

Theory

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ENGL 244-03 (27820): Fall 2016
Tu/Th 10:05 AM–11:55 AM, Kiely Hall 173
<http://theoryf16.qwriting.org>
[password: theoryf16]

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course explores theoretical formulations that inform the work of literary study, examining what different methodologies value, how they are articulated, and how they assign meaning to texts. The course focuses on at least three distinct critical methods, and it includes both the use of theory in interpreting specific literary texts and the critical scrutiny of theoretical texts themselves. (4 hrs 4 crs; Prereq: English 170W.)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

In studying key texts in three distinct critical methods, students will be able to . . .

- Speak fluently about trends and changes in the scholarly study of literature
- Describe how differences between theoretical approaches affect the interpretation of literary texts.
- Describe both advantages and problems of these various theoretical approaches.

In completing research-based writing assignments, students will be able to . . .

- Apply theoretical approaches to literary texts.
- Identify genuine intellectual problems and conduct scholarly research that recognizes the conventions of literary criticism and academic essays.
- Find and evaluate appropriate secondary sources (including visual, graphic, or numerical information), to select quotation for use as evidence, to integrate quotation, and to properly cite quotation using MLA style.

In creating a final online research project, students will be able to . . .

- Effectively use web-based technologies in order to publish and present academic writing.
- Develop and use strategies for improving writing and critical thinking through recursive practice, self-reflection, and the process of revision.
- Take advantage of a range of appropriate scholarly resources such as books, journals, indexes, online catalogs, web search engines, and libraries.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS:

Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, 978-0199691340
Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, 978-1844671854
Mary Shelley, *The Original Frankenstein* (ed. Charles E. Robinson, Vintage), 978-0307474421

All other readings are available as pdfs: <http://theoryf16.qwriting.org> [password: theoryf16]
Bring a printed copy of the readings to class, unless you use a tablet device to annotate readings.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Learn Things: You're going to no-joke come to every class and participate every time. This means: you will always have read the text before class, thought about it enough to have either one brilliant or three mediocre things to say, will actually say those things in class or at least think them very hard at other people, and will do your utmost best to learn something new. I will ask what you have learned, so be ready to say something.

2. Weekly Responses: Each Monday you will post on our shared class blog. These should be substantial (~400 word) responses to ideas from the week's assigned readings. You don't need to discuss every reading, and you should not summarize them. Instead, do things like: identify a conflict between two authors, present a question that builds on an author's argument, share a contemporary article or image to discuss, or connect the readings to *Frankenstein*. By each Thursday, you should leave at least one substantial comment (~100 words) on a classmate's post.

3. Paper 1: Authorship and Writing. Using the course readings so far as your theoretical perspective, compare two versions of one paragraph from *Frankenstein* in order to make an argument about how debates over the meaning of authorship would change the text's meaning. (~1500 words. Your paper should have a thesis, should support that thesis with evidence from the text, should explicitly describe an intellectual debate over authorship or writing, and should clearly distinguish between two or more possible interpretations).

4. Paper 2: Structural Analysis. Using one of the course readings from the second section of the course, identify three structural aspects of the text in order to demonstrate how *Frankenstein's* meaning depends on an analysis of its underlying structure rather than its surface meaning. (~1500 words. Your paper should have a thesis, should support that thesis with evidence from the text, should identify three appropriate structural aspects of *Frankenstein* so far, and should clearly demonstrate how those structural aspects create a meaning that is otherwise not obvious).

5. Annotated Bibliography. You will find five scholarly secondary sources (i.e. journal articles, book chapters, scholarly reviews, interviews) that offer specifically theoretical approaches to *Frankenstein*. Use [electronic databases](#) like [JSTOR](#), [EBSCOHost](#), and the [CUNY+ catalog](#). Following [MLA style](#), create an annotated Works Cited page with citations and one-paragraph evaluative summaries for each article.

6. Final Collaborative Website Project. For your final project, you will work in groups to build a website that offers different theoretical perspectives on *Frankenstein*. Each group will collectively be responsible for writing one page on the site, finding Creative Commons images to use, and organizing your content. Individually, you will contribute a brief essay (~1000 words) that offers a literary argument about your text informed by a theoretical perspective and supported by secondary research. More details to come.

