

ENGL 300: Critical Approaches to Literary Studies.

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Course Description:

This course will help you learn about the various interpretive frameworks ("theories") that have been, and still are, used by scholars of literature, to understand and engage with, the field of Literary Studies. What the various "schools" of literary theory provide, are, in effect, metacognitive approaches to the content that we, as students and lovers of literature, were taught over a century ago to "appreciate" via the tools of is known as, "practical criticism." Thus, both "literary criticism" (of the 'practical' variety), and "literary theory"-- compose what is understood as "Theoretical Approaches" to Literature.

In the context of this course, emphasis will be given to "theory" as a mode of meta-analysis necessary to recognize the grounds of our appreciation for, and understanding of, the cultural texts which comprise "literature." As literary critic and theorist Patricia Waugh explains, the contrast between "literary criticism" and "literary theory" is:

...literary criticism tends to emphasize the experience of close reading and evaluation and explication of individual works, [whereas] literary theory insists that assumptions underlying reading practices must be made explicit, and that no reading is ever innocent or objective or purely descriptive...

(Patricia Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism*; OUP: 2006, p. 2)

Course Goals

1. learn about the various interpretive frameworks ("theories") that have been, and still are, used by scholars of literature, to understand and engage with, the field of Literary and Cultural Studies.
2. Understand and appreciate the importance of "doing theory."
3. Learn to observe ideological underpinnings of literary interpretation
4. Question the distinction between "literary" and other "texts," "high" and "low/mass" culture, past and present.
5. Annotate texts, make presentations, discuss and write essays/exams that articulate these connections

Learning Modules and Schedule:

This course contains the learning modules listed below:

Aug 25: Module 1: Practical Criticism: Formalism/New Criticism.

Readings:

1a) Terry Eagleton, Introduction to Literary Theory
("What is Literature?") p 1-10.

1b) Victor Shklovsky "Art as Technique"

1c) Robin Di Angelo, White Fragility Introduction

Sep 1: Module 2: Practical Criticism (Cont.)

Readings:

2a) Robin Di Angelo, White Fragility Chapter 1

2b) T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

2c) Matthew Arnold, "Culture and Anarchy."

SEP 8: Module 3: American New Criticism

Readings:

3a) Terry Eagleton, Introd to Literary Theory, p 10-14

3b) Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox."

3c) Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics."

Sep 15: Module 4: Group 1 Provocation, based on 1st three modules

Sep 22: Module 5: Marxism and Concept of Hegemony (Why Theory?)

Readings:

5a) The Communist Manifesto: Ch 2, Proletarians
and Communists <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm> (Links to an external site.)

5b) Antonio Gramsci: <https://infed.org/mobi/antonio-gramsci-schooling-and-education/> (Links to an external site.) Plus from the pdf of The Gramsci Reader: p 217-221; ad p. 347-349

5c) White Fragility, Ch 2

Sep 29: Module 6: Structuralism and Existentialist Feminism:

Readings:

- 6a) Back to Ch 1, White Fragility (focus: p 11)
- 6b) Ferdinand de Saussure, "A Course in General Linguistics."
- 6c) Simone de Beauvoir, "One is Not Born a Woman."

Oct 6: Module 7: Ideology (Structuralism cont.)

Readings:

- 7a) Louis Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses"
- 7b) Stuart Hall, Encoding/Decoding
- 7c) Stuart Hall, Ch 1, (p 1-28) from *Policing the Crisis*.

Homework: Everyone watch *The Matrix*

Oct 13: Module 8: Group 2 Provocation prompted by Modules 5,6 and 7.

Use the film *The Matrix*, and essay by Dana Cloud (**available in Files**) to make your intervention, plus any other materials you like from popular culture

Oct 20: Module 9: Poststructuralism and (Lacanian) Psychoanalysis

Readings:

- 9a) Jacques Derrida, "Differance."
- 9b) Jacques Lacan. <https://cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/psychoanalysis/lacandevlop.html> (Links to an external site.)

Oct 27: Module 10: Poststructuralism, Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Readings:

- 10a) Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."
- 10b) Helen Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa" (excerpt).
- 10c) Luce Irigaray, "This Sex That Isn't One"

Nov 3: Module 11: American "Pragmatic" Feminism

Readings:

- 11a) Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics."
- 11b) Barbara Christian, "A Race for Theory."
(Poems by Adrienne Rich and June Jordan in class)

Nov 10: Module 12: Group 3 Provocation based on Modules 9,10, 11

Group 3: Make use of a Hitchcock film, plus other materials that strike your fancy in your Provocation this week that takes account of the modules from Weeks 9,10, 11

Nov 17: Module 13: New Historicism and/vs Reader Response Theory

Readings:

- 13a) Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture."
- 13b) Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author."

Nov 24: Module 14: Postcolonialism and Discourse Theory

Readings:

- 14a) Michel Foucault, from "The Order of Discourse."
- 14b) Edward Said, Introduction to Orientalism.

Dec 1: Module 15: Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Readings:

- 15a) Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
- 15b) From the Spivak Reader, chapter/interview with Sneja Gunew, "Questions of Multiculturalism." (p 59-66)

Dec 8: Module 16: Group 4 Provocation

Reading:

Nawal el Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Zed Books, 1975).

Everyone should read Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

Group 4 should use it as a text to provoke discussion utilizing questions and insights derived from ANY and ALL theoretical frameworks we have discussed in class this term.

ASK: What might you notice/highlight in this novel if you looked at it through a New Critical lens? What would you notice/pay attention to? Similarly, what would you notice, what would you ignore, if you analyzed the text through various other theoretical frames we've studied this term?

Requirements/Assignments:

- 1) Weekly reading and annotating of assigned texts, plus class discussion= 25%
 - *I will drop the 3 lowest grades in this assignment*
- 2) Group Provocations: You must show evidence of your input to the group's discussion and brainstorming via a google doc created for your group in "Conferences." This brainstorming MUST begin at least TWO FULL WEEKS prior to when your group is assigned to bring the provocation to class. Each group should generate enough material (video clips, powerpoints, creative in class activities, audio and visual prompts and tools)--to engage the class in discussion/games/responses/questions for a full hour of class time= 25%
- 3) Midterm essay on Richard Wright's chapter excerpt from his novel *Black Boy*; Due Oct 7th at 11:59 pm. (You may substitute a powerpoint slide lecture, or make a video and upload it addressing the question in an articulate, coherent and systematic way, utilizing/referencing quotes from the different texts in the class)= 25%
 - *Question will be available in "Assignments" section in Canvas.*
 - *You may choose a video or pp format for EITHER midterm OR final, NOT both.*
- 4) Final essay due Mon Dec 14th, 9 am via Canvas upload (You may substitute a powerpoint slide lecture, or make a video and upload it addressing the question in an articulate, coherent and systematic way, utilizing/referencing quotes from the different texts in the class)=25%
 - *Question will be available in "Assignments" section in Canvas.*
 - *You may choose a video or pp format for EITHER midterm OR final, NOT both*