

LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORIES FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE RENAISSANCE

MA & PhD course, Fall, 2018 (Tuesdays), 15:30-17:10

György E. Szónyi

Office hours after class + appointment

(N11/114, SzonyiGy@ceu.hu; geszonyi@freemail.hu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to introduce students to an overview of thinking about literature and culture by providing a historical perspective from the antiquity to the late-Renaissance. The objective of the course is to offer a survey of the major movements, figures, and texts of literary theory as well as to supply the cultural, historical and philosophical background to the literary theory of each era (Antiquity, Hellenism, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Mannerism). The course also reflects on modern and postmodern theories, pointing out how these concepts of old have been often recycled in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries up to today.

Since even today literary theory relies on the ancient theories of Plato and Aristotle and also the traditions of ancient rhetoric, the first third of this course is devoted to the study of this classical heritage. The rest of the course follows the chronological survey through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with a concluding glance at the theories of the sublime in the 18th century.

LEARNING OUTCOME

The course helps those MA and eventually PhD students of history and medieval studies whose thesis work is related to cultural representations, to develop an awareness of and sensitivity for critical thinking and conceptualizing about literature and culture. Since the texts studied are highly theoretical, their reading should lead to the development of abstract thinking. At the same time these texts are from earlier centuries, so their study cannot be separated from historical contextualization which is another important aspect of structuring knowledge on the graduate level.

The discussion of texts will help to develop skills of summarizing, expression, and balancing arguments, while the written exercises will enhance writing skills.

ASSIGNMENTS, GRADING

Although the format of the course is mainly lecture, those will be based on texts which will have to be read by the participants week by week. This also means that personal participation is indispensable. The **exam** will consist of a home essay (50%) and either a written exam or an *oral colloquium* (50%).

WEEKLY OUTLINES AND READINGS

0. September 11

Zero Week presentation: The Origins of Art and Critical Thinking

1. September 18

Introduction: Literary/Cultural Theory; Orientations in Critical Thinking

Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), "Orientation of Critical Theories."

2. September 25

Greek Literature and the Rise of Critical Thinking with Plato

Excerpts from Plato's Works.

3. October 2

Plato [cont.]

4. October 9

Aristotle's *Poetics*

Aristotle's *Poetics*.

5. October 16

Aristotle [cont.] and the Rise of Rhetorical Awareness

6. October 30

Roman Literature and Critical Thinking

Horace, *Ars Poetica*.

7. November 6

The Theory of the Sublime

Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime*.

8. November 13

From Neoplatonism to Augustine's Semiotics

Plotinus, "On Beauty," from the *Enneads*.

Augustine, *On the Christian Doctrines* (excerpts).

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* (excerpt).

9. November 20

The High Middle Ages

Aquinas, From *Summa Theologiae*.

Excerpts from Dante (Letter to Can Grande) and Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*

Christine de Pizan, Excerpts.

10. November 27

Renaissance Issues for Literature and Criticism: Between Plato and Aristotle; Latin versus national languages; the debate over the primacy of genres and of art forms.

Castiglione-Hoby, *The Courtier* (excerpt).

Giraldi Cinthio on Tragedy.

11. December 4

A Full Scale Theory of Literature and Criticism: Philip Sidney

Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesie*.

Bálint Balassi, *A Pleasing Hungarian Comedy* (Preface)

12. December 11 (bonus class)

Epilogue: The Rising Importance of the Sublime

Burke, On the Sublime.

13. After December 11

Term Test, or Colloquium.

READINGS–BIBLIOGRAPHY

The core texts will be provided as a reader in pdf format. Items in the bibliography are recommended for further study.

Coyle, M. et al. eds. *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

Gilbert, Allan H. *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1962.

Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Leitch, Vincent B. et al. eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York and London: Norton, 2001.

McGann, Jerome. "Rethinking Romanticism." *English Literary History*, 59.3 (Autumn, 1992): 735-754. (JSTOR)

Pateman, Trevor. "Classicism and Romanticism: M H Abrams and Beyond." In *Key Concepts. A Guide to Aesthetics, Criticism and the Arts in Education*. London: Falmer Press, 1991. <<http://www.selectedworks.co.uk/classicismromanticism.html>>.

Preminger, Alex, Leon Golden, O. B. Hardison, Kevin Kerrane eds. *Classical Literary Criticism. Translations and Interpretations*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974.

Smith, Gregory G. ed. *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (2 vols, 1904). Oxford University Press, 1971.

Vogler, Thomas A. "Romanticism and Literary Periods: The Future of the Past." *New German Critique* 38 (1986): 131-60. (JSTOR)