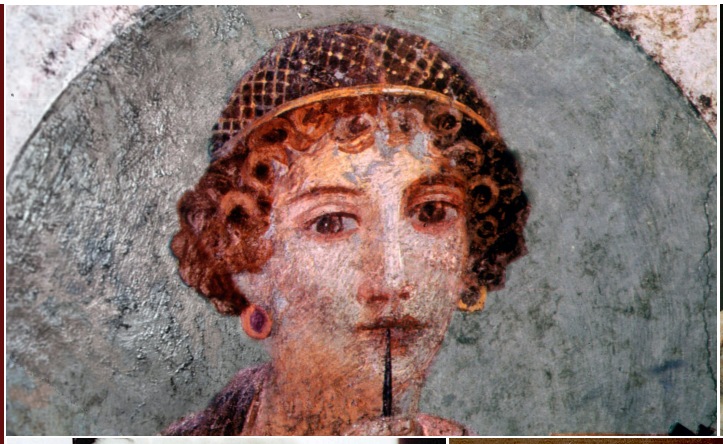
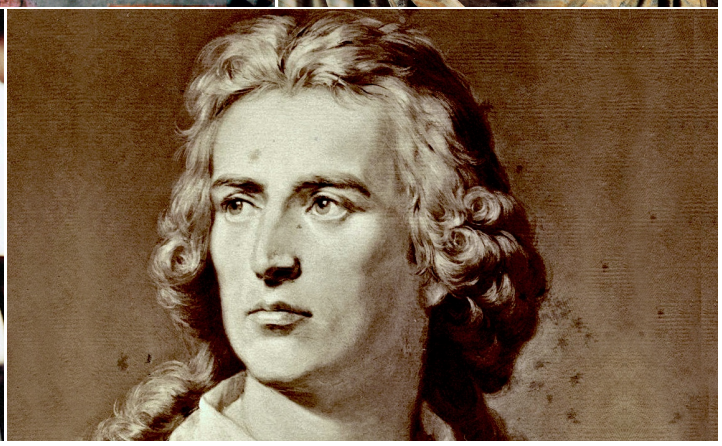
CRW 5321 NARRATIVE THEORY & *POETICS*

May I write words
more naked than flesh,
stronger than bone,
more resilient
than sinew,
more sensitive
than nerve.
—Sappho

There is no
outside the text.
—Jacques Derrida





CRW 5321— 10966 *Narrative Theory & Poetics*

Old Main Room 201 — Wednesday 3:00–5:50 PM — August 28–December 7, 2023

José de Piérola, Ph.D.
jdepierola@utep.edu — OFFICE: University Towers 510D — HOURS: TUESDAY 3:00–5:00 PM (MT)

Introduction

Poetics, understood as the study of how a literary text creates an effect on its audience, and the rules and principles used to create such effect, has been a concern for critics and writers for more than two thousands years. The goal of this seminar is to help students become aware, explore, and reflect on their own poetics.

To this end, we will explore the meaning of poetics by reading some of the most influential texts in the field, from classics such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, to writer's statements written in the past century. These readings will provide students with a number of approaches to understand their own poetics—as readers and writers—as well as a good set of ideas to retool their own *poetics*.

Students registered in this course should have a basic understanding of the elements of fiction as well as a basic understanding of the elements of poetry. Students should also be able to write at a graduate level and read analytically theory, fiction, and poetry. Students will be required to read an average of fifty pages per week and participate in each week's discussions in class. Students will also be required to write an analytical discussion about the *poetics* that inform a literary work of their choosing. In keeping with the goal of the class, students will need to write their own poetics, which will be the basis for our workshop. In addition, as a hybrid class, students are expected to participate in a few synchronous Zoom sessions through the semester.

Inside

Course Goals

- Grasp narrative theory within a historical context
- Understand the major theories on narrative developed in the 20TH century
- Have an overview of the poetics of major poets of the 20TH century
- Discover, develop and retool a personal *poetics*

Required Texts

The following texts are required to complete the class assignments. When electronic texts are available (marked as ebook below), a PDF of the full text will be posted on Blackboard under the corresponding week. Short excerpts of the theoretical texts will be available in PDF format through Blackboard at least one week before they are required; nevertheless, access to the full text is a must. Make sure that you have access to the required texts, or make arrangements to buy them in advance.

