

Advanced Level Course Approaches to Realism (ENAR75) (Autumn 2024), 7.5 credits

Instructor: Giles Whiteley

Course description

Proceeding from the observation that mimesis, or the representation of reality, is one of the oldest issues in the history of literature, this course aims to introduce you to central arguments that have evolved around realism, broadly conceived. What is meant by realism? How does realism relate to the real? Is realism a style, a literary period, a political attitude, or a rhetorical trick? These and related questions, including also postmodern perspectives, will be addressed in the course. The readings are divided between literary texts and critical commentary that ranges from Plato and Aristotle to contemporary theory; each seminar will be structured around an authoritative intervention (or set of interventions) in the debates on realism. As the course progresses, you will be encouraged to formulate independent positions in relation to these debates. Ultimately, the intention is to enable a textured and historically grounded appreciation of realism as an open question rather than a closed book.

Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students should

- have acquired a critical perspective on the analysis of literary realism by reflecting on the literary works and the critical material read for the course;
- have acquired a broad knowledge about and understanding of different approaches to the study of realism and the notion of mimesis, as represented by the readings for the course;
- have the ability to independently formulate an interpretation of a literary text informed by the idea of the representation of reality as both an aesthetic and theoretical problem;
- have developed their ability to present such analyses in written or spoken English, using the appropriate concepts and making the appropriate references;
- express themselves in academic English

This is what we aim for. The means for this is conscientious preparation for each seminar, active participation in seminar discussion, focused responses to given assignments, and the independent production of written work.

Course requirements

To achieve the goals of the course, and be given a passing grade, you will be required to

- Attend the seminars. That is, attendance is mandatory. Notify the seminar instructor **by e-mail** ASAP if for some reason you will be/have been absent. For each seminar you miss you will be given an extra assignment to make up for your absence, but you are only allowed to miss two seminars. If you miss more than two seminars you will not be able to receive a grade for the course.

- Prepare for the seminars by reading the assigned texts in a critical and active manner. Also prepare by carrying out any other tasks that you have been assigned.
- Participate actively in class discussion. Come well prepared and be ready to contribute to constructive and critical exchanges. Since at each seminar you will communicate your main findings and questions to others, it is important to be prepared for this task.
- Write and hand in responses to assignments given by each instructor.

Contact info

Course coordinator: Giles Whiteley; giles.whiteley@english.su.se

Course Overview

Detailed schedule is available on Athena.

Seminar 1	<p>From the Greeks to the Renaissance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Auerbach, Chs 1, 8 & 13• Said (intro to Auerbach)• Homer (pdf/handout); Dante (pdf/handout) <p>Please also revise Plato and Aristotle from the module “Literary Interpretation” (if you haven’t already read these passages, please read in <i>Norton</i>: Plato, <i>Republic</i> Books II, III, VII, X; Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i>).</p>
Seminar 2	<p>Eighteenth-Century Realism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watt, chs. 1-4• Defoe, <i>The Journal of the Plague Year</i>
Seminar 3	<p>Transitioning from Late Eighteenth to Early Nineteenth-Century</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Franco Moretti, ‘Serious Century’ (pdf/handout)• Jane Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
Seminar 4	<p>Nineteenth-Century Realism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Auerbach, ch. 18• Barthes, ‘The reality effect’ (in <i>The Rustle of Language</i>)• Jameson, ‘Floor-Plan’ (pdf/handout)• Flaubert, extracts from <i>Trois Contes</i>
Seminar 5	<p>Dickens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dickens, <i>Bleak House</i>• Chappell; Wolfreys (ebook via su library)

Seminar 6	<p>Nineteenth-Century Naturalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auerbach, ch. 19 • Eliot, extracts from <i>Middlemarch</i> (pdf/handout) • Zola, extracts from <i>Thérèse Raquin</i>, prologue to <i>Thérèse Raquin</i> (pdf/handouts)
Seminar 7	<p>Modernism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auerbach, ch. 20 • Woolf, <i>Mrs Dalloway</i>; • Excerpts from ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown’ (pdf/handout); • Excerpts from Benjamin, ‘Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ (pdf/handout)
Seminar 8	<p>Traumatic Realism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blanchot, ‘The Instant of My Death’ • Excerpts from <i>The Writing of the Disaster</i> and <i>Après coup</i> (pdf/handout) • Excerpts from Adorno, <i>Prisms</i> (pdf/handout) <p>Suggested optional reading: Rothberg pt. I</p>

Course Literature

Please get hold of the following, ideally in these editions where specified:

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans.

Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Any edition.

Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1992.

Blanchot, Maurice, and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death / Demeure*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Chappell, Patrick. ‘Paper Routes: *Bleak House*, Rubbish Theory, and the Character Economy of Realism.’ *ELH*, 80:3 (2013): 783-810.

Defoe, Daniel. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Any edition.

Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Watt, Ian. *The Rise of The Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Bodley Head, 2015.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Ed. David Bradshaw. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2008.

The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. 3rd edn. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2018.

