LITERARY CRITICISM & THEORY

Instructor: Dr. Sharon Talley
Office: FC 258
Office Hours: MW 3:30-5:30, T 9:00-10:00 (and by appointment)
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Required Texts:
Herman Melville. *Billy Budd, Sailor*
Naomi Shihab Nye. *Words under the Words*
Edith Wharton. *The House of Mirth* (must be Bedford/St. Martin’s Case Studies Edition; editor is Shari Benstock)
Other texts listed on the schedule are available on Blackboard. (You will be expected to print and bring a hard copy of these readings to class on the day[s] they will be discussed.)

Recommended Text:
David H. Richter. *Falling into Theory* (2nd edition)

Course Description:
The goal of this course is to expand students’ knowledge of current debates in literary theory and to provide the vocabulary and analytical tools for critical reading, writing, and theorizing. The course will cover traditional methods such as New Criticism and Marxism, as well as more recent theories such as Poststructuralism, Feminism, New Historicism, and Postcolonialism. It will also explore how traditional methods can be incorporated into the more recent approaches. Our analysis of the various readings will emphasize the historical conditions of their production and the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their perspectives. Students will pick at least two critical schools to study in depth on their own.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:
1. articulate informed personal responses to theory, criticism, and literature
2. explain the premises and assumptions underlying their responses
3. apply theory to literary and cultural texts
4. draw relevant insights and critical conclusions from their applications
5. demonstrate competency in literary research
6. incorporate research with their own critical insights
Evaluation and Grading:

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading journal</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<td>Discussion facilitation</td>
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<td>Short paper</td>
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<td>Independent research project:</td>
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<td>Critiques of two sources</td>
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<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
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<td>Abstract</td>
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90-100 = A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, below 60=F

Course Requirements:

**Reading Journal (SLOs 1, 2, 3, and 4):** Throughout the semester, you will keep a weekly reading journal that will serve as your on-going academic conversation with the different critical approaches. Please be sure that you type each entry and write about each of the assigned readings (theory, criticism, and literature). The purpose of this assignment is not to summarize the readings. Instead, use the journal as a learning tool to raise questions, to make connections, and to engage critically with the texts that we read. For possible issues to address in responding to theory, see “Questions to Consider when Reading Theory” (attached). For the weeks that we read literary texts, you should use your journal to respond critically to the literature as you apply relevant theory and reflect upon the implications of those applications. On the week of your discussion facilitation, you are not required to turn in a reading journal. Otherwise, a journal entry for the week’s readings is due at the beginning of class each Monday from 9/9 through 11/25. Since the main purpose of the journal is to help you prepare for class discussion, late journals will not be accepted.

**Discussion and Attendance (SLOs 1, 2, 3, and 4):** The course format will consist of both teacher- and student-facilitated discussion. In addition, students will work in small groups throughout the semester to discuss the readings. Not only is attendance required, but consistent and informed participation in class discussion is essential for full credit. You can miss one class without penalty; for every subsequent class you miss, two points will be subtracted from your final course grade.

**Discussion Facilitation (SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5):** To prepare you for writing your final essay and to make sure that your concerns and questions are voiced, you will lead a 30-minute discussion facilitation related to your research and reading of the theory assigned for one of our class periods. Your task is not to present the material that we read but instead to illustrate and examine theoretical concepts raised in the assigned reading. Please do not read to the class or lecture extensively. Instead, teach the class by bringing in outside materials to illustrate the text and/or suggest interesting comparisons with it or reactions to it. Feel free to use small group activities and/or full-class discussion to create an effective learning experience. On the class session immediately following, you will also provide a one- to two-page self-assessment that describes and critiques the facilitation and related preparation (including a bibliography [note:
outside research is required for this assignment). I will use this reflection, as well as my own observation of your work, to assess your ability to engage the class in a meaningful learning activity, as well as your originality, effort, and preparation (including research, other resources, handouts, visual aids, etc.). Note: You will need to meet with me or contact me by e-mail one week before your facilitation to let me know what you plan to do.

**Short Paper (SLOs 3 and 4):** No outside research is required for this paper, a textual analysis which should be approximately five pages in length. For this assignment, you may choose between two options:

**Option 1:** Prepare a close reading in which you explore one of Emily Dickinson’s poems or a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye (not discussed in class) from a new critical perspective. You may either do a complete explication or focus on one element of poetic discourse. Some poems by Dickinson and Nye are online at [http://poemhunter.com](http://poemhunter.com).

