

Masters Program in Literature. Approaches to Realism (ENAR75) (Autumn 2020)

Instructor: Giles Whiteley (coordinator)

Module description

Proceeding from the observation that mimesis, or the representation of reality, is one of the oldest issues in the history of literature, this course aims to introduce you to central arguments that have evolved around realism, broadly conceived. What is meant by realism? How does realism relate to the real? Is realism a style, a literary period, a political attitude, or a rhetorical trick? These and related questions, including also postmodern perspectives, will be addressed in the course. The readings are divided between literary texts and critical commentary that ranges from Plato and Aristotle to contemporary theory; each seminar will be structured around an authoritative intervention (or set of interventions) in the debates on realism. As the course progresses, you will be encouraged to formulate independent positions in relation to these debates. Ultimately, the intention is to enable a textured and historically grounded appreciation of realism as an open question rather than a closed book.

Module aims

At the end of the course, students should

- have acquired a broad knowledge about and understanding of different approaches to the study of realism and the notion of mimesis, as represented by the readings for the course.
- have acquired a critical perspective on the analysis of literary realism by reflecting on the literary works and the critical material read for the course.
- have the ability to theorise realism from both historical and aesthetic viewpoints.
- have developed his or her ability to present such analyses in written or spoken English, using the appropriate concepts and making the appropriate references.

This is what we aim for. The means for this is conscientious preparation for each seminar, active participation in seminar discussion, focused responses to given assignments, and the independent production of written work.

Module requirements

To achieve the goals of the course, and be given a passing grade, you will be required to

- Attend the seminars. That is, attendance is compulsory. Notify the course co-ordinator and the seminar instructor **by e-mail** ASAP if for some reason you will be/have been absent. For each seminar you miss you will be given an extra assignment to make up for your absence, but you are only allowed to miss two seminars. If you miss more than two seminars you will not be able to receive a grade for the course.
- Prepare for the seminars by reading the assigned texts in a critical and active manner. Also prepare by carrying out any other tasks that you have been assigned.

- Participate actively in class discussion. During the seminars every one of us will take part in a discussion that aims at finding and probing the difficult questions that come up when we analyze narrative form. Come well prepared and be ready to contribute to constructive and critical exchanges. Since at each seminar you will communicate your main findings and questions to others, it is important to be prepared for this task.
- Write and hand in responses to assignments given by each instructor.

Contact info

Course coordinator: Giles Whiteley; giles.whiteley@english.su.se

Module Overview

Detailed schedule is available on www.english.su.se

There may be some adjustments to the below readings before the start of the course.

Seminar 1	From the Greeks to the Renaissance Homer (pdf/handout); Dante (pdf/handout); Auerbach, chs 1, 8 & 13; Said (intro to Auerbach) Please also revise Plato and Aristotle from the module on Literary Interpretation, or if you haven't already read these passages, please read <i>Norton</i> , pp. 58-89 and pp. 99-127
Seminar 2	The Rise of the Novel Defoe, <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> ; Foucault; Lukács (<i>Norton</i> , pp. 909-20); Watt chs. 1-4 Suggested optional reading: Villanueva chs. 1 & 2
Seminar 3	French Realism and Naturalism Zola, extracts from <i>Thérèse Raquin</i> , prologue to <i>Thérèse Raquin</i> (pdf/handouts); Ankersmit; Auerbach, chs. 18, 19 & 20; Barthes, 'The reality effect' (in <i>The Rustle of Language</i>); Jameson, 'Floor-Plan' (pdf/handout)
Seminar 4	Victorian Realism I: Dickens Dickens, <i>Bleak House</i> ; Chappell; Wolfreys (handout)
Seminar 5	The Function of Criticism Arnold's 'The Function of Criticism' (<i>Norton</i> , pp. 684-1703); Pater's preface and conclusion to the <i>Renaissance</i> (<i>Norton</i> , pp. 713-19); Wilde, preface to <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> and excerpts from 'The Critic as Artist' and 'The Decay of Lying' (<i>Norton</i> , pp. 763-83); Deleuze, 'Plato and the Simulacrum' (pdf/handout)

