

Memorandum

Date: January 7, 2010
To: ENG 635 Students
From: Jake Jakaitis
Subject: Assignment for First Class Meeting

I have duplicated two essays from recent issues of the journal, College Literature, as the assigned reading for our first meeting of ENG 635: Literary Theory and Criticism at 6:15 p.m. in Root Hall A-108 on Tuesday, January 12. PDF files of the essays are attached to the e-mail that accompanies this memo. Hard copies are also available in Mary Ann Duncan's office: Root Hall A-261. [Teaching assistants in English will find the essays—as well as a copy of this memo in their mailboxes; others can acquire the essays from Mary Ann Duncan in Root Hall A-261 anytime before 4:30 p.m. except during her lunch hour from 11:45-12:45 p.m. English.]

Here are the articles:

Lackey, Michael. "A.S. Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia*: Prologomena to Any Future Theory." *College Literature* 35.1 [Winter 2008]: 128-147.

Womack, Kenneth. "Authorship and the Beatles." *College Literature* 34.3 [Summer 2007]: 161-181.

If you read the essays in the PDF format, please also pick up copies at Mary Ann's office or print out the PDF files and bring hard copies to class.

Please read the essays listed above in the order in which I have listed them and respond to the following instructions for each essay. My purpose here is to introduce both the language/jargon of theory and a few of the issues current in debates about theory and criticism. I'd also like to establish a pattern for reading and thinking about the assigned readings, although we'll keep it informal for this first assignment.

Please consider the following issues while reading these articles and come to class prepared with notes and comments:

- What is at stake in each essay? That is, what is each author trying to defend or promote? What are the **unstated** founding principles or values that sustain each author's argument/presentation? That is, what does each author assume to be true while building an argument?
- What theoretical/methodological influences can you identify in each essay? What assumptions do the authors make about their audience's prior knowledge of theoretical positions? You might just list some of their influences and any questions that you might have about jargon or theory sustaining each essay.
- After completing each essay, take a few minutes to write a paragraph summarizing the critic's primary argument. This is not a formal writing assignment. Instead, simply write down [It is best if this is done at the computer and printed out.] your impressions of the critic's purpose and goals. Summarize his thesis as you have understood it.
- Do these arguments conform to your preconceptions about justifications for teaching and studying literature? How do they conform to your views or in what ways do they conflict with your views?

While we will spend a little time on the course structure and syllabus, most of our class will be spent discussing these articles, so please come with written notes and comments that will remind you of your initial reactions and assist us in our discussion. Ideally, I would like to use discussion of these articles to

expose tensions and conflicts implicit in our obligation to professionalize our relation to the study of literature and resident within the profession itself.

I look forward to seeing you at our first class. At our first meeting, I will ask you to write your name, preferred e-mail address, and telephone number, as well as your primary area[s] of academic interest on an index card. If you already know your thesis topic or are considering a particular topic, I'd like you to provide that information as well.