

Introduction to Literary Studies

English 150W (AM3WA)

M/W 10:50 – 12:05 pm

RA 102

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This class introduces you to literary study: how students and scholars of literature read, what kinds of critical lenses we use, and how/why those lenses are useful. In the first section of the course, we will examine the reading encounter – the relationship between the reader and the text. The second section will introduce you to some basic theoretical models including: psychoanalytic, feminist, gender, Marxist, cultural, poststructural, race, and postcolonial criticism. The third section, we will tackle some of these approaches more specifically, using them primary theoretical texts to open up the literature we read. Finally, we will take a step back and consider the major questions we have been asking and the stakes of those questions. In your final paper, you will be asked to consider the benefits and drawbacks of the theoretical tools we have explored.

A Note on Approach:

While perusing the various tools and modes of the discipline, we will try to always be mindful of the process of interpretation. It will be important to keep in mind how we come to our interpretations, what grounds them, and what might be at stake in our critical commitments. Clearly we will not be able to do a thorough job with any one form, lens, or text, but by the end of the course you should feel grounded in basic tools that will facilitate your future study. To that end, I encourage you not to wed yourself too quickly to any one critical approach. Tempting as that may be, there is a value in grappling and struggling with new analytical tools. Ultimately, the difficulties these struggles pose will only enrich your scholarship. Do not fear failure. Sometime the most interesting and instructive moments result from spectacular flops. And, to quote Mimonedes, “if not now, when?”

Texts you will need to purchase:

Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction by Jonathan Culler

[ISBN: 978 019 2853 837]

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley [You will need to purchase the Bedford edition because we will explore the additional critical materials it provides.

ISBN: 978 0312 1912 69]

Othello by William Shakespeare [ISBN: 978 074 3477 550]

The Awakening by Kate Chopin [ISBN: 978 159 308 0013]

Texts you will get from blackboard, the internet or class photocopies:

Excerpt from *Is there a text in this class?* by Stanley Fish

“Introduction: What is Literature?” from *Literary Theory: An Introduction*

by Terry Eagleton

“The Purloined Letter” by Edgar Allan Poe

- <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/POE/purloine.html>
- “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/POE/fall.html>
- “The Mirror Stage” by Jacques Lacan
<http://www-class.unl.edu/ahis498b/parts/week5/mirror.html>
- “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner
http://www.ariyam.com/docs/lit/wf_rose.html
- “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Gayatri Spivak
- “Cultural Materialism, *Othello*, and the Politics of Plausability”
by Alan Sinfield
- “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from *The Souls of Black Folk*
by W.E.B. DuBois
<http://www.bartleby.com/114/1.html>
- “The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying
Monkey” by Henry Louis Gates
[Available on JSTOR from library website – search in library at www.jstor.org if
you have trouble]
- “The Sheriff’s Children” by Charles Chesnutt
<http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Works/Stories/sheriff.html>
- “Dave’s Neckliss” by Charles Chesnutt
<http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Works/Stories/neckliss.html>
- “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/GilYell.html>
- “Right of Death and Power over Life” by Michel Foucault from *The History
of Sexuality, Volume I*
- “Dear John Wayne” by Sherman Alexie

General Expectations

- 1) Regular attendance and in-class participation
- 2) Online participation (critical responses)
- 3) Arriving at class prepared: having read the assigned texts for the day and read your classmates’ selected critical responses for that week.

Grading

In-class participation (20%):

I will be assessing you on your in-class engagement, respectful engagement with texts, peers and me, active participation, and in-class assignments (free-writes, quizzes, etc). I consider in-class participation a key element of your learning. In-class assignments cannot be made up at a later time. As such, I expect that you will attend class regularly. If you have an issue with this, please come speak with me. You are responsible for any work you missed due to absences.

Online participation (30%):

You will be expected to post a critical response of at least 500 words on our class blog (<http://altschuler150.wordpress.com/>) once a week for a total of 8 times over the course

of the semester. This means you get some reprieve for those moments in the semester that are especially busy for you. Plan well. **I will check for these by 5 pm on Sunday evenings.** You will need to sign up for a wordpress account in order to post. Please use your full name: e.g. fscottfitzgerald so that everyone involved in the class can easily recognize you.

The aim of these assignments is to give you a space to reflect a bit on the course and process in new and different ways. I highly encourage using the space to try out different critical lenses. For example: try out a queer reading of *The Awakening*, attempt a psychanalytic reading of *Othello*, think about what a new historical reading of Charles Chesnutt might look like. OR, if we're reading a critical article on a piece (say, in the *Frankenstein* weeks), offer your own critique of the article we have read. Do you buy the reading offered? Why or why not? Do you have further thoughts about how the approach taken works in the text? Ramifications of the given perspective? Do you think the psychoanalytic reading offered is anti-feminist? What happens to postcolonial issues in the feminist reading? If you want, think about how such readings might work together in interesting ways. **Above all, make sure to ground your arguments in the text. I expect no fewer than four direct quotations in your responses.**

I will not be judging your posts on how "right" or "wrong" they are, but rather whether to what degree you've engaged the issues of the course *analytically*. It is my secondary hope that you will use this space to have productive discussions, not just independent posts. I will occasionally post questions to facilitate discussion.

Two notes about posting:

- 1) Twice over the course of the semester, your response will be singled out to open up class discussion. We will spend some time on these pieces, so please be thoughtful about what you write. This means YOU MUST POST on these days, and your post must address the reading for that class. **These posts will be worth twice as much as the posts you present on other days – hopefully this will encourage you to be as thoughtful as possible about the kind of contribution you will be making to class discussion.**
- 2) Toward the end of the semester, I encourage you to use your postings toward your final paper. If you work strategically, you should be able to draft 2/3 of your final paper through your postings.

Occasionally, your posts (no more than 3) can take one of several other forms, which need to add up to a total of 500 words for the week:

- 1) a continuation of our in-class discussion (something you might have thought of later or didn't get a chance to say)
- 2) an observation about the way in which our discussion or the text relates to other texts we have read in the class
- 3) an observation about the way in which our discussion or the text relates to something else you have read or seen recently
- 4) a critical question about the reading (not "what happened?" but rather "what does it mean that...?")

- 5) something that might be of interest to the class given our discussions
- 6) a response to someone else's post

You are expected to post 8 times over the course of the semester. You will receive a grade on these assignments ranging from 0 to 3. 0 is for a missing assignment. 1 represents an assignment that is not analytical or fails to address the texts assigned. 2 is for an assignment that attempts to approach the text critically but contains a major misreading/misunderstanding/misinterpretation or some other fundamental weakness. 3 is for an assignment that does a good job applying a particular critical issue/approach to the texts assigned for the week. As you can see, it should not be hard for a diligent student to earn an A+ for this part of the course.

First Essay (20%):

A well-considered, substantial rough draft of at least 3 pages. You must bring this in on the day it is assigned in order to get credit for it. (5%)
Final draft of first essay, 4 – 6 pages (15%)

Second Essay (30%)

A well-considered, substantial rough draft of at least 4 pages. You must bring this in on the day it is assigned in order to get credit for it. (5%)
Final draft of second essay, 8 – 10 pages (25%)

Specific Rules and Expectations:

- 1) Respect. The classroom must be a safe space in order for fruitful learning to take place. I absolutely expect you to respect the material, each other and me. If you are unable to do so, you will be asked to leave, and you will not be able to make up any assessments that occur during the rest of that class period.
(this *includes* turning off cell phones during class, not chatting with your friends during discussion, etc).
- 2) Plagiarism. Plagiarism occurs when you use someone else's ideas or words as your own. You must clearly indicate (through citation or reference) whose words you are using if you have not come up with the material or ideas yourself. This is also true for paraphrasing and summarizing. If you are confused, please ask me. It is always better to cite too much than too little.
Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students who plagiarize will automatically fail the paper and risk failing the class. Not only will your act of plagiarism be marked on your permanent record, but a second act of plagiarism could lead to a suspension or dismissal.
- 3) Turnitin.com. Your paper will not be considered "submitted" until you have both handed me a hardcopy and submitted it electronically to Turnitin.com.
- 4) Late Papers. If you are having a personal problem and are worried you will not be able to complete a paper on time, please speak with me BEFORE your paper is due. Papers will be down-graded a half a grade for every day they are late. Both

papers must be turned in before you can receive a grade for the class. NO LATE FINAL PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Schedule:

* Subject to change*

The dates below indicate the days on which the texts are due. We may or may not get to discussing them that day, but it is my expectation that you will have read the texts by these dates and will be fully prepared to participate in class discussion.

