

# How We Read Now: Literary Criticism and Theories of Reading

ENGL 726

Professor Jessica Pressman

Spring 2018

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In their now-seminal special issue of the journal *Representations* (2009) titled “How We Read Now,” scholars Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus ask what literary criticism looks like—and should look like—in our digital, neoliberal, twenty-first century. They are not alone. From Bruno Latour’s “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” to Rita Felski’s *The Limits of Critique*, scholars are questioning the contemporary toolkit of literary criticism. This course uses the opportunity posed by this trend in self-reflection to study the history of our discipline and its critical reading practices. We read seminal examples of literary critical reading practices from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century up until the present—texts representative of New Criticism, New Historicism, Reader-Response Theory, Symptomatic Reading, Distant Reading, Actor-Network Theory, and more—in order to gain a foundation from which to understand and determine “how we read now.”

## Learning Outcomes

In this class, you will

- acquire an understanding of critical reading as a learned, not natural, practice
- acquire an understanding of Literary Criticism as a profession with specific and historically-contingent practices of reading
- gain familiarity with seminal texts and thinkers in the history of Literary Criticism
- hone your skills as a critical thinker and writer by focusing on the development of a thesis statement and the ability to prove it through explication

## Administrative Information

Email: jpressman@sdsu.edu *Do not expect a response within 24 hours	Course Website: spring2018-eng726.jessicapressman.com
Office: AL 261 Office hours: Tuesday 1:30-3 and by appointment	Course Meeting: T 3:30-6:10 Room: EBA 257
English Subject Librarian: Markel Tumlin	mtumlin@rohan.sdsu.edu

**Required Reading (all books available at SDSU bookstore unless otherwise noted)**

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique* (University Of Chicago Press (October 20, 2015)

Leitch, Vincent B. ed. *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory & Criticism*, second edition, (W.W. Norton & Co., 2010)

**ASSIGNMENTS**

Participation and Presentation 20%

Weekly Blog Posts 25%

Midterm Essay: Short Close Reading 20%

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography for Final Essay 5%

Final Essay Project 30%

**Participation 20%**

This is *your* class, and your active participation is vital to its success. You must attend *all* class meetings in order to receive full credit for participation. You must also engage—talk and listen—in class. Come to class prepared to discuss the text in depth; this means having read the *entire* text *before* class. I expect you to speak and listen.

- **Your participation grade includes engaging in dialogue in class.** This means speaking and listening actively, attentively, and respectfully. (If you have fear of speaking in public, this seminar is a good place to learn to address that fear. Please come see me early in the term to discuss strategies for dealing with this fear).
- **Your participation grade includes an in-person meeting with the professor.**
- **You will give a 5-minute presentation on one of the texts.** This presentation should serve to start the class's conversation for the day. You will point us to a question from the day's reading and to the specific passage in the text that sparked that inquiry for you. You will get the discussion rolling. You should be able to direct the class to a passage for close reading and/or a series of questions for discussion.

**Weekly Blog Posts (25%)**

You will write (**500 words**) **blog responses to the reading and each provide a comment on a peer's blog each week**, before the next week's class meeting. The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor to address and incorporate these topics in that week's meeting. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

--Blog posts are due *on Monday at 6pm* weekly; **late posts will not receive credit.**

-You will be given an *overall* grade for blog posts, based on completion and content, not a grade for each post. Rubric for grading is available on our website and below.

Your Blog Grade is based on 2-parts: 1) a completion grade, and 2) a content grade.

<b>The completion component of the blog grade</b> requires you to have the following number of posts:	<b>The content component of the blog grade</b> is based on the following grading rubric
A= 11-13 posts B= 8-10 posts C= 6-7 posts D= 4-5 posts F= 3 or less	A= Post contains a focused thesis or question and close reading of a passage, B= Post contains a close reading of content but no focused question or thesis C= Post contains no analysis of text (no close reading), just summary and undirected ideas D=Post contains little substantive thinking as content

### **Short Close Reading (20%)**

This short (4-5 page) essay is intended to provide *a benchmark* for your writing (and grade), a place to test your thesis and explication skills before the final essay. You will revise one of your blog posts or write new content that demonstrates your ability to **1) develop a thesis, and 2) use a text to support, through textual explication/analysis/close reading, your argument.**

*\*\*Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

### **Proposal/Annotated Bibliography (5%)**

In preparation for your final essay project, you will write a short proposal (500-words) *that includes a thesis statement* and an annotated bibliography of 8-10 centrally relevant sources for the essay. Information of proposal and bibliography are available on our website. *\*\*Late assignment are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

### **Final Essay (30%)**

In this **20 page analytical essay**, you will explore in-depth one research question raised by our course. You will propose your own essay topic and determine the best way to present, your argument and research. You will conduct and implement scholarly research, **secondary sources (at least 2)** not included on our syllabus, in your essay.

-Your essay must include **a thesis** that guides the analysis and **textual explication** (close reading) to support it. (We will discuss and practice these analytical skills throughout the semester; informative guides to thesis writing and explication are also available on our website).

