

English 234: Literary Theory Repetition, Remixing, Remediation

Course Description:

One of the strangest and most unpredictable developments of the contemporary culture war involves the renewed urgency of literary theory—and its siblings, critical theory and cultural studies—in the popular imagination and public sphere. If “theory” was viewed only recently as a historical curiosity, a set of esoteric preoccupations amongst French intellectuals and their acolytes in Britain and North America in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, it is now front-and-centre in conservative attacks on higher education and what it is that we allegedly do in universities: disrupt conventional thinking, undermine foundational knowledge, foment resistance, preach social justice—all the while chasing our intellectual tails and brainwashing our students with dangerous ideas that fall ambiguously under the heading, “Postmodernism.” Consider a March, 2017, article for *Aero* magazine, “How French ‘Intellectuals’ Ruined the West: Postmodernism and Its Impact, Explained.” Before offering a grab-bag account of a few major theoretical schools—post-structuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Deconstruction—the writer claims: “Postmodernism presents a threat not only to liberal democracy but to modernity itself.”¹

Are the stakes really so high? How could something as (let’s face it) remote as the study of how, why, and under what conditions texts produce meaning threaten to topple everything good in the world?

In this class, we are going to take up this question by tracing the development of literary theory from its origins in English Departments in the first half of the twentieth century, to the fractious debates about theory (and anti-theory) in the postwar academy, to our own theoretical—or post-theoretical—moment as knowledge producers and students of English literature at Bishop’s University in 2018. Paying heed to the truism attributed to Karl Marx that “practice without theory is blind, theory without practice is sterile,” we’re going to *do stuff* with the theoretical concepts we explore by putting them into dialogue with a core literary text, namely Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Required Texts

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein* (1818 Edition)

Readings from Stuart Hall, Sigmund Freud, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Judith Butler, Linda Hutcheon, and others.

¹ Helen Pluckrose, “How French ‘Intellectuals’ Ruined the West: Postmodernism and Its Impact, Explained.” *Aero Magazine*, 27 March 2017. < <https://areomagazine.com/2017/03/27/how-french-intellectuals-ruined-the-west-postmodernism-and-its-impact-explained/> >

NB: I will be uploading theoretical readings to the course Moodle site. You must have a hard-copy of the text with you in class, as electronic reading devices, including laptops, are prohibited.

Many weeks will feature discussion of films; it is your responsibility to view these films outside of class time.

Method of Evaluation:

Active Class Engagement: 15%

Participating and collaborating with one another in the difficult process of understanding and making meaning are crucial to the experience of any course in the humanities. I expect all of you to come prepared every day to help build a stimulating, productive intellectual environment.

***Frankenstein* Group Assignment: 20%**

The group assignment involves two components: in the first, you will meet with members of your group to discuss your approach to framing an in-class discussion about how a particular theoretical perspective can be used to illuminate some aspect of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; in the second, each member of that group will become the leader of another group: your job will then be to moderate a seminar-style discussion with your colleagues, with a mind to stimulating (and gaining for yourself) a richer understanding of the theoretical concepts in question, as well as Shelley's novel.

Midterm: 15%

Wednesday, 28 February 2018

Final Paper: 25%

Friday, 13 April 2018

Final Exam: 25%

TBA

Course Trajectory

Week One: Introduction to Literary Theory: Interpreting Texts

W.K Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy"

Week Two: Literary Theory, Critical Theory, Cultural Studies

Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"

Week Three: Structuralism and Poststructuralism

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Brett Gaylor, *RIP! A Remix Manifesto* (2008)

Week Four: Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud, Selections from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Film: Robert Weine, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)

Week Five: Heteroglossia, Polyvocality, Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel"

Week Six: Gender Theory, Queer Theory, Performativity

Judith Butler, Selections from *Gender Trouble*

Film: Jennie Livingstone, *Paris is Burning* (1990)

Week Seven: Adaptation Theory

Linda Hutcheon, Selections from *A Theory of Adaptation*

Week Eight: Midterm Exam (Wednesday, 28 February; Class on Friday, 2 March cancelled)

Week Nine: Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley, "Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Third Edition (1831)"

Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"

Week Ten: Psychoanalysis and *Frankenstein*

Sigmund Freud, selections from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

Freud, "The Uncanny"

Week Eleven: Dialogism and *Frankenstein*

Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel"

Bakhtin, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse"

Week Twelve: Queer Theory, Performativity, and *Frankenstein*

Judith Butler, Selections from *Gender Trouble*

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Selections from *The Epistemology of the Closet*

Film: Jim Sherman, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975)

Week Thirteen: Adaptation Theory and *Frankenstein*

Linda Hutcheon, Selections from *A Theory of Adaptation*

Robert Stam: "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation"

Film: James Whale, *Frankenstein* (1931)

Last Class: Skepticism, Doubt, Suspicion

Selection from Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*

Final Paper Due (Friday, 13 April)

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory. If you miss more than 5 classes (whether excused or unexcused) you will not be eligible for a passing grade in this course.

Technology Policy:

A 2011 study at the University of Michigan found that 75% of students reported “using a laptop during class increased the amount of time they spent on non-course work.” 35% of students reported having spent “more than ten minutes per class using social media sites and email.” In light of this study, I have a strict ban on digital/communications technologies in class, including e-books. Without exception, laptops, tablets, and cell-phones must be stowed away in bags for the duration of class time.

Policy on Submissions:

All assignments must be submitted to me in hard-copy, in class on the due date. All assignments must be completed in order to be eligible for a passing grade in this course. Requests for extensions must be made to me in writing (via email) at least one week prior to the due date. Late submissions will receive a penalty of 10% per day late.

Learning Assistance:

Accommodations and support for students with disabilities is a shared responsibility between the students, the Student Accessibility & Accommodation Services, faculty and all University personnel. Students requesting accommodations are responsible for providing the appropriate documentation which supports their requests. Students are also responsible for communicating requests as early as possible to allow the service provider adequate time to respond. For more information, please consult the Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services website: <http://www.ubishops.ca/future-current-students/student-campus-life/student-services/student-accessibility-accommodation-services/>

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism is a major academic offence and tough penalties apply (see the section “Academic Integrity” in the Academic Calendar). Make sure you know what plagiarism is. Ignorance is no defence. The Dean of Arts and Science will be notified about all cases of plagiarism and a note will be made in the student’s personal file.

If a student has any question about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, it is that student’s responsibility to clarify the matter by conferring with the instructor and to seek out other resources available on the campus. **Any assignment deemed to have been plagiarized will receive a grade of zero.**