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## ENGL 385-01, Critical Theory and Methodology, Fall 2010

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English 385  
Fall Semester, 2010  
MW 3-4:15

Gordon Bigelow  
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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*  
Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Ed. Linda H. Peterson, 2nd edition).  
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.

**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% |

**Late Essay Exams or Papers** 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.)

### 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.

The more valuable and broadly useful skills 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.

### 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 ordered 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, what aspects of the reading do you find successful, or helpful, or provocative, or problematic, etc.?

Presentations should last for 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.



| <b>Psychoanalysis</b>  |   |               |
|--|---|---------------|
| M 10/ 25   | Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> (N)      | ---           |
| W 10/ 27   | Freud "Uncanny" (N) and Chabon "Black Mill" (M) | Both Readings |
| <b>Friday, 10/ 29: Second Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 319</b> |   |               |

| <b>Feminism</b> |   |                    |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|
| M 11/ 1         | Beth Newman, "Situation of the Looker-On" (M)<br>Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (N)   | Gilbert & Gubar    |
| W 11/ 3         | Hélène Cixous (N)   | ---                |
| M 11/ 8         | Judith Butler (N)   | Butler             |
| W 11/ 10        | Pykett "Changing the Names (WH)<br>[Editor], "What is Feminist Criticism?" (WH);<br>Nancy Armstrong, "Imperialist Nostalgia" (WH) | Pykett or Armstrg. |

| <b>Postcolonial Studies</b>                                       |  |               |
|---|--|---------------|
| M 11/ 15  | Edward Said (N)<br>Frantz Fanon, from <i>Wretched of the Earth</i> (N) | Said or Fanon |
| W 11/ 17  | TBA  | ---           |
| M 11/ 22  | Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i>                                  | ---           |
| <b>Tuesday, 11/ 23: Third Essay Exam Due by 5pm at Palmer 319</b> |  |               |
| W 11/ 24  | THANKSGIVING BREAK   |               |

| <b>Critical Race Theory</b> |  |                |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------|
| M 11/ 29                    | Henry Louis Gates "The Blackness of Blackness" (M)<br>bell hooks (sic) (N) | Gates or hooks |
| W 12/ 1                     | Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>                                  | Whitehead      |
| M 12/ 6                     | Whitehead  | Whitehead      |
| W 12/ 8                     | Whitehead  | ---            |

**Monday, 12/ 13: Final Essay Exam due by Noon at Palmer 319**

| Day/ Date  | Assignment  | Presentation?      |
|--|---|--------------------|
| <b>Obejctivity and "New" Criticism</b>                             |   |                    |
| M 9/ 8   | Matthew Arnold "Function of Criticism" (N)  | Arnold             |
| M 9/ 13  | Cleanth Brooks, "Well-Wrought Urn" (N)<br>Wimsatt & Beardsley "Intentional Fallacy" (N) | Both texts         |
| W 9/ 15  | Ewbank "Structure and Pattern" (M)<br>(Finish <i>Wuthering Heights</i> by today)        | Ewbank             |
| <b>Structural Linguistics and Structuralism</b>                    |   |                    |
| M 9/ 20  | Saussure (N)  | ---                |
| W 9/ 22  | Tzvetan Todorov (N), Barthes "Mythologies" (N)  | Todorov or Barthes |
| <b>Poststructuralism</b>   |   |                    |
| M 9/ 27  | Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" (M)  | ---                |
| W 9/ 29  | Derrida, from <i>Of Grammatology</i> (N)  | ---                |
| <b>Friday, 10/ 1: First Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 316</b>   |   |                    |
| M 10/ 4  | Barthes "Death of the Author" (N)   | Barthes            |
| <b>Marxism</b>   |   |                    |
| W 10/ 6  | Karl Marx (N), selections on pp 767 - 783   | ---                |
| M 10/ 11   | Mikhail Bakhtin(N); Pierre Bourdieu (N)   | Bakhtin or Bourd.  |
| W 10/ 13   | Fitzgerald, <i>The Bookshop</i>   | ---                |
| M 10/ 18   | FALL BREAK  |                    |
| W 10/ 20   | Finish <i>Bookshop</i>  |                    |
| M 10/ 25   | Eagleton "Myths of Power" (WH)<br>[Editor], What is Marxist Criticism?" (WH)            | Both Readings      |
| <b>Psychoanalysis</b>  |   |                    |
| W 10/ 27   | Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> (N)  | ---                |
| <b>Friday, 10/ 29: Second Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 319</b> |   |                    |
| M 11/ 1  | Freud "Uncanny" (N) and Chabon "Black Mill" (M)   | Both Readings      |
| <b>Feminism</b>  |   |                    |
| W 11/ 3  | Beth Newman, "Situation of the Looker-On" (M)<br>Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (N)     | Gilbert & Gubar    |
| M 11/ 8  | Hélène Cixous (N)   | ---                |
| W 11/ 10   | Judith Butler (N)<br>Butler   | Butler             |
| M 11/ 15   | Pykett "Changing the Names (WH)   | Pykett or Armstrg. |

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| <b>Postcolonial Studies</b> |  |  |
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| W 12/ 8  | Whitehead  | ---            |

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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.