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 -- the theory of how stories work -- 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, feminist, 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. Our texts are challenging, and each week’s reading assignments are substantial. Plan your time. Complete the reading before each session, give yourself time to think about the texts before class, and arrive with a handful of points for discussion. Take notes on your reading and bring them to class.

Writing. The writing for the course comprises three kinds of assignment:

A) Weekly short summaries (1-2pp.) that convey the central argument(s) or point(s) in the week’s reading. These summaries serve two purposes: first, they require you to establish what our theorists are saying before you elaborate on (or argue against) their propositions. Second, they will ensure that you have the basic premises of the texts before you in class during our discussions. I will collect these at the end of every class session. You may write your short summaries in the form of notes or bullet points -- they need not be essays or properly polished response papers.

B) Four short reading exercises (3pp.) focused on close reading -- usually of a theoretical text, but sometimes of another narrative text. These will sharpen your critical reading skills as the semester progresses, and they will give you the opportunity to put the theory to work (and to work out the theory).

C) Two essays, 5-7pp. and 10-12pp. In the first essay, you will apply theoretical concepts from our reading in a short analysis of *Benito Cereno*. Your second essay will give you the occasion to look outside the course: to apply the theory to a narrative (a novel, a film, etc.) of your choice, and perhaps to test the theory against a particularly interesting (or challenging) example of narrative representation. I will provide a bibliography of useful references for the second essay.

In-class presentations. Each member of the seminar will pair up with another to give an in-class presentation on a question or problem from the reading and to direct our attention to particularly significant passages. We will schedule these presentations during the second week of class.
**Participation.** This course is a seminar; we succeed or fail collectively. Arrive at each of our sessions ready to talk and ready to listen with engagement and generosity to your fellow students. If a text excites you, talk about why. If something confuses you, ask questions. If you agree with comments someone makes, elaborate on your agreement with the class. If you disagree with someone, explain why. In short, contribute with gusto to our common enterprise in the seminar -- which is to engage deeply with a rich and exciting collection of theoretical texts and, ultimately, to understand together how narratives work.

**Attendance, deadlines.** Attendance at every session is required; more than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. Assignment due dates are provided on the syllabus so that you can plan your work for the semester. All due dates are firm: extensions will be granted only in cases of serious illness or personal crisis. *Don’t even ask.*

**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 making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please notify me as soon as possible (certainly by 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](http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html).

**The Honor Code.** Please include the following pledge on each of your assignments: "In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged." More information on the Wesleyan Honor Code may be found at [http://www.wesleyan.edu/studenthandbook/3_honorsystem.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/studenthandbook/3_honorsystem.html).

**Grading**
Your final grade breaks down like this:

- 10%: Participation (including weekly short summaries)
- 10%: In-class presentation
- 25%: Reading exercises
- 55%: Two essays (5-7pp., 20%; 10-12pp., 35%)

**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)
- Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Cornell UP)
- Herman Melville, “Billy Budd” and Other Stories (Penguin)
- Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (Routledge)

**Additional readings,** marked with an asterisk (*) below, will be posted on the course Moodle site. These readings are required. Read them, and print them out and bring them to class for our discussion.
SCHEDULE

1. TUESDAY, 1/25 -- INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE THEORY AND FORMAL ANALYSIS
   
   Introduction to *Benito Cereno.*

2. TUESDAY, 2/1 -- PROLOGUE: HERMAN MELVILLE, *BENITO CERENO* (1855)
   Read the entire novella for this session.
   **First reading exercise due in class.**

PART ONE: STRUCTURE


4. TUESDAY, 2/15 -- Aristotle, *Poetics* (pp. 45-118); E.M. Forster, from *Aspects of the Novel,** Viktor Shklovsky, "The Structure of Fiction."*
   **Second reading exercise due in class.**

5. TUESDAY, 2/22 -- Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives;"* Tzvetan Todorov, “The Grammar of Narrative.”*

6. TUESDAY, 3/1 -- Pierre Macherey, from *A Theory of Literary Production,** Franco Moretti, from *Graphs, Maps, Trees.*

   **5PM, THURSDAY, 3/3 -- FIRST ESSAY DUE IN BOX OUTSIDE MY OFFICE.**

3/4-3/21: Spring Break

PART TWO: TEXT


   **Third reading exercise due in class.**

9. TUESDAY, 4/5 -- Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre;"* Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?;"* Alex Woloch, from *The One vs. the Many,** Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction,* Chapters 5-6, 8.

10. TUESDAY, 4/12 -- D.A. Miller, *Bringing Out Roland Barthes.*
PART THREE: TIME


12. TUESDAY, 4/26 -- Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84-258)
   **Fourth reading exercise due in class.**


**5PM, FRIDAY, 5/6 -- SECOND ESSAY DUE IN BOX OUTSIDE MY OFFICE.**