

English 800: Critical Methods (3 Credits)

Notes on Deconstructing the Literary, or How to Read Literature After Cultural Studies

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Class Meetings: T 1-3:30 PM, 7105 Helen C. White Hall (HCW)

Office Hours: M 1-3 PM, or by appointment, 7161 HCW

Course Description: This foundations course in literary studies will introduce first-year graduate students to methods in literary and cultural analysis through a series of engagements with scholarship across distinct subfields, time periods, and theoretical lineages. Central to our course will be the transformation of classical literary studies by the intellectual movement called cultural studies, an interdisciplinary and politicized orientation towards textual analysis that demanded a new methodological dynamism in the study of literature beginning in the late 1960s. Cultural studies altered the contexts, motives, and consequences of literary analysis by making visible the writing and cultural production of racially, sexually, and economically marginalized communities, and demanding rigorous attention to so-called “low” cultural forms including pulp fiction, comics, film, television, pornography, and magazine culture. Most importantly perhaps, cultural studies required scholars of literature to move beyond the limits of their disciplinary training to explain literary phenomenon that had political, social, economic, and cultural implications far beyond the immediacy of any given text. In other words, it demanded the invention of new theories, concepts, and modes of interpretation to explain literature’s relationship to the complex wider world within which we read, write, and live. This class will explore the consequences and possibilities of this adventurous anti- and interdisciplinary method, and the incendiary claims it has made for literary studies as aesthetic *and* political, textual *and* social, rigorous *and* fun. Among the topics we will explore include Marxist and Foucauldian approaches to literary analysis, critical race and ethnic studies, queer theory, affect studies, and popular culture studies.

Covid-related Procedures: Per university policy, everyone is required to wear a mask to class. The mask should be surgical grade or have at least three layers and must cover your nose and mouth. While we currently do not have a vaccine mandate on campus, the Covid-19 vaccine is the most effective protection against the virus. Three of the most common covid-19 vaccinations (Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna) are also now officially approved by the CDC. Using every possible form of protection against Covid will ensure that you and your peers can stay safe, healthy and active participants in your education. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult the university's Covid-19 response page: <https://covidresponse.wisc.edu/faq/>. In the meantime, always make sure to self-monitor for signs of illness and do not attend class if you are experiencing symptoms.

What are we reading?

The texts below are required. They are available at the University Bookstore or online. All readings marked with * will be available on the course website. You must bring physical copies of all readings to class (no electronic tablets or laptops):

- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*
- Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*
- Phil Deloria and Alex Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide*
- Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction, Third Edition*
- Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow
- Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961*
- Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*
- Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History*

Required Reference Guide:

- *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*

What are we doing here? (Or, Course Learning Outcomes by another name)

This is an introductory, **reading intensive** graduate theory seminar. The texts we will read this semester are conceptually dense, and they will challenge many of the assumptions you may have about what traditional literary studies is and should be. It will surprise many, for instance, that we are not reading any primary literary texts. Rather we will treat theory itself as a distinct mode of creative writing and explore the movement of thought that organizes different theoretical lineages, worldviews, and methods. We will also leap between surprising, odd, and unexpected clusters of texts, building depth in particular areas of knowledge, while also reading widely across a range of recent interventions in African and Asian American literary studies, queer cultural studies, affect theory, and popular culture studies, among others. The aim is to provoke you to think critically about your relationship to the study of literature while building a repertoire of analytical skills that will enliven your own approach to literary and cultural analysis broadly. This necessarily means questioning why you are invested in this endeavor, what kinds of intellectual questions keep you up at night, and what areas of knowledge you tend to resist or ignore (and why).

Across the arc of the semester you will be at times bewildered, frustrated, illuminated, shocked, thrilled, angry, intrigued, excited, or even bored by different arguments, sets of ideas, or areas of inquiry. All are legitimate feelings, all are worth experiencing, and all are necessary to grapple with as part of developing your scholarly worldview or perspective. The life of the mind, which includes the pursuit and production of knowledge and the retuning of the sensorium, tends to elicits all of these emotion states and more. Consequently, we will cultivate an affective orientation of openness and curiosity toward the full range of our psychic and intellectual reactions to various ideas; simultaneously, we will practice loosening our grip on our most tightly held beliefs or assumptions, rather than rigidly defend them.

With all this in mind, it is crucial that you devote significant time and energy to all the readings, and pace yourself accordingly. Please plan to read all the texts carefully and bring your questions and ideas to every class meeting. All course readings marked with * on the syllabus will be available for download on Canvas. You must bring physical copies of readings to class each week, including printing out all articles. I discourage the use of electronic copies on tablets or computers unless you must use digital formats for accessibility reasons. It is highly recommended that you purchase all of the required course books, new or used, so that you may begin building a personal library. I am aware that Joseph North's book *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* is particularly pricey. If you have difficulty locating the book at a reasonable cost, please let me know in advance of week 7.

All members of the class must participate in every discussion. Collaborative engagement and dialogue is a central component of academic life, and our class discussions will function as a model for how to enter debates in thoughtful and generative ways. If you find it difficult to participate in our sessions for any reason, please visit me in office hours to discuss fun, easy, and useful strategies for developing your voice in the classroom.

What do we have to write?

This course has four writing assignments:

1) Distributed weekly posts and responses to an online forum. Each week, 2-3 members of the class will be responsible for developing a 500-700 word response to a pre-circulated question or task related to that week's reading. These are mini essays of sorts that should be well written and organized in thought and execution. You should have an original argument or stake a distinct position and incorporate at least 1-2 direct citations from the week's reading in shaping your claims. These posts must be online by 8 PM on the evening before our class meetings. The rest of the class is required to post short replies that take up and complicate particular ideas, questions, or concepts brought up in the primary posts. These responses are due no later than 10 AM on Tuesday mornings before our class meeting. Each member of the class will cycle through posting a primary response two times across the semester.

2) A short 3-4 page reflection paper considering your most firmly held intellectual attachments to a particular cultural object, method, body of knowledge, theoretical tradition or set of scholarly questions.

3) An 7-8 page draft of your final seminar paper, which will be given extensive feedback in preparation for revision and expansion.

And 4) a final 15-20 page seminar paper analyzing a literary or cultural text of your choosing using 3 theoretical texts, including one not assigned in class. This course meets the criteria for a 3-credit seminar with weekly 2.5 hour meeting and at least 8-10 hours of class preparation excepted weekly.

WEEK 1: What is Criticism For?

Monday, September 13 Pre-reading: Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; 3rd edition 2008). Read all.

Barbara Johnson, “The Critical Difference: BartheS/BalZac” *Diacritics* 8.2 (1978) and “Translator’s Introduction to *Dissemination* (Abridged)” (1981)*

Barbara Smith, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1978)*

Selected further reading:

Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg, and Paula Treichler, eds. *Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 1991)

Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2005)

Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (University of Chicago Press, 2008)

Jason Potts and Daniel Stout, eds. *Theory Aside* (Duke University Press, 2014)

Barbara Johnson, *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness*, eds. Melissa Feuerstein, Bill Johnson González, and Lili Porten, and Keja L. Valens (Duke University Press, 2014)

Elisabeth Anker and Rita Felski eds. *Critique and Postcritique* (Duke University Press, 2017)

Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History* (Duke University Press, 2017)

****Reflection Paper Due Saturday, September 18 by 11:30 PM****

WEEK 2: Culture and Ideology

Monday, September 20 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957, translated 1972). Read: The World of Wrestling, The Romans in Films, The Writer on Holiday, Blind and Dumb Criticism, Soap-powders and Detergents, Toys, Novels and Children, The Face of Garbo, Wine and Milk, Steak and Chips, The Brain of Einstein, *Neither/Nor Criticism*, Striptease, The New Citroen, Literature According to Minou Drouet, Astrology, Plastic, The Great Family of Man, and Myth Today.

Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology—Marxism without Guarantees,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 (1986)*

Frederic Jameson, “Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film,” *College English* 38.8 (April 1977)*

Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” *differences* 17.3 (2006)

Selected further reading:

Louie Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (Monthly Review Press, 1970)

Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977)

Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell University Press, 1981)

Terry Eagleton, "The Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Poetics Today* 9.2 (Duke University Press, 1988)

Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson (University of Illinois Press, 1988)

Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Duke University Press, 1991)

Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)

WEEK 3: Knowledge/Power, or Discovering Foucault

Monday, September 27

Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (1984). Read: Part I: Truth and Method, Disciplines and Sciences of the Individual, Right of Death and Power Over Life, Sex and Truth, and Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault.

Recommended: Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (Summer 1982)*

Selected further reading:

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1995 [1975])

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978* (Picador, 2009 [1977-1978])

Herbert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (University of Chicago Press, 1983)

D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (University of California Press, 1989)

Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (Routledge, 1992)

Anna Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995)

David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Lynn Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2009)

WEEK 4: Thinking with and Beyond Foucault

Monday, October 4

Hannah Arendt, *Introduction into Politics* (1955)*

Edward Said, Introduction to *Orientalism* (1979)*

Eve Sedgwick, selections from "Axiomatic," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)*

Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You." In *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (1994; reprinted in 2003)*

Dorit Cohen, "Optics and Power in the Novel," *New Literary History* 26.1 (1995)*

Selected further reading:

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 2018 [1958])

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979)

D.A. Miller, "Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House*," *Representations* 1.1 (February 1983)

Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion." In *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, eds. Jonathan Dillmore and Alan Sinfield (1985)

Carolyn Porter, "History and Literature: After the New Historicism," *New Literary History* 21.2 (Winter 1990)

John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2003)

Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Zone Books, 2017)

WEEK 5: The Cultural Politics of Race (Part I)

Monday, October 11

Franz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)*

Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1.1 (Spring 1991)*

Gloria Anzaldúa, Preface and chapters 1, 2 and 7 in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)

Arun Saldanha, "Reontologising Race: The Machinic Geography of Phenotype," *Environment and Planning D: Space and Society* 24 (2010)*

Jennifer Nash, "Rethinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008)*

Selected Further Reading:

Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance" (1980)

Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (University of Chicago Press, 2017)

Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

WEEK 8: Affect

Monday, November 1 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2007). Read Introduction, Chapters 1-2, 4, 6, and afterward.

Selected Further Reading:

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Siegworth eds., *The Affect Studies Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010)

Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 2004)

Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011)

Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (University of Chicago Press, 2009)

Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in American Art* (Duke University Press, 2013)

Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2015)

Kathy Hong Park, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (Random House, 2021)

****7-8 page final paper draft due Saturday November 6 by 11:30 PM****

WEEK 9: Doing Interdisciplinary Research

Monday, November 8 Phil Deloria and Alex Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide* (2017). Read all.

Selected Further Reading:

Lawrence Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97.5 (December, 1992)*

John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993)

Michael Bérubé, *Public Access: Literary Theory and American Cultural Politics* (Verso, 1994)

Julie D'Acci, "Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities." In *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Priscilla Ovalle, and Lynn Spigel (2004)*

Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2012)

Bruce Burgett and Glen Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Third Edition* (NYU Press, 2020)

WEEK 10: On Genre

Monday, November 15 Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1993). Read all.

Selected further reading:

Tvetzen Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Routledge, 1975)

Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Routledge, 1993)

Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television* (Routledge, 2004)

Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (Verso, 2007)

Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke University Press, 2008)

Michael Saler, *As If: On the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford, 2014)

andré carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2016)

WEEK 11: Reading and Reading the Popular (Part I)

Monday, November 22 Janice Radway, "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context," *Feminist Studies* 9.1 (Spring, 1983)*

Ann DuCille, "Toy Theory: Black Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference," (1996)*

José Esteban Muñoz, "'The White to Be Angry': Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag," *Social Text* 52-53 (Winter 1997)*

Aniko Bodroghozy, "Smothering Dissent: The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour and the Crisis of Authority in Entertainment Television," from *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Duke Univ. Press, 2001)*

Melani McAlister, "What is Your Heart For? Affect and Internationalism in the Evangelical Public Sphere," *American Literary History* 20.4 (2008)*

Selected further reading:

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944)

Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" (1981)

Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Harvard University Press, 1990)

Susan Willis, *A Primer for Everyday Life* (Routledge, 1991)

Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Routledge, 1993)

Carol Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," *Critical Inquiry* 21.4 (Summer 1995)

Ann DuCille, *Skin Trade* (Harvard University Press, 1996)

José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999)

WEEK 12: Reading and *Reading* the Popular (Part II)

Monday, November 29 Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (2003). Read Introduction, Chapters 1-2, 4-5 and Conclusion.

Selected further reading:

- Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (University of California Press, 1998)
- Lauren Berlant. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 1997)
- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Media, Culture, and US Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (University of California Press, 2001)
- Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*, Duke Univ. Press, 2006)
- Shana Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sounds of Solidarity in the Black Diaspora* (NYU Press, 2013)
- Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (Verso, 2015)

WEEK 14: Queer Theory (Part I)

- Monday, December 6 Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ* 1.1 (1993)*
- Eve Sedgwick, "Queer and Now." In *Tendencies* (1993)*
- Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," *GLQ* 3.4 (1997)*
- Robert McRuer, "As Good as it Gets: Queer Theory and Critical Disability," *GLQ* 9.1-2 (2003)*
- Anthony Michael D'Agostino, "Flesh-to-Flesh Contact": Marvel Comics' Rogue and the Queer Feminist Imagination," *American Literature* 90.2 (June 2018)*

Selected Further Reading:

- Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 1990)
- Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1996)
- Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004)
- Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2005)
- José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (NYU Press, 2009)

Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (NYU Press, 2014)

Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke Univ. Press, 2007)

Rostom Mesli, *In Defense of Identity Politics: A Queer Reclamation of a Radical Concept* (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2015)

Week 15: **“An Open Mesh of Possibilities”**

Film Screening: *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016)

Monday, December 13

Omise’ke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ* 14.2-3 (2008)*

Ramzi Fawaz “‘An Open Mesh of Possibilities’: The Necessity of Eve Sedgwick in Dark Times.” In *Reading Sedgwick*, ed. Lauren Berlant (2019)

Ellen Rooney, “Form and Contentment,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000)

****Final paper due Sunday, December 19 by 11:30 PM****