Wolfreys, Julian. *Dickens’s London: Perception, Subjectivity and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. (Available as an ebook via su library)

In addition, the following will be available as pdfs via Athena:

Adorno, excerpt from *Prisms*
Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century'
Blanchot, excerpts from *The Writing of the Disaster* and *Après coup*
Dante, extract from the *Divine Comedy*
Eliot, extract from *Middlemarch*
Flaubert, extract from *Trois Contes*
Homer, extract from the *Odyssey*
Jameson, 'Floor-Plan'
Moretti, 'Serious Century'
Woolf, 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown'
Zola, extracts from *Thérèse Raquin*, and the prologue

Further Reading

While we cover a great deal of material during the space of such a short course, and will not have time in seminars to investigate all aspects of the texts we read each week, you will nevertheless find that the best way to fully develop your own critical voice is to read as widely around the set texts as possible.

The best place to begin is by reading further in Auerbach's *Mimesis* and Watt's *The Rise of The Novel*. For those who hanker for more, or want direction to help when writing their assignments, I suggest the following:

- Beaumont, Matthew, ed. *A Concise Companion to Realism*. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2012. The first six essays are all excellent, including one by Terry Eagleton, and chapters 13 and 15, by Slavoj Žižek and Christopher Norris are useful theoretical approaches from a Lacanian and poststructuralist perspective respectively.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 'The Narrative Voice (the "he", the neutral).' In *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 379-87.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Demeure.' In Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death / Demeure*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2015.
- Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Potolsky, Matthew. *Mimesis*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Grading

The module adopts the 7-grade SU scale.

To receive a final grade, students must have completed all the examinations and met the attendance requirement.

To receive a passing grade (A to E), students must pass all the examinations, and demonstrate that they achieved all the learning outcomes at least at the minimum level.

Examination

Assignment One: Oral Presentation (pass-fail)

Date for Oral Presentations: 3 December 2024.

Retake Date for Oral Presentations: 7 January 2025.

Assignment Two: Analytical Essay (A-F)

- Write an argument essay (an essay arguing a case, driven by a thesis statement) focusing on AT LEAST TWO of the set texts: one (or more) literary and one (or more) theoretical.
- You should make clear your understanding of the material so far studied and discussed and show DETAILED knowledge of BOTH the text AND theories of realism. Good essays will also show the ability to analyse the text closely for its use of literary devices and explain not only which devices are used but also WHY they are used.
- You MUST make reference to secondary reading to substantiate your argument: see the Course Reading List for suggestions, but don't feel limited by this.
- Length: 2000–2500 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.
- Font: Times New Roman 12. Spacing: 2. Use the departmental style sheet. Please remember to add your name and word count.
- The essay must be uploaded on Athena so that you can certify that the text is your own. All essays will be run through the university's text-matching tool Urkund to detect potential cutting and pasting from the internet. NO E-MAIL SUBMISSION.

Date for Essay Submission: 19 January 2025.

Retake Date for Essay Submission: 23 February 2025.

Assessment Criteria: The Essay

EXCELLENT

For a grade of **A** the student should ...

- Display wide-ranging knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a profound familiarity with the texts we have read.
 - Show the ability, in written work and in speech, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion innovative and often illuminating, consistently deploying appropriate critical concepts in an elegant way.
 - Present arguments in a persuasive and coherent manner, in correct, fluent and idiomatic English, in a consistently academic style of writing and spoken delivery.
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VERY GOOD

For a grade of **B** the student should ...

- display a broad knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a strong familiarity with the texts we have read.
 - show the ability, in written work and in speech, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion illuminating, with frequent and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
 - present arguments in a coherent manner, in correct and fluent English, in an academic style of writing and in an acceptably formal register of spoken delivery
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GOOD

For a grade of **C** the student should ...

- display considerable knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as an adequate familiarity with the texts we have read.
 - show the ability, in written work and in speech, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works, with at least occasional and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
 - present arguments in a coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, with only some lapses from an academic style of writing and with a correct and fluent spoken delivery
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SATISFACTORY

For a grade of **D** the student should ...

- display basic knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as some familiarity with the texts we have read.
 - show the ability, in written work and in speech, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with some basic use of appropriate critical concepts.
 - present arguments in a largely coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, in a consistent, formal register of writing and with a largely correct and fluent spoken delivery
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ADEQUATE

For a grade of **E** the student should ...

- display basic knowledge of some of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a basic knowledge of some of the elements of plots, characters, settings and narrative structure in most of the texts we have read.
- show some ability, in written work and in speech, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with at least a minimal employment of technical terms.
- present arguments in an intelligible manner, in adequate English, in a largely formal register of written or spoken delivery, with some fluency and few errors.

FAIL, some additional work required

A grade of **Fx** will be set if the student

- needs to complete work with minor corrections to achieve the criteria for a passing grade.

FAIL, much more work required

A grade of **F** will be set if the student

- shows scant or no knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations; likewise shows very little or no familiarity with the texts we have read.
- fails to reach a satisfactory level of critical analysis in written assignments and in speech, a failure that includes inability to properly use critical concepts.
- fails to communicate adequately in English, with many errors and no sense of stylistic register.

Any of these failures is enough for an overall fail.

Assessment Criteria: Oral Presentation

Criteria	Pass	Fail
Content	The presentation introduces the topic of the presentation in a clear and concise manner demonstrating the student's understanding of the literary, historical and theoretical issues discussed. These issues are presented and discussed in a lucid manner.	In the presentation the student does not demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the literary, historical, and theoretical issues discussed. These issues are not presented and discussed in an adequate manner.
Organisation and language	The presentation is well structured and easy to follow. The language used is academic and does not contain any severe mistakes.	The organisation of the presentation is poor, and the language used contains several mistakes.