

LMB_AM101G5

LITERARY THEORY: AMERICAN CRITICAL THEORY AND LITERARY FORM
SEMINAR

SPRING 2020

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The seminar intends to elaborate on the American trends and critical approaches in literary theory, ranging from New Criticism, Feminist Criticism via Psychoanalytical and Postcolonial Criticism to Cultural and Performative Studies. In the class, not only the theoretical texts are discussed but also textual and visual examples are analysed to practice applying the concepts and methods of the different critical approaches.

Each student should choose a theoretical piece to have a **short presentation** for the class (on the right side). The assigned critical and literary texts are to be read for the classes (on the left and on the right). In the discussion-based analysis, the students are to take active part and they should write **an essay** upon a chosen topic (work, form or trend). The essay is to be of 5-6 pages (TNR 12, single spaced), critical and clearly noted. The deadline of the essay is **30th May**.

Requirements: Participation 20%; Presentation 20%; Essay 60%

Schedule:

Consultation 1 (14.15-16.30 on 27th March, B305)

New Criticism and Deconstruction

- Cleanth Brooks, "Irony as a Principle of Structure"
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5441df7ee4b02f59465d2869/t/588e94e446c3c4023d8c80ae/1485739236785/Irony+as+a+Principle+of+Structure.pdf>
- or Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase"
<http://oldsite.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/ayliu/unlocked/brooks-cleanth/heresy-of-paraphrase.pdf>
- Joseph Hillis Miller, "The Figure in the Carpet"
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1772414>

Class Readings (**Qs will be sent**):

- Sylvia Plath, "I Am Vertical", "Mirror", "A Secret", "Medusa", "Lady Lazarus"
https://www.internal.org/sylvia_plath
- Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet* <http://www.biblioteca.org.ar/libros/167495.pdf>

Consultation 2 (16.45-19.00 on 27th March, B305):

Feminist Criticism, Gender Studies and Performativity

- Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory"
<http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/TimarAndrea/17a.Butler.performative%5B1%5D.pdf>
- Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman"
https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/881484/files/29889512?module_item_id=6278065

Class Readings (**Qs will be sent**):

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Turned", "If I Were a Man", "When I was a Witch", "Making a Change" http://wps.prenhall.com/wps/media/objects/107/110026/ch18_a2_d2.pdf ;
- <http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/101/19.pdf>

Consultation 3 (16.45-19.00 on 25th April, B207)

Psychoanalytical Criticism

- Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"

<http://pages.mtu.edu/~rlstrick/rsvtxt/lacan.htm>

- Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

<https://www.asu.edu/courses/fms504/total-readings/mulvey-visualpleasure.pdf>

Class Reading: *Inception*, dir. Christopher Nolan (film) - **Qs will be sent**

<https://ww.0123movies.su/movie/inception-2010-online-123movies/watching/?ep=1>

Consultation 4 (14.15-16.30 on 9th May, B 207)

Postcolonial Criticism and Cultural Studies

- Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man"

<http://www.marginalutility.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/01.-Bhabha.pdf>

- Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"

http://art.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/Jameson_Postmodernism_and_Consumer_Society.pdf

Class Readings:

Don de Lillo, *Cosmopolis* (+ film adaptation, dir. David Cronenberg) - **Qs will be sent**

http://unlimited-ebooks.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/3/9/13397081/delillo_don_-_cosmopolis.pdf

Consultation 5 (16.45-19.00 on 9th May, B207)

New Historicism – Utopia, Dystopia & Irony

- Fredric Jameson, "Varieties of the Utopian"

<http://monumenttoformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/u/utopia/varieties-of-the-utopian-fredric-jameson.html>

- Linda Hutcheon, "Interventionist Literary Histories. Nostalgic, Pragmatic, or Utopian?"

<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19081/1/Hutcheon-3.pdf>

- Linda Hutcheon, "The Complex Functions of Irony"

<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/10251/1/Hutcheon1992Complex.pdf>

Class Readings:

- Philip K. Dick, short stories - **Qs will be sent++**

http://www.openculture.com/2013/03/download_14_great_sci-fi_stories_by_philip_k_dick_as_free_audio_books_and_free_ebooks.html ;

<https://philipdick.com/resources/web-sites/short-stories-online/>

+++ <http://cwanderson.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Philip-K-Dick-The-Minority-Report.pdf>

- ((Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (novel and the series)

<https://1.cdn.edl.io/rOZeEoIzqLA5h7b4cDX6aDEBZuJXyRRW0YD6o0ns1BB0gpbC.pdf>)

Suggested Readings:

- *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton, 2001 (see its introductory chapters)

- Habib, M.A.R. *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory. A History*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008

- Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh (ed.). *Modern Literary Theory*. London: Arnold, 2001

Consultation 1 - LMB_AM101G5 LITERARY THEORY: AMERICAN CRITICAL THEORY AND LITERARY FORM SEMINAR (DR ÉVA ANTAL), 2020 SPRING

New Criticism (Cleanth Brooks) + PPTs (Mirtill's and mine)

key words:

close reading; contextual irony; dynamic structure; meanings: denotative and connotative; contrasts, tension; unity of interpretation --- metaphors!

Examples: Sylvia Plath's poems

1. "Metaphors" by Sylvia Plath

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

- What state is described in the poem? In what metaphors (9+5) is it presented? What are your feelings associated with the poem?

2. "Mirror" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nZht4WMoMo>)

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful,
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

- Who is speaking in the poem? What is the speaker's perspective in place and time? What changes in the second stanza? Show the contrasts in the poem (e.g. liars vs. truthful, faithful telling)
- 3. "I am Vertical" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mG1biL_Yq2E)

But I would rather be horizontal.
I am not a tree with my root in the soil
Sucking up minerals and motherly love
So that each March I may gleam into leaf,
Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed
Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
Unknowing I must soon unpetal.
Compared with me, a tree is immortal
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,
The trees and the flowers have been strewing their cool odors.
I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.
Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping
I must most perfectly resemble them --
Thoughts gone dim.
It is more natural to me, lying down.
Then the sky and I are in open conversation,

And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:

Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me.

- What contrast gives the framework of the poem? What metaphors and connotative meanings are associated with the two states? Which state is the speaker longing for? Why?

4. "A Secret" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC-JGU33wrc>)

It is the most difficult poem with half-mad associations and it is highly autobiographical. These are fragments of the speaker's "cryptic fury".

- Can you find some clues in the poem why she is suffering and so hurt?

The poem shows disunity of meanings, it is still full of tension. ---

--- Deconstruction

Key words:

intertextuality; multiplicity of meanings; unreadability (see Miller 112); rhetorical close reading – never-ending process; more questions than answers --- tropes and figures

Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet* (+ Joseph H. Miller's theoretical text)

- Who is the narrator? Who are the characters? What are their professions? What is the obsession of the narrator? How are the other characters related to "the secret"? Who knows the secret? Is there a secret?

- How is the reader involved in the story? Who are the figures – in which carpet? (see Miller 109, 116)

Consultation 2 --- Feminist Criticism

PPTs: Szilvia's and mine

Key words: stereotypes of social behavior; gender roles; performativity in our life (Butler); re-writing; re-defining (Butler); emancipation; feminism; WOMAN (Wittig) + self-definition

Examples: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories

1. "If I Were a Man" (1914)

What is the image of "a true woman" (and man) displayed here? What does Mollie experience physically and 'mentally', becoming a man? What does 'she' learn about men's view of women? – Think about criticism of gender roles.

2. "If I Were a Witch" (1910)

What wishes of the 'I' narrator come true? What is the common feature of the first wishes of hers? How does she achieve small improvements later, making the world better? What is her ultimate wish? Does it work? – Think about the symbolism of witchcraft (white vs. black) and its relation to womanhood.

3. "Making a Change" (1911)

What does the family in the story look like? What are the roles assigned? Why is the mother suffering? How does the grandma solve the situation? – Consider the importance of 'sisterhood'.

4. "Turned" (1911)

What has happened to the Marroners? How is the secret revealed? How does the wife react? What changes described at the end of the short story? How can you interpret the final "glance"? -- Think of sisterhood and "lesbian continuum" (Wittig).

Extra task(s):

Can you define "woman"? Is it a concept? Can it be?

Watch the recent provoking video: "Be a Lady They Said" (2020)

<https://vimeo.com/393253445>