

**ENGLISH 303W-02: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE  
(WRITING INTENSIVE - 3 CR.)**

Instructor: Christian Moraru  
Fall 2001

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“Theory is often a pugnacious critique of common-sense notions, and further, an attempt to show that what we take for granted as ‘common sense’ is in fact a historical construction, a particular theory that has come to seem so natural to us that we don’t even see it as a theory. As a critique of common sense and exploration of alternative conceptions, theory involves a questioning of the most basic premises or assumptions of literary study, the unsettling of anything that might have been taken for granted: What is meaning? What is an author? What is to read? What is the ‘I’ or the subject who writes, reads, or acts? How do texts relate to the circumstances in which they are produced?” (Jonathan Culler, Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction 4-5)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GENERAL GOALS:** The course provides an introduction to the interpretation, study, writing about, and research on literature and literary-cultural criticism. Specifically, this class will familiarize you with the fundamentals of literary and cultural criticism: its basic notions, terminologies, methods, tools, schools, and resources. We all are, in one way or another, readers of literature, enjoying it more or less “naturally,” to varying degrees. In this course, we will move from “passive,” less reflective reading and enjoyment of literature--the “precritical” stage, as we will call it--to criticism or interpretation, that is, to understanding how literary discourse comes to be what it is, how its “machinery” works, finally, how and why literature “moves” us. Thus, we will strive to become aware of what literature means, how it does it, what it does to us, and how its effect depends on form and the cultural-historical context bearing on this form. Reading of both primary (“target”) texts and criticism/theory, writing, as well as research--on which the course provides detailed instruction--are all geared towards these goals (see below).

CONTENTS, SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES, AND METHODS: We will explore and test out the major approaches in literary-cultural criticism, studying and trying our hands at various interpretation methods from the more traditional ones to the most innovative. Extremely diverse and more often than not based on seemingly mutually exclusive premises, interpretive methods can be confusing. To prevent this confusion, we will begin by organizing them--and by the same token our class--around a model of literary discourse understood as a particular form of communication. After all, literature is something, a message in specific form, a text or discourse fragment somebody--a writer--wants to communicate to somebody else, that is, to the reader.

Along these lines, we will sort out the fundamental components of any act of literary communication. As we will notice, some critical approaches address primarily certain components such as the context of the text (the historical ambiance of literary production, for example), while others choose to focus on the author (or the message's "sender"), or on the text itself (the message) and its form. Depending on what these approaches insist upon, we should be able to differentiate among as distinct interpretive models as source criticism, positivism, biographism, textual scholarship, psychoanalysis, formalism and its various schools, from early 20th-century Russian "poetics" to the New Criticism, structuralism and poststructuralism, the New Historicism, cultural and identity studies, and so on. These both dispute each other's claims and share significant premises and concerns, which is why the distinctions among them are not always clear-cut. Nonetheless, by the end of the semester we should know a) what they are, that is, how they work, and b) how to use them--where their limitations lie and how to step beyond them.

STRUCTURE: The class revolves around certain approaches to literature. To lay out the differences among them, we shall step beyond their "theoretical" study. Thus, we shall observe a number of critical models at work on "target" texts by Joseph Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and David Henry Hwang. The critical handbook and anthology used in the course will help us see how the same work has generated a variety of competing readings. Let me also point out that our discussion of "target" texts will not seek so much to touch on all aspects of these works as to develop particular interpretations by rehearsing specific methods of reading and the "theories" behind them. In addition, the course pursues, overall, a fairly straightforward chronology, tracing the modern history of critical theory and methodology from late 19th-century positivism to early 20th-century formalism, post-World War II recuperations of the formalist tradition and recent reactions against this tradition. The first weeks or so stress the study of consecrated critical approaches, of how they produce interpretations when applied to our primary texts by major critics; the last weeks will be spent mostly on exercises, research, individual consultations, and other kinds of work related to your final project.

FORMAT: The course combines opening lectures by the instructor and discussion, with emphasis on the latter. It also requires group work and a considerable amount of writing and research of different kinds.

NOTE: I urge you to subscribe to our department listserve so that we can communicate with you if you are a major. To subscribe, from the computer you receive e-mail on, send the following message to [listproc@uncg.edu](mailto:listproc@uncg.edu): <Subscribe English-I yourfirstname [blank] yourlastname> . "I"

in “English-1” is lower-case “L.”

