English 470A
Contemporary Critical Theory
Course Syllabus, Winter 2011
Mon/Wed, 10:00-11:20
HH 227

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Office Hours: by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

Whenever we make assessments of texts--it’s good, it’s bad, it’s boring, it’s racist, it’s inspiring, it’s trivial, it’s confusing, etc.--we are, whether we know it or not, applying a theory of what texts are and what they do. In this course, we will learn to use contemporary critical theory to assess texts in a more self-reflexive, rigorous way. Along the way, we will learn to think about texts in new ways, to ask new questions of them, and generally open our minds to new and different ways of thinking.

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.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- recognize and explain the characteristics of different theoretical schools
- define key theoretical concepts
- compare and contrast different theoretical approaches
- use theory to analyse texts

TEXTS

Required
Available in Bookstore:

Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds. Literary Theory: An Anthology 2nd Ed. (Blackwell, 2004).
Peter G. Beidler, ed, The Turn of the Screw by Henry James (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010)

Highly Recommended
The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory or a similar dictionary of theoretical terms.

(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 few recommendations:

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*
Raman Selden, *Practicing Theory & Reading Literature: An Introduction*
Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES & READINGS**

Unless indicated otherwise, all readings are from the Rivkin & Ryan anthology.

This schedule may change. Changes will be announced in class and on ACE. Please bring your texts to class.

Jan 5: Introduction to Course

**Formalism**
Jan 10: Rivkin & Ryan (1.1), Shklovsky (1.3), Brooks (1.4).

**Structuralism/Semiotics**
Jan 12: Rivkin & Ryan (2.1), Culler (2.2), De Saussure (2.3)

Jan 17: Barthes (2.7)

**Psychoanalysis**
Jan 19: Rivkin & Ryan (5.1), Freud (5.2, 5.4), Lacan (5.7)

Jan 24: *The Turn of the Screw*, “Psychoanalytic Criticism and *The Turn of the Screw*” (in Beidler 302-333)

**Marxism**
Jan 26: Rivkin & Ryan (7.1); Marx (7.4); Gramsci (7.7) Althusser (7.10), Fisk (12.6);

Jan 31: “Marxist Criticism and *The Turn of the Screw*” (in Beidler 360-390)

**Poststructuralism/Deconstruction**
Feb 3: Rivkin & Ryan (4.1), Nietsche (4.3), Derrida (4.6)

Feb 2: Deconstruction cont’d.

**Postmodernism**
Feb 7: Lyotard (4.11)

Feb 9: Baudrillard (4.12), **Presentation: Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations**

Feb 14: TBA

Feb 16: Mid-Term

**Reading Week**

**Feminism/Gender Studies/Queer Theory**
Feb 28: Rivkin & Ryan (8.1), Rubin (8.2), Irigaray (8.3)

Mar 2: Gilbert & Gubar (8.5), Kahn (8.6)

Mar 7: Rivkin & Ryan (9.1), Foucault (9.3), “Gender Criticism and The Turn of the Screw” (in Beidler 333-360)

Mar 9: Butler (9.4); **Presentation: Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble**

**Historicism**
Mar 14: Rivkin & Ryan (6.1); Foucault (6.4); “Combining Criticism in The Turn of the Screw” (in Beidler 390-407)

Mar 16: **Presentation: Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction.**

**Postcolonialism/Race Theory**
Mar 21: Rivkin & Ryan (11.1), Said (11.5), McClintock (11.9)

Mar 23: Rivkin & Ryan (10.1), Morrison (10.5); **Presentation: Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic**

**Cultural Studies**
Mar 28: Rivkin & Ryan (12.1), Benjamin (12.2), Adorno & Horkheimer (12.3)

Mar 30: Hebidge (12.5), **Presentation: Dick Hebdige’s Subculture: The Meaning of Style**

Apr 4: TBA

**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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term</td>
<td>Feb 16</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Seminar</td>
<td>Sign up</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**1. Exams**

Mid-term (20%)
The mid-term exam will consist of a choice of short-answer questions covering readings, lectures, and presentations.

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, including assigned readings, lectures, and presentations.

**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? If applicable, 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? 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, above. Seminar sign-up will take place during the first week of classes. All of the books to be studied are available from the UW library. Be sure to sign out the books you need well in advance of your presentation.

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. You may also email your handout one day in advance 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. Peer evaluations: each group member to briefly and constructively assess each peer’s contribution to the project. Peer evaluations can be emailed to me on the day of the presentation.

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%)
Due April 4, to be submitted electronically as email attachment in pdf or docx format.

Required Length: 2000-2500 words (about 8-10 pages) presented according to these specifications:

- double-spaced
- body text in a 12 pt font; no fancy fonts please
- all margins set at 1-1.5"; do not use right justification;
- number all pages except first page
- on the first text page, provide your name, the date, and course number in upper-left corner.
  Center the title, and double-space between title and first line of text.
- Use correct MLA format for in-text citations and Works Cited.
Topics: You can choose one of two topics: 1) Apply a theory or combination of theories to a contemporary popular or literary text. 2) Write about a theoretical concept or problem (e.g., language, the body, sexuality, agency, etc). 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.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Cross-listed course:
Please note that a cross-listed course will count in all respective averages no matter under which rubric it has been taken. For example, a PHIL/PSCI cross-list will count in a Philosophy major average, even if the course was taken under the Political Science rubric.

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm
**Academic Integrity website (Arts):**
http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

**Academic Integrity Office (University):** http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:**
**Note for students with disabilities:** The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

**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.

Essays are due by midnight on the designated deadline date and should be emailed to me as an email attachment in pdf or docx format. 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. Always back up your work. 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.*