

**LITERATURE and SOCIETY**  
(Tu, Th 2:30-3:45p.m.; Calloway S101)

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**Overview**

"Nature imitates Art more than Art imitates Nature." (Oscar Wilde)

"Literature, though it may also be many other things, is social evidence and testimony." (Lewis Coser)

Some conceptualizations of the relationship between literature and society are rather straightforward: literature is a reflection of society, a force in society, or simply a separate part of social life. Others argue that the enterprise of literature is more complex, potentially capturing diverse forms of interaction between various parts of and players in society. Thus the roles of literature in society, and of society in literature remain open to debate. That literature is best understood only as aesthetic creation silences the debate yet leaves many questions unanswered. The goal of the course is to explore the multifaceted relationship between literature and society, examining the intricacies of the debate and attempting to answer the questions it inspires.

The course allows the possibility of integrating two ways in which sociologists examine literature. The dominant approach of the course is that of the *Sociology of Literature*, focusing on the production and consumption of literature in society. The course will demonstrate how social structures and processes govern the relationships among creators, audiences, and gatekeepers, both now and in the past. Analysis of works of fiction, representing a *sociology through literature* approach, provides a means to exemplify concepts, theories, and issues raised by the Sociology of Literature. The merging of these two approaches highlights the integral part literature plays in society.

We begin with an analysis of the question: What is literature? We move from there to a review of how we study literature sociologically. Each of the three main substantive

parts of the course focuses on literary roles. Proceeding first with creators, we examine what personal and societal factors influence writers and what they write. Readers, defined more generally in terms of the audience, constitute the second role of interest. Here we ask: how do audiences vary? how do readers interpret texts? Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* will reveal mechanisms of social perception that also apply to reading. The third role, gatekeepers, consists of two different types of actors: publishers and critics. We will discuss the activities and power of publishers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The industrial setting of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* provides a backdrop for our analyses of changes in literary production. For critics, we will examine the multiple roles that they play and the scholarly tools they use to interpret works. The course concludes with re-consideration of general questions about the relationship between literature and social change at the level of the text, the activity of interpretation, and dynamics within society. Don DeLillo's *White Noise* epitomizes the intricate relationship of literature and society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to this substantive focus, the course is designed to be *writing intensive*. Considering literature as a form of writing facilitates emphasis on the importance of writing for capturing and communicating the nature and logic of ideas. Brief writing exercises provide the basis for harvesting ideas and illustrating issues. In addition, to emphasize the notion that "good writing is re-writing" (and to illustrate the process novelists themselves often undergo), the term paper assignment involves reviews at several points during the semester (by the instructors and/or by peers) as a means of obtaining feedback for revisions. On the mundane, bureaucratic level, this course fulfills the writing requirement and the advanced seminar requirement of the general education requirements for Emory College.

### Course Requirements

1. **Participation.** The content and organization of the course as well as its actual size demands the participation of class members. First, attendance is expected. Second, students should actively engage themselves in the learning process by participating in discussion. Third, completing in-class writing assignments constitutes a form of participation. And, fourth, students should be prepared to answer written questions on the readings during any class session (i.e., there may be pop quizzes).
2. **Readings** are listed on the course outline. Please complete the reading(s) for a particular day prior to that class session. Other readings are available online (you need Adobe Acrobat to read the files). Some may be added as the semester progresses. In addition, the texts that we will use are available at the bookstore:

Mary Rogers, *Novels, Novelists, and Readers*  
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*  
Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*  
Don DeLillo, *White Noise*



3. **Essay exams** cover lecture and reading materials presented in the course. The **three** essays divide the course into segments of about 4-5 weeks. Each will be a take-home exam, to be completed in a week (at a minimum). Tentative due dates for the exams are:

Thursday, 27 February  
Thursday, 3 April  
Thursday, 1 May

4. The **Term Paper** provides you with the opportunity to examine literature through a sociological lens. The 10-15 page paper may take one of several forms: (1) application of some sociological theory to a literary work; (2) comparisons between a literary piece and current empirical research; (3) investigation of the reactions of different audiences to a literary piece; or (4) a form of your own choosing. More structure and detail on this assignment will be given. Be forewarned that, because of the emphasis on writing in this course, we expect to see your papers at several stages: (tentative dates)

The idea -- Tuesday, 11 February  
First draft -- Tuesday, 25 March  
Second draft -- Thursday, 17 April (if necessary)  
Final draft -- Tuesday, 6 May

At all stages, we will be happy to discuss with you the content and writing of your paper. In addition, I encourage you to have your classmates examine your work in progress. Should you choose to collect your own data for a project and should that involve using human subjects, you will be required to complete the Social, Humanist, and Behavioral Institutional Review Board application.