**Option 2:** Choose a text of your choice and prepare an analysis of it from a structuralist perspective.

Your essay should adhere to MLA documentation/style requirements. I will evaluate the paper on the complexity, sophistication, and originality of your thesis; your demonstrated understanding and application of the theory that underlies your approach; the selection and strength of the evidence that you use to support your claims; the clarity and coherence of your interpretive argument; your personal engagement with the text; and your command of literary terms, documentation style, writing conventions, and surface features. We will peer-review a complete draft of your essay in class a week before it is due. At any point in the planning and writing process, please feel free to discuss your paper with me during office hours or at a mutually agreed upon time.

**Independent Research Project (SLOs 3, 4, 5, and 6):** This assignment provides the opportunity to demonstrate your ability to apply a critical theory (or a combination of theories) to a text (in any sense you want) and to integrate research into the resulting argument. For this purpose, you will choose a theory or a combination of theories that we have discussed after New Criticism and Structuralism and a literary or cultural text that makes sense to analyze through this method. It will be important to select a text that is manageable in length/complexity or to focus clearly on one issue in a longer/more complex text. To prepare yourself for developing the paper, you will research both the method(s)/approach(es) you have selected and the existing scholarship on the text itself. In the paper, which should be written for a scholarly audience, you will use the critical vocabulary of the method(s) you have chosen and demonstrate clearly what an analysis of the text gains from such scrutiny by proving a **specifically focused and original thesis** about the text. The final essay should be 12-15 pages (typed and double-spaced) plus appropriate endnotes and a list of works cited. To help you succeed in developing this project, you will:

- Prepare a one-page (typed and single-spaced) analysis and critique of each of two secondary sources of your choice that expand your understanding of this school of criticism.
• Prepare an annotated bibliography of all of the sources that you plan to include in your paper, including a two- to three-sentence explanation of the relevance of each source. This bibliography should be in MLA form and include a minimum of 20 scholarly sources not assigned for class.

• Prepare a one- to two-page (typed and double-spaced) abstract of what you plan to argue in your paper. Such an abstract, which should include your thesis, can often be revised slightly to form the introduction of the paper.

You should have a complete draft of your paper ready for review by your peers in class on December 4. The final paper, which will be due on December 9, should adhere to MLA documentation requirements. In evaluating this project, I will consider the complexity, sophistication, and originality of your thesis; your demonstrated understanding and application of the theory that underlies your approach; the selection and strength of the evidence that you use to support your claims; your choice and integration of secondary research with your own ideas; the clarity and coherence of your interpretive argument; your personal engagement with the text; and your command of literary terms, documentation style, writing conventions, and surface features.

Student Communications:
You are responsible for the material covered and assignments and announcements made in every class whether or not you are present. In addition, from time to time, it may be necessary for me to contact you individually or to contact everyone in the class to communicate important course-related information. To do so, I will use the email function in Blackboard unless I am responding to an email you have sent to me. I will expect you to act responsibly to ensure that you receive and, if appropriate, respond to all such communications in a timely manner.

Late Assignments:
Please contact me by e-mail or telephone if an emergency arises and you cannot attend class. I will not accept late assignments unless you have made previous arrangements, and neither journals nor the final paper will be accepted late for any reason. An “Incomplete” will be given at my discretion only and must involve exceptional circumstances. To qualify for consideration, you must have satisfactorily completed two-thirds of the course requirements and met graduate standards for attendance and participation.

Academic Advising:
Upon entering the MA in English Program, each student is assigned a faculty mentor by the Graduate Coordinator. You should make an appointment to meet with your faculty mentor every semester to develop a degree plan and monitor your progress toward graduation. Your faculty mentor can also answer questions and provide valuable information about the comprehensive examination, other degree requirements, Ph.D. programs, and career opportunities. To finalize your degree plan and register for graduation, you must also meet with the Graduate Student Academic Advisor in the Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts. This office is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.

Graduate Student Academic Integrity Statement:
English graduate students are expected to “conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty” (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Graduate Catalog). The
Student Code of Conduct defines Academic Misconduct as cheating, plagiarism, multiple submissions, complicity, fabrication, falsification, and misrepresentation; in addition to “any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion” (Student Code of Conduct, Article III, 1. Academic Misconduct). Academic misconduct is a serious offense that will result in the professor assigning a serious penalty, possibly including failure for an assignment, failure in a course, or recommendation for dismissal from a program (TAMUCC Graduate Catalog, Academic Honesty). For each Academic Misconduct case, the faculty member must file a record, including a description of the disciplinary action taken, along with any materials involved, with his or her college dean, who will forward a copy to the Office of Student Affairs. Further information regarding the judicial process is available on the website of the Office for Student Affairs.

