**30.463 Contemporary Critical Theory**

Winter 2024



**Instructor:** Dr. Reinhold Kramer 109 Clark Hall

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**Course Description:**

An introduction to recent literary theories, including cognitive, structuralist, post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, feminist, materialist, and evolutionary approaches. These theories will be examined in light of their aims, general principles, strengths, weaknesses, and critical statements by representative theorists. Although the History of Literary Criticism is recommended as an introduction to Contemporary Critical Theory, it is not a prerequisite.

**Assignments:** 1. Class Participation 10%

 2. Reading Test (on *entire* novel) **19 January** 5%

 3. Seminar presentation various; choose by **8 Jan.** 10%

 4. Mid-term Test **16 February** 15%

 5. Research Paper (12-14 pages)  **due 22 March\*** 20%

 6. Final Exam **April 16**, **2-4 p.m.** 40%

There may be penalties for late essays, depending upon circumstances. Reading tests cannot be postponed, and missed tests cannot be rewritten without a doctor’s note or other documentation. Cite all sources for ideas and quotations. Assignments containing plagiarism will be graded “0” and will result in disciplinary action. Please read BU UndergraduateCalendar 3.14 “Academic Integrity.”

No cell phones in class.

Students who require disability accommodations should register with the Accessibility Services Coordinator, 204-727-9759, magnussonm@brandonu.ca. Student Services also offers personal counselling (contact 204-727-9737). If students find controversial readings and/or discussions troubling, please contact the instructor immediately about alternatives.

**Grading: Letter/Number/Grade Point**

Outstanding Good Satisfactory Weak Inadequate

A+ 90 & up 4.3 B+ 77-79 3.3 C+ 67-69 2.3 D 50-59 1.0 F 0-49 0

A 85-89 4.0 B 73-76 3.0 C 63-66 2.0

A- 80-84 3.7 B- 70-72 2.7 C- 60-62 1.7

**Texts:**

Leitch, Vincent B. et. al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Norton. **3rd ed.**

McEwan, Ian. *Saturday*. (\*Read by **Jan. 19**)

**Tentative Schedule:**

Jan. 3, 5 Introduction to Semiology

 Components of the Speech Act

 Jakobson, fr *Linguistics and Poetics*, 1067-74

 **Psychoanalysis**

 8 **Decide on theorist for seminar presentation**

 10 Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” 1869-86

 12, 15 Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in

 Psychoanalytic Experience,” 1111-7

 17 Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (**Library Reserve** BF109.L28Z59)

 “Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at Its Destination?” 3-12 (also at Google Books)

 “Why is Every Act a *Repetition*?”96-9, 102-5 (not online)

19 **Reading Test**

 Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (2005)

 **Structuralism**

 19, 22 de Saussure, “The Object of Linguistics,” “Nature of the Linguistic Sign,” *Course in*

 *General Linguistics*, 824-30

 Jakobson, “The Metaphoric & Metonymic Poles,” *Two Aspects of Language & Two Types*

 *of Aphasic Disturbances*, 1074-9

 24, 26 Todorov, “Structural Analysis of Narrative,” 1918-25

29 Barthes, “Death of the Author,” “Photography & Electoral Appeal,” *Mythologies*, 1266-72

 31 *The Englishman’s Boy*

 Austin, “Performative Utterances,” 1236-48

 **Post-Structuralism**

Feb. 2, 5 Derrida, from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 1650-4

 7 Timothy Morton, from *The Ecological Thought*, top 2626-31

 9, 12 Foucault, “The Carceral,” *Discipline & Punish*, 1409-21

 14 Baudrillard, from *The Precession of Simulacra*, 1483-92

 16 **Mid-term Test**

 **Reception and Cognitive Theories**

 26 Iser, “Interaction between Text & Reader,” 1452-61

 28 Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* (**Library Reserve** PN3331. Z86 or **Online** via library)

 Part 1 “Attributing Minds,” Section 1-2 (3-10, 16-22)

 Part 2 “Tracking Minds,” Section 1 (47-54)

Patrick Hogan, “Why Genres Recur,” *Affective Narratology*, 185-9 (**Online** via library)

 “What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion,” 276-83 *Oxford Handbk of Cognitive*

 *Literary Studies* (**Library Reserve**  PN56.P93O93 2015 or **Online** via library)

Mar. 1, 4 Suzanne Keen, *Empathy & the Novel* vii-xxii, 105-10, 145-8

(**Library Reserve** PN3352. P7K44 2010or **Online** via library)

 Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions* 145-7, 150, 152-5, 158-65, 271-8

 (**Library Reserve** PN1995. G6886 2009)

 **Feminist, Gay, and Queer Theories**

6 De Beauvoir, “Myth & Reality,” *The Second Sex*, 1214-21

 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 1954-66

 8 Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, & Socialist-Feminism in the

 1980s,” 2043-50, 2052-4, 2060-5

 11, 13 Butler, “Subversive Bodily Acts,” *Gender Trouble*, 2377-89

 **Evolutionary Theory**

Mar. 15 Robert Storey, *Mimesis & the Human Animal* (**Library Reserve** PN56.M536S76)

“‘I Am I Because My Little Dog Knows Me’: Of Apes & Essences,” 3-17 (also at

Google Books)

 18 “‘What Is Art For?’ Narrative & the Ludic Reader,” 101-14 (not available online)

 20 Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories* (**Library Reserve** PN3451.B69 2009 or **Online**)

“Fiction as Adaptation,” 188-208

 cooperation in *The Odyssey*, 289-96

 22 Robert Storey, *Mimesis & the Human Animal*

“Comedy & the Relaxed Open-Mouth Display,” 153-62 (not available online) **Research Paper due\* \*later if you’re doing an evolutionary or Marxist theorist**

 25 “Tragedy: The Ape Gets Serious,” 131-9, 150-51 (not available online)

 **Marxism/Materialism**

 27 Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities,” *Capital*, 667-75

 Jameson, “Postmodernism & Consumer Society,” 1758-72

Apr. 1 Bourdieu, from *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 1586-92

3 Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 999-1005;

5 Review

**Apr. 16** **Final Exam, Tuesday, 2-4 p.m.**

**Seminar Presentation**

Choose a theorist from among the following:

Cixous, Lacan, Todorov, Barthes, Austin, Foucault, Morton, Baudrillard, Iser, Zunshine, Keen,

Hogan, Grodal, Mulvey, Haraway, Butler, Storey, Boyd, Jameson, Bourdieu

Let me know your choice by **8 January** (first-come, first-choice)

You will present when we study the theorist (the day listed on the course outline… unless we’re behind)

*Length*: 7 minutes (prepare slightly more material than needed; plan where to cut to meet time limit)

*Topic*: --explain a few major points that the theorist makes in their articles

 --explain how the theorist’s work fits into a larger paradigm (e.g. into post-structuralism)

 --give a couple of strengths & weaknesses of the theorist’s approach

 --no biographies, please

 --use lecture style (don’t read your paper); use PowerPoint or online material judiciously

*Research*: --use the syllabus article and at least 2 articles or book chapters *by* the theorist

 --use secondary materials about the theorist or theory (3 articles or chapters if possible)

 --at the presentation, give me a single sheet with your references & a brief outline

 --you may use the seminar presentation as a partial basis of your research paper