

English 485  
Fall 1998  
P hour  
201 Palmer

Professor C. Marshall  
316 Palmer x3980  
Office hours: M, W 3-4  
T, Th 1-1:30 & by appt

### Senior Seminar: Contemporary Critical Theory

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** One purpose of this course is to explore questions related to reading, writing, and the production of meaning. A second purpose, which is also a means to accomplish the first, is to become conversant in some recent developments in literary and cultural theory. We will begin by considering the basic terms in the literary event--author, text, and reader--and how their interaction produces meaning. Then we will explore structuralism and how it led (some say inevitably) to deconstruction; next we will see this pattern repeated in the areas of psychoanalysis, materialism, and feminism. Along the way various theoretical ideas will be tested in relation to selected literary texts. In the concluding unit, groups of students will consider works of contemporary fiction from the perspectives of various critical and theoretical positions.

#### TEXTS:

Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 4th ed., 1997 (CLC)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Susanne L. Wofford, 1994 (H)

Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams* [1901], 1980

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 1997

Sapphire, *Push*, 1996

Graham Swift, *Last Orders*, 1996

Packet of course readings available at bookstore (R)

#### REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION:

Participation 15%

Since this class is a seminar, each member's participation is vital to the overall discussion and that enable all class members to contribute are highly valued. disposit

Another component of the participation grade will

be your pre-class questions: you are required to submit (at least) five questions about the assigned reading, through email, at least 24 hours before a class

meeting.

Presentation and paper 15%

Each student will be responsible for one in-class presentation of 10-15 minutes. These m  
presentation date.

Group project 15%

Working in groups, students will lead class discussion of a work of contemporary fiction c  
insights and class readings to enable a multifaceted encounter with the text.

Three essay / examinations 55%

You will be assigned topics on which to write papers due on 24 Sept., 27 Oct., 24 Nov.

Please refer to the statement of Expectations and Policies of the Department of English for other relevant guidelines.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS: All writing and reading assignments are due on the date listed. Please bring the appropriate text to class.

- 27 Aug. Introduction: "Who put Christ in the spaghetti sauce?"
- 1 Sept. Frye, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (CLC)  
Graff, "Introduction: The Humanist Myth" (CLC)  
Barthes, "What Is Criticism?" (CLC)
- 3 Sept. Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (R)  
Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (CLC)
- 8 Sept. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*" (CLC)  
Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" (handout)
- 10 Sept. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" (CLC)
- 15 Sept. De Saussure, Selections from *Course in General Linguistics* (CLC)
- 17 Sept. Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," "The World of Wrestling," and "From  
Work to Text" (R)
- 22 Sept. Foucault, "What is an Author?" (CLC)
- 24 Sept. First Essay/Exam due  
*Hamlet*; Wofford, "A Critical History of Hamlet" (H)
- 29 Sept. Culler, "Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin" (CLC)
- 1 Oct. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (R)
- 6 Oct. de Man, "The Resistance to Theory" (CLC)
- 8 Oct. Ferguson, "*Hamlet*: Letters and Spirits" (R)  
Frost, "Road Not Taken" (handout)
- 13 Oct. Freud, *On Dreams*
- 15 Oct. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" (CLC)  
Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (CLC)

- 20 Oct. FALL BREAK
- 22 Oct. Adelman, “Man and Wife Is One Flesh” (H); “What is P/A?” (H)  
Skura, “The Historicity of Psychoanalysis” (R)
- 27 Oct. Second Essay/Exam due
- 29 Oct. Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” (CLC)
- 3 Nov. Bristol, “Funeral-Bak’d Meats” (H); “What is M?” (H)
- 5 Nov. Howard, “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies” (R)  
Coddon, “Suche Strange Desygn” (H); “What is NH?” (H)
- 10 Nov. Armstrong, “The Occidental Alice” (CLC)  
Showalter, “Representing Ophelia” (H); “What is F?” (H)
- 12 Nov. Kristeva, “Stabat Mater” (R)
- 17 Nov. bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” (CLC)  
Diana Fuss, “Reading Like a Feminist” (CLC)
- 19 Nov. Cornel West, “Black Critics and the Pitfalls of Canon Formation” (CLC)  
James Clifford, “The Translation of Cultures” (CLC)
- 24 Nov. Third Essay/Exam due
- 26 Nov. THANKSGIVING
- 1 Dec. Group project
- 3 Dec. Group project
- 8 Dec. Group project

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Schedule of reports

- 3 Sept Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
- 8 Sept Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum"
- 10 Sept Schweikart, "Reading Ourselves"
- 17 Sept Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity"
- 22 Sept Foucault, "What is an Author?"
- 6 Oct. De Man, "The Resistance to Theory"
- 13 Oct Freud, *On Dreams*
- 15 Oct Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"
- 22 Oct Adelman, "Man and Wife is One Flesh"  
Skura, "The Historicity of Psychoanalysis"
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