-You must *meet with the professor* to discuss your plans for the final essay

-You will *briefly present* your research during the final week of class.

*\*\*Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*

### **Extra Credit (Total of 1%)**

There are multiple ways to earn extra credit in this class, all of which will be listed on our website.

**\*\*To receive credit for any of these events, you must not only attend but also *write a blog post* that situates that event (the reading, the literature, the discussion) in the context of our class**

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## **READING SCHEDULE**

Unless otherwise noted, all readings are from our anthology *The Norton Anthology of Literary Theory & Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, second edition, (W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

### **Part I. Introduction**

#### **Week 1: January 23. Introduction to our Study**

January 23: Introduction

#### **Week 2. January 30: What is Critical Reading?**

- Warner, Michael. "Uncritical Reading" (2004) [PDF]
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: an introduction" (2009), introduction to special issue of *Representations* "How We Read Now" [PDF]

### **Part II: A History of 20<sup>th</sup> C Critical Reading**

#### **Week 3. February 6: The New Criticism**

- Ransom, John Crowe. "Criticism, Inc." (1938), p. 971
- Brooks, Cleanth. "The Well Wrought Urn" (1947), p.1217
- Wimsatt, Jr. William K. and Monroe Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) p. 1232

#### **Week 4. February 13: Marxist and Materialist**

- Gramsci, Antonio. "The Formation of the Intellectuals" (1948) p. 1002-1008
- Jameson, Fredric. Excerpt from *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism* (1988) p.1818-1860

#### **Week 5. February 20: Deconstruction**

- de Man, Paul. "Semiotics and Rhetoric" (1973) p. 1365
- Derrida, Jacques. Excerpt from *Dissemination* (1972), p. 1697

#### **Week 6. February 27: Symptomatic Reading**

- Freud, Sigmund. Excerpt from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) p. 814-824
- Lacan, Jacques. "Seminar on The Purloined Letter" (1972) [online]
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) p. 2084-

**Week 7. March 6: The Historical Turn and The New Historicism**

- White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact" (1978), p. 1536
- Greenblatt, Stephen J. from *Resonance and Wonder* (1990) p. 2150
- Gallagher, Catherine and Stephen Greenblatt. Introduction to *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) [PDF]

**Week 8. March 13: The Sociology of Literature**

- Bourdieu, Pierre. Excerpts from *Distinction* and *The Rules of Art* (1992), p. 1664-80
- Radway, Janice. "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context" (1983) [PDF]

Additional Reading: Jim English, "[Everywhere and Nowhere: The Sociology of Literature After "the Sociology of Literature"](#)"

**Week 9. March 20: Professor Pressman Away**

Writing Workshop & Special Collections visit

- bring printed thesis (and draft of essay, if you have it) to class for peer review

**\*\*Sunday, 3/25@ midnight: Midterm essay due posted to blog\*\***

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

**Week 10: April 3: Post-Colonialism and Race**

- Said, Edward. Excerpt from *Orientalism* and from *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) pp. 1866-1904
- Delueze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, "Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature" pp.1451-1454
- Morrison, Toni. "Black Matters" [PDF]

**Week 11. April 10: Feminism, Gender, and Sexuality**

- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. Excerpt from *Epistemology of the Closet* [PDF]
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." (1993) [PDF]
- Gunn Allen, Paula. "Kochinnenako in Academe" (1986) pp. 2000-2021

**Week 13. April 17: Textual Studies, Book History, and Comparative Textual Media**

- McGann, Jerome. Excerpt from *The Textual Condition* (1991) [PDF]
- Price, Leah. "From *The History of a Book* to a 'History of the Book'" (2009) [PDF]
- Additional: -Hayles, N. Katherine and Jessica Pressman. introduction to *Comparative Textual Media* (2013) [PDF]

**\*\*Sunday, 4/22@ midnight: Final Proposal due posted to blog\*\***

### **Part III: Where We Are Now**

#### **Week 14. April 24: Digital Humanities**

- Moretti, Franco. Excerpt from *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* (2003) pps. 2441-2464)
- Hayles, N. Katherine. Excerpt from *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (2012), Chapter 3: "How We Read: Close Hyper, Machine" [PDF]

#### **Week 15. May 1: Concluding Discussion and Student Presentations**

- Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique run out of Steam?" pp. 2282-2302
- Felski, Rita. Excerpts from *The Limits of Critique*

*\*\*Sunday, May 6@ midnight: final essays due, posted to blog\*\**

### **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

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***NOTE:** This syllabus is subject to change.*

#### **SDSU as "safe space"**

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to 'protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students . . . including supporting DACA students.' Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit <http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/> for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College."

#### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

I take teaching seriously, and I expect you to take seriously your work as a student. That means that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonest includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else's work on an assignment, basic cheating. Plagiarism and Cheating of any kind will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for further action. If you have questions at all, you should consult me immediately.

#### **DISABILITY STATEMENT**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