## REQUIREMENTS:

### I. The Writing and Research Component

**1. Major Written Assignments.** Since this is a writing intensive course, the writing load will be high. However, the number of assignments is less important than it may appear. What matters is how we use critical writing and its revision to further our understanding of literary discourse. Simply put, we hope to become more sophisticated readers as we better our writing. All papers are due **in class** on the day indicated in the syllabus. You will receive more detailed instructions before each assignment. Students complete **5** major assignments as follows:

A 3-5-p., typed, double-spaced paper where you summarize a critic’s argument. Revision optional (due by Dec. 10).

A 4-6-p., typed, double-spaced paper, in which you use a critical model of your choice to read a literary work indicated by the instructor (possibly Hawthorne’s “The Birth-Mark”). Research optional. Revision required.

A final project (8-10 pp. plus notes and bibliography), which integrates bibliographical research and personal commentary. This project may grow out of a previous paper. Steps:

a) Students consult with the instructor on the appropriateness of their topic and then submit a 1-p., single-spaced proposal. Once the proposal has been accepted and they have received the instructor’s suggestions, they start working on the essay. Your proposal might very well evolve as you discover new critical models over the last days of the course. Please contact me if you expect to make radical changes to your initial project.

b) The first draft of the essay. Students will get the essay back from the instructor, revise it according to the comments received, and resubmit it.

c) The final draft, due on the last day of classes.

**2.** Students also keep a **critical journal** where they record:

a) their reflections, notes, and questions on the readings for the day, which must be recorded before the class and used during oral participation; I will specifically ask you to use your journal during class time. **You need to have at least one question ready for each class.**

b) brief freewriting responses to questions and issues the instructor and students raise during class periods, which means, again, that you must bring your journal to every class. Students write their responses and notes almost on a daily basis. No entry should be shorter than 250 words or a three-ring binder page (legal size: 8.1/2 x 11). The journal should be regarded as a resource for the longer assignments.

**II. 1. Attendance and Participation:** Both are expected and will factor in the final grade (see below). Since this class combines lecture and discussion, students' active oral participation is critical. I expect you to come to class with your reading and writing assignments completed, ready to ask questions, engage in discussion and group work. These activities require, besides preparation, civility, respect for others' opinions, and willingness to learn from your peers even when you are in disagreement with them.

**2. Group Activities:** Students will be assigned to groups of 4-5 members, which will meet during class time to complete various brief assignments. Usually, the groups will discuss a specific topic or material and will then delegate a group member to report their conclusions back to the rest of the class. Reports will be oral (5-10 minutes). Group work will be graded, too. Students in the group will get the same grade regardless of who gives the presentation.

**3. Optional (For Extra Credit):** 15-min. individual presentations on the topics for the day. Please come to see me if you want to take advantage of this opportunity.

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your work the course. I encourage you to make at least one "formal" appointment early in the semester. I will also hold a second round of formal conferences, where I will discuss your progress. The meetings will include a comparison of one of your first assignments to a later, fully revised one.

ENGLISH 303's CRITICAL WRITING PHILOSOPHY: Revision is crucial both to the reading and writing components of the course. Writing assignments are a core part of students' training in literary interpretation, the course's main objective. Students will discover that the ability to learn the basics of critical discourse entails the capacity to establish a dialogue with "professional" readers and their opinions, furthermore, the skill of building on, and ultimately revising, these opinions. More importantly perhaps, students will come to practice revision--and self-revision--not only as a formal operation but as a means to generate and better articulate critical insights. Finally, they will learn to appreciate the heuristic significance of writing--writing as discovery--as well as the unit of form and content, seeing how formal revision bears upon the substance of their thought. In brief, they will become better readers of others' work as they become better readers of their own work; they will be better critics as they develop, under the instructor's guidance, self-criticism.

Training in writing is a learning tool. We will analyze, for example, how our critics build an argument, support a thesis, treat evidence and use their own style to make a specific case and thus advance a critical hypothesis. We will explore the form of their writing to understand how that form is essential to the critical work that writing in general is supposed to do. Accordingly, the critics we study will be, in a sense, our writing teachers as well. We will try to see not only what they do, but also how they do it and how we can criticize their own work and possibly do better what they have set out to accomplish.