5. **Grading**

Exams	50%
Paper	40%
Participation	10%

### Course Outline

- I. Introduction (16 - 28 January)  
A. What is literature? (16 January)

Wellek, Rene and Austin Warren. 1977. *Theory of Literature* (pp. 20-28, "The nature of literature"). San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.  
Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 5-20, "The world of

- literature"). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.  
B. What gave rise to the novel? (21 January)

Watt, Ian. 1965. *The Rise of the Novel* (pp. 35-59). Berkeley: University of California Press.

- C. What does Sociology contribute to how we study literature? (23 January)

Albrecht, Milton. 1954. "The relationship of literature and society." *American Journal of Sociology* 59:425-36.

Templeton, Alice and Stephen B. Groce. 1990. "Sociology and literature: Theoretical considerations." *Sociological Inquiry* 60:34-46.

Zolberg, Vera. 1990. *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (pp. 1-25, "What is Art? What is the Sociology of Art?"). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- C. What are empirical ways to study literature sociologically? (28 January)

Griswold, Wendy. 1986. *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980* (pp.1-13 "Introduction"). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Griswold, Wendy. 1987. "A methodological framework for the sociology of culture." *Sociological Methodology* 17:1-35.

## II. Creators (30 January - 4 March)

- A. What personal forces propel individuals to write? (30 January)

Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 21-34, "Self-experiences and novel making" and pp. 34-50, "Novel making and the world of everyday life"). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Coser, Lewis A., Charles Kadushin, and Walter W. Powell. 1982. *Books* (pp. 224-59, "Authors: A worm's-eye view"). New York: Basic Books.

- B. How do societal and cultural factors affect writers? (4 - 6 February)

Griswold, Wendy. 1981. "American character and the American novel: An expansion of reflection theory in the sociology of literature." *American Journal of Sociology* 86:740-65.

Tuchman, Gay and Nina Fortin. 1980. "Edging Women Out: Some Suggestions about the Structure of Opportunities and the Victorian Novel." *Signs* 6: 308-325.

Barker-Nunn, Jeanne and Gary Alan Fine. 1999. "The vortex of creation: Literary politics and the demise of Herman Melville's reputation." *Poetics* 26:81-98.

C. How was Jane Austen affected by her 19<sup>th</sup> C context? (11 February)

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*

III. Audiences (13 February - 4 March)

A. How do reading audiences vary? (13 February)

Gans, Herbert. 1974. *Popular Culture and High Culture* (pp. 67-94, "Comparative analysis of high and popular culture"). New York: Basic Books. (Note: updated version may be substituted)

Woodward, Ian and Michael Emmison. 2002. "From aesthetic principles to collective sentiments: The logics of everyday judgements of taste." *Poetics* 29:295-316.

Tepper, Steven J. 2000. "Fiction reading in America: Explaining the gender gap." *Poetics* 27:255-275.

B. What are "interpretive communities" of readers? (18 February)

Radway, Janice. 1991. "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading." Pp. 465-484 in *Rethinking Popular Culture*, edited by Chandra Mukers and Michael Schudson. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 91-106, "Readers' self-experiences" and pp. 107-128, "Novel making, novel reading, and literary interaction"). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

(Out of town) (21 February)

C. How do readers interpret texts? (25 February)

Iser, Wolfgang. 1980. "Interaction between text and reader." Pp. 106-19 *The Reader in the Text*. edited by S.R. Suleiman and I. Crosman. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Pollard-Gott, Lucy. 1993. "Attribution theory and the novel." *Poetics* 21:499-524.

Miall, David S. and Don Kuiken. 2002. "A feeling for fiction: Becoming what we behold." *Poetics* 30:221-241.