Nonfiction

- Aristotle: *Poetics* (ebook)
- Longinus: *On the Sublime* (ebook)
- Horace: *Ars Poetica* (ebook)
- R.M. Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet* (ebook)
- Henry James: *The Art of Fiction* (ebook)
- Vladimir Propp:*Morphology of the Folktale*
- Mieke Bal: *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (3rd edition)
- Gérard Genette: *Narrative Discourse Revisited*
- N.J. Lowe: *The Classical Plot and the Invention of the Western Narrative*

Fiction & Poetry

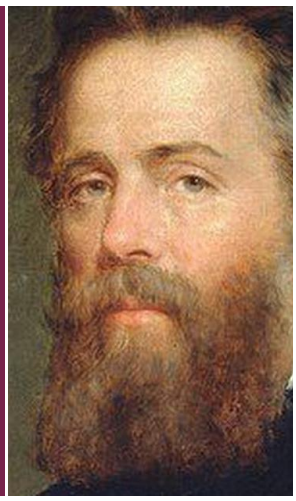
- Homer: *The Odyssey* (ebook)
- Sappho: *Complete Poetry (selections)* (ebook)
- Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (play)
- Whitman: *Leaves of Grass* (ebook)
- Hans Christian Andersen: *Three Tales* (ebook)
- Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary* (ebook)
- Herman Melville: *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (ebook)
- Michael Curtiz: *Casablanca* (film)
- W.G. Sebald: *Austerlitz*
  (The Modern Library ISBN 0–375–75656–6)
- *Selected Poems* (ebook)
- Other downloadable readings in PDF format will be posted as required.

Communication Channels

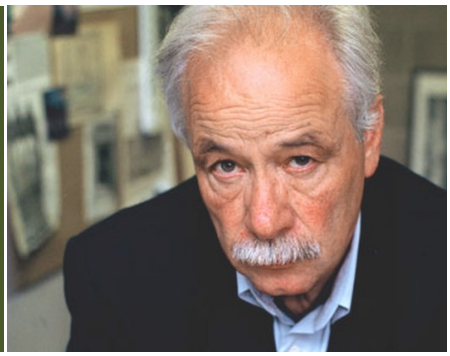
Most of our interaction will happen in class. Nevertheless, if you need help outside the classroom, consider the following options:

- OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday from 3:00 to 5:00 PM @ University Towers 510D. I encourage you to make an appointment in class or by email. I schedule appointments from 3:00 to 4:00 PM, and take walk-ins after 4:00 PM. If the posted hours conflict with other classes, contact me.
- EMAIL: `jdepierola@utep.edu`. I reply to emails daily on business days, starting at 5:00PM, in order of reception. IMPORTANT: Emails received after 5:00PM will be answered the next day.
- If all else fails, call the Creative Writing Department during business hours at (915) 747-5713.

"It is one of the most insidious temptations to the young artist to go on doing what he already knows how to do, and knows he will be praised for doing."
—Wharton: *The Writing of Fiction*



"You adulterate the truth as you write. There isn't any pretense that you try to arrive at the literal truth. And the only consolation when you confess to this flaw is that you are seeking to arrive at poetic truth, which can be reached only through fabrication, imagination, stylization."
— W.G. Sebald



Guidelines

- GENERAL: There are no lectures in this class. Your learning will depend on carefully reading texts, responding critically to them, and engaging with your classmates' ideas in the classroom.
- EMAIL: Students are expected to follow the email etiquette for an academic setting. My email filters out emails that don't address me personally. Keep in mind that I reply to emails once a day (see Communication Channels).
- ZOOM: Some sessions will be held via Zoom. The link will be available in the week's discussion in Blackboard.
- ATTENDANCE: Students are expected to attend every class. Students cannot miss more than two (2) classes, unless there are provable impediments. In the final grade, I will subtract half a grade for each additional unexcused absence.
- TARDINESS: Two late arrivals equal one absence.
- PARTICIPATION: You are expected to participate in our class discussions. Come prepared to comment on the texts of the week; ideally, bringing a discussion question relevant to you.
- READINGS: Students are expected to read each week's selection in advance (see Program). Students are encouraged to plan accordingly.
- ASSIGNMENTS: Most assignments will be turned in as a PDF file via email. Read the guidelines for each assignment carefully; if your assignment does not follow the guidelines, it will not be accepted.
- WORKSHOP: For the workshop section of our class, you will need to make copies of your work for all of your classmates. If possible, use double-sided printing on renewable-sourced paper.
- CLASS ETIQUETTE: This is a seminar class; therefore, you are required to be an active participant in all of our discussions. If you engage in parallel conversations with your classmates, browsing the Internet, texting, keeping track of a website, or other disruptive behavior, I will ask you to leave the class and mark you as absent.

