

English 308.001: Introduction to Literary Theory
Professor Tamara Harvey
Fall 2012, TR 10:30-11:45 a.m., University Hall 1204
Office hours: W 6:30-7:30 p.m., Th 12-1 p.m., and by appointment
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He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

--Edgar Allan Poe, "Criticism" (1850)

Course description:

Literary theory and criticism provide us with both tools for understanding and explaining literature and compelling debates about the nature of art, subjectivity, meaning, academia, and culture. In this class we will focus on some of the most significant debates driving the study of literature since the late nineteenth century. How do we define "literature" and what are the consequences of these definitions? What is an author? How do we understand the "I" who reads? How are texts related to the cultures in which they are produced and the cultures in which they are read? We will also consider the usefulness of these theories as tools, developing strategies throughout the semester for writing about theory and using it to interpret literary texts.

Learning outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Read works in literary theory and criticism accurately, critically, and analytically and use them to develop critical readings of literary texts
- Describe some of the major schools and debates of literary criticism since the late 19th century
- Discuss different approaches to the critical study of authors, texts, and readers and the relationships among these three elements of literature
- Develop a well-supported, arguable position within ongoing critical debates
- Write clearly argued, well-supported, and error-free analytical essays using MLA format

Required texts:

Richter, David H., ed. *Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*. 2nd ed. (Bedford St. Martin's, ISBN: 0312201567)

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford, ISBN: 019285318x)

Recommended: Palmer, Donald D. *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners*. (For Beginners, ISBN: 1934389102)

Various texts available through databases or other online sources including our class wiki, <http://engh308f12.pbworks.com>.

Course Requirements (there are a total of 200 pts. available for the course. See below for grading scale):

Response papers (14)	28% (56 pts.; 4 pts. each)
Group presentations (2)	7% (14 pts., 7 pts. each)
Midterm exam	10% (20 pts.)
Paper 1 (3-4 pages)	10% (20 pts.)
Paper 2 (5-6 pages)	20% (40 pts.)
Final exam:	15% (30 pts.)
Participation:	10% (20 pts.)

Grading:

Letter grades have the numerical equivalents listed below:

A = 4.0	C = 2
A- = 3.66	C- = 1.67
B+ = 3.33	D+ = 1.33
B = 3	D = 1
B- = 2.66	D- = .67
C+ = 2.33	F = 0

Final grades are calculated according to the following ranges (average on left, points on right):

A = 3.8-4.0	190-200=A
A- = 3.5-3.8	175-189=A-
B+ = 3.13-3.5	156-174=B+
B = 2.8-3.13	140-156=B
B- = 2.5-2.8	125-139=B-
C+ = 2.13-2.5	106-124=C+
C = 1.8-2.13	90-105=C
C- = 1.5-1.8	75-89=C-
D+ = 1.13-1.5	56-74=D+
D = .8-1.13	40-55=D
D- = .5-.8	25-39=D-

Response papers: Each week a response paper (1-2 pages, double-spaced) is due before class on Thursday (except for the week of Thanksgiving and the last week of classes; due dates are noted below). Like all formal written assignments for this class, you will turn these papers in on Blackboard. You may write on any of the readings assigned for that week. These responses do not need to be fully formed arguments but instead should focus on a specific question or problem raised by the reading and refer specifically to textual evidence in developing a perspective on the issue. Occasionally I may ask you to address a specific question or suggest topics for your weekly response. These prompts will be announced in class and posted on the wiki. No late response papers will be accepted; I will accept early response papers.

Group presentations: Each class will include a short (15 minute) discussion by 2 or 3 students. You do not need to meet in person, but you do all need to contribute to the presentation and wiki page (in other words, if you want to divide responsibilities, that is fine). Before class, please create a page on our wiki (see below) that you will be able to use during class and students will be able to review throughout the semester. You should provide 1) a brief summary of the reading that incorporates a few key passages and 2) discussion questions. This page is meant to both help students prepare for exams and papers and direct discussion in ways you find meaningful.

You are not expected to have fully mastered this complex, often perplexing material. All students will do 2 short, informal presentations.

If you are not presenting, but would like to post relevant information, please wait until after the class presentation to add your material or contact me about setting up a separate page.

Papers: Two formal papers are assigned for this class. Paper format and citations must conform to MLA Style. Papers should be typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Be sure to use a standard font size (12). All pages but the first must be numbered. Include your name, the date, and a title for the assignment at the top of the first page.

For paper 1, you will develop one of your response papers more fully. For paper 2, you will have the option of exploring a theoretical issue in greater depth by comparing and contrasting the works of two theorists or using theory to discuss a literary work. I will distribute fuller descriptions of these assignments later in the semester.

