COURSE OVERVIEW

Narrative, one great critic suggests, may be the central function of the human mind. It is, as another once wrote, “simply there, like life itself.” As these claims indicate, the study of narrative is the study of some of the most fundamental aspects of our collective life. This course provides an introduction to the tradition of narrative theory through a sustained engagement with three core narrative-theoretical concepts: structure, text, and time. A single book will anchor and orient each of the course’s units: for structure, Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*; for text, Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*; for time, Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*. Herman Melville’s novella *Benito Cereno* will supply our “control text”: a narrative to which we will return as we study the theory, and through which we will test the powers and the limits, both analytical and historical, of our theorists. In each of our units, we will begin with a careful reading of our main theorist, move on to consider work that elaborates on the theory, and then turn to robust approaches—Marxist, historicist, queer, sociological—that challenge or modify the theoretical terms with which we started.

REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Reading. Read and reread. Then read again. Makes notes in the margins, underline and circle words and phrases: be an active reader. Do this with each text in advance of our session, and arrive with several points or questions for discussion. The reading for this course is difficult and will require—and reward!—your sustained and thoughtful attention. We will work through the texts together in class, but it is crucial that you arrive prepared to contribute to our conversation.

Writing. Weekly memos (2pp.) providing a summary treatment of the reading for the session; in these papers, you should convey as clearly as possible what the argument of the text is rather than discussing your own views of that argument. The thirteen memos, adequately written, will amount to an “A” for 25% of your grade. In addition, you will write either two short essays (5-7pp.) or one longer essay (12-15pp.). These essays will apply the theory from the course to a narrative text (e.g., a novel or film) that we have not read together; you will develop the topic(s) in consultation with me. This assignment will constitute 75% of your grade (so, if you choose to write two essays, each will be worth 37.5% of the total grade).

Presentations. Each student will give one short (10 min.) in-class presentation introducing a term or concept from the reading.

Attendance, participation, deadlines. Arrive to class on time and prepared to actively participate in our discussions. “Class participation” is not a formal part of the grade for this course because this is a discussion course: the basic assumption is that we will all participate. More than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. All due dates are firm.

Students with disabilities. It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, and for making requests known to me in a timely manner. If
you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible (during the second week of the semester) so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

**TEXTS (available at Broad Street Books):**

- Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (U of Texas P)
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (Hill and Wang)
- M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (U of Texas P)
- D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* (U of California P)
- Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Cornell UP)
- Herman Melville, “*Billy Budd*” and Other Stories (Penguin)
- Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (Routledge)

A course reader, available from Pip Printing, 344 Main St.

**Order the reader online at www.pipmid.com. Click on the course-book icon and complete the order form. You can save your username and password for future orders. Course readers will be ready for pickup one workday after you place your order.**

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**
THURSDAY, 1/22 – Introduction: Narrative theory and formal analysis


**PROLOGUE: BENITO CERENO**

**Week 2**
TUESDAY, 1/27
Melville, *Benito Cereno* (read the entire novella for this session)

THURSDAY, 1/29
Melville, *Benito Cereno*

**PART ONE: STRUCTURE**

**Week 3**
TUESDAY, 2/3
Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (xxv-117)
THURSDAY, 2/5
Propp, *Morphology*
[Rimmon-Kenan, Chapters 2-3]

**Week 4**
TUESDAY, 2/10
Aristotle, *Poetics* (45-118)

THURSDAY, 2/12
E.M. Forster, from *Aspects of the Novel*°
Viktor Shklovksy, “The Structure of Fiction”°

**Week 5**
TUESDAY, 2/17
Tzvetan Todorov, “The Grammar of Narrative”°
Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”°

THURSDAY, 2/19
Northrop Frye, from *Anatomy of Criticism*°
Claude Lévi-Strauss, from *The Origin of Table Manners*°

**Week 6**
TUESDAY, 2/24
Pierre Macherey, from *A Theory of Literary Production*°

THURSDAY, 2/26
Franco Moretti, from *Graphs, Maps, Trees*°

**PART TWO: TEXT**

**Week 7**
TUESDAY, 3/3
Barthes, *S/Z*
*Sarrasine* (221-254)
*S/Z* (3-151)

THURSDAY, 3/5 – CLASS RESCHEDULED
Barthes, *S/Z* (151-217)

**MIDSEMESTER RECESS, 3/6 - 3/23**

**Week 8**
TUESDAY, 3/24
Barthes, *S/Z* (*reread* the entire book for this session)
THURSDAY, 3/26
   Barthes, S/Z

Week 9
TUESDAY, 3/31
   Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” (259-422)
   Ann Banfield, from *Unspeakable Sentences*

THURSDAY, 4/2
   Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre”*
   Georg Lukács, “Narrate or Describe?”*

Week 10
TUESDAY, 4/7
   Alex Woloch, from *The One vs. the Many*
   [Rimmon-Kenan, Chapters 5-6, 8]

THURSDAY, 4/9
   Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes*

PART THREE: TIME

Week 11
TUESDAY, 4/14
   Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (21-112)

THURSDAY, 4/16
   Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (113-160)

Week 12
TUESDAY, 4/21
   Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (161-211)
   [Rimmon-Kenan, Chapter 4]

THURSDAY, 4/23
   Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (212-268)

Week 13
TUESDAY, 4/28
   Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (84-258)

THURSDAY, 4/30
   Peter Brooks, from *Reading for the Plot*

Week 14
TUESDAY, 5/5 – CLASS RESCHEDULED
   Moishe Postone, “Abstract Time”*