English 470A
Contemporary Critical Theory
Course Syllabus, Winter 2005
Tues/Thurs 10:00-12:20; EIT 1015

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 2:30-4:00 or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

Since the 1980s, critical theory has revolutionized the study of texts, not only within the
discipline of English literature, but also in a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and
social sciences. English studies no longer restricts its area of focus to “great” literature, but now
examines all kinds of written forms, from comic books to medical discourse. Nor are literary
scholars any longer restricted to written language: speech, song, performance, and everyday
social rituals and practices are among the diverse array of signifying practices that now fall
within the purview of literary scholarship. To understand these texts, literary scholars have turned
to a wide range of other disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and history;
in turn, scholarship in the latter fields now regularly involves the study of language and culture.
Indeed, some scholars now suggest that the university needs to be restructured to reflect the
interdisciplinary character of much current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences.
This course is the story of how all of this came about.

You will be introduced to the major fields of critical theory, and the key theorists
associated with them. We will begin with a brief overview of Russian and American formalism.
We will then take an intellectual tour through the major fields comprising contemporary critical
theory: Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, Gender Studies,
Historicism, Post-Colonial/Ethnic Studies, and Cultural Studies. Class format will combine
lectures, class discussion, and student presentations. Upon successful completion of this course,
students will be well-prepared for graduate study in English and related disciplines, which now
emphasize theoretically grounded scholarship. Students planning to pursue other careers will be
equipped to become informed, lifelong critics of their culture and society, and make interesting
conversation at cocktail parties.

A note on the readings: Much of the theory we will be studying is challenging and
complex and cannot be learned through lectures alone. It is crucial that you prepare for class by
reading the assigned texts carefully and preparing specific questions or comments for class
discussion.

TEXTS

Required
Available in Bookstore: Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. Literary Theory: An Anthology
(Blackwell, 1998).

Recommended
The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory (several copies available in bookstore)


(Note: all royalties earned from the sale of The Little, Brown Compact Handbook will go to the Department of English Scholarship Fund.)

The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism (an electronic reference resource available through the UW Library. If you are having difficulty with a particular topic, or simply want to learn more about it, this is a good “first resort.”)

Students are encouraged to consult a good introductory guide to literary theory. Listed below are a couple of recommendations:

Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction
Raman Selden, Practicing Theory & Reading Literature: An Introduction

ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATION

In the interest of fairness, all students will be evaluated on the basis of the following assignments. There will be no exceptions (i.e. substitute assignments, second exam sittings, etc.) without supporting documentation (usually medical) which convincingly justifies the request for special treatment.

Unless otherwise indicated, values indicated below represent percentage of final mark for the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term</td>
<td>Feb 10</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Seminar</td>
<td>Sign up</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Exams

Mid-term (20%)
The mid-term exam will consist of a choice of short-answer questions covering material studied up to and including Feb. 10.

Final exam (30%)
The final exam will consist of short-answer questions, and an essay. There will be a choice of questions. This exam will cover the entire course, with emphasis on material covered since the mid-term.
2. Group Seminar (20%)
This assignment will give you the opportunity to explore a particular theorist’s work in depth. Each group will read a theoretical work in its entirety and explain the theory to the class using a seminar format (i.e. a format that involves lots of interaction with your audience). To prepare your seminar, I recommend that you follow these steps: Do some background research on the theorist and his or her significant contributions to critical theory. Read the work in its entirety (if it is a very long work, the group may split up the reading to make it manageable) and make sure you understand it, using secondary sources if you find them helpful (be sure to cite these sources orally in your presentation and in writing in your bibliography). What is its central argument or purpose? How is it connected to other theories you have learned? What examples does the author use to support his or her arguments? Evaluate the choice of excerpt included in the anthology: does it fairly represent the work and the ideas of the author? Is the work still relevant in 2005? Tell the class what you learn, and facilitate discussion about the theory and its implications. If the book discusses popular media, visual culture, or music, consider showing these examples in your seminar to help explain and clarify the theorist’s ideas. Your seminar should be 60 minutes long, including discussion. I strongly encourage you to be creative. Your goal should be to explain theoretical concepts using creative and intellectually stimulating presentation techniques that make your professor look as boring as possible.

Important: Seminar dates and book titles are indicated in the outline of classes, below. A sign-up sheet will be posted on my office door during the first two weeks of classes. All of the books to be studied are available from the UW library.

Everyone in the group will receive the same mark, and it is the group’s collective responsibility to ensure that everyone contributes his or her fair share; however, the instructor reserves the right to reduce the grade of individual students who have clearly not made an adequate contribution to the project. If you experience problems with group dynamics, it is important that you bring them to my attention as soon as they arise.