Grade Appeal Process:
As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Website at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

Students with Disabilities and Veterans:
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in CCH116. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Blackboard:
To log into Blackboard, go to: http://bb9.tamucc.edu . You must have a NET ID (also known as an Active Directory account or “Islander ID”) to log in. For instructions on how to get this account and more information about using Blackboard, go to: http://distance-education.tamucc.edu/student_resources.html . If you need additional help at any time to access, download, or print course materials on Blackboard, please contact the Island Online (IOL) Help Desk by telephone at (361) 825-2825 or by email at iolsupport@tamucc.edu .
Tentative Class Schedule (subject to change):
Please note that all readings and your related journal entry should be completed by the start of class on Monday of each week. You must bring a copy of all assigned readings to class. Blackboard readings = BB

W 9/4  Course Overview.

9/9-9/11  Richter, CT: Introduction (1-22, 749-60); Eliot (534-41); Brooks (797-806); Wimsatt and Beardsley (810-18). Ornstein, “Historical Criticism and the Interpretation of Shakespeare” (BB).

9/16-9/18  Glossary of Literary Terms (online—or any glossary of your own choice). Nye, *Words under the Words.*

9/23-9/25  Richter, CT: Introduction (819-26); Saussure (841-51); Levi-Strauss (859-67); Propp (785-97); Eco (950-61).

9/30-10/2  Richter, CT: Introduction (826-37); Barthes (874-77); Foucault (904-14); Derrida (914-26).


10/21-10/23  Richter, CT: Introduction (1502-16); Gilbert and Gubar/Moi (1531-49); Cixous (1643-55); Smith (1600-10). Susan Stanford Friedman, “‘Beyond’ White and Other: Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse” (BB).

10/28-10/30  Richter, CT: Introduction (1611-25); Foucault (1627-36); Sedgwick (1683-91); Butler/Nussbaum (1707-20); Mulvey (1172-80). CRITIQUES DUE 10/30.
Marxist Criticism

11/4-11/6 Richter, CT: Introduction (1198-1214); Marx (397-411); Benjamin (1232-49); Althusser (1263-71); Jameson (1290-1306).

11/11-11/13 Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (including introduction and case study essays)

The New Historicism & Cultural Studies


Postcolonial Theory, Ethnic Studies, & Beyond


12/2-12/4 Continue discussion of 11/25 readings; PEER REVIEW COMPLETE DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER ON 12/4.

12/9 FINAL PAPER DUE IN MY OFFICE (FC 258) BY 5:30 PM
Questions to Consider when Reading Theory:

These questions are provided to give you a framework for approaching our readings this semester. Please use them as a point of departure in preparing your journal entries.

1. What is the essence of this school of thought? What would an inventory of its characteristics look like?
2. How is it different from other theories? Is it fundamentally different or different in degree?
3. What is this theory’s relation to history (literary or political)? How does it position itself along the “binary” of politics and aesthetics?
4. Is this theory particularly applicable to a certain kind of literature (of a certain period, region, what have you) or genre? How can you tell? Does it exclude others (kinds/genres) from consideration?
5. What are the philosophical roots of this theory?
6. What use is this particular theory in the classroom? What skills that this theory emphasizes would you want your students to learn? How could you best teach these skills?
7. Is this theory difficult to apply? What theoretical groundwork does a student need to use it?
8. How is this particular theory useful for your own work or interests? Or is it?
9. Can aspects of this theory be combined with aspects of other theories? Which ones? Can you use it eclectically?

Supplemental Resources at Bell Library:

- Ashcraft, Bill, ed. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*
- Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*
- Cixous, Helene. *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text, and Politics*
- Culler, Jonathan. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*
- Dimock, Wai Chee, *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey*
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*
- Jussaalla, Feroza, and Reed Dasenbrock, eds. *Interviews with Writers of the Postcolonial World*
- Keesey, Donald. *Contexts for Criticism*
- Landry, Lorraine. *Marx and the Postmodern Debates: An Agenda for Critical Theory*
- Leitch, Vincent. *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*
- McClintock, Anne, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*
- McQuillan, Martin, ed. *Deconstruction: A Reader*
Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders*
Richards, I. A. *Practical Criticism*
---. *Principles of Literary Criticism*
Saldívar, Jose David. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*
Scholes, Robert. *Structuralism in Literature*
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*
---. *In Other Worlds*
Sturrock, John. *Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*
Wall, Cheryl, ed. *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*
Warhol, Robin, and Diane Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*
Wellek, Rene. *Concepts of Criticism*
Young, Thomas Daniel. *The New Criticism and After*

For background information, see also in the reference area:
Groeden, Michael, ed. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*
Makaryk, Irena R., ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*