Seminar 6	Victorian Realism II: 'After Dickens' Dickens, <i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i> ; <i>Bleak House</i>
Seminar 7	Modernism Baudelaire, 'Painter of Modern life' (pdf/handout); Woolf, <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> ; Woolf, excerpts from <i>A Room of Her Own</i> (Norton, pp. 857-66); Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (pdf/handout) Please also revise Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay from the module on Literary Interpretation, or if you haven't already read it, please read Norton, pp. 976-97
Seminar 8	Traumatic Realism Blanchot, 'The Instant of My Death'; excerpts from <i>The Writing of the Disaster</i> and <i>Après coup</i> (pdf/handout); excerpts from Adorno, <i>Prisms</i> (pdf/handout) Suggested optional reading: Rothberg pt. I

Module Literature

Please buy the following books in these editions:

- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Blanchot, Maurice, and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death / Demeure*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Defoe, Daniel. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Ed. Louis Landa. Revised edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dickens, Charles. *Bleak House*. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Dickens, Charles. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Ed. Margret Cardwell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. Ed. David Bradshaw. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. 3rd edn. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2018.

While it is not essential that you buy your own copies of the following, these are also set texts that you are expected to get a hold of from the library or otherwise. If your budget allows it, I suggest you buy Watt:

- Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1992.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise Of The Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Bodley Head, 2015.
- Wolfreys, Julian. *Dickens's London: Perception, Subjectivity and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. We read an extract from this book for seminar five, but it is a *tour de force*.

And you need to read/print out the following:

- Ankersmit, Frank. 'Why Realism? Auerbach and the Representation of Reality.' *Poetics Today*, 20:1 (1999): 53-75.
- Chappell, Patrick. 'Paper Routes: *Bleak House*, Rubbish Theory, and the Character Economy of Realism.' *ELH*, 80:3 (2013): 783-810.

Further Reading

While we cover a great deal of material during the space of such a short course, and will not have time in seminars to investigate all aspects of the texts we read each week, you will nevertheless find that the best way to fully develop your own critical voice is to read as widely around the set texts as possible.

The best place to begin is by reading further in Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Villanueva's *Theories of Literary Realism* and Watt's *The Rise Of The Novel*. For those who hanker for more, or want direction to help when writing their assignments, I suggest the following:

- Armstrong, Nancy. 'Fiction in the Age of Photography.' *Narrative*, 7:1 (1999): 37-55.
- Beaumont, Matthew, ed. *A Concise Companion to Realism*. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2012. The first six essays are all excellent, including one by Terry Eagleton, and chapters 13 and 15, by Slavoj

- Žižek and Christopher Norris are useful theoretical approaches from a Lacanian and poststructuralist perspective respectively.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 'The Narrative Voice (the "he", the neutral).' In *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 379-87.
- Byerly, Alison. *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Especially the Coda on 'Aestheticism: The Erasure of the Real'.
- Campbell, Jan. 'Hysteria, Mimesis and the Phenomenological Imaginary.' *Textual Practice*, 19:3 (2005): 331-351.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Demeure.' In Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death / Demeure*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- . 'Economimesis.' Trans. R. Klein. *Diacritics*, 11.2 (1981): 2-25.
- Halliwell, Stephen. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2015.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. 'Typography.' Trans. Eduardo Cadava. In *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*. Ed. Christopher Fynsk. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. 43-138.
- Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. London; Routledge, 2003.
- Nuttall, Anthony David. *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Potolsky, Matthew. *Mimesis*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Riffaterre, Michael. 'Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse.' *Critical Enquiry*, 11:1 (1984): 141-62.
- Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Stewart, Elizabeth. *Catastrophe and Survival: Walter Benjamin and Psychoanalysis*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Especially part two on 'Cultures of Mimesis', although please note that you need to have a good grounding in Lacan to get the most from this text.
- Villanueva, Dario. *Theories of Literary Realism*. Trans. Mihai I. Spariosu and Santiago Garcia-Castañon. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997.
- Waldrep, Shelton. 'The Aesthetic Realism of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*.' *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 29:1 (1996): 103-12.
- Whiteley, Giles. *Oscar Wilde and the Simulacrum: the Truth of Masks*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2015. Especially the introduction and chapter one.
- . *The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Assignments

Essay One: midnight 20 November 2020.

- Focusing on Auerbach's Shakespeare-chapter, select *one* of the scenes that he mentions in passing (from *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* etc.). Read this scene independently and use it as a springboard to test and analyse Auerbach's views on realism in *Mimesis*.
- What do you see as the key points in Auerbach's account of the "representation of reality"? Are there problems or inconsistencies in his approach?
- Make use of Said and Ankersmit to structure your argument.
- Length: 1200-1500 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.
- Font: Times New Roman 12. Spacing: 2. Please do add your name and page numbers!
- The essay must be uploaded on athena so that you can certify that the text is your own. All essays will be run through the university's text-matching tool urkund to detect potential cutting and pasting from the internet. NO E-MAIL SUBMISSION!!

