

ENGL 601—Theory, Criticism, and Methods

Class Time: M 6-9 PM

Classroom: GRUE 301

CRN: 34347

Spring 2008

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And by Advance Appointment

Course Description:

One of the most challenging tasks facing advanced students of English is that of making sense of the diverse array of theories and critical vocabularies employed in contemporary literary studies. I have designed ENGL 601 to provide you first and foremost with an overview of those theories, as well as to give you some practice in using them in your own work. Our weekly readings of theoretical texts (listed on the schedule as “theory”) are designed to acquaint you with the origins of the concepts and vocabularies that you will find in scholarship on literature. Most of our class meetings will be devoted to evaluating these key statements in literary theory closely, and we will also spend some time (anywhere from 5-30 minutes at the end of some sessions) examining literary or cinematic texts (listed by genre) and critical readings of them (listed as “criticism”) that illustrate the theoretical approaches in question. In reading the essays in criticism, keep in mind that their role in this particular class is to provide a taste of what theory can bring to the analysis of literature and film. The readings in literary criticism are not offered as exhaustive analyses of the literary texts in question, and our emphasis will be on using them to examine the advantages and disadvantages of each approach rather than on developing thorough readings of the literary texts and films. In this ENGL 601 will be different from your seminars in literary analysis, and deliberately so: its emphasis on the theoretical texts is designed to cultivate a facility with critical concepts and approaches that will deepen the analyses that you perform at greater length in other classes.

The three weekly response papers I will ask you to write about the theoretical texts are designed to help you to evaluate the premises for and arguments behind the different approaches that we will be studying; the Critical Reader assignment is designed to cultivate your ability to compare different theories and to evaluate their use in literary criticism; and the Analytical Paper will enable you to employ theories and theoretically informed literary criticism in your own work.

As this course is designed to hone skills that will be helpful throughout your graduate career in the English department at UAF, I urge you to take it as early as possible. In addition to cultivating useful intellectual skills, this course will allow us the opportunity to reflect on some questions underlying the study of English at the graduate level. What is the purpose of studying and writing about literature? Of using theory to do so? How might scholarly writing about literature benefit our work in other genres of writing? What could be gained from using the methods of literary study to

analyze other kinds of texts, such as films or elements of popular culture? What diverse answers do people have to these questions, and why?

Required Books:

Leitch, Vincent, et. al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001. ISBN 0-393-97429-4.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992. ISBN 026274015X.

Articles posted to Blackboard

Course Policies:

Requirements and Criteria for Evaluation:

- 5% Response Paper #1, 3-4 pp., due 2/4, 2/11, or 2/18 (your choice)
- 10% Response Paper #2, 3-4 pp., due 2/25, 3/3, 3/17, or 3/24 (your choice)
- 10% Response Paper #3, 3-4 pp., due 3/31, 4/7, 4/14, or 4/21 (your choice)
- 30% Critical Reader representing three kinds of critical perspectives on a text of your choice, due to my box by 2 PM on Friday, 5/2
- 30% Analytical Paper, either on a theoretical text we have studied or on the literary or cinematic text that was the subject of your Critical Reader, due to my mailbox in the English Department main office by 4 PM on Friday, May 9.
- 5% Team-Leading one discussion.
- 10% Regular participation

In order to earn credit for ENGL 601, you must complete all of the above requirements.

This course will **not** be graded on a curve. Grading standards will follow UAF guidelines. Plus/minus grading will be used within the following ranges:

- A = An honor grade, indicates originality and independent work, a thorough mastery of the subject, and the satisfactory completion of more work than is regularly required
- B = Indicates outstanding ability above the average level of performance
- C = Indicates a satisfactory or average level of performance
- D = The lowest passing grade, indicates work of below average quality and performance
- F = Indicates failure to meet lowest standards

Response Papers:

The response papers are designed to help you to explore the key theoretical texts that we are studying in this course. They should principally concern one or more of the texts listed on the syllabus as “Theory,” and might approach them from any number of angles. You might, for

example, explore a tension, difficulty, or contradiction within a text's argument; identify lines of argument that make it similar to or different from other texts in theory or philosophy; or come up with any number of other possibilities for exploring the theoretical statements we will be reading in this class.

