



(Drawing of Plato and Socrates by  
Matthew Paris of St. Albans, 13<sup>th</sup> century)

## COLT 302: Introduction to Literary Theory

Professor Richard McLaughlin ([richardsm@usc.edu](mailto:richardsm@usc.edu))

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30-11:50 AM, WPH 603

- What's more essential, speech or writing? Are all forms of address, and even consciousness itself, forms of writing? Is writing, with its tendency to go astray and escape its author's ability to speak for it, dangerous, or is the impulse to anchor meaning in an immutable interpretation dangerous? Who or what is the author? Is the author dead, and why does this matter?

- How do economic conditions impact literary production? And furthermore, how can a novel about, say, an estate in the English Midlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also essentially be about sugar plantations in the Caribbean?

- How can the familiar become strange, and is there something familiar at the heart of the strange?

- How does literature represent what we could call "the minor" or the everyday, the moments of repetitive labor, linguistic practices, and engagements with social space of marginalized subjects, and why does this matter?

- Are the differences that mark gender essential or performative, and how would works of literature answer this question?

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Literary theory is a constellation of schools of thought that can help us explore and come up with compelling answers to these and other questions. In our course, we'll engage with some of the most enduring forms of critical thought on the literary, including structural and poststructural theory, Marxist and postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, cultural studies and theories of everyday life and social space, feminist theory, and queer theory. We'll consider how these forms of thought help to illuminate literary productions, and we'll also read some literary works (like E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman" and short stories by Albert Camus and Franz Kafka) to see firsthand the encounter between theorist and text.

By participating in this course, you'll learn how to approach works of literature (stories, novels, films, etc.) through the use of theoretical tools that help to unpack the contextual information, authorial assumptions and political stakes underpinning all works of art.