

CRITICAL THEORY 101/  
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE 141

INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL AND  
LITERARY THEORY



SPRING 2012 T,R 12.10-1.30 PM WELLMAN  
127

CRN# 93546 (COM 141) / CRN# 93662 (CRI 101)

**Instructor:** Prof. Neil Larsen  
Program in Critical Theory  
Department of Comparative Literature

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**Office hours:** [Note: due to health problems, I will not be holding my office hours in my Sproul Hall office, but rather from home, as follows.] W & F,

**3-4 PM**, via telephone or skype; or by appointment. Please email me first for an appointment, or during my office hours, and I'll then furnish you with a telephone number to call and/or my skype address.

### Course description:

This course introduces students to the basic concepts and methods of critical and literary theory. Drawing on Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: an Introduction* and selections from primary works by theorists from Marx and Freud to Benjamin and Foucault, the class will explore the theoretical ramifications of a small group of literary and cultural texts, including Shakespeare's *King Lear*; Morrison's *Beloved*; Kafka's "The Cares of a Family Man"; and a classic modern film, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Students will be required to write a number of short summaries of readings, participate to two working-group critical-theoretical/interpretive exercises in and outside of class; and complete a final project of theoretical analysis centered on a text to be selected in consultation with instructor.

### Course procedures & requirements:

- consistent attendance and preparation
- periodic, brief in-class presentations based on pre-distributed study and discussion questions
- occasional, short reading-quizzes
- two group exercises and with in-class presentations (small working groups to meet at least once outside class, in person and/or on-line)
- short (1,000 word max.) written summaries of any five of the readings, excluding Eagleton, Lear and Beloved
- completion of a final writing project of theoretical analysis centered on a pre-determined text/object [app. 4,000 words]. Projects turned in by **5/30** will receive comments and an opportunity to revise; those turned in by **6/5** comments and final grade; those turned in on the final deadline, **6/7**, grade only.

Final grade factors: [note that there will be no formal midterm or final exams

- short written summaries 20%
- class presentations (including group exercises): 20%
- reading quizzes: 15%
- final writing project: 45%

**Please note the following strict course policies:**

- **Attendance is mandatory; more than two unexcused absences are grounds for lowering of final grade by one letter; more than three are grounds for dismissal from course.**
- **No make-ups given under any circumstances for missed reading quizzes or presentations. Lowest quiz score dropped from final average, however.**
- **Under extreme circumstances, a grade of Incomplete can be given for the course. However, the maximum course grade that can replace an Incomplete is A-.**

**Readings: [in bookstore]**

- Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: an Introduction [EGLT]
- Shakespeare, King Lear [LEAR]
- Toni Morrison, Beloved [BLV]

**Supplemental readings [to be supplied in digital format or, if necessary, in photocopy]**

- Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (selection)
- Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?"
- Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'"
- Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* chapters 2, 12 & 15
- Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"
- Interview with Judith Butler
- Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (brief selections from various works)

- Georg Lukács, "Shakespeare and Historicism" (from *The Historical Novel*)
- Walter Benjamin, selection from "The Story Teller" (sections I-V) and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility" (sections XIII-XIX)
- T. W. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka" (selections)
- Franz Kafka, "The Cares of a Family Man"

**Reading and activity schedule:**

<b>DATE</b> 2012	<b>READING (I.E. YOU MUST HAVE READ BY THIS DATE)</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES, DUE DATES, ETC.</b>
T 4/3	_____	WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY?	INTRODUCTORY LECTURE
R 4/5	<b>EGLT INTRO. &amp; CHAP. 1</b>	WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY?	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 4/10	<b>EGLT CHAP. 3</b>	FORMALISM & STRUCTURALISM	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
R 4/12	<b>Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (selection)</b>	STRUCTURALISM	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 4/17	_____	_____	WORKING GROUPS MEET TO WORK ON FIRST THEORY EXERCISE
R 4/19	<b>Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (selection), cont. &amp; LEAR</b>	STRUCTURALISM	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS

T 4/24	_____	_____	WORKING GROUPS PRESENT RESULTS OF FIRST THEORY EXERCISE
R 4/26	EGLT CHAP 4	POSTSTRUCTURALISM	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 5/1	NO CLASS MEETING  Foucault, "What is an Author?"	POSTSTRUCTURALISM	PODCAST MATERIALS ON EGLT 4 & FOUCAULT
R 5/3	EGLT CHAP 5 BLV	PSYCHOANALYSIS	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 5/8	Freud "The 'Uncanny'"	PSYCHOANALYSIS	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
R 5/10	Kracauer, <i>Theory of Film</i> , chapter 2 Hitchcock, "Vertigo"	FILM THEORY	FILM SHOWING LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 5/15	Kracauer, <i>Theory of Film</i> , chapters 12 & 15, "Vertigo," cont.	FILM THEORY	FILM SHOWING LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
R 5/17	Freud, "The Uncanny", cont;	PSYCHOANALYSIS  FILM THEORY	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
T 5/22	Kracauer, <i>Theory of Film</i> , cont; Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"	FILM THEORY FEMINISM	LECTURE & PRESENTATIONS
R 5/24			GROUP

			PRESENTATIONS OF RESULTS OF SECOND THEORY EXERCISE
T 5/29	<b>Marx &amp; Engels</b> , (selections from various works); <b>Lukács</b> , "Shakespeare and Historicism"; <b>Benjamin</b> , "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility" (sections XIII-XIX)	<b>MARXISM</b>	<b>LECTURE &amp; PRESENTATIONS</b>
R 5/31	<b>Lukács, Benjamin</b> , cont., <b>Kafka</b> , "The Cares of a Family Man" & <b>T. W. Adorno</b> , "Notes on Kafka" (selections)	<b>MARXISM</b> <b>WHAT IS CRITICAL THEORY?</b>	<b>LECTURE &amp; PRESENTATIONS</b>  GROUP DISCUSSIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS  <b>first deadline for final project</b>
T 6/5	<b>Rubin</b> , "The Traffic in Women" & Interview with <b>Judith Butler</b>	<b>FEMINISM</b>	<b>LECTURE &amp; PRESENTATIONS</b>  <b>second deadline for final project</b>
R 6/7 <b>NO CLASS</b>			<b>final deadline</b>