

WHAT IS THEORY????!!!!??? Seriously, tell me. What is it? Help.

ENGL 300

1

Just like Life?

HOW IS THIS



DIFFERENT FROM THIS?

O Rose, thou art sick.
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy
--William Blake, "The
Sick Rose"

Or this?



Or this?

<http://kevinhutchings.ca/music/sickrose/>

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TWO TRENDS IN LITERARY CRITICISM

PRACTICAL CRITICISM

- TEXT-CENTRED
- CRITIC mediates between individual texts and their readers

KEY FIGURES: ARNOLD, F.R. LEAVIS, I.A. RICHARDS

LITERARY THEORY

- LITERATURE CENTRED
- CRITIC seeks to explain the function and nature of literature as a SYSTEM

KEY FIGURES: PLATO, ARISTOTLE, SIDNEY, WORDSWORTH

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CORE QUESTIONS

- Why do we read? Write?
- What do we do when we read?
- What do we get from literature that we don't get anywhere else?
- In what ways is literature unique?
- In what ways is it like other forms of representation?
- How does literary study differ from other disciplines?
- How is it similar to other disciplines?

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CORE QUESTIONS 2 Son of Core Questions

- What is the relationship between "the world" and its textual "representation?"
- How does a literary text work?
- What is the relationship between the writer and the text? Reader and text?
- What are the roles of the "poet," the critic, and the reader in civic culture?
- In what ways is literature ideological?

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We may think of representation as

- MIMETIC: reflects reality

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We may think of representation as

- **AESTHETIC:** as an object of beauty distinct from its mimetic, expressive or didactic function

7

We may think of representation as

- **DIDACTIC:** a source of wisdom, lessons, prophesy, morality, ethics

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We may think of representation as

- **EXPRESSIVE:** communicates our inner being

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REPRESENTATION

- Re-present = to "copy" the world in a new form
 - Writing
 - Painting
 - Gesture
 - Plastic arts
 - Language in general
- Mimesis
 - How do we represent the world?
- Expression
 - How do we communicate our particular IDEAS and EXPERIENCES?

KEY FIGURE: PLATO

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POLYSEMY

- POLY = MANY
- SEME = MEANING
- Polysemy refers to the instability or multiplicity of meaning associated with a given signifier.
- HOT
 - = in a state of heightened molecular energy
 - = physically attractive
- What is the nature of language?
- How do we communicate our intent?
- How do we use language to communicate truth?
 - Can we?

KEY FIGURES: AUGUSTINE, HUME

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STABILIZING STRATEGIES

- INTENTION:
 - THE AUTHOR FUNCTION
- TRANSCENDENTAL SIGNIFIER
- NECESSITY
 - DECORUM
 - ORDER
- How can we stabilize meaning?
 - Should we?

KEY FIGURES: AUGUSTINE, ARISTOTLE, AQUINAS, HORACE, BOCCACCIO

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BRACKETING STRATEGIES

- AESTHETICISM
- DISINTERESTEDNESS

KEY FIGURES: WILDE (KANT),
ARNOLD

- What is the relationship between art and history?
- How is the work of art different from other forms of representation?
- What is the definition of beauty?

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CHALLENGES

- HISTORY
- SELFHOOD

KEY FIGURES: DE PIZAN, DU BELLAY,
GIRALDI, HUGH OF ST. VICTOR

- How do we account for difference—time, place, gender etc.?
- Is it possible to look view art in isolation?
- What is the role of CONTEXT?

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EXPRESSIVISM

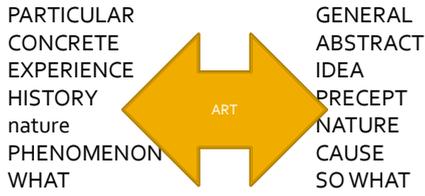
- HUMANISM
- THE SELF
- ROMANTICISM

KEY FIGURE: HEGEL

- Why do we need to "represent ourselves to ourselves?"
- How does our use of language shape the world?

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MEDIATION



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ASKING QUESTIONS

- Some typical questions to ask when you approach a new theory or methodology:



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Question One

- What is the theory's attitude toward literature? According to this theory, what role does literature play in everyday life? In academic life?



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QUESTION TWO

- What does the theory take as its **object of study**? Individual texts? Literature as a whole? Language itself? Culture in general?

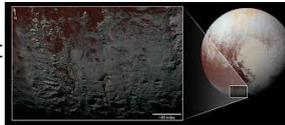


The diagram on the lower left looks more like the penguins are simply providing a free trunk inspection.

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QUESTION THREE

- What is the theory's attitude toward a literary text's social, historical, political, conventional context?
- Does it seek to isolate the text from that context or
- to situate it within that context?



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QUESTION FOUR

- What does the theory see as the function of literary criticism?
 - Explication?
 - Cultivation of "taste?"
 - Scientific enquiry?
 - Social Critique?
 - Political Agitation?



Left lane for mail-like vehicles; right lane for abandoning New Year's resolutions.

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QUESTION FIVE

- Is the theory generally conservative (upholding the *status quo*, **hegemonic**) or is it more radical (challenging the *status quo*, **counter-hegemonic**)?



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