

# INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY THEORY

COLT 302, 22008R, Fall 2016, Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays, 1:00-1:50 pm, THH 118

This course will consider what we do when we encounter a text—how we frame it, what sense we make of it (if at all) and, most importantly, why we engage in interpretation. The course will begin with a short text by the writer Isak Dinesen (the pseudonym of Karen Blixen), “The Blank Page.” Secrecy is put on stage in this story and the question of secrecy as an inescapable part of interpretation will guide us throughout our semester. We will consider the mystery of authorship next, in relation to that most mysterious of authors, “William Shakespeare,” as we examine competing biographical claims about “Shakespeare” as author—as pseudonym, as conspiracy, as individual. Here we will work with the library briefly to introduce issues of digital research in the humanities. We will also read two enormously influential accounts of authorship (or its ends): Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” and Michel Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” Alongside Barthes and Foucault, we will read “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” by Jorge Luis Borges, perhaps one of the most enigmatic stories about authorial identity. Next, we will examine an essay by Barthes about Edgar Allan Poe’s



short story about posthumous life, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” We will then read one of Sigmund Freud’s few essays that focuses exclusively on a literary text, “The Uncanny” with the short story, “The Sandman” by the German Romantic writer, E.T.A. Hoffmann from which Freud draws his explanations for the secrets of the “uncanny.” In the final section of the class we will read two essays—on the notions of “hybridity” and “mimicry” --by the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha along with stories by the South African writer Can Themba (“The Suit”) and the African American science fiction writer, Octavia Butler (“Bloodchild”). We will also read selections from Rey Chow, a contemporary Asian American critic in this section as we consider the mysteries of power.

There will be two presentations, four short (3-page) papers (two based on presentations) and one longer (5-page) final paper.

Professor Michael du Plessis

duplessi@usc.edu

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