Although drafts are not required, I will read and comment on drafts turned in to me by the draft due date. I also invite and encourage you to come talk about your paper with me during office hours.

The formal papers you write in this course may be revised and resubmitted within two weeks after get the graded paper back from me. To be eligible for revision, the original paper must have been carefully proofread and handed in on time. Please keep in mind that revisions should be substantive rather than simply cosmetic. In other words, you should overhaul rather than touch up your essay. Expand, delete, and rearrange; respond thoughtfully to my questions and comments. Merely correcting your spelling and grammar or adding a few words here and there does not constitute a sufficient revision.

Here are my expectations for revisions:

1. Please make an appointment with me at some point after you have begun to plan your revision. I'll be happy to work with you at any point in the process of revising your paper, but I do require that you sit down with me and discuss your revision plans in specific detail before you actually rewrite your paper.
2. Hand in your revised paper within two weeks after you get the graded paper back from me.
3. Include a cover letter in which you specifically explain what you've changed and how you've improved the paper.

Participation: Ten percent of your grade is determined by your participation in this course. You are expected to attend each of our class meetings and participate actively in discussion and all class activities. Good attendance and active participation can help raise your grade for the class. Lack of preparedness for class and/or a significant number of absences may result in a zero for participation, thereby lowering your final grade one full letter grade.

Exams: The midterm and final exams will likely ask you to identify key terms and discuss briefly key concepts from the course. Both exams will cover the entire course to that point, though the final exam will emphasize material from the second half of the course. More specific information about these exams will be provided later in the semester.

Please note that the midterm will be administered online, probably with a combination of short answers to be answered online and take home essay questions to be submitted by the exam deadline. I will be out of town for a conference that week, so we will hold no class on the day of the midterm.

Note: You must complete all graded work in order to receive a grade for the course. Papers must be submitted on Blackboard; if for some reason Blackboard is not working, email them to me by the deadline and then upload your paper to Blackboard later. Late papers will be downgraded one half-grade for each day they are late. **If you anticipate problems or conflicts, let me know as soon as possible.** I reserve the right to make exceptions to these policies, at my discretion, for students facing serious difficulties.

If class is canceled for any reason, continue with the assignments as scheduled.

Email, Blackboard, and pbworks: We will be using two primary online spaces for this class. You will be using Blackboard primarily to submit assignments. This week, take the time to log on and familiarize yourself with what is there (<http://mymason.gmu.edu/>). We will be making more frequent use of our course wiki: <http://engh308f12.pbworks.com>. Here you will find announcements, links to and pdfs of course readings, and the wiki pages where you will post presentation materials. This is a private site; before our first class meeting I will add those people who have enrolled in the class using the email addresses listed on patriotweb. If you cannot access the site, go to the first page and click on “Request access.”

Writing Center: The University Writing Center is a **free** writing resource. Tutors are available to assist students at any level and at any stage of their writing process. Tutors will not proofread your writing, but they will help you to develop revision and editing strategies. **Please Note:** If you have difficulty writing grammatically correct English, I may **require** you to meet regularly with a tutor at the Writing Center. The University Writing Center is located in Robinson A 114. Hours are:

Monday-Thursday 9:30-7:30 (last appointment at 6:30)

Friday 9:30-2:30 (last appointment at 1:30)

For an appointment, call (703) 993-1200 or schedule online at <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>.

Also, consult the Writing Center website for more information about their services as well as a variety of helpful online resources.

Academic integrity: GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form.

Plagiarism means using words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. You must cite, using a standard citation format, all the articles, books, and other sources that your own writing draws on, either directly or indirectly. In addition to listing sources in a bibliography, you must also correctly quote and/or attribute passages and ideas from your sources that you use in the body of your text. Paraphrases and

summaries of others' ideas must also be properly attributed. This is a matter of academic honesty, but proper citations and attributions also improve your writing. As the English Department's statement about plagiarism explains, "it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being 'reader friendly.' In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further" (<http://composition.gmu.edu/faculty/policies/plagiarism>).

Also note that un-cited sources will constitute plagiarism even if they ended up in your work without your conscious knowledge (e.g. you forgot you read the material or you confused your own notes with notes on a source), since part of the scholarly responsibility that comes with using secondary sources is keeping track of which words or ideas were yours and which came from another source.

Like you, I am bound by the Honor Code to report suspected plagiarism to the Honor Committee. For a description of the code and the committee, go to: <http://honorcode.gmu.edu/>.

Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt, please ask for guidance and clarification.

Office of Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Mason Alert: I have set up my Mason Alert account so that I will receive text alerts during class if anything is amiss in our building or at the university generally. If you want to set up your own alerts, you may do so at <http://alert.gmu.edu>. Please take a moment to notice the emergency instructions posted in this room; more information about emergency procedures is available at <http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert/>.

