strike you as particularly interesting or significant. Finally, on occasion I will be asking to review your in-class notes to determine your grasp of the material and our discussions.

7. The major writing assignment will consist of two formal papers, ranging in length. Presentation will count toward the grade of the paper: for example, each paper is expected to be double-spaced, with one-inch margins, printed in a reasonable 12-point or smaller font, and use a consistent bibliographic and reference format. You will also be required to present specific supporting evidence for your claims, in the form of citations from the work, page numbers included. Each paper will focus on the course readings and will address a set of questions, issues, and themes we develop together in our class discussions. These papers will be your best opportunity to demonstrate your skills as an advanced prose writer and your grasp of both the readings and our discussions in class. Approximately two weeks before each paper is due, I will provide you with questions that will help frame your discussion, and you will be required to develop each of your papers in response to

them. Any paper that does not meet the basic requirements listed above—including, but not limited to, using a consistent format; meeting at least the minimum length requirement; including specific citations from the readings; and making explicit connections to and engaging specifically with the prompts and class discussions—will be seen as not fulfilling the assignment, and will be returned for revision and a late grade.

Papers are due on the dates noted; late papers, including any returned to the student for revision, will receive lowered grades, unless other arrangements have been made in advance.

8. No final or midterm examinations.

9. Grades will be based on the conscientious completion of all of the above requirements. Please feel free to ask any questions in class or on an individual basis. Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

10. Finally, communication is crucial to everything we are going to do in the next four months. Thus, if you are unsure about any of the course requirements, or run into any kind of difficulty, academic or otherwise, as the semester progresses, please come and speak with me as soon as you can. I will try to be as accommodating as possible, but I cannot help you if you do not convey to me what is going on. Also if you have any general questions, or even just feel like continuing the discussion begun in class, I encourage you to drop by during my scheduled open office hours, or to make an appointment to see me.

Once again, welcome – I look forward to an exciting and rewarding semester!

Grading Criteria

Attendance (see above)

Participation and response papers: 40%

Formal papers: 60%

UF Policy Statements

- 1) Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.
- 2) UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>
- 3) UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.
- 4) Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/> ([Links to an external site.](#))
- 5) Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Tentative Discussion Schedule

PART I: Preface

1. **August 21 - 23** –Introduction
Jonathan Culler, “What is Theory?”
Michel Foucault, "Modifications"
Woody Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977) ([Links to an external site.](#))
2. **August 26 – 30** – Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Book You Haven't Read*

NO CLASS Monday September 2 (Labor Day)

PART II: How do we Read: New Criticism, Formalism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism

3. **September 4 - 6** – W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy” and “The Affective Fallacy”
Cleanth Brooks, “The Language of Paradox,” “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” and “Irony as a Principle of Structure”
4. **September 9-13** – Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” “Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary”
5. **September 16 - 20** – Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myths”
Roland Barthes, “The Structuralist Activity”
Gérard Genette, “Structuralism and Literary Criticism”
Algirdas Julien Greimas, “The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints” and “The Love-Life of the Hippopotamus”
Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”
Slavoj Zizek, “A Black Hole in Reality”
6. **September 23-27** – Roland Barthes, *Mythologies, The Complete Edition*
7. **September 30 - October 2** – Paul de Man, “The Resistance to Theory”
Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*

NO CLASS Friday October 4 (Homecoming)

PART III: Who Reads and Who Writes: Reader Response, Feminist, Queer, African-American Theories

8. **October 7 - 11** – Stanley Fish, “Is There a Text in This Class?”, “Interpreting the *Variorum*”, and “Interpreting ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*’”
Patrocínio P. Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading”
Bill Readings, “The Scene of Teaching”

October 9 – Paper #1 due

9. **October 14-16** – Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl”
Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion”

NO CLASS Friday October 18 (Professor Travel)

10. **October 21 - 25** – Barbara Smith, “Toward A Black Feminist Criticism”
Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

PART IV: Reading and Writing in History: Marxism, New Historicism, Cultural Studies

11. **October 28 - November 1** – Georg Lukács, “Walter Scott and the Historical Novel”
Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”
Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” and “Progress versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?”
12. **November 4 - 8** – Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”
Stephen Greenblatt, “Invisible Bullets”
Janice Radway, “The Book-of-the-Month Club and the General Reader: On the Uses of ‘Serious’ Fiction”

NO CLASS Monday November 11 (Veteran’s Day)

PART V: 21stCentury Readers Reading: Thinking the Global and the Contemporary

13. **November 13- 15** – Edward Said, “Globalizing Literary Study”
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Literature”
Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”
Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “What Was Close Reading?”
14. **November 18 -22** – Hiroki Azuma, “Database Animals”
Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avant Garde”
Carolyn Lesjak, “Reading Dialectically”

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "On Generosity"
Phillip E. Wegner, "Greimas Avec Lacan"

15. **November 25** – continue...

NO CLASS Wednesday November 27- Friday November 29 (Fall Break)

16. **December 2-4** –Final Meetings: to be continued . . .

Friday, December 6 –_FINAL PAPERS DUE