

Dr. Andrew Donnelly

ENGL 7/8701: History of Criticism and Theory

For most of us doing literary criticism today, literary theory and the history of criticism serve two important functions: First, a map of the history of thought through which we categorize, genealogize, hierarchize, find, understand, embrace, and sometimes even dismiss scholarship within our fields and beyond. Second, fuel for new insights, approaches, readings, interpretations and ways of seeing the world and our work. This course, on the History of Criticism and Theory, aims for both functions, so that no matter your prior experience with theory or literary criticism, you'll leave with both a cartographer's knowledge of what's out there and enthusiasm for where you want to go. To that end, we'll spend the first 8 weeks surveying the most influential approaches and schools of thought in 20th-century literary criticism. One focus, across this survey, will be the opposition, attempts at synthesis, and occasional outright conflict between close-reading and historicist approaches, the textualists vs. the contextualists. Then, for the final 6 weeks, we'll vote as a class on a set of modules that explore works foundational to distinct approaches and trends still relevant and exciting today.