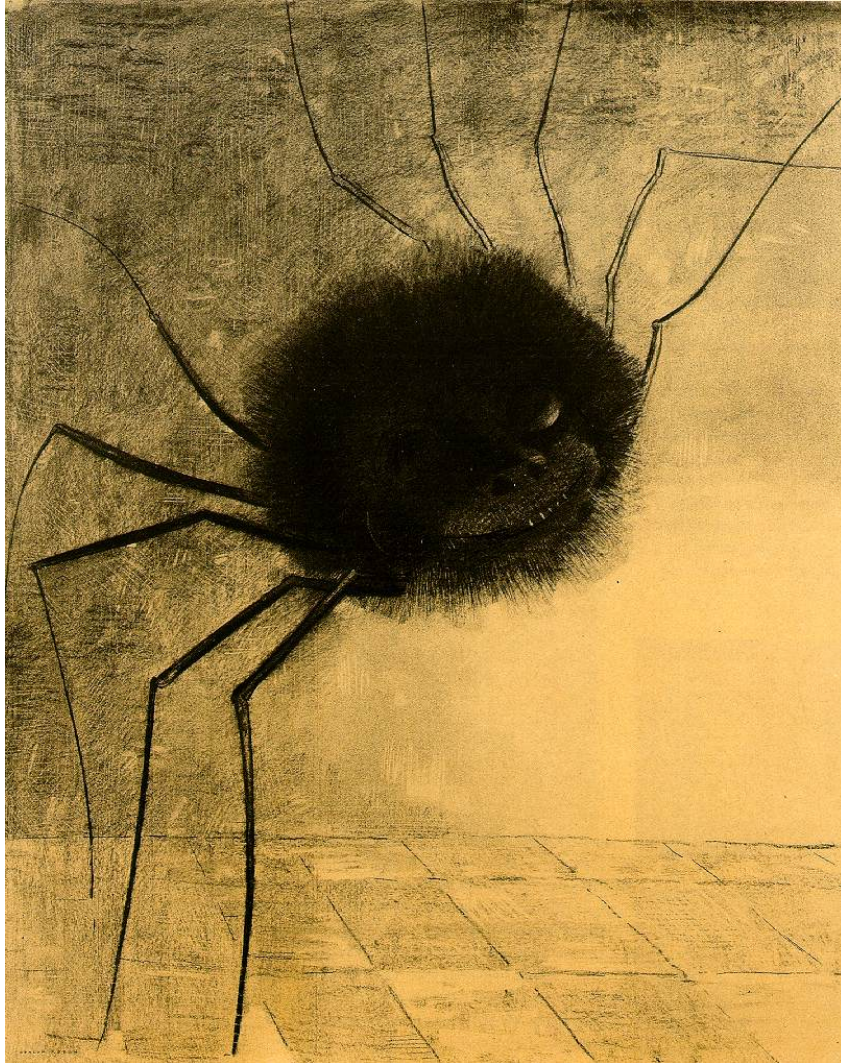


Introduction to Literary Theory

COLT 502, Class #22075R, Fall 2009, Tuesdays 4-6:50, THH 217



Odilon Redon, "The Smiling Spider," 1881.

Thinking Desire: what does literary theory want?

What do we want from literary theory? What does literary theory want from us? The primary aim of this course will be to introduce students to some of the most significant methodologies and conceptual trends that have been generated by literary and critical theory. In exploring what literary theory sets out to do, we will focus on the desires that might be said to animate theory from within. On the one hand, desire stands at the center of many theories of the literary: it drives narrative, brings subjects into being, organizes social formations, both creates and obscures meaning, and structures language, among other things. Desire thus inevitably maintains an enigmatic yet intimate relationship with knowledge itself; as Judith Butler writes, "to desire is to err, but to err necessarily." On the other, literary theory might be said to engender (and satisfy) its own set of desires: from the desire to know, to the desire to make and master sense—to signify, in other words. We will couple a study of desire as generative concept with attention to the desires that "theory" seeks to gratify. By the end of the semester, we will have moved closer to some answers to the question: what does literary theory want, from us and for us?

Students will be asked to purchase a series of texts—please email me for more information—and will be provided with a series of essays collected in a coursepak. Authors studied will include (but not be limited to): Adorno, Bhabha, Barthes, Bataille, Butler, Cixous, Derrida, Foucault, Freud, Irigaray, Jameson, Lacan, Lorde, Marx, Rubin, Sedgwick, and Žižek.

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