However you decide to approach this assignment, I will be looking for evidence that you've either understood the theory or attempted to identify specific aspects of it that you don't fully understand, and that you're beginning to formulate a critical perspective on it.

Critical Reader:

One of your two major assignments for this course will be the preparation of a Critical Reader on a literary text or a film of your choice. For your reader, you should select 3 critical essays, representing 3 different schools that we have studied in this class, that you believe to represent the best of that type of criticism on your chosen text. While you may choose individual essays from published collections or editions, you may not select a combination of essays that already appear together.

Once you have chosen your essays, you should place them together in a three-ring binder (1/2 inch binding). On top of the essays you should provide a 3-4 pp. introduction that explains your reasons for selecting the literary text or film in question. What about this text struck you as worthy of critical investigation? What questions did you have in mind as you surveyed the criticism on your text? What patterns (of questions asked or not asked; of methodologies used or not used, etc.) did you notice in the choices of criticism that were available? What schools of criticism did you select from the available choices, and why? What aspects of the text are illuminated by your selection of essays, and what questions did you not find addressed in the criticism that seem worthy of further investigation?

Also, before each of the essays, please provide a 2-3 pp. introductory evaluation that includes the following:

1. An explanation of the most important aspects of the theoretical school that the essay draws upon;
2. An evaluation of the selected essay's features: what makes it exemplary of the theoretical school in question, and what makes it superior to other possibilities that you considered?
3. Your assessment of what the essay illuminates about the text, and of what it does not illuminate.

Hints for Creating a Successful Critical Reader:

- For a model Critical Reader, you might examine the Bedford "Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism" edition of Joyce's "The Dead" that I ordered for ENGL 310, or look under the Bedford/St. Martin's website under "English literature—literary reprints" for more examples.
- I am open to all kinds of texts for this assignment, so long as you can find a selection of articles on them that will allow you to represent three of the categories of criticism studied in this course. Do be aware, however, that not all texts will have attracted the same quantity or quality of criticism. If you are having trouble finding a diverse selection of perspectives on a text you are considering, and consulting with a librarian on search techniques has not

resolved the situation, you might seriously consider whether the text in question is an appropriate choice for this assignment.

- Once you have chosen your three critical texts, obtain a “clean” copy for inclusion in the Reader, and keep another copy (with your annotations, if desired) to use while completing your Analytical Paper.

Analytical Paper:

Your second major assignment for this course will be a 10-page Analytical Paper that makes extensive (rather than incidental) use of theory and criticism. You will have several options for this paper:

- Option #1: On the text selected for your Reader, write a 10-page, thesis-driven critical essay that advances your own interpretation of the text and substantially engages at least three critical or theoretical essays on approaches studied in this course, whether as support for your argument or as texts against which you argue. You may choose to include essays from your Critical Reader if you wish, but you are not required to do so. Also, the essays and your paper may not rely solely on formal analysis (close reading), though they may do so if they also engage other approaches at length. (This is because, in my experience, formal analysis is the theory and practice with which students are already most familiar, and this course is designed to cultivate the ability to work with others as well.)
- Option #2: write a 10 pp. essay exploring a critical difficulty or tension within one of the theoretical texts we’ve read.
- Option #3: combine Option #1 and Option #2.

This paper should be formatted in keeping with MLA Style and include a Works Cited page.

Team-Leading One Discussion:

You will be asked to collaborate with a classmate to lead one discussion this semester. You should work with your partner to select one or more of the texts listed as “Theory” for discussion, and should notify me by e-mail of your selection(s) no later than the Sunday before the class in which you will be leading discussion. When you lead discussion, please bring a handout that offers at minimum 1) a concise abstract of the text you plan to discuss, and 2) a series of questions for discussion.

