

English 385-02, Fall 2012  
MW 3-4:15  
Buckman 330

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## CRITICAL THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This course is designed with three central goals in mind. These goals are:

- To clarify the connection between modern theories of literature and the longer tradition of philosophical inquiry from which these theories emerged.
- To provide students with basic understanding of terms and concepts central to the range of theoretical perspectives that guide contemporary scholars of literature.
- To allow students to interrogate and ultimately, through writing and class discussion, to evaluate these theoretical perspectives.

### Texts

Vincent Leitch, ed., *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*  
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Norton Critical Edition (2011)  
Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*  
Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Bookshop*  
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Various handouts or readings on the Moodle site for the course.

### Course Requirements

#### Reading.

Purely in terms of page numbers, the reading load in this class will be light when compared to other upper-division English classes. I have made this choice partly because some of the material is difficult, but mostly because I expect a very high degree of critical engagement from you -- significant passages marked, questions and comments noted, etc.

**Class Discussion.** I expect each of you to contribute comments and questions to every session of this class. If you haven't had much to say during a given class, you can anticipate being called on. But in addition to speaking, I expect you to listen to each other carefully, both with critical attention, and with a spirit of generosity and respect. Disagreements, debates, differing perspectives, divergent assumptions: these are the very substance of literary theory, and indeed of literature itself. If we cannot cultivate and explore differences among ourselves in this room, we can have little hope of learning in this field.

#### **Symposium: Global Hamlets. October 5, 1-5pm, Blount Auditorium**

Several innovative critics will converge on the Rhodes campus this fall to discuss Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in global context. We will take advantage of this promising conversation by considering *Hamlet* from a variety of critical perspectives. In advance of the symposium, we will focus on some of the debates that inform the work of the visiting scholars, and we will read some of their previously published criticism. Symposium presentations will be considered texts for the class, so attendance here is required.

### **Presentations**

At least once during the semester, each of you will choose one major text to present in class. Eligible candidates for presentations are marked in the schedule of readings below. A good presentation should offer:

- An explanation of the reading's central argument, as you see it.
- An insightful distillation of the reading's most significant ideas, perhaps in comparison/ contrast with other readings, perhaps simply in themselves. Explain why these ideas might matter to people who are committed to the study of writing and literature. What makes these particular ideas important?
- A tentative evaluation of how successful or persuasive this argument is. I don't expect you to take a definitive position yet. But to open our discussion, consider what aspects of the reading do you find successful, or helpful, or provocative, or problematic, etc.

Presentations should last **10 minutes**. It is difficult to time an oral presentation, so your presentation must be carefully prepared and carefully rehearsed. Offhand, rambling, or incoherent presentations will receive exactly the grade they deserve. Collaborative presentations may be ok, but I will expect the collaboration to be substantial, involving significant interaction between the ideas of the presenters. If the schedule of readings permits, it may be possible for a student to present more than once during the term, with the second presentation counting for extra credit.

**Grades** will be figured as follows:

Essay Exam I	15%
Essay Exam II	20%
Essay Exam III	20%
Final Essay Exam	25%
In-Class Presentation	10%
Class Discussion	10%

### **Essay Exams.**

There will be 4 writing assignments for the course, and each will function as a take-home examination. These exams will involve essay writing only: no short answers, identifications, etc. In literary studies, and in other professions where critical reading and writing is necessary, there is little value accorded the skill of memorization. If you cannot recall Ferdinand de Saussure's terms for the elements which make up a sign, you simply pull his book off the shelf and look them up.

More valuable and useful in this field are the higher-order skills of application and interpretation. These come into play only after basic facts and information have been learned, and they involve synthesis, imagination, often creativity. They require you to combine what you know about a particular theoretical or philosophical perspective -- say that of Sigmund Freud, or Edward Said -- with what you know about a given text or movement -- say Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, or contemporary French drama. In this class, I take it as a given that you will assimilate the basic facts and information conveyed in all the readings and lectures, like, for example what Matthew Arnold means by "science," or what Judith Butler means by "performance." What I will ask for when you write will be for you to use these concepts, to employ them in a particular analysis, to interrogate, critique, and evaluate them.

Each paper/ exam will offer you a choice of essay questions. For some you may be able to write one essay of 6-7 pages; for others I'll ask you to write shorter essays of 2-4 pages each. These exercises will all be cumulative; that is, each may ask you to draw from everything we have read up until that point.