Important: The following must be handed in on the day of your seminar:
1. A class handout (about 2 pages) summarizing the content of your presentation in enough detail to serve as study notes for the final exam, to be distributed to the class on the day of your presentation.
2. One copy of an annotated bibliography of works consulted for the presentation, formatted using correct MLA style as explained in the Little Brown Handbook. Do not make up your own citation style; doing so will result in the loss of marks. Each entry must be accompanied by a brief (1-3 sentences) summary of the major argument of the text.
3. A copy of the notes and any additional aids (e.g. overheads) you use for the presentation. This material is for reference purposes only and will not be formally evaluated.
4. A summary of the division of labour, indicating clearly how each member contributed to the project.

Pointers for a Successful Seminar
1. Stay within the time allowed.
2. Work as a group. Presentations consisting of four or five loosely connected—or unconnected—topics will receive lower marks than those showing solid evidence of team-work at all stages of the project.

3. Avoid information overload. The most common weakness in group presentations is that they present too much detailed material at too fast a pace, without clearly emphasizing key points or giving the audience a chance to digest it all. Talk about the forest, not the trees: select a few important points to focus on in your seminar and use several examples to illustrate each one.

4. Problems with group dynamics (usually related to unfair division of workload) should be brought to my attention immediately. There is nothing I can do about them once the project reaches its final stages.

5. Creativity is encouraged. Role playing, dramatizations, multi-media aids, class exercises, and debates are just a few of the alternatives to the traditional lecture as means of delivering the content.

6. Remember, the main goal of your presentation is to generate intellectual discussion.

Tips for Public Speaking

1. Do not constantly lecture or read from a written text. Unless you are “natural” at public-speaking, you will probably need to equip yourself with a script, but your delivery should be informal and “speakerly.”

2. Make eye contact with everyone in the room. Do not fix your gaze on one person; this tends to exclude everyone else from the discussion.

3. Don’t talk too fast.

4. Create spaces for exchange with your audience throughout your presentation. An audience can only listen for so long before they get bored and start to tune out. It’s a good idea to “wake up” your audience occasionally through some kind of participation exercise (a writing exercise, a discussion question, a poll, a quiz, etc.)

5. Ask good questions (not as easy as it sounds!). A good question should be open-ended (i.e. it should solicit elaboration rather than a “yes/no” answer). A good question should not look for the “right” answer; rather, it should be an invitation for the audience to contribute their own ideas. When asking questions, it’s a good idea to write student responses on the board. This validates student responses, and makes it easier for you and the class to analyze the responses.

6. If you get a good discussion going, don’t shut it down prematurely so you can get through all of your material. While every member of your group should have an equal chance to participate in the presentation, it’s not the end of the world if you don’t get through everything you have prepared.

7. Keep within the time allowed, even if doing so means you don’t get to deliver all of the material you have prepared. Rehearse your seminar to make sure you will be able to deliver it within the time allowed.

Evaluation

Presentations will be evaluated according to the following criteria: intellectual challenge of the content, evidence of ample background preparation, equal division of labor of all group members in both preparation and presentation of material, integration of individual contributions into a coherent whole, ability to facilitate class participation and discussion, attention to broader issues raised in the course, commitment to and enthusiasm for the project. A 5% bonus mark will be awarded to groups that stay within five minutes of the time allowed. Everyone in the group will receive the same mark. It is the group’s collective responsibility to ensure that all members...
contribute equally, and to contact me to mediate if there are problems with the division of labor or other aspects of group dynamics that cannot be resolved within the group. **In circumstances where a student clearly does not complete his or her fair share of the group assignment, I reserve the right to assign that student an individual grade.**

3. **Essay (30%)**
Required Length: 2000-2500 words (about 8-10 pages) presented according to these specifications:

- typed or word processed, single-sided, on 8 1/2” x 11” white paper;
- double-spaced, with three lines of type per inch;
- body text in a 12 pt font; no fancy fonts please
- all margins set at 1”—no more and no less; do not use right justification;
- number all pages 1/2” down from the upper-right hand corner with your last name before the number;
- on the first text page, provide your name, the date, and course number one inch down from upper-left corner. Double-space between this identification and the essay title, center the title, and double-space between title and first line of text.

**Topics:** You are responsible for devising your own essay topic, which should be intellectually ambitious and clearly situated in the context of this course. If you need help thinking of a topic, please do not hesitate to approach me. Once you have developed a topic, make an appointment to discuss it with me in person (not via email). **I will not accept essays on topics that have not been discussed with and approved by me.**

The instructor reserves the right to run all essays through a plagiarism screening service. To this end, you will be required to submit both an electronic and a hard copy of your essay.

**Evaluation**
Essays will be evaluated according to the following components: originality, interest, and level of intellectual challenge of the thesis; coherence and persuasiveness of the argument; analysis and integration of supporting evidence; and mechanics (organization, sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, correct use of MLA citation format). First-class (80-100%) marks will be awarded only to essays that excel in every category. Note that, because the composition and content of an essay are interdependent, problems with the composition of an essay are likely to impede the clear expression of the content.

If you are having difficulty with any aspect of these assignments, it is important that you consult with me early on in the process.

**Note on avoidance of academic offenses:** All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline), which is
supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p. 1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

If you use secondary sources in your essays, you must use correct citation and documentation. If you are uncertain of how to use secondary sources, consult The Little, Brown Handbook. If you are still uncertain, consult with me. Incorrect citation and documentation is a form of plagiarism, a serious academic offense, and could result in academic penalty.

**LATE POLICY**
In order to ensure that all students receive fair and equal treatment with respect to lateness or absence, the policy for this course regarding late or missed assignments is as follows:

**General Expectations:** All students are expected to make their education a top priority. Requests for special treatment will be considered only if circumstances which are **totally** beyond the student’s control make it impossible for the student to meet his or her academic obligations without special dispensation.

**Exams and Seminar Presentations:** Exams and presentations will not be rescheduled except in the case of documented emergencies. If a student misses a group presentation, mid-term or final exam, that student will receive a grade of zero for that assignment, except in the case of documented emergencies. In the event of an emergency, contact me **immediately** so that we can make whatever arrangements are appropriate.

All other assignments are due **at the beginning of class** on the designated deadline date. Extensions will be considered provided the student consults with me **before** the deadline. The penalty for late assignments is a deduction of 3% per day or part thereof, including weekends. Assignments submitted on the deadline date, but **after class has started**, will be considered late. Submit assignments outside of class at your own risk. Late assignments submitted outside of class must be submitted to the English Department drop box. Always back up your work on disk, and save hard copies of all assignments you submit. I accept no responsibility for lost assignments.

*Emergencies (usually medical) will be fairly dealt with, provided you contact me (by phone, email, or in person) within three working days of the assignment due-date, and are able to provide documentation to explain and justify the missed/late assignment. Documentation requirements for medical emergencies are outlined in the University of Waterloo calendar (p. 1:10). Students are also expected to know University and Faculty regulations regarding exams and assignments (University Calendar p. 1:9-1:11 and 9:8). Non-medical emergencies will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and must be accompanied with appropriate documentation. While I sympathize with students who encounter computer/printer malfunctions, I do not consider these to be emergencies.*

I will not accept any essays at all after the final exam date. I do not reconsider marks for term assignments after the date of the final exam. Requests to review final exam grades must be received by me within the first two weeks of classes of the 2005 Spring term.
**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES & READINGS**

Please bring your texts to class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings, Group Presentation Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 4</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 6</td>
<td>Formalism</td>
<td>&quot;Introduction&quot; (3-7); Shklovsky, &quot;Art as Technique&quot; (17-23); Tamashevsky, &quot;Thematics&quot; (24-27); Brooks, &quot;The Formalist Critics&quot; (52-7).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 11</td>
<td>Introduction to Structuralism</td>
<td>Culler, &quot;The Linguistic Foundation&quot; (73-75); de Saussure, &quot;Course in General Linguistics&quot; (76-90).</td>
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<td>Jan. 13</td>
<td>Structuralist Theories of Language and Culture</td>
<td>Jakobson, &quot;Two Aspects of Language&quot; (91-95), Levi-Strauss, &quot;The Structural Study of Myth&quot; (101-118).</td>
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<td>Jan. 25</td>
<td>Marxism: the concept of ideology</td>
<td>&quot;Introduction&quot; (231-242); Marx, <em>The German Ideology</em> (250-255); Althusser, &quot;Ideology &amp; Ideological State Apparatuses&quot;; Fiske, &quot;Culture, Ideology, Interpellation&quot; (305-311)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 27</td>
<td>Marxism and culture</td>
<td>Benjamin, &quot;The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction&quot; (282-289)</td>
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<td>Feb. 1</td>
<td>Post-Structuralism and Language: Derrida</td>
<td>&quot;Introduction&quot; (333-57); Derrida, &quot;Plato's Pharmacy&quot; (429-450)</td>
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<td>Feb. 8</td>
<td>Catch-up; Review</td>
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<td>Feb. 10</td>
<td><strong>Mid-Term Exam</strong></td>
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<td>Feb. 15</td>
<td>Feminism: Linguistic Models</td>
<td>&quot;Introduction&quot; (527-32); Cixous, &quot;Sorties&quot; (578-84); Homans, &quot;Representation, Reproduction, and Women’s Place in Language&quot; (650-55).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Reading/Book</td>
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<td>Feb. 21-25</td>
<td><strong>Reading Week</strong></td>
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<td>Mar. 8</td>
<td>Gender, Race, &amp; Class Difference; Queer Theory</td>
<td>Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex” (630-6); Rich, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” (637-49); “Introduction” (675-8); Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (722-30).</td>
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<td>Mar. 29</td>
<td>Film: <em>The Merchants of Cool</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>Catch-up/ Review Essays Due</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 8-21</td>
<td><strong>Exam Period</strong></td>
<td>Final Exam TBA. Do not make travel arrangements or other commitments that may conflict with the final exam. There will be no second exam sittings except in the case of documented emergencies.</td>
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