

English 216: Foundations of Literary Study: Critical Approaches (Section 01)

Fall 2015 TuTh 4:00 -- 5:15 Lake Superior Hall 227

Instructor: Dr. Ilse Schweitzer VanDonkelaar
 Email: schweitl@gvsu.edu (give me 24 hours to respond)
 Office: Lake Huron Hall 237
 Office Hours: MW 12-2 and by appointment

Required Texts:

Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (Routledge, 3rd ed.), ISBN: 978-0415506755
 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (Random House), ISBN: 978-0812979657

Assorted readings and handouts (available via Blackboard)

****Web access:** As this course will be “digitally enhanced,” you will need to have access to Blackboard to complete some readings, access handouts, and take quizzes.**

Course Description and Objectives:

This course will examine literary texts through the prism of different literary theories and other critical approaches and prepare students to undertake advanced literary interpretation and to produce literary critical writing. This course will enable students to connect literary texts and critical approaches to their historical and social contexts. Prerequisite: WRT 150 (Catalogue description)

Course Goals:

- ❖ To introduce core theoretical concepts, schools, and vocabulary
- ❖ To introduce the basics of literary criticism, with an emphasis on use of theory as a tool of interpretation
- ❖ To reflect on relevance of literary theory to literature and culture
- ❖ To engage with critical conversations surrounding theory and literature in discussion and writing
- ❖ To enhance critical thinking skills through active reading and writing strategies

You may find your beliefs or worldview challenged by the theories we encounter in this class. Please be aware that this is part of the experience of higher education and is meant to push you to consider new and diverse perspectives and to help you to more clearly orient and articulate your own perspectives. You are not required to “sign up” with any given critical theory or approach, and there is NO ONE correct theoretical approach to literature and culture... some theories may be a “better fit” for certain texts or media, but any critical lens may reveal something -- some new meaning, idea, or interpretive possibility -- that was not clear before.

In this course, we will consider:

- How do we define a “text”? How do we define “literature,” and what separates it from other kinds of texts or media?
- How we value and evaluate literature? How do we distinguish between literature that is “classic” or canonical, and literature that is embraced by a certain population, as iconic of that moment or culture?

- How does any given theory locate or explain meaning, the subject, agency, and power? Are any of these concepts permanent or universal?
- How does any given text adhere to or resist the extant power structure / ideology in which it was created?
- How does literature reflect (or help to construct) our beliefs and practices regarding gender, class, sexuality, race or ethnicity, and humanity?

Coursework:

Reading, participation, “show and tell,” and daily writing activities: Our class will be discussion-based and will depend upon your willingness to read carefully and to apply what you have read. You will be expected to complete the reading assignments prior to each class meeting, to attend class regularly, and to contribute to class discussion often. Your comments and questions to some extent determine the shape and direction of the course -- your active engagement will help me to make this class a productive, positive experience for all of us! In-class writing assignments and your contributions to group-work assignments will also count toward the “participation” portion of your grade.

Show and tell: For each theory we read about in class, I will expect you to bring to class at least one example of how that particular theory might apply or be relevant to your daily life. For example, you might bring a text or a piece of visual media (film, video, website, advertisement, etc.) that you think “cries out” for a particular kind of critical lens, or you might talk about how the concepts we discuss with relation to feminist theory, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc., play out in your life. For example, *displacement*: I was angry at my professor, but I picked a fight with my roommate instead.

Quizzes: You will take five reading quizzes via Blackboard, designed to assess how well you understand vocabulary, basic theoretical concepts, and the objectives of each critical theory. Quizzes will cover all previous reading and discussion. Quizzes MUST BE COMPLETED by 11:59pm on the day they are due; once you begin the quiz, you must complete it in a half hour or Blackboard will freeze you out. Quiz questions will take the form of short (1-2 sentence) answers.

Response Papers: You will write THREE response papers (2-3 FULL pages) each engaging with a critical theory of your choice. For each response, you should consider how one or more critical theory(ies) influences how you might read or interpret a text or piece of visual media (i.e. film, music video, advertisement, etc.). You should demonstrate what that particular critical “lens” reveals about your chosen text. Paper topics may grow out of in-class writing prompts. Assignment sheets for the response papers will follow.

Group Discussion Lead: You will sign up to work with a group to develop discussion questions and help to lead our discussions of *The God of Small Things*. Prior to Thanksgiving Break, each student will choose a particular theoretical approach and use the tenets of that approach to prepare discussion questions and observations for our discussions of Roy’s text.

Final Exam: Held on Thursday, December 17, 4:00-5:50. Exam will be cumulative, and may include identifications, definitions, short answer questions, and essay questions. Content covered will include terminology, theoretical concepts, assigned readings, class discussion and lecture notes; you may also be asked to apply a critical theory to a selected text.

Grading Breakdown by Assignment:

Participation / “show and tell” / attendance: 30%

Response papers: 30% (10% each)

Quizzes: 10% (2% each)

Group discussion lead: 10%

Final exam: 20%

A = 94-100	A- = 90-93	B+ = 87-89	B = 84-86	B- = 80-83	C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76	C- = 70-73	D+ = 67-69	D = 64-66	F = 0-63	

Communication and Blackboard:

Any updates and notices (change of venue, change in assignment, instructor absence, etc.) will go out over email and will be posted on the Blackboard site. PLEASE CHECK EMAIL AND BLACKBOARD REGULARLY! I promise to make my best attempt to get this information to you as soon as possible.

