

Department of English | University of Hawai'i at Manoa  
**ENG 737: Problems in Literary Criticism**  
**Defenses of Poetry: Aesthetics, Ideology, Society**

John Zuern  
Fall 2000  
T 6:30 - 9:00  
Kuykendall 409

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<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~zuern/737>

### **Overview**

This course aims to present the history of literary theory in a manner that bridges the concerns of students in literary studies and those of creative writers. Organized around key moments in the development of literary-critical discourse, the seminar will focus on efforts by writers and critics alike to elaborate compelling defenses of *poiesis* against various challenges to its philosophical validity and social value. Rather than simply examining literary production as an activity that is perennially on the defensive, however, we will explore the ambiguity of the expression “defenses of poetry,” looking at the ways theories of literary production have built up conceptual categories that have had a profound impact on cultural formations in general, as well as the ways these concepts can operate as defenses in the psychoanalytic sense—as unconscious, unexamined reactions to the challenges they face. The guiding premise of the course is that any defense of poetry must necessarily entail a theory of poetry, so that before we can understand what it means to *defend* literature we must understand what it means to *theorize* about it. The goal of the course is to develop a dialogue among critics and writers about critical issues that is grounded in intellectual history and guided by philosophical rigor.

### **Required Texts**

Richter, David H. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*  
Plato, *Phaedrus* (both texts are available from Revolution Books)  
*Hybolic* 1.1 (1999) and *Oiwi* 1.1 (1998) (on reserve)

### **Assignments**

Exercises (20%)  
In-Class Presentation (20%)  
Individual Manifesto/Essay (30%)  
Collaborative Manifesto/Essay (30%)

Each of you will take responsibility for leading class discussion by giving an in-class presentation, which you will also submit to me in written form. Your writing during the semester will be aimed at developing either a personal manifesto on the nature and value of creative writing or a critical essay on any issues raised in the seminar. In either case, the product will include serious research (that is, your texts must explicitly engage other texts). These individual projects will feed a collective effort on the part of working groups to develop a set of theoretical positions on the value of writing. Working groups will turn in a written document representing their discussions, either as a jointly written working paper or a complete edited transcript of a forum discussion. *All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade.*

### **Policy**

You are expected to attend this seminar regularly and on time. If circumstances arise that make it difficult for you to come to class or to complete your assigned work, please inform me immediately. Don't wait until the end of the semester, when it will be harder to make accommodations. I will give incompletes only in cases of medical or family emergencies.

### **Class Web Site**

Your written exercises and assignments will be compiled on a class web site that will **not** be made available to the general public during the semester. Your work **will** be available for other members of the class to read. At the end of the term, we will decide as a group if we want to publish the site.

**Schedule** (subject to change)

**August 22**

*Introduction to the course.*

**August 29**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria* Chapters 13-14 (321-325)  
Karl Marx, from *The German Ideology*, “Consciousness Derived from Material Conditions” (388-391)  
Sigmund Freud, from *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (handout)  
Raymond Williams, from *Marxism and Literature*, “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent,” “Structures of Feeling” (1164-1172), and selections from *Keywords* (handout)

**Exercise**

*Identify **four** key concepts that guide your work as a writer and your thinking about literature. Write a paragraph about each of them explaining their significance to you.*

**September 5**

Plato, *Republic*, Book X (21-29) and *Phaedrus*

**Exercise**

*Formulate **two** questions that guide your work as a writer and your thinking about literature.*

**September 12**

Augustine, from *Confessions* (handout);  
Christine de Pisan, from the *Querelle de la Rose* (125-130);  
Martin Heidegger, “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” (563-570)

**Exercise**

*Revise your paragraphs about your key concepts to include basic historical information about them. Where do we get our words for these concepts? From what disciplines are these concepts derived?*

**September 19**

Ovid, “Echo and Narcissus” from *Metamorphoses* (handout);  
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Echo” (handout)

**Exercise**

*Choose **two** of your key concepts and draw a graphical diagram representing each of them. Make sure your diagrams are bold enough to be successfully digitized, as they will be included in the glossary on the class site.*

**September 26**

Aristotle, *Poetics* (42-64)

**Exercise**

*Find a short citation (or small set of citations) from a text (your own or another writer’s) that connects in some way to one or more of your key concepts. Convey the connection in at least **two** pages of writing.*

### October 3

Friedrich Nietzsche, from *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (419-433)

#### Exercise

Use the two pages of writing from last week to develop an **introduction** to an essay. Your introduction should both introduce the particular subject of your study and frame the theoretical concerns that guide it. It should be no more than **two** pages long.

### October 10

Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination" (1514-1525)

### October 17

Dante Alighieri, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Book 1 (handout);

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature and Society" (handout)

Lee Tonouchi, "No Laugh, Brah, Serious: Pidgin's Association Wit Local Comedy" (*Hybolic*)

Michael J. Puleloa, "One Kula Moon" (*Hybolic*)

Ku'ualoa Meyer Ho'omanawanui, all poems ('*Oiwi*)

### October 24

Eric Chock, "The Neocolonization of Bamboo Ridge: Repositioning Bamboo Ridge and Local Literature in the 1990s" (handout)

Roque Dalton, "Poetry & Militancy in Latin America" (handout)

Darrell Lum, "The Weightroom" (*Hybolic*)

Haunani-Kay Trask, all poems ('*Oiwi*)

'imaikalani Kalāhele, all poems ('*Oiwi*)

Alani Apio, from *Kāmau* ('*Oiwi*)

#### Assignment

Drafts of individual papers (maximum **ten** pages) must be posted on the class site by **Friday, October 27**.

### October 31

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry* (339-356)

Charles Bernstein, "A Defense of Poetry" (handout)

Manu Aluli Meyer, "The Very Act" and "Multiple Realities" ('*Oiwi*)

Francisco Acoba, "Hawaiian Music and Local Memories" (*Hybolic*)

### November 7

*Election Day*

### November 14

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Writing, 'Race,' and the Difference it Makes" (1576-1588)

Lisa Linn Kanae, "Island Girl" (*Hybolic*)

Rachel Naki, "Have no Fear of the Rich Man with the White Skin" ('*Oiwi*)

**November 21**

*Presentations from working groups.*

**Assignment**

*In collaboration with members of your working group, compose a text (maximum **twelve** pages) that engages the concepts and arguments presented in the individual papers.*

*These texts should be critical but productive. They can take a variety of forms, but they must clearly intersect with both the writing of class members and the materials we have read during the semester.*

**November 28**

Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (890-900);

Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (901-905)

Moana Kaho'ohanohano, "Mana Wahine," "Mana Kane," "Faces of Annexation" ('Oiwi)

**Assignment**

*Review the class site and be ready to make suggestions for hyperlinks.*

**December 5**

*Wrap-up; review and discussion of class site.*