Attendance:

Seminar courses depend on students’ attendance and active participation, so regular attendance is expected. Please let me know, preferably before class, if illness or another emergency will make it impossible for you to attend a given session.

Academic Integrity:

This course is subject to UAF’s policies on academic integrity as outlined on p. 80 of the *University of Alaska Fairbanks 2007-2008 Catalog*. Plagiarism and illegitimate collaboration are grounds for failing the course.

Office Hours:

I keep 3 office hours per week, listed at the top of this syllabus. If they do not fit in with your schedule, I would be happy to consult with you briefly by e-mail or to schedule an appointment at another time that I am on campus.

Computers:

You will need to have Internet access and your UAF e-mail account for this course, and should check e-mail daily: I will be providing course materials, especially readings, online through Blackboard.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible and contact the appropriate office on campus to document your request.

The Fine Print:

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus.

Tentative Schedule:

1/28 (M): Course Introduction; Psychoanalysis I

Commentary:

- "Introduction to Theory and Criticism," *Norton*, pp. 1-28

Theory:

- Freud, intro, *Norton*, pp. 913-919; from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 919-929; "The 'Uncanny,'" pp. 929-952; "Fetishism," pp. 952-956

Poetry:

- H.D., "Oread," **Blackboard**

Criticism:

- Friedman, from *Psyche Reborn*, **Blackboard**

2/4 (M): Structuralism I

Theory:

- Saussure, intro, *Norton*, pp. 956-960; from *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 960-977
- Levi-Strauss, from *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, **Blackboard**

Literature:

- Stein, “Braque” from *Geography and Plays*, **Blackboard**

Criticism:

- Pondrom, introduction to Stein’s *Geography and Plays*, **Blackboard**

2/11 (M): Structuralism II

Theory:

- Barthes, “The Death of the Author” and “From Work to Text,” *Norton*, pp. 1466-1475
- Barthes, from *S/Z*, **Blackboard**

Fiction:

- Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” **Blackboard**

Criticism:

- Barthes, “Textual Analysis of a Tale of Poe,” **Blackboard**

*2/18 (M): Psychoanalysis II

Theory:

- Lacan, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1278-1285; “The Mirror Stage,” pp. 1285-1290; “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” pp. 1290-1302; “The Signification of the Phallus,” pp. 1302-1310

Fiction:

- Joyce, “Araby,” *Dubliners*, pp. 20-26

Criticism:

- Leonard, “The Question and the Quest: The Story of Mangan’s Sister,” **Blackboard**

Deadline for Response Paper #1

2/25 (M): Marxism I

Theory:

- Marx and Engels, intro, *Norton*, pp. 759-763; from “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” pp. 764-767; from “The German Ideology,” pp. 767-769; from “Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,” pp. 774-775; from *Capital, Vol. 1*, pp. 776-787
- Althusser, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1476-1479; from “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” pp. 1483-1509

Response Paper #1 Returned

3/3 (M): Marxism II

Theory:

- Benjamin, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1163-1166; “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” pp. 1166-1186
- Horkheimer and Adorno, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1220-1223; “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 1223-1240

(Anti-)Poetry:

- Tzara, “To Make a Dadaist Poem,” **Blackboard**

3/10-3/14: NO CLASS—ENJOY SPRING BREAK!