Check the class blog for etext links.

These selections are subject to change, and you are responsible for keeping up with these changes.

Monday, January 28

Introduction and opening discussion.
What is literature? What is criticism?

Wednesday, January 30

Excerpt from *Is There a Text in this Class?* (check blog/email for readings)
“The Purloined Letter” by Edgar Allan Poe
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/POE/purloine.html>
Purchase materials for class
Set up your Blackboard and WordPress accounts

Monday, February 4

Terry Eagleton “What is literature?”
“The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/POE/fall.html>

Wednesday, February 6

Read *Frankenstein*, p. 16-65

Monday, February 11

Read *Frankenstein*, to p. 121

Wednesday, February 13

Finish *Frankenstein*

Wednesday, February 20

Read sections in *Frankenstein* – “What is feminist criticism?” and Johanna Smith’s “‘Cooped Up’ with ‘Sad Trash’: Domesticity and the Sciences in *Frankenstein*”

Monday, February 26

Read sections in *Frankenstein* – “What is psychoanalytic criticism?” and David Collings’s “The Monster and the Maternal Thing: Mary Shelley’s Critique of Ideology”

Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage”

<http://www-class.unl.edu/ahis498b/parts/week5/mirror.html>

Wednesday, February 28

Read sections in *Frankenstein* – “What is gender criticism?” and Frann Michel’s “Lesbian Panic and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”

Monday, March 3

Read sections in *Frankenstein* – “What is Marxist criticism?,”

Warren Montag’s “The ‘Workshop of Filthy Creation’: A Marxist Reading of *Frankenstein*,” and “What is Cultural Criticism?”

Wednesday, March 5

Read sections in *Frankenstein* – Bouriana Zakhariieva’s “Frankenstein of the Ninties: The Composite Body” and “Combining Perspectives on *Frankenstein*”

Monday, March 10

Rough Draft of First Paper (must bring two copies to get credit for it)

Asking Critical Questions

Wednesday, March 12

“A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner

http://www.ariyam.com/docs/lit/wf_rose.html

Meetings about papers

Monday, March 17

1st Paper Due (include both peer reviews and rough draft)

Wednesday, March 19

“The Doll” by Charles Chesnutt

“Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois

<http://www.bartleby.com/114/1.html>

Monday, March 24

----- NO CLASS -----

Wednesday, March 26

“Dave’s Neckliss” by Charles Chesnutt

“The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey” by Henry Louis Gates

[Available on JSTOR from library website – search in library at www.jstor.org if you have trouble]

Monday, March 31
Read Acts One and Two of *Othello*
Excerpt of Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Wednesday, April 2
Read Act Three of *Othello*

Monday, April 7
Finish *Othello*

Wednesday, April 9
"Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Gayatri Spivak

Monday, April 14
"The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Wednesday, April 16
"Right of Death and Power over Life" by Michel Foucault from *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*

Monday, April 21
----- NO CLASS -----

Wednesday, April 23
----- NO CLASS -----

Monday, April 28
Read *The Awakening* through chapter 15.

Wednesday, April 30
Read *The Awakening* through chapter 24.

Monday, May 5
Finish *The Awakening*

Wednesday, May 7
Bring Rough Draft to class (with two extra copies)

Monday, May 12
"I Hated Tonto (Still Do)" by Sherman Alexie
<http://www.fallsapart.com/tonto.html>
"Superman and Me" by Sherman Alexie
<http://www.fallsapart.com/superman.html>
"Dear John Wayne" by Sherman Alexie

Wednesday, May 14

Final Essay Due (include both peer reviews and rough draft).
LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.
Finish up discussions and conclude