Assignments

- WEEKLY RESPONSE: Due from Week 1 to Week 13. This is a two page (≈600 words) response to ONE passage of ONE of the texts we are reading for the week. It should show that you have carefully read and thought about that particular text.
- PRESENTATION: Due from Week 2 to Week 13, this is a 15 to 20 minute presentation on one of the texts of the week (see our Program). Make it a professional-grade presentation, using additional materials and visual aids as needed.
- POETICS: Due Week 13. This is a statement of your *poetics* as a working writer. It can draw on ideas from the readings, or other sources, but it should present your original take, while acknowledging its sources. It should be at least 5 pages (≈1,500 words).
- RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL: Due Week 12, this is a two page precis of your research project (≈600 words). It should include the text you will analyze, the theoretical framework you will use, and your tentative thesis about the text.
- EDITORIAL REVIEW: Due Week 15, this is an editorial review of the POETICS of one of your classmates. See the guidelines.
- RESEARCH PROJECT: Due Week 15. This is an essay about 15 pages long (≈4,500 words). You may write about any one of the works of fiction or poetry we have read, analyzing it with the theories we have discussed in class. It should show that you have a good command of the theory and how it applies to fiction and poetry. You are expected to submit a PROJECT PROPOSAL by Week 12.

Program

Week 1—AUG 28
- Introduction
- Plato: *The Republic*
- Aristotle: *Poetics*

Week 2—SEP 4
- Horace: *Ars Poetica*
- Longinus: *On the Sublime*
- Sappho: *Poetry* & Homer: *The Odysey*

Week 3—SEP 11
- Schiller: "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry"
- Poe: "Philosophy of Composition"
- Whitman: *Leaves of Grass*

Week 4—SEP 18
- Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet*
- "The Art of Poetry": Moore, Neruda, & McLeish
- *Selected Poems*: Moore, Neruda & MacLeish

Week 5—SEP 25
- Brooks: *The Well Wrought Urn*
- "The Art of Poetry": Paz, Milosz & Szymborska
- *Selected Poems*: Paz, Milosz & Szymborska

Week 6—OCT 2
- Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale*
- Andersen: *Three Tales*
- Calvino: *Italian Folktales*

Week 7—OCT 9
- James: *The Art of Fiction*
- Wharton: "Constructing a Novel"
- Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*

Week 8—OCT 16
- Bakhtin: "Discourse in the Novel"
- Melville: *Bartleby, the Scrivener*

Week 9—OCT 23
- Lowe: "The Classical Plot"
- Orloff: *Playwriting 101*
- Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

Week 10—OCT 30
- Chatman: "Story: Events & Existents"
- Bordwell: "Chapter 2: Film Form"
- Curtiz: *Casablanca*

Week 11—NOV 6
- Hutcheon: "Narcissistic Narrative"
- Culler: "Literary Competence"
- Sebald: *Austerlitz*

Week 12—NOV 13
- Genette: *Narrative Discourse Revisited*
- Bal: "Narratology"
- Maupassant: "Boule de Suif" & "A Coward"
- Cortázar: "Letter to a Young Lady in Paris" & "The Night Face Up"
- RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

Week 13—NOV 20
- Orwell & Didion: "Why I Write"
- Atwood: "Nine Beginnings" & Ishiguro: "My Twentieth Century Evening"
- Morrison: "The Site of Memory" & Dillard: "Write Until You Drop"

Week 14—NOV 27
- Abrams: *The Mirror and the Lamp*
- Barthes: "The Death of the Author"
- Foucault: "What Is an Author?"
- POETICS DUE

Week 15—DEC 4
- Workshop: "Poetics"
- Final Review
- EDITORIAL REVIEW DUE
- RESEARCH PROJECT DUE

My job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over "proceedings too terrible to relate." —Toni Morrison

Grading Policy

- Weekly Response 20%
- Attendance & Participation 20%
- Presentation 10%
- Poetics 20%
- Research Project 30%

"Nothing can ever happen twice. In consequence, the sorry fact is that we arrive here improvised and leave without the chance to practice." —Szymborska

University Policy Statements

SELF IDENTITY The Department of Creative Writing at UTEP supports students' right to define their identity in terms of name, pronoun, and mode of address. This class will provide each student the opportunity to let their preference be known. Should you need to discuss this issue with your instructor in private, you are encouraged to make an appointment early in the semester.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY STATEMENT: Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording, and it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to `http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm` for further information.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at (915) 747-5148, or by email to `cass@utep.edu`, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the `cass@utep.edu` website at `https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/`.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT: All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated in any form.

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS: If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or are experiencing its symptoms, let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. In addition, you should report a positive test to COVID-19 to `covidaction@utep.edu`, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support an. The CDC recommends wearing face masks when indoors in shared spaces in areas affected by COVID-19. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit `epstrong.org`