**NOVEL THEORY**

English 580 Professor Kornbluh

Spring 2018 [kornbluh@uic.edu](mailto:kornbluh@uic.edu)

W 2:00-4:50, Lincoln 214 office hours: F 2-3pm

appointments!

How do novels theorize? What kinds of abstraction, speculation, projection, and seeing activate the form of the novel? How do novels represent, register, or indeed perform theories, universalities, generalities, totalities, commonalities, collectivities? How do novels think, and does it matter what they think about? What role has novel thinking played in theories of the novel? Taking up a primary works from a variety of periods and styles in the Anglophone novel archive, the course is organized by three central conceptual problems in the study of the novel: totality, impersonality, and infrastructure.

**Required Texts**

Georg Lukacs, *Theory of the Novel*

Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory*

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*

Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*

Jean Toomer, *Cane*

Kim Stanley Robinson, *2140*

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*

V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*

Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*

**Requirements**

* active seminar participation, including careful completion of assigned reading, and consistent, thoughtful contribution to discussion
* discussion facilitation, one session (focused on critical texts)
* discussion wrap-up, one session (informal summation of that day’s discussion)
* close reading discussion stimulation, one session (focused on primary texts)
* seminar paper

**Guidelines**

**Readings and Discussion Preparation:** This is an intensive seminar, with a heavy reading load of complex texts and long novels. We will approach the seminar space as a laboratory for experimenting with collective reading and discovering as much as we can about how novels are built, how they work, how they think. Our reading methods will therefore be first and foremost formalist, and students should read with an eye for distinctive formal elements of any given texts, as well as common formal elements across disparate texts. Discussions will address how the forms at work in a text produce its unique ideas; preparation for discussion should involve reflecting on aspects like narrative structure, plot, focalization, description, beginnings and endings, style, mode. Seminar sessions will often commence by asking every student to indicate ideas or forms or phenomena in the readings that call for unpacking, and to supply page numbers where possible. Discussion participation is key to a strong seminar and an important basis for your evaluation.

**Discussion Facilitation:** Lead a chunk of discussion time focusing on ideas in the critical texts assigned for a given session (drawing connections to previous readings where useful). Focus need not be on all of the critical texts; it could be on only one. Take pedagogical liberties as far as activities, discussion plan, etc, but be sure to include at least these 3 steps. First step: substantive paraphrase aimed at educing the value of the argument. Second step: highlight at least 1 passage of interest / vexation for further unpacking. Third step: pose 3 critical questions for discussion pertaining to theoretical questions in the course, literary examples in the course, or other avenues of inquiry that strike you. Your task is to read generously, with an eye toward what the critical text(s) illuminates, and to practice taking positions vis-à-vis critics and theorists.

**Discussion Wrap-up:** At the end of a seminar session, spend 5 minutes extemporaneously reviewing what emerged as key themes during that session’s discussion. No advance preparation is necessary; simply attend to the flow of that session’s conversation and select a few central points for recapitulation and carry-over to the next discussion.

**Close Reading Presentation:** oral presentation based on 3-4 pages writing of concerted attention to poetics of prose in one of our novels; careful and deliberate reading of the syntax, rhythm, tonality, imagery, and lettering of language; treatment of short slices as cross-sections that reveal the formal and thematic dynamics of a longer work; concluding with 3 questions for discussion. Consult the Close Reading techniques handouts. While straightforward formal oral presentation is fine, interveners are encouraged to take an interactive approach to the passage / conduct pedagogical experiments in close reading, and to facilitate discussion for a chunk of the session.

**Seminar Paper**: 12-15 pageessays should respond to the formal and theoretical issues raised by the seminar, and *may* do so by way of readings of novels not on our syllabus. Papers should reflect / incorporate research conducted using the MLA database. Abstracts (1-2pages) of papers will be presented during the course celebration in finals week.

**Reading Schedule**

**GROUNDWORKS**

**17 January**

Georg Lukacs, *Theory of the Novel* Part 1

Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production* Chapters 1-6

Raymond Williams, “Mediation”

Kent Puckett, “Epic, Novel, Narrative Theory”

Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Literature* title essay

Anna Kornbluh, “We Have Never Been Critical” (optional)

**24 January**

FredricJameson, *The Political Unconscious* excerpt

Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think* excerpt

Puckett, “Form, Structure, Narrative”

Caroline Levine, *Forms* Intro

Levine, “The Enormity Effect”

**PART ONE: TOTALITY**

**31 January** *Wuthering Heights*

Tom Bottomore “Totality”

Eric Auerbach, “On the Serious Imitation of the Everyday”

Michael McKeon, “Generic Transformation and Social Change”

Michael Cunningham, “Capitalist Epics”

**7 February** *The Golden Bowl*

James, “The Art of Fiction”

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public”

Carolyn Lesjak, “George Eliot and Politics”

Levine and Mario Ortiz Robles, *Narrative Middles* intro

`**14 February** *The Golden Bowl*

Sharon Cameron, “Thinking Speaking”

Lisi Schoenbach, “Jamesian Institutions”

Jonathan Freedman, “What Maggie Knew”

Kevin Ohi, “Writing Queerness: Zeugma and Syllepsis”

**21 February** *Cane*

Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse and the Novel”

James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”

Henry Louis Gates, “The Trope of the Talking Book”

Madhu Dubey, “Racecraft in American Fiction”

**28 February** *2140*

Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* “Stories” excerpt and “Politics” excerpt

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence* intro

Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* excerpt

**7 March** *2140*

Jeet Heer, “The New Utopians”

Jameson, “Varieties of the Utopian”

Mieke Bal, “Over-Writing as Un-writing”

**PART TWO: IMPERSONALITY**

**14 March** *Pride and Prejudice*

Jonathan Culler, “Omniscience”

Woloch, *The One Versus The Many* “Narrative Asymmetry in *Pride and Prejudice*”

Dan Stout, “Personification and Its Discontents”

Frances Ferguson, “*Emma* and The Impact of Form”

**21 March** *To the Lighthouse*

Woolf, “Modern Fiction”

Wayne Booth, “Types of Narration”

Theodor Adorno, “Commitment”

Maud Ellman, “A Passage to the Lighthouse”

**4 April** *A Bend in the River*

Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism* intro

Annette Van, “Novel Futures”

Zarena Aslami, “The Lyricism of the State”

Sanjay Krishnan, “Said, Mamdani, Naipaul: Rethinking Postcolonial Studies”

**11 April NO CLASS**

**PART THREE: INFRASTRUCTURE**

**18 April** *Looking Backward*

Phil Wegner, *Imaginary Communities* excerpt

Michael Rubenstein and Bruce Robbins, “Infrastructuralism”

Rubenstein, *Public Works* chapter 1

**25 April** *Manhattan Transfer*

Friedrich Engels, “Walking in Manchester”

Cunningham, “Spacing Abstraction”

Kate Marshall, *Corridor* excerpt

**2 May** *The Intuitionist*

Aida Levy Hussen, *How to Read African American Literature* excerpt

Spencer Morrison, “Elevator Fiction”

Cunningham, “Very Abstract and Terribly Concrete: Capitalism and the theory of

the novel”

**(party)**

**final essays due Monday 7 May**