D. How do social factors affect interpretation patterns? (27 February)

Press, Andrea. 1994. "The sociology of cultural reception: Notes toward an emerging paradigm." Pp. 221-245 in *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Diana Crane. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Griswold, Wendy. 1987. "The fabrication of meaning: Literary interpretation in the United States, Great Britain, and the West Indies." *American Journal of Sociology* 92:1077-1117.

### EXAM 1 due 27 February

E. How does social perception propel action in *Pride and Prejudice*? (4 March)

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*.

IV. Gatekeepers (6 March - 17 April)

A. How do publishers, critics, and others affect writers and readers? (6 March)

Becker, Howard. 1982. *Art Worlds* (pp. 1-39 "Art Worlds and Collective Activity") Berkeley: University of California Press.

de Glas, Frank. 1992. "Authors' oeuvres as the backbone of publishers' lists: Studying the literary publishing house after Bourdieu." *Poetics* 25:379-397.

B. Publishers

1. How did a book get published prior to the 20th century? (18 March)

Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 153-163, 169-174, "The business of literature"). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Benedict, Barbara M. 2001. "The eighteenth-century anthology and the construction of the expert reader." *Poetics* 28:377-397.

Winship, Michael. 1999. "The transatlantic book trade and Anglo-American literary culture in the nineteenth century." Pp. 98-122 in *Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America*, edited by Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.

2. How did Dickens epitomize 19<sup>th</sup> C publishing? (20 March)

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*.

3. How does a book get published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? (25 March)

Coser, Lewis A., Charles Kadushin, and W.W. Powell. 1982. *Books* (pp. 118-47, "To sign or not to sign"). New York: Basic Books.

de Nooy, W. 1991. "Social networks and classifications in literature." *Poetics* 20:507-537.

Rostenberg, leona and Madeleine B. Stern. 2002. *From Revolution to Revolution: perspectives on Publishing and Bookselling 1501-2001* (pp.171-177, "Conventional and electronic books: Pluses and minuses."). New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press.

4. How does capitalism drive individual action in *Hard Times*? (27 March)

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*.

5. What makes a best seller? (1 April)

Radaway, Janice. 1989. "The Book-of-the-Month Club and the general reader: On the uses of "serious" fiction." Pp. 154-176 in *Literature and Social Practice*, edited by P. Desan, P.P Ferguson, and W. Griswold. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

6. How has the women in print movement emerged over time? (3 April)

*Guest Speaker:* Kathy Liddle, Sociology graduate student

Chesnut, Saralyn and Amanda C. Gable. 1997. "Women ran it: Charis books and more and Atlanta's lesbian-feminist community, 1971-1981." Pp. 241-284 in *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, edited by John Howard. New York: New York University Press.

## **EXAM 2 due 3 April**

## C. Critics

1. What roles do critics play? (8 April)

Janssen, Susanne. 1997. "Reviewing as social practice: Institutional constraints on critics' attention for contemporary fiction." *Poetics* 24:275-297.

Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 163-169, "The business of literature"). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Janssen, Susanne. 1998. "Side-roads to success: The effect of sideline activities on the status of writers." *Poetics* 25:265-280.

2. What are scholarly frameworks for criticism? (10 - 15 April)

Hall, John. 1979. *The Sociology of Literature* (pp. 1-23, "Theoretical traditions"). London: Longman, 1979.

3. Why is DeLillo a critically acclaimed novelist? (17 April)

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*.

## V. Conclusions

- A. How do gatekeepers create and maintain the canon? (22 April)

Corse, Sarah M. and Monica D. Griffin. 1997. "Cultural valorization and African American literary history: Reconstructing the canon." *Sociological Forum* 12: 173-203.

Corse, Sarah M. 1995. "Nations and novels: Cultural politics and literary use." *Social Forces* 73:1279-1308.

- B. How does literature influence society? How does social change affect literary form, as represented in *White Noise*? (24 April)

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*.

Rogers, Mary F. 1991. *Novels, Novelists, and Readers* (pp. 129-152, "Literary socialization"; pp. 175-202, "The art of social worlds and the science of social worlds"; pp. 203-212, "The fictive"). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Long, Elizabeth. 1994. "Textual interpretation as collective action." Pp. 181-212 in *Viewing, Reading, and Listening*, edited by J. Cruz and J. Lewis. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

**EXAM 3 due 1 May**