

Introduction to Literary Interpretation

7,5 credits

Course Description

This core course for the Master's Program in Literature at Stockholm University introduces the long tradition of textual interpretation and interpretive theories within literary studies, examining the shifting ideas and theories of interpretation and the literary. The course explores key thinkers and tendencies, starting with Plato and proceeds chronologically to the turn of the twentieth century and up to the present day. While the course focuses on the relationship between literature and theory, its major focus is on theoretical questions about interpretation in their own right, which involves both historicizing ideas and considering the theoretical implications of the thinkers' styles of argumentation.

Some of the issues addressed in the course are: the relation of literary interpretation to other forms of interpretation, the differing approaches to aesthetic judgment, taste, textuality, and authorial intentionality as well as the historicity of interpretation and interpretive validity. The course is designed to increase the students' knowledge in these areas as well as raise awareness of the ongoing and persistent debates about the practices and limits of interpretation.

Course Activities: 6 two-hour seminars

Course Literature

Leitch, Vincent. B., Editor et al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Third Edition. Norton, 2018.

Course Aims

At the end of the course, students should

- be able to characterise different critical method in literary studies, as represented by the readings for the course;
- be able to comprehend different critical methodologies in terms of the analytical tools for interpretation they provide;

- be able to write an analysis of one of the suggested literary texts using ONE of critical approaches to interpretation aiming to assess and test the strength of the analytical tools and arguments this critical approach provides.

Seminar Participation and Activities

The course aims above require from the students: conscientious preparation for each seminar; active participation in seminar discussion; focused responses to given seminar tasks; and the independent production of written work.

To achieve the goals of the course, you are advised to:

- Attend the seminars;
- Prepare for the seminars by reading and annotating the assigned texts in response to the discussion prompts assigned by the instructor.
- Participate actively in class discussion. During the seminars every one of us will take part in a discussion that aims at finding and probing the difficult questions that come up when we investigate the nature of literature, interpretation, and criticism. 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.
- Give ONE oral presentation on one of the theoretical approaches to literary interpretation. The individual presentations – 5 to 7 minutes each – will be given as part of a group presentation, in which students will place one of the assigned texts within the general framework of the studied critical approach and reflect critically on the text's contribution to the theoretical discourse.
- Complete the written assignment on ONE of the given topics. Topics and parameters will be given by the instructor in the second seminar. The basic requirements: the length of the written assignment will be 2000–2500 words; the genre is analytical essay, which will have to be formally organized and have to develop informed critical arguments.

Course Overview

This core course is offered in collaboration between several departments at Stockholm University, and it is coordinated by the Department of Culture and Aesthetics. The Department of English gives a series of seminars for the course in English. Detailed schedule is available on www.english.su.se

There may be some minor adjustments to the below readings before the start of the course.

For exact dates, please check your online schedule.

All the assigned readings are available in the model course book, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Third Edition (NORTON in the schedule below).

<p>INTRO:</p> <p>POST ON ATHENA FORUM by 3/09</p>	<p>Read in NORTON: "Introduction to theory and criticism" pp.1-35.</p> <p>Pay particular attention to the following sections—"What is interpretation?"; "What is literature?"; and "Twenty-First-Century Theory Map"—and try to place your <u>theoretical</u> and <u>literary</u> interests on the map of literary studies.</p>
<p>SEMINAR 1 4/09</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Poetics: From Classical to Renaissance and to Neoclassical Theory</p> <p>Plato, <i>Republic</i> Books II, III, VII, X Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i> Dante Alighieri, "The Letter to Can Grande" Sidney, <i>The Defense of Poesy</i></p>
<p>SEMINAR 2 11/09</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Aesthetic Judgment and Taste: From the Romantic Tradition to the Nineteenth-Century</p> <p>Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i> (selected sections) Burke, <i>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful</i> Wilde, "The Critic as Artist"</p>
<p>SEMINAR 3 18/09</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Form, Structure, Aesthetic Autonomy: Formalism, Structuralism, New Criticism, and Surface Reading</p> <p>Saussure, <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> Bakhtin, <i>Discourse in the Novel</i> Best and Marcus, <i>Surface Reading</i></p>
<p>SEMINAR 4 25/09</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Reader: Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Reception Theory</p> <p>Spinoza, Ch. 7: "Of the Interpretation of Scripture" Iser, "Interaction between Text and Reader" Fish, from "Is There a Text in this Class?"</p>