Other Policies...

Respect: The classroom (this includes our online class space!) is a place of respect, civilized discussion, and open-mindedness. We will likely disagree with each other from time to time about literary interpretations (among other things), but we will learn to do so respectfully and sensitively. Please be aware your tone online and in person.

Attendance: is expected. I will take attendance at the start of each class. Arriving more than 20 minutes late will be counted as an absence. ****EVERY** component of your grade draws upon the material we explore in class discussion and in lecture, so be here!** If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to find out what content you missed, preferably by first asking your classmates. Any absences beyond three will result in a deduction of 3% from your final grade, *per day*. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences... if you run into a situation where you must miss multiple classes, talk to me.

Computers and cell phones: **You may use a laptop to take notes**, read the handouts posted on Blackboard, and find information relevant to our discussion. You may NOT use your laptop for Facebooking, watching cat videos, or otherwise wasting time or distracting yourself during class. If this becomes a problem, I will disallow laptops in class for everyone. **No cell phones out or open during class**. Lectures and class discussions **may not be** recorded in any fashion by students.

Late work: Assignments are due at the start of class on the due date OR when indicated on Blackboard. One letter grade will be lost for every calendar day that an assignment is late (i.e. if the paper is due on Monday the 1st and you turn it in Wednesday the 3rd, the grade will be reduced by 2 letters). Class activities and quizzes cannot be made up at a later date.

FERPA: Because of FERPA regulations, I cannot discuss your grade via phone or email. If you would like to discuss your academic standing and progress in this class, I am happy to meet with you during my office hours.

Plagiarism: IF YOU ARE CAUGHT PLAGIARIZING, you will face academic sanctions including possible failure of this course and a letter sent to the appropriate campus offices. We will discuss what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty in this course, but if you have any questions or uncertainty about the issue, PLEASE ASK ME. I'm happy to talk about it.

Students with Disabilities:

If you need academic accommodations because of a learning, physical, or other disability, please contact Disability Support Resources at 331-2490. Furthermore, if you have a physical disability and think you will need assistance evacuating this classroom and/or building in an emergency situation, please make me aware so I can develop a plan to assist you.

Course Schedule

****PLEASE REGARD THIS SCHEDULE AS SOMEWHAT FLUID. I may move some readings and assignments around or eliminate them if we fall behind, or due to weather****

Tu, Sept 1 -- Introductions and discussion: Canonicity and Popularity

Th, Sept 3 -- Tyson, "Introduction" (in class: watch *Gatsby*)

M,T Sept 7,8 -- LABOR DAY RECESS

Th, Sept 10 -- Tyson, "Chapter 5: New Criticism" (in class: watch *Gatsby*)

Tu, Sept 15 -- Graff, "Hidden Meaning - Disliking Books at an Early Age" (on Blackboard)

Th, Sept 17 -- Tyson, "Chapter 1: Psychoanalytic Criticism"

Tu, Sept 22 -- **QUIZ #1 DUE by midnight**; Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher"; Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (on Blackboard)

Th, Sept 24 -- Tyson, "Chapter 2: Marxist Criticism"

Tu, Sept 29 -- Blake, *Poems of Innocence and Experience* (on Blackboard)

Th, Oct 1 -- Tyson, "Chapter 3: Feminist Criticism"

Tu, Oct 6 -- **QUIZ #2 DUE**; Kincaid, "Girl"; Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (Bb)

Th, Oct 8 -- fairy tale selections -- Red Riding Hood and Cinderella (Bb)

Friday, Oct 9 -- **FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Tu, Oct 13 -- Tyson, "Chapter 7: Structuralist Criticism"

Th, Oct 15 -- Tyson, "Chapter 8: Deconstruction"

Tu, Oct 20 -- Tyson, "Chapter 9: New Historicism / Cultural Criticism"

Th, Oct 22 -- **QUIZ #3 DUE**; Russell, "St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves" (Bb)

Tu, Oct 27 -- Tyson, "Chapter 10: Lesbian, Gay, and Queer criticism"

Th, Oct 29 -- poetry selections: Audre Lord, Adrienne Rich (Bb)

Friday, Oct 30 -- **DEADLINE TO WITHDRAW (5pm) AND SECOND RESPONSE DUE**

Tu, Nov 3 -- Tyson, "Chapter 11: African-American Criticism"

Th, Nov 5 -- **QUIZ #4 DUE**; Morrison, "Recitatif"; Walker, "Everyday Use" (Bb)

Tu, Nov 10 -- Tyson, "Chapter 12: Postcolonial Criticism"

Th, Nov 12 -- secondary readings TBA

Tu, Nov 17 -- Intro to Ecocriticism (reading TBA)

Th, Nov 19 -- **QUIZ #5 DUE**; selections from Whitman, "Song of Myself"; secondary TBA (Bb)

Friday, Nov 20 -- **THIRD RESPONSE PAPER DUE**

Tu, Nov 24 -- Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" OR Bennett, selections from *Vibrant Matter* (Bb); *sign up for groups*

W, 25 -- THANKSGIVING RECESS BEGINS at NOON

Tu, Dec 1 -- *The God of Small Things* (groups lead discussion)

Th, Dec 3 -- *The God of Small Things* (groups lead discussion)

Tu, Dec 8 -- *The God of Small Things* (groups lead discussion)

Th, Dec 10 -- Summary, review, and evaluations

FINAL EXAM: December 17, 4-5:50