

Literary Criticism from Plato to Postmodernism

COLT 391, 22047R, Fall 2016, Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 12:00 - 12:50 pm, THH 118

This course will focus on questions of literature and interpretation. Reading fiction alongside literary criticism directed at specialist audiences as well as general readerships, we will investigate how criticism and literature are intertwined and the extent to which both produce, rather than simply reflect, intersections of social categories (sexual, racial, national, gendered...). The class will consist of four sections: the first will read, in detail, Sigmund Freud's reading of literature and dreams in his essay, "Dream and Delusion in Jensen's *Gradiva*." As part of the issues of literature and dream, we will consider issues of genre and read sections from Tzvetan Todorov's study in the genre of the fantastic. In the following three sections, we will use literary texts as points of departure to investigate issues and intersections of racial and sexual difference. We will analyze a short novel by Honoré de Balzac, *The Girl with the Golden Eyes*, with essays by psychoanalytic feminist critic Shoshana Felman and postcolonial critic Edward Said to think about gender, desire and geopolitical difference. Then, we will read Toni Morrison's thought-provoking collection of essays, *Playing in the Dark*, in which Morrison examines the role that "blackness" plays in the tradition of US literature. Essays by a key African American literary critic, Henry Louis Gates, and by a ground-breaking Latina writer, Gloria Anzaldua, will help us read the short novel *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen (a Harlem Renaissance writer). In the last section, we will consider how



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *The Librarian*, (1566), oil on canvas.

sexuality and sexual identity overlap and intertwine with other forms of social categorization as we examine sections from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on the notion of the "closet." With Sedgwick, we will read Larsen's best-known novel, *Passing*. Here, we will also read a short story by Jean Rhys and essays by Cherrie Moraga. Grades will be made up of one in-class presentation, four short papers (3 pages each) and one longer final paper (7 pages).

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