3/17 (M): Language, Discourse, and Power

Theory:

- Foucault, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1615-1622; “What is an Author?,” pp. 1622-1636; from *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 1636-1647; from *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, pp. 1648-1666; from “Truth and Power,” pp. 1667-1670

Criticism:

- Miller, from *The Novel and the Police*, **Blackboard**

***3/24 (M): Poststructuralism**

Theory:

- Austin, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1427-1430; “Performative Utterances,” 1430-1442
- Derrida, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1815-1821
- Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” **Blackboard**
- Derrida, from *Of Grammatology*, pp. 1822-1830; from *Dissemination*, pp. 1830-1846. (*Dissemination* continues to p. 1876; consider this optional.)
- Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” **Blackboard**

Fiction:

- Joyce, “Eveline,” *Dubliners*, pp. 26-32

Criticism:

- Norris, “The Perils of ‘Eveline,’” pp. 283-298

Deadline for Response Paper #2

***3/31 (M): Poststructuralism into Postmodernism**

Theory:

- de Man, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1509-1513; “Semiology and Rhetoric,” pp. 1514-1526; “The Return to Philology,” pp. 1527-1531
- Lyotard, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1609-1612; “Defining the Postmodern,” pp. 1612-1615
- Baudrillard, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1729-1732; from “The Precession of Simulacra,” pp. 1732-1741

Poetry:

- Yeats, “Among School Children,” **Blackboard**

**1-page rationale for Critical Reader due, along with a printout of relevant MLA search results
Response Paper #2 Returned**

4/7 (M): Feminist Theories

Theory:

- Woolf, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1017-1021; from *A Room of One’s Own*, pp. 1021-1029
- Cixous, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2035-2039; “The Laugh of the Medusa,” pp. 2039-2056
- Rubin, from “The Traffic in Women,” **Blackboard**

Poetry:

- Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” **Blackboard**

Criticism:

- Garson, “Bodily Harm: Keats’s Figures in the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’” **Blackboard**

4/14 (M): Queer Theories

Theory:

- Butler, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2485-2488; from *Gender Trouble*, pp. 2488-2501
- Sedgwick, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2432-2434; from *Between Men*, pp. 2434-2438; from *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 2438-2445
- Halberstam, "The Brandon Archive," **Blackboard**

Fiction:

- Joyce, "A Painful Case," *Dubliners*, pp. 89-99

Criticism:

- Jackson, "The Open Closet in *Dubliners*: James Duffy's Painful Case," *Dubliners*, pp. 327-341

*4/21 (M): Theories of Race and Ethnicity

Theory:

- Anzaldúa, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2208-2211; from *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 2211-2223
- Baker, Jr., intro, *Norton*, pp. 2223-2226; "Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory," p. 2227-22240
- hooks, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2475-2478; "Postmodern Blackness," pp. 2478-2484

Poetry:

- Hughes, "The Weary Blues," **Blackboard**

Deadline for Response Paper #3

4/28 (M): Postcolonial Theories

Theory:

- Said, intro, *Norton*, pp. 1986-1990; from *Orientalism*, pp. 1991-2012
- Spivak, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2193-2197; "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, pp. 2197-2208
- Bhabha, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2377-2379; "The Commitment to Theory," pp. 2379-2397

Fiction:

- Joyce, "The Dead," *Dubliners*, pp. 151-194

Criticism:

- Cheng, "Empire and Patriarchy in 'The Dead,'" *Dubliners*, pp. 341-364

Response Paper #3 Returned

5/1 (Th), 6-8:30 PM: Screening of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, RASM 340 (Media Classroom). If you can't make this screening, please view the film on your own before Wednesday's class. Rasmuson Library has the film available for checkout, and has viewing stations.

5/2 (F): *Critical Reader due to my mailbox in the English Department by 2 PM

5/5 (M): Theories of the Visual

Theory:

- Mulvey, intro, *Norton*, pp. 2179-2181; "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," pp. 2181-2192
- Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, pp. 1-122
- Mirzoeff, Introduction to *Introduction to Visual Culture*, **Blackboard**

Film:

- Out-of-class screening: Hitchcock, *Vertigo*. Thursday, May 1 (see above).

5/7 (W), 1-3 PM: Optional Workshop on Analytical Papers
Critical Readers returned at 1 PM

5/9 (F): *Analytical Papers due to my mailbox by 4 PM