

Wilkes Honors College  
LIT 3213 : Honors Literary Theory  
Spring, 2017

TR:  
Room:

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**Office Hours:** TR 12:00-2:00; Wednesday 2:00-4:00. Available via Skype and by appointment. My cell number is on the syllabus above, so call me if you need to confer about anything.

#### Required Texts:

Vincent B. Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Second Edition (paperback if you can find it):*  
[http://www.amazon.com/Norton-Anthology-Theory-Criticism-Second/dp/0393932923/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178468&sr=1-1&keywords=norton+anthology+of+criticism+and+theory](http://www.amazon.com/Norton-Anthology-Theory-Criticism-Second/dp/0393932923/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178468&sr=1-1&keywords=norton+anthology+of+criticism+and+theory)

Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*  
[http://www.amazon.com/Beginning-Theory-Introduction-Literary-Cultural/dp/0719079276/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178574&sr=1-1&keywords=beginning+theory+an+introduction+to+literary+and+cultural+theory](http://www.amazon.com/Beginning-Theory-Introduction-Literary-Cultural/dp/0719079276/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178574&sr=1-1&keywords=beginning+theory+an+introduction+to+literary+and+cultural+theory)

Samuel R. Delaney, *Tales of Neveryon:* [http://www.amazon.com/Tales-Neveryon-Samuel-R-Delany/dp/081956270X/ref=sr\\_1\\_sc\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178656&sr=1-1-spell&keywords=teles+of+neveryon](http://www.amazon.com/Tales-Neveryon-Samuel-R-Delany/dp/081956270X/ref=sr_1_sc_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1386178656&sr=1-1-spell&keywords=teles+of+neveryon)

Note: I require you to have these editions of the texts. Check the ISBN: I won't accept another edition.

**Course Description:** The purpose of this course is to begin the professionalization of our relation to works of literature. It is often argued that we begin reading books as children or young adults because we love the experience of reading: we love the stories, the feel of the words on the page, the suspense of the narrative – whatever. But upper-division work in literature and the senior thesis require a developed sense of our reading methods and a placement of ourselves as readers in a history of reading and of readerships. Perhaps not surprisingly, it will turn out that we've been doing this all along. Reading is thus a very private and public experience: we read alone, but also in a strange fellowship with those who read with us.

For example, two friends of mine just spoke to me about the Roberto Rodriguez movie of 2011, *Machete*. One said he thought it was a triumph of camp and social satire, coming at an important turning point in Rodriguez's directing career. The other told me he stopped watching in the middle because the film was "too liberal" and showed the undocumented Mexicans as heroes and the American whites as corrupt and evil. Very different readings: but for each we can trace the reading itself back to a grounding theoretical set of workpoints. This course will expose and teach us to work with those workpoints.

We will consider how the Western literary tradition has grown up around various readerships, each of which has attempted to give systematic accounts of the nature of literature and the methods for analyzing it. The philosopher Georges Bataille writes that "literature is guilty." What could this mean? For one thing -- and this idea may serve as our point of departure -- it means that if writing literature is not innocent, then neither is reading it. This means in turn that, whether or not we know or admit it, we already look for meaning and pleasure in reading, story telling or

film viewing according to some sort of intellectual or ideological agenda that identifies us as members of a readership community. We want to see the good guy win; we want the boy to get the girl; we want the orphan child reunited with the tearful mother. Or, we want to see them all get run over by a truck, or hacked up by a mad slasher. How come? Saint Augustine rightly asks why an audience would cry over the death of a pair of lovers on a stage, played by perfectly sound and happy actors, while real people suffer and die around us all the time without our apparently noticing. Our objective in this course is to examine the innocence or guilt of writing and reading.

Saint Augustine's accusation raises a critical philosophical issue. And, as we'll see, "literature" develops in the West out of a synergistic relation -- almost a competition -- with philosophy and religion. It is Plato who first honors Homer as a poet, but this is also in the famous gesture that banishes poets from *The Republic*. Banishes them because they *lie*. And their lie seems to be that they usurp some of the territory of philosophy and of the philosopher. What is at stake in the love-hate relation between literature and philosophy in our culture is the nature of truth, the nature of being, the origin and power of language, and the queer fact that human being tends to define itself most perfectly in social organization, in language, in the fictive. The many theoretical systems we will encounter will examine from different perspectives this peculiar synergy between language and world, truth and lie, innocence and guilt that is captured in the exchange between philosophy and literature. By the end of the term we will know what literary "theory" is. We'll know the difference between formalism and structuralism, between psychoanalytic and historical criticism, and we'll have begun manipulating the materials and methods acquired here in our own literary study. Like Cyrano, who comes back at the men who mock his nose by out mocking them with a virtuoso survey of all the possible styles of mockery and insult to the nose, you will be able to run through the various critical systems that have been informing your reading and writing all this time. Like Cyrano, you'll be part lover and part mad slasher.