Other Useful Campus Resources:

Writing Center: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>
University Libraries "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>

Enrollment:

- Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.
- Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes:

Last Day to Add/Last Day to Drop with No Tuition Penalty	September 4, 2012
Last Day to Drop	September 28, 2012
Selective Withdrawal Period	October 1-26, 2012
- After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.
- Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

University Policies: The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

Schedule of readings and assignments (readings are listed in recommended order each week):

Week 1: Introduction

- T 8/28: Introduction.
Th 8/30: Helen Vendler, "What We Have Loved, Others Will Love" (Richter 31-40);
Gerald Graff, "Disliking Books at an Early Age" (Richter 40-48); Culler 1-17.
Recommended: Richter 1-13
Response paper due.

Week 2: Structure of texts and language

- T 9/4: Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox" (pdf—all pdfs are available on the class wiki); Culler 18-42, 70-82. **Recommended:** Terry Eagleton, "The Rise of English" (Richter 48-59)
T 9/4: Last day to add; last day to drop without penalty.
Th 9/6: Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course in General Linguistics* (pdf); Culler 55-69.
Recommended: Palmer 1-25
Response paper due.

Week 3: Structuralism/Poststructuralism. Psychoanalysis and subjectivity

- T 9/11: Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (pdf). **Recommended:** Culler 110-122
Th 9/13: Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" (pdf). **Recommended:** Palmer 65-86.
Response paper due.
Paper 1 assigned.

Week 4: Structuralism/Poststructuralism. Marxism and ideology

- T 9/18: Karl Marx, selections from *The German Ideology* and from *Capital* (sections 1 and 4 of chapter on "Commodities") (pdf)
Th 9/20: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)" (pdf)
Response paper due.
Draft of paper 1 due (optional).

Week 5: Deconstruction

- T 9/25: Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (pdf). **Recommended:** Palmer 26-48, 123-142
Th 9/27: Toni Morrison, "Black Matter(s)" (Richter 309-322). **Recommended:** Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" (Richter 339-348)
F 9/28: Last day to drop
Response paper due.

Week 6: The Author, Living and Dead

- T 10/2: Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (Richter 253-257). Peter Rabinowitz, "Actual Reader and Authorial Reader" (Richter 257-266). **Recommended:** Palmer 49-64.
Midterm information distributed.
Response paper due.

Th 10/4: **Midterm review**
Paper 1 due.

Week 7

T 10/9: No class (Columbus Day recess).

Th 10/11: Conference. **Midterm exam—submitted online.**

Week 8: Ideology and change

T 10/16: Michel Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality, vol. I* (pdf); Michel de Certeau, from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (pdf). **Recommended:** Palmer 87-122

Th 10/18: Judith Butler, from *Bodies that Matter* (pdf). **Recommended:** Culler 95-109.
Response paper due.

Week 9: Readers and Texts

T 10/23: Stanley Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" (Richter 267-278)

Th 10/25: Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Do We Write the Text We Read?" (Richter 278-289).
Response paper due.

F 10/26: Last day of elective withdrawal period

Week 10: Canons. Readers, History, Culture

T 10/30: Jane Tompkins, "Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne's Literary Reputation" (Richter 137-147); Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Value" (Richter 147-152). **Recommended:** Culler 83-94

Th 11/1: Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa" (Richter 323-333); Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands" (Richter 333-339)
Response paper due.
Paper 2 assigned.

Week 11

T 11/6: Herbert F. Tucker, "Wanted Dead or Alive: Browning's Historicism" (Richter 366-377)

Th 11/8: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Female Swerve" (Richter 289-295); Toril Moi, from *Sexual/Textual Politics* (Richter 295-301)
Response paper due.

Week 12

T 11/13: Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Canon-Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told" (Richter 174-182); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "What Is a Minor Literature?" (Richter 166-174)

Th 11/15: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, from *Epistemology of the Closet* (Richter 182-188)
Response paper due.

Week 13

T 11/20: Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge" (Richter 188-198) **Response paper due.**

Paper 2 draft due (optional).

Th 11/22: Happy Thanksgiving! No class.

Week 14: Taste and Aesthetics

T 11/27: Janice A. Radway, Introduction to *A Feeling for Books* (Richter 198-210).

Recommended: Culler 43-54

Th 11/29: George Levine, "Reclaiming the Aesthetic" (Richter 377-390); Michael Bérubé, "Aesthetics and the Literal Imagination" (Richter 390-397)

Response paper due.

Week 15: Cultural Capital

T 12/4: Alan Purves, "Telling Our Story about Teaching Literature" (Richter 210-218);

John Guillory, "The Canon as Cultural Capital" (Richter 218-224)

Response paper due.

Th 12/6: **Paper 2 due.** Review for final exam.

Final exam: Tuesday, December 18, 10:30 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.