THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF LITERATURE

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:10–2:30, Murray 112
Professor Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)
Office hours: Mondays 2:30–4:30 in Murray 019
http://soclit14.blogs.rutgers.edu

OVERVIEW

Where does literature come from? Many discussions about literature proceed as if this question hardly matters: the text, say the teachers and the critics, is there, and we only need to read it closely enough to discover its meaning. But who put the text there, who said that it was literature, and who is this “we” who is doing the reading? Once we ask these questions, we have begun to think of “literature” as a social construction, and to enter into literary studies’ debates, from the early twentieth century to present, about the relationship between literature and society. These debates are the subject of the course. Central themes include: literary form and the rejection of social context; literature as socially oppositional force; literature and political power, especially the power of the European empires; the debate over the literary canon and the role of educational institutions; and sociological theories of the literary field. The readings in this course are challenging but highly rewarding. Seminar discussion concentrates on patient engagement with statements by major literary and social theorists from across the twentieth century. We put the theories to work in brief case studies of twentieth-century lyric poetry; modernist narrative fiction; the history of Rutgers course catalogues; and contemporary literary prizes.

COURSE GOALS

1. Understand major themes of the literary-theoretical debate about the relation between literature and society.
2. Become proficient in analytically reading and critically engaging with difficult theoretical texts.
3. Learn to put theoreticians’ conceptual arguments in conversation with literary interpretations in both seminar discussion and formal writing.
4. Develop a reflexive understanding of the way social actors and institutions, including the educational institution we participate in, continually reshape the content and function of “literature.”
REQUIREMENTS

10% PARTICIPATION

Attendance and active, thoughtful participation in discussion are required. The purpose of a seminar is for us to learn by addressing difficult questions together. This requires every student to take the intellectual risk of offering observations, ideas, and arguments in class in response to one another and to me. You aren't supposed to know all the answers in advance, or to talk all the time, but you are required to make your best effort to figure things out as we go along, and to work with your classmates to help them do so as well. Lateness, lack of preparation, or disruptive behavior during seminar will affect the participation mark.

Two absences are allowed without penalty. If you fall ill or miss class for a family emergency, please contact me as soon as possible; you can make up for an excused absence. Students can do work to make up for unexcused absences only at my discretion. The maximum participation mark if you have three absences is 3.0; if you have four, 2.0. Missing more than four classes without excuse will normally result in a failing grade for the course (not just a 0 for participation).

5% INFORMAL WRITING

Students are required to contribute to a course blog six times in the semester. Individual entries are graded on a credit/no credit basis; it is not possible to receive credit for a late blog entry. Grading scale: No more than one entry missing, 4.0; two or three entries missing, 2.0; four or more entries missing, 0.

25% PAPER 1

A short paper (6 pp.), on lyric and theories of form, is due October 3.

25% PAPER 2

A second short paper (7 pp.), interpreting multiple theoretical texts, is due November 4.

35% FINAL PAPER

The final paper (11-13 pp.) is a researched interpretive argument engaging substantively with a theoretical problem raised in the course. It must also bring the theoretical argument to bear on one or more primary sources, which will normally be the author's own choice. The specific topic is to be developed over the course of the semester. Both thoughtful analysis of primary texts and meaningful engagement with secondary sources are required. A draft (not separately graded) is due December 2. The paper is due December 15 (one- or two-day extensions possible).
GRADING

Grades will be given on the four-point scale as specified in the Undergraduate Catalog. In converting the final numerical score to a letter, the equivalents in the Catalog are taken as the maxima of intervals open on the left and closed on the right. Thus A corresponds to scores strictly greater than 3.5 and less than or equal to 4.0, B+ to scores greater than 3.0 and less than or equal to 3.5, B to scores greater than 2.5 and less than or equal to 3.0, and so on. There are no “minus” grades. The general standards for grades are as follows:

A range (3.5, 4.0]: Outstanding. The student’s work demonstrates thorough mastery of course materials and skills.

B range (2.5, 3.5]: Good. The student’s work demonstrates serious engagement with all aspects of the course but incomplete mastery of course materials and skills.

C range (1.5, 2.5]: Satisfactory. The student’s work satisfies requirements but shows significant problems or major gaps in mastery of course material.

D (0.5, 1.5]: Poor or minimal pass. The student completes the basic course requirements, but the student’s work is frequently unsatisfactory in several major areas.

F [0, 0.5]: Failure. Student has not completed all course requirements or turns in consistently unsatisfactory work.

The final grade will be based on a numerical score but is subject to my discretion. Unsatisfactory work in all areas of the course will result in an F even if the numerical score corresponds to a passing grade. It is not possible to pass the course without completing all three papers.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students and instructors have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University’s academic integrity policies, please see academicintegrity.rutgers.edu.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All reasonable accommodation will be given to students with disabilities. Students who may require accommodation should speak with me at the start of the semester. You may also contact the Office of Disability Services (disabilityservices.rutgers.edu; 848-445-6800).
SCHEDULE

Blog entries are to be posted by 6 p.m. on the evening before the date on which they are listed. Many of the readings are found in Richter, *The Critical Tradition*, hereafter abbreviated *CT*. I have listed original book titles rather than the excerpt titles given by Richter.

THE WHAT WHAT OF WHAT?

Wednesday, September 3.

Williams, “Literature” (distributed in class).

FORM AND SOCIAL OPPOSITION

Monday, September 8. Blogging trial run.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry,” in *CT*.
Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying: An Observation,” in *CT*.


Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *CT*.
Cleanth Brooks, “Irony as a Principle of Structure,” in *CT*.
Brooks, “My Credo.”
Ransom, “Criticism, Inc.”

Monday, September 15. Blog post 1 (group B).

From Auden, *Selected Poems*:
19 (“Paysage Moralisé”).
33 (“Lullaby”).
34 “Spain.”
42 “Musée des Beaux Arts.”
43 “Epitaph on a Tyrant.”
44 “In Memory of W.B. Yeats.”
47 “September 1, 1939.”
From Bishop, *The Complete Poems*:
“A Miracle for Breakfast.”
“At the Fishhouses.”
Wednesday, September 17.

Paper 1 assignment distributed.
From McKay, *Harlem Shadows*:
- “The Harlem Dancer.”
- “If We Must Die.”
- “America.”
- “The White City.”
- “Outcast.”

From Hughes, *Collected Poems*:
- “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.”
- “I Too.”
- “The Weary Blues.”
- “The Bitter River.”
- “Good Morning Revolution.”


**SOCIAL FORCES**


Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *CT*.
Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *CT*.
Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, in *CT*.
Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (excerpt distributed in class).

Wednesday, September 24.

Marx.
Williams.
Piketty.

Monday, September 29.

Joyce, *Dubliners*, through “Grace.”
Wednesday, October 1.

Micro-workshop: arguments.
Joyce, *Dubliners*.
Joyce, *Selected Letters*, 78–9, 81–90, 197–9, 207–9.

(Friday, October 3.) Paper 1 due.


Joyce, *Dubliners*.
Georg Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” in *CT*.
Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, in *CT*.

Wednesday, October 8.

Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” in *CT*.
Optional: Mullin, “‘Something in the Name of Araby.’”

CULTURAL POWER


Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, in *CT*.

Wednesday, October 15.

Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa,” in *CT*.

Monday, October 20. Blog post 3 (group B).

Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.
Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

Wednesday, October 22.

Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education.”
Chattopadhyay, “Confessions of a Young Bengal.”
Viswanathan, “Currying Favor.”
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain,” in *CT*.

Monday, October 27. Blog post 4 (group A).

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, in *CT*. 

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Last revised 12/01/2014
Wednesday, October 29.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in *CT*.
Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, in *CT*.

**CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND CULTURAL VALUE**

Monday, November 3.

Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *CT*.
Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *CT*.

Wednesday, November 5. Blog post 4 (group B).

Martin, “Criticism and the Academy.”

(Friday, November 7.) Paper 2 due.


Visit with University Archivists Tom Frusciano and Erika Gorder.
Research skills workshop with English librarian Kevin Mulcahy (tentative).
Selections from Rutgers course catalogues, almost all included in a single PDF file on Sakai:
*Catalogue of Rutgers College, 1890–91*, Classical Department, 22–27.
*New Jersey College for Women Catalogue, 1923–24*, English, 68–71. These pages are in a separate PDF file on Sakai.
*Douglass College: Programs of Study..., 1969–70*, English Language and Literature, 77–85.

All pages of the Rutgers “Department of English History,” [http://english.rutgers.edu/department/history.html](http://english.rutgers.edu/department/history.html).
(Research suggestion: anthology tables of contents.)

Wednesday, November 12.

Danto, “The Artworld.”
DiMaggio, “Classification in Art.”


Wednesday, November 19.


(Friday, November 21.) Final paper proposal due.


Lamont and Lareau, “Cultural Capital.”

(Wednesday, November 26.) No class; Friday classes meet.


Huggan, “Prizing ‘Otherness.’”
Selected Booker prize journalism.

Wednesday, December 3.


(Saturday, December 6.) Final paper draft due.

**STINGER: READERS**

Monday, December 8.

Ohmann, “The Shaping of a Canon.”
Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature.”

Wednesday, December 10.

Griswold, McDonnell, and Wright, “Reading and the Reading Class in the Twenty-First Century.”
Striphas, *The Late Age of Print*.

(Monday, December 15.) Final paper due.

**READINGS**

Auden, W. H. Selected Poems. New ed. Edited by Edward Mendelson. New York: Vintage, 1979. Excerpt available on Sakai. If you wish to buy an Auden collection, the Collected Poems are a better choice than this or the more recent expanded Selected Poems.


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