In other words, this course will be both a "history of" and a "how to" course. I will ask you to write short response papers to each of the critical methods we encounter, so that you can recapitulate in a few paragraphs what Plato says about poetry and how Aristotle counters his objections. I will not ask for a thesis or thesis development in these papers: I just want you to show me that you have understood the argument we've read and that you can say something about what it implies about our field of study. In addition, each student will write a term paper of 15-20 pages on a literary work of his or her choice. The paper will present, first, a critical history of the work itself, identifying formalist, feminist, Marxist readings deployed by earlier critics, and, second, a new reading of the text that invokes one or a combination of the critical theories we've encountered in the semester. At present, I am not planning any tests, quizzes or exams -- but as everybody already knows, this can change. I expect everybody to show up for class energized and having prepared thoroughly for discussion of the day's reading assignment. If I'm satisfied with the level and intensity of class discussion, I won't bother with quizzes.

Naturally, attendance is required. But as I suggest above, mere attendance will not be enough. I will expect you to show up for each class energized and ***thoroughly engaged with the reading assignment***. I will expect you to read from the assignment and to be prepared to reconstruct the arguments of each writer we read. If you don't understand the reading assignment, no problem. But be prepared to read the parts you don't understand so that we can work through them together. I'll file an automatic and irrevocable F for anybody with more than two (2) unexcused absences. An excused absence is one that you clear with me in advance, or one for which you provide an excuse recognized by the university as valid (doctor's note, bail bond, death certificate, etc.)

**Note of Honors Distinction:** This course differs substantially from the non-Honors version. First, the writing component of the course will be much more demanding, and will prepare students for upper-division college writing and for work on the **Honors Thesis**. Students will be exposed to vocabulary of a specifically theoretical nature, and will be expected to comprehend these new concepts and to deploy these new terms in their own critical thinking and writing. In addition, we will begin professionalizing our own readings and analyses of these texts. Students will be expected to familiarize themselves with the history and the ongoing critical and scholarly conversation about these works, and will give in-class presentations about critical history and about the living scholars in the field as it now stands. Students will also engage with the theoretical tools used by today's reading community to study literature. Most importantly, students will do all of this under the mentoring supervision of the instructor. This course will reflect the interdisciplinary nature of Honors education and will inculcate critical attitudes and skills that will teach you how to learn for yourself.

**How you'll get your grade:** Grading will be based on:

- 1) class discussion. If you've been in a class with me you know I mean this. I will call on you about the reading assignment and grade you based on your answers;
- 2) Short response papers. You will upload a 3-page paper every Friday to BB that recapitulates in your own words the philosopher we read that week. NB: THIS IS NOT A THESIS PAPER. I don't think you should argue with Aristotle until you can understand him. If you can just reiterate what the philosopher said, that will be great. It is also harder than you think;
- 3) Term Paper: This paper will be a Critical History of a text of your choosing. We'll go over this thoroughly in class, but for now I will say that this, also, is not a thesis paper. I want you to investigate and report on the community of readers that has engaged your literary work through its history. This, also, is harder than it seems.

Assignments for this course will be of a slightly different nature than you may be used to from other Lit classes. I ask you to summarize and to give an account in your own words of the issues contained in the readings. Every Friday I'll ask you to upload a 3-page paper to BB with a brief account of the readings we covered on Tuesday. What are the issues confronted by the author? How do they bear on the course? What implications can you find for our subject matter?

Your final paper will be a critical history of a text you choose. I implore you to choose a text that is old enough and has a rich enough critical canon for you to execute this assignment. However you may love *The Lord of the Rings*, or *Twilight*, these works may not give you the amount of scholarship you need for this assignment. I will give more explicit directions about this term paper as we advance in the course.

I will grade these papers based on very specific criteria:

1. Cogency of analysis and comprehension of the texts;
2. Sentence mechanics;
3. Topic maintenance;
4. Transition and topic sentences;
5. Deployment of new vocabulary.

### **Grade Weighting:**

The Friday papers will count for 50% of your grade. The final paper will be 25% and class discussion will be 25%

**Academic Integrity:** This course follows FAU and Honors College guidelines regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. Because this is an Honors College I expect you are all to proud to hand in another's work as your own. And the course is set up so that such actions are difficult here. I want you to try to write like the critics and philosophers we read: and that means stealing vocabulary and sometimes whole phrases. Plagiarism is something different, and means representing another person's work as your own. Here is a link to the FAU rules on academic integrity: <http://www.fau.edu/ctl/AcademicIntegrity.php>

And here is the HC Honor Code: [http://www.fau.edu/divdept/honcol/academics\\_honor\\_code.htm](http://www.fau.edu/divdept/honcol/academics_honor_code.htm)

**Students With Disabilities:** FAU is also committed to making an excellent education available to students with disabilities. If you have any issue you would like to discuss with me that pertains to your learning experience in the classroom here, please see me about it. Here is the university policy on students with disabilities: <http://www.osd.fau.edu/Rights.htm>

**Recording the class:** If you have special needs, please see me. Otherwise, I do not permit students to record my voice or my image inside the classroom. This will be a discussion class, and everybody in it will be talking. Please respect the rights of your fellow students and your instructor.

**Working Agenda:** This agenda is not a contract, and we can change it any time we want. I urge you to look through your texts and to let me know if there is anything you would like to add or skip in our readings.

**Week One: The Problem of Literary Understanding:**

**Tuesday, Jan 7:** Helen Vendler, “What We Have Loved Others Will Love,”; Gerald Graff: “On Disliking Books at an Early Age”; John Donne, “Holy Sonnet 14”; Wallace Stevens, “The Emperor of Ice Cream.”

Please read these materials for class and come prepared to discuss them. I will be particularly interested to see what you can find in the two poems; but I also want you to be able to see what Vendler and Graff are discussing, and to be able to say what the stakes and implications are of these essays.

**Thursday, Jan. 9: Plato, *Ion*.**

**Friday, January 10: 3-page paper on Week One Material due on BB by 9:00 p.m.**

**Week Two: Plato and Aristotle:**

**Tuesday, January 14:** Plato, Selections from *The Republic and Gorgias*. Norton

**Thursday, January 16:** Aristotle, Selections from *The Poetics*. Norton

**Friday, January 17: 3-page paper on Plato and Aristotle due on BB by 9:00 p.m.**

**Week Three: The Beautiful and the Sublime I**

**Tuesday, January 21:** Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Dante, selections. Norton. Neil Hertz, “A Reading of Longinus,” BB.

**Thursday: January 23:** “A Brief History of the Notion of the Sublime.” Kant, from *The Critique of Judgment*.

**Friday, January 24: 3-page paper on The Sublime due on BB by 9:00 p.m.**

**Week Four: More Beautiful and Sublime II:**

**Tuesday, January 28:** David Hume, “On the Standard of Taste, Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, selections. Read also, Barry, Chapter One: *Theory Before Theory – Liberal Humanism*

**Thursday, January 30:** Edmund Burke, “A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.

**Friday, January 31: 3-page paper on The Beautiful and the Sublime due on BB by 9:00 p.m.**

**Week Five: Idealism, Materialism, Marx:**

Barry: Chapter 8, *Marxist Criticism*

**Tuesday, February 4:** Hegel, *Phenomenology*, selections. Begin selections from Marx and Engles.

**Thursday, February 6:** finish selections from Marx and Engles.

**Friday, February 7: 3-page paper on Hegel and Marx on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Six: Marxisms in criticism:**

**Tuesday, Thursday, February 11, 13:** Gyorgy Lukacs, from *The Historical Novel*; Antonio Gramsci, *The Formation of the Intellectuals*; Max Horkeimer and Theodor Adorno, “Dialectics of Enlightenment.” Richard Ohmann, “The Shaping of a U.S. Canon”

**Friday, February 14: 3-page paper on Marxist criticism due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Seven: February 18, 20: Marxist, Historicist Criticism:**

**Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in an age of Technological Repruduction." Michael Foucault, selections. in the Norton. Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture."**

**Friday, February 21, 3-page paper on Historicist Criticism on BB by 9 p..m**

**Week Eight, February 25, 27: Psychoanalytic criticism;**

**Read the selections from Freud and Lacan in the Norton. Also Janet Adelman's Suffocating Mothers (chapter on Hamlet) on BB.**

**Friday, February 28: 3-page paper due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Nine: Spring Break. No classes.**

**Week ten, March 11, 13: Delaney, *Tales of Neveryon*.**

**Friday, March 14: 3-page paper on Delaney due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Eleven, March 18, 20: Sassure and linguistics: The American New Critics**

**Selections from Saussure and Jakobson in the Norton. Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase," Wimsatt and Beardsly, "The Intentional Fallacy," "The Affective Fallacy." Read also Barry, Chapter 2.**

**Friday, March 21: 3-pages on linguistics and the American New Critics due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Twelve, Tuesday, March 25, Thursday, March 27: Feminisms I**

**Selections in the Norton from Aphra Behn, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, Simone de Beauvoir.**

**Friday, March 28 Three-page paper due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Thirteen, Tuesday, April 1, Thursday, April 3: Feminisms II**

**Selections in the Norton from Adreienne Rich, Barbara Herrstein Smith, Gilbert and Gubar, Monique Wittig, Judith Butler, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwig, Laura Mulvey.**

**Friday, April 4: 3-page paper due on BB by 9 p.m.**

**Week Fourteen: Tuesday, April 10, Thursday, April 13: Post-modernism and deconstruction.**

**Norton selections from Foucault, Derrida, Barbara Johnson.**

**No paper.**

**The last two weeks of our course will be comprised of student presentations of their critical histories. We'll confer and decide together how best to do this.**

**Friday, April 28: Final paper due.**