Essay Two: midnight 11 January 2021.

- Write an argument essay (an essay arguing a case, driven by a thesis statement) focusing on AT LEAST TWO of the set texts, one (or more) literary and one (or more) theoretical. Construct an argument addressing the major fault lines in theories of literary realism as you understand them: the tensions between genetic, historical (or period-oriented) and formalist approaches.
- Ask yourself what it means to read your selected text as a "realistic" text. How do you then locate and characterise its realism? What conception(s) of reality undergird its realism? Conversely, what might a focus on "realism" leave out?
- You should make clear your understanding of the material so far studied and discussed and show DETAILED knowledge of BOTH the text AND theories of realism. Good essays will also show the ability to analyse the text closely for its use of literary devices and explain not only which devices are used by WHY they are used.
- You MUST make reference to secondary reading to substantiate your argument: see the Course Reading List for suggestions, but don't feel limited by this.
- Length: 2500-3000 words, including footnotes but excluding bibliography.
- Font: Times New Roman 12. Spacing: 2. Please do add your name and page numbers!
- The essay must be uploaded on athena so that you can certify that the text is your own. All essays will be run through the university's text-matching tool urkund to detect potential cutting and pasting from the internet. NO E-MAIL SUBMISSION!!

Retake date for essay one: midnight 17 December 2020.

Retake date for essay two: midnight 7 February 2020.

Assessment and Assessment Criteria

You will be continually assessed according to your performance in class, and according to the quality of your submitted assignments. Your grade for the course will be averaged between all of the assignments as they are judged by the three instructors in the course.

OUTSTANDING

For a grade of **A** the student should ...

- Display wide-ranging knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a profound familiarity with the texts we have read.
- Show the ability, in written work and in active class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion innovative and often illuminating, consistently deploying appropriate critical concepts in an elegant way.
- Present his/her arguments in a persuasive and coherent manner, in correct, fluent and idiomatic English, in a consistently academic style of writing and spoken delivery.

EXCELLENT

For a grade of **B** the student should ...

- display a broad knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as an solid familiarity with the texts we have read.
- show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works in a manner that is on occasion illuminating, with frequent and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
- present arguments in a solid and coherent manner, in correct and fluent English, in an academic style of writing and in an acceptably formal register of spoken delivery

GOOD

For a grade of **C** the student should ...

- display considerable knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as an adequate familiarity with the texts we have read.
- show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze theoretical arguments and literary works, with at least occasional and correct use of appropriate critical concepts.
- present arguments in a coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, with only some lapses from an academic style of writing and with a correct and fluent spoken delivery

SATISFACTORY

For a grade of **D** the student should ...

- display basic knowledge of most of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as some familiarity with the texts we have read.
- show the ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with some, basic use of appropriate critical concepts.
- present his/her arguments in a largely coherent manner, in adequate English with only minor errors, in a consistent, formal register of writing and with a largely correct and fluent spoken delivery

ADEQUATE

For a grade of **E** the student should ...

- display basic knowledge of some of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations as well as a basic knowledge of some of the elements of plots, characters, settings and narrative structure in most of the texts we have read.
- show some ability, in written work and in class discussion, to critically analyze literary works and theoretical arguments, with at least a minimal employment of technical terms.
- present his/her arguments in an intelligible manner, in adequate English, in a largely formal register of written or spoken delivery, with some fluency and few errors.

INADEQUATE

A grade of **F** will be set if the student

- fails the attendance requirements or fails to hand in assignments in time.
- shows scant or no knowledge of the themes and concepts covered by the course material and seminar presentations; likewise shows very little or no familiarity with the texts we have read.
- fails to reach a satisfactory level of critical analysis in written assignments and in class discussion, a failure that includes inability to properly use critical concepts.
- fails to communicate adequately in English, with many errors and no sense of stylistic register.

Any of these failures is enough for an overall fail.

INCOMPLETE

The **Fx** grade is set if the student has reached most of the Learning outcomes of the course, but must hand in revised or supplementary material in order to fully meet the requirements.