

Reading Guide: *Literary Theory* by Jonathan Culler

*Please note that I do not mean for you to turn in your answers to these questions. These questions are primarily to guide your thinking while you read the assigned material from Culler's Literary Theory. We will discuss the questions in Wednesday's class, so please give them some thought and jot down a few of your ideas. However, there is no need for you to write out complete answers to all of these questions (although you are free to do so if you wish).*

Chapter 2

1. What are the five properties of literature described by the author (pp. 28-35)? Which of these properties is closest to your own sense of what makes literature "literary"?
2. How do the exemplarity, universality, and socio-political functions of literature (particularly the novel) relate to one another?
3. What does the author have to say about the relationship of literature to authority?

Chapter 4

1. How are *poetics* and *hermeneutics* two distinct approaches to the analysis of a literary work?
2. What aspects of the following two lines of poetry (composed by Emily Dickinson) would be emphasized differently through poetic *versus* hermeneutic analysis?

"Hope" is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops—at all

3. Which of the theoretical "dispositions" listed at the bottom of page 64 and in the Appendix appeals to your own way of thinking about literature, society, culture, politics, etc.?

Chapter 5

1. What are some of the conventional literary genres? From an historical perspective, how have they or their reception shifted or changed (pp. 74-75)?

2. What is the “aspiration to the sublime” (p. 77) that has traditionally defined the voice of lyric poetry? Can you think of any examples from your own readings of poetry that evoke this “aspiration”. or in other words, that “strive to be an event” (p. 78)?

## Chapter 6

1. Can you think of any examples from your own experience as consumers of narrative (whether through novels, or movies, or jokes, etc.) in which a single story or plot has been treated through differing perspectives (i.e., “discourse”, p. 86)?

2. Please answer the question posed in the first paragraph of p. 94: “Is narrative a fundamental form of knowledge (giving knowledge of the world through its sense-making) or is it a rhetorical structure that distorts as much as it reveals?” Obviously, there’s no right answer here. What does your gut say?