PARTICIPATION:

Since participation is crucial to your success, you should not miss more than three classes. I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. If you come unprepared to class, you are not present; “coming unprepared” includes such things as not doing the reading, not bringing the text to class, sleeping during class, not making an effort to participate, arriving late or leaving early. If you know you cannot attend, contact me *before* to ask about submitting homework; I do not accept late assignments.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

<<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>>

Violations of academic integrity include: cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and denying others access to information or material. It is the student’s responsibility to be aware of what constitutes academic dishonesty; students who are unsure of whether their work meets criteria for academic integrity should consult with their instructor. Students should look at the full policy, which provides further examples and possible consequences for incidences of academic dishonesty.

I have a *zero-tolerance* policy towards plagiarism and academic dishonesty. The minimum punishment for plagiarism is an F as a final grade and being reported to the campus officer.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation, please inform me and the Office of Special Services at 718-997-5895.

EVALUATION / GRADING:

Students will be evaluated in three broad areas:

- 1) their ability and diligence in completing all writing assignments on time, reading and reflecting on assigned readings before class, and participating in class discussions.
- 2) their competence in meeting the learning objectives identified above.
- 3) their ability to demonstrate, through the pieces in their final web project and their meta-reflective cover letter, that they have made thoughtful and careful revision from earlier drafts.

In practice, the final grade will be more of a negotiation than a reward. Sometime during the final third of the semester, students should meet with me one-on-one. During this time we will discuss their current strengths and weaknesses and establish a set of expectations for the remainder of the semester. The student and instructor will agree on what is an appropriate final grade, dependent upon their completing a list of expectations. This list might include specific revision of certain assignments, good faith effort to participate more, or mastery of certain recurring problem areas. Students will submit a short memo outlining our conversation, to serve as a grading contract.

COURSE CALENDAR

Section I: What is Theory? What is Literature? What is an Author?

8/25: Course Introduction

Read *Frankenstein* 16–39

8/30: Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory*, Chs. 1 & 2 (1–42) and “Appendix” (135–146)

9/1: Barbara Johnson, “Writing” [pdf]

Frankenstein 40–58

9/6: Culler, Chs. 3–6 (43–94)

9/8: Culler, Chs. 7–9 (95–133)

Frankenstein 59–80

9/13: Donald E. Pease, “Author” [pdf]

9/15: Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text” [pdf]

Frankenstein 81–99

9/20: Barthes, “The Death of the Author” and Harvey, “Elements of Academic Essay” [pdfs]

9/22: *Frankenstein* and Writing Workshop

Due: Draft of Paper 1

Frankenstein 99–125

9/27: Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” [pdf]

9/29: Sheila Ahlbrand, “Author and Editor: Mary Shelley’s Private Writings and the Author Function of Percy Bysshe Shelley” [pdf]

Due: Paper 1

10/4: NO CLASS

10/6: NO CLASS (Classes follow a Monday schedule)

Section II: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism

Frankenstein 126–147

10/11: NO CLASS

10/13: Charles E. Bressler, “New Criticism” [pdf]

10/14 (Friday, but classes follow a Tuesday schedule): Bressler, continued

Frankenstein 147–168

10/18: Ferdinand de Saussure, “Nature of the Linguistic Sign” [pdf]

10/20: Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth” [pdf]

Frankenstein 169–186

10/25: Barthes “The Structuralist Activity” [pdf] and Charles Bressler, “Deconstruction” [pdf]

10/27: *Frankenstein* and Writing Workshop

Due: Draft of Paper 2

Frankenstein 186–204

11/1: Peter Barry, “Post-structuralism and Deconstruction” 61–80 [pdf]

11/3: Barbara Johnson, “My Monster, My Self” [pdf]

Due: Paper 2

Section III: Digital Humanities

Frankenstein 204–223

11/8: Matthew Kirschenbaum, “What Is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?” [pdf] and Matthew L. Jockers, “Macroanalysis” [pdf]

11/10: Sarah Allison *et al.*, “Quantitative Formalism: an Experiment” [pdf]

Frankenstein 223–245

11/15: Franco Moretti, “Graphs” (1–33)

11/17: Moretti, “Maps” (35–64)

11/22: Moretti, “Trees” (67–92)

Due: Draft Annotated Bibliography

11/24: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Recess)

11/29: Voyant <<https://voyant-tools.org/>>

12/1: Voyant, continued

Due: Annotated Bibliography

12/6: work on final web projects

12/8: work on final web projects

12/16: *Final Projects and Reflective Essay due by noon [online/email]*