**Late Essay Exams** will be penalized 1/ 3<sup>rd</sup> of a grade per day. (E.G. a B paper one day late becomes a B-, two days late becomes a C+, etc.)

### Schedule of Readings and Assignments\*

Day/ Date	Assignment	Presentation?
<b>Tradition and the Problem of Modernity</b>		
M 8/ 27	William Wordsworth (N) (Begin reading <i>Hamlet</i> for ongoing discussion starting 9/ 19)	---
W 8/ 29	Matthew Arnold "Function of Criticism" (N)	Arnold
<b>Marxism</b>		
M 9/ 3	LABOR DAY	
W 9/ 5	Karl Marx "On <i>The Jewish Question</i> , by Bruno Bauer" Part I (M) (Begin Fitzgerald's <i>The Bookshop</i> for discussion 9/ 17)	---
M 9/ 10	Marx, from <i>German Ideology, Grundrisse</i> , and <i>Capital</i> ( pp 663—666 only) (all in N)	---
W 9/ 12	Mikhail Bakhtin (N); Pierre Bourdieu (N)	Either Text
M 9/ 17	Fitzgerald, <i>The Bookshop</i>	---
W 9/ 19	Greenblatt (H) Watch <i>Hamlet</i> , dir. Michael Almereyda (2000) (stream on Moodle)	Greenblatt
<b>Postcolonial Studies</b>		
M 9/ 24	Edward Said (N) Frantz Fanon, from <i>Wretched of the Earth</i> (N)	Said or Fanon
W 9/ 26	Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i>	---
<b>Fri 9/ 28</b>	<b>First Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 319</b>	
M 10/ 1	De Grazia (H)	De Grazia
<b>Symposium: Global Hamlets</b>		
W 10/ 3	Readings from Symposium Presenters, TBA	
<b>Fri 10/ 5</b>	<b>Symposium: Global Hamlets (1-5pm Blount Auditorium). Attendance Required</b>	
M 10/ 8	Prepare responses to Symposium presentation for discussion	

\* N = Norton Anth. of Theory & Criticism; H = *Hamlet*, Norton Critical Ed.; M = Moodle site for English 485-01.  
Expect some corrections and adjustments to the schedule as we go.

<b>Structural Linguistics and Structuralism</b>		
W 10/ 10	Saussure (N) Augustine <i>Christian Doctrine</i> Book 2, I-IV; <i>Trinity</i> (192-4 only) (N)	---
M 10/ 15	FALL BREAK	
W 10/ 17	Tzvetan Todorov (N), Barthes "Mythologies" (N)	Todorov or Barthes

<b>Poststructuralism</b>		
M 10/ 22	Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" (M)	---
W 10/ 24	Derrida, from <i>Of Grammatology</i> (N)	---
M 10/ 29	Barthes "Death of the Author" (N) (Continue Discussion of Derrida)	Barthes
<b>Tues 10/ 30: Second Essay Exam due by 5pm at Palmer 319</b>		

<b>Psychoanalysis</b>		
W 10/ 31	Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> (N)	---
M 11/ 5	Freud "Uncanny" (N) and Chabon "Black Mill" (M)	Both Readings

<b>Feminism</b>		
W 11/ 7	Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (N) Jones (H)	G & G
M 11/ 12	Hélène Cixous (N)	---
W 11/ 14	Judith Butler (N)	Butler
M 11/ 19	Showalter (H), Howard (H)	Showalter
<b>Tuesday, 11/ 22: Third Essay Exam Due by 5pm at Palmer 319</b>		
W 11/ 21	THANKSGIVING BREAK	

<b>Critical Race Theory</b>		
M 11/ 26	Henry Louis Gates "The Blackness of Blackness" (M) bell hooks (sic) (N)	Gates or hooks
W 11/ 28	Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>	Whitehead
M 12/ 3	Whitehead	Whitehead
W 12/ 5	Whitehead	---

**Friday, December 7 by 5:00PM: Final Essay Exam due at Palmer 319**

RHODES COLLEGE  
Department of English

Expectations and Policies

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

**Attendance:** The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

**Deadlines:** Writing assignments, test, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course's goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor's prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

**Submission of all work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.