



ENGL 485-01, Critical Theory and Methodology, Fall 2008

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Gordon Bigelow

Fall Semester, 2008

English 485, Section 1

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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.
- To enable students to evaluate literary criticism with greater insight and rigor.

Texts

Vincent Leitch, ed., *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*

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

Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*

Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

Various 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 $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ 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 already 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 10minutes. 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.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments*

Section 1: MW 3-4:15, Palmer 207

Day/Date	Assignment	Presentation?
W 9/3	William Wordsworth (N) Begin Brontë's <i>Wuthering Heights</i> for discussion 9/17	---
M 9/8	Augustine <i>Christian Doctrine</i> Book 2, I-IV and <i>Trinity</i> (pp 192-4 only) (N) Plato, "Ion" (N) Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (Moodle)	---
W 9/10	Matthew Arnold "Function of Criticism" (N)	Arnold
M 9/15	Cleanth Brooks, "Well-Wrought Urn" (N) Wimsatt & Beardsley "Intentional Fallacy" (N)	Both texts
W 9/17	Finish <i>Wuthering Heights</i> by today Ewbank "Structure and Pattern" (Moodle)	Ewbank
M 9/22	Saussure (N)	---
W 9/24	Tzvetan Todorov (N), Barthes "Mythologies" (N)	Todorov or Barthes
M 9/29	Derrida from <i>Of Grammatology</i> (N)	---
Tuesday 9/30, Screening of the film <i>Derrida</i> , Time and Place TBA		
W 10/1	Continue Discussion of Derrida Barthes "Death of the Author" (N)	---
Friday, 10/3: First Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 316		
M 10/6	Balzac, "Sarazine" (in <i>S/Z</i>); Begin Barthes, <i>S/Z</i>	Barthes
W 10/8	Finish Barthes, <i>S/Z</i>	Barthes
M 10/13	Karl Marx (N), all selections on pp 767 - 783	--
W 10/15	Mikhail Bakhtin(N), Pierre Bourdieu (N)	Bakhtin or Bourdieu

* N = *Norton Anth. of Theory & Criticism*; WH = *Wuthering Heights* volume; Moodle = Moodle site for English 485-01. Expect some corrections and adjustments to the schedule as we go.

M 10/20	FALL BREAK	
W 10/22	Eagleton "Myths of Power" (WH) [Editor], "What is Marxist Criticism?" (WH)	Both Readings
M 10/27	Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> (N)	---
W 10/29	Freud "Uncanny" (N) and Chabon "Black Mill" (Moodle)	Both Readings
Friday, Hallowe'en: Second Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 316		
M 11/3	Beth Newman, "Situation of the Looker-On" (Moodle) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (N)	Gilbert & Gubar
W 11/5	Hélène Cixous (N)	---
M 11/10	Judith Butler (N)	Butler
W 11/12	Pykett "Changing the Names (WH) [Editor], "What is Feminist Criticism?" (WH); Nancy Armstrong, "Imperialist Nostalgia" (WH)	Pykett or Armstrg.
M 11/17	TBA	
W 11/19	Edward Said (N) Frantz Fanon, from <i>Wretched of the Earth</i> (N)	Said or Fanon
Friday 11/21: Third Essay Exam due by noon at Palmer 316		
M 11/24	Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i>	---
W 11/26	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
M 12/1	Henry Louis Gates "The Blackness of Blackness" (Moodle) bell hooks (sic) (N)	Gates or hooks
W 12/3	Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>	Whitehead
M 12/8	Whitehead	Whitehead
W 12/10	Wrap up	

Monday, 12/15: Final Essay Exam due at Palmer 316 by 5:30PM