SEMINAR 5 9/10	<p style="text-align: center;">Language and Subjectivity: Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis</p> <p>Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" and "Agency of the Letter" Barthes, "The Death of the Author" Foucault, "What is an Author?"</p>
SEMINAR 6 16/10	<p style="text-align: center;">Politics in and of the Text: Critical Theory</p> <p>Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" White, <i>The Historical Text as Literary Artifact</i> Jameson, <i>The Political Unconscious</i></p>
November 3 & December 8	<p>Deadline for Analytical Essay: November 2, 2024 (before midnight, submit on ATHENA in Assignments, Analytical Essay)</p> <p>Deadline for re-submission: December 8, 2024</p>

Grading

ACTIVITIES	PERCENTAGES
Written Assignment: Analytical Essay Assessed according to the quality of the submitted assignment (see the detailed description on Athena).	100%
Final Grade The grade for the course will be based on the essay assignment grade and the completion of the required seminar participation and tasks.	100%

Grading Criteria: Written Assignment

Grade	Criteria
A: Excellent	The student shows excellent ability when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - discussing, in a critical and reflexive manner, the literary, critical and theoretical works that are part of the course • - formulating independent interpretations of literary texts, using the theoretical and critical concepts that are part of the course • - Giving an account of and motivating their own theoretical positions and interpretations of literary works
B: Very Good	The student shows a very good ability when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - discussing, in a critical and reflexive manner, the literary, critical and

	<p>theoretical works that are part of the course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formulating independent interpretations of literary texts, using the theoretical and critical concepts that are part of the course - Giving an account of and motivating their own theoretical positions and interpretations of literary works
C: Good	<p>The student shows good ability when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussing, in a critical and reflexive manner, the literary, critical and theoretical works that are part of the course - formulating independent interpretations of literary texts, using the theoretical and critical concepts that are part of the course - Giving an account of and motivating their own theoretical positions and interpretations of literary works
D: Adequate	<p>The student shows adequate ability when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussing, in a critical and reflexive manner, the literary, critical and theoretical works that are part of the course - formulating independent interpretations of literary texts, using the theoretical and critical concepts that are part of the course - Giving an account of and motivating their own theoretical positions and interpretations of literary works
E: Minimally Adequate	<p>The student shows minimally adequate ability when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discussing, in a critical and reflexive manner, the literary, critical and theoretical works that are part of the course - formulating independent interpretations of literary texts, using the theoretical and critical concepts that are part of the course - Giving an account of and motivating their own theoretical positions and interpretations of literary works
Fx: Fail (Inadequate)	N/A
F: Fail	The student's work does not demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes of the module.

Grading 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 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 and theoretical issues discussed. These issues are not presented and discussed in an adequate manner.
Organisation & 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.

Overall Assessment Criteria

OUTSTANDING

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 active class discussion, 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 his/her 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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EXCELLENT

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 solid familiarity with the texts we have read.
 - show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, 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 solid and 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 class discussion, 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 class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with some, basic use of appropriate critical concepts.

- present his/her 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 class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with at least a minimal employment of technical terms.
 - present his/her arguments in an intelligible manner, in adequate English, in a largely formal register of written or spoken delivery, with some fluency and few errors.
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INADEQUATE

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

- fails the attendance requirements or fails to hand in assignments in time.
- 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 class discussion, 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.

INCOMPLETE

The **Fx** grade is set if the student has reached most of the Learning outcomes of the course, but must hand in revised or supplementary material in order to fully meet the requirements.