The course includes: freewriting and drafting sessions, peer revisions, and writing workshops following submissions of major assignments. Individual conferences will insist on all aspects of

research and writing, on the premise that one cannot work out a compelling interpretation if one cannot write well. As stated above, writing is, for us, a learning instrument. A significant amount of class time will be devoted to rhetorical issues (outline, exposition, argument, thesis, introduction, conclusion, evidence), stylistic matters, research tools, format, etc. I will not simply evaluate students' writing. Since my approach to student writing is developmental, my comments will suggest ways for improvement, expansion, and progress, drawing not only upon what students' writing is but also upon what it can become, upon its potential. The revision of the final project will particularly require close consultation on a one-on-one basis between the instructor and students. We will address both the form and substance of writing, emphasizing the structural character of revision whereby changes in form impact substance.

#### COURSE POLICIES:

1. **Late Papers:** No late papers accepted. Please come to see me ahead of time if you foresee any deadline problems.
2. **Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of others' materials both in form (wording) and substance (ideas). Any paper bearing your name signifies that you are the author, namely, that the words and the ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by quotations marks and paraphrases. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an "F" for the whole course, and/or a report filed with the dean. Also, consult the UNCG policies on plagiarism.
3. **Absences:** You are allowed no more than 3 absences (which you must document) during the semester for illnesses, religious holidays and emergencies preventing you from attending. Any absences beyond this number will affect your grade and may result in your being asked to drop the course. If you are the victim of an emergency or serious illness, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone. Do not hesitate to call me at my home number. And because tardiness disrupts class, too, be aware that coming in late 2 times counts as an absence.

**GRADING: No incompletes.** To pass the course, you must submit all assigned work in time, come to class regularly and participate in discussion. The instructor will comment on and evaluate all student writing, regardless of its nature. The submissions (revisions included) will be graded and will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

1. Initial versions or unrevised papers: 45%
2. Revisions: 40% (revision of the second paper: 15%; revision of the final project: 25%)
3. Remaining 15% of the grade: class participation, group work.

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

1. Daniel R. Schwarz, ed. The Secret Sharer. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Boston. New York: Bedford/St.Martin's, 1997. ISBN: 0-312-11224-6

2. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, eds. Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader. Second ed. New York: Longman, 2000. ISBN: 0-582-31287-6
3. David Henry Hwang. M. Butterfly. New York: Penguin, 1993. ISBN: 0452272599
4. Lois Tyson. Critical Theory Today. A User-Friendly Guide. New York: Garland, 1999. ISBN: 0-8153-2879-6
5. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. ISBN 0684801523

\* 6 short items on reserve, the Jackson Library (see syllabus)

Note: Readings of lengthier primary texts discussed over a few classes are to be completed before the opening class in the sequence of meetings devoted to those texts. E. g., you must have read Hwang's entire play for the first class in the series of meetings dealing with M. Butterfly. Plan ahead and make sure you finish longer readings in due time.

RECOMMENDED RESEARCH TOOLS: See Appendix to the syllabus.

#### COURSE SYLLABUS:

##### **Week 1**

- |            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mon Aug 20 | Presentation of the course: goals, requirements, topics, and policies. Reading, writing, and research. Evaluation of student work; reading groups. Course syllabus--discussion. Our course's materials and tools. Start reading <u>The Great Gatsby</u> |
| Wed Aug 22 | "Precritical" vs. "critical" reading. Interpretation and methodology: organizing critical models. Assignments: Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark"*; Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in Lodge & Wood 31-38                                                 |
| Fri Aug 24 | Literary criticism, literary history, literary theory<br>Assignments: "The Birth-Mark." Optional: Tyson 1-11                                                                                                                                            |

##### **Week 2**

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|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mon Aug 27 | Authors and authorship. Traditional or "humanistic" criticism - historical and biographical criticism<br>Assignments: "The Birth-Mark" |
| Wed Aug 29 | "Form" and the formalist reaction: the New Criticism<br>Assignments: Tyson 117-134                                                     |
| Fri Aug 31 | Hands-on: Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"*                                                                                                |

**Week 3**

Mon Sep 3

**Labor Day Holiday - No Class**

Wed Sep 5

Hands-on: Dickinson, "My Life had stood--A Loaded Gun" (in Anderson); Anderson, "Ecstasy"\*  
**1st 3-5-p. essay assigned**

Fri Sep 7

Research workshop (I): Internet resources (Jackson Library, computer lab). No readings for the day, but have The Great Gatsby read by Wed., Sep. 12.

**Week 4**

Mon Sep 10

Research workshop (II): Library resources and tour (class meets in the Jackson Library, computer lab)

Wed Sep 12

From "form" to "structure." Structural analysis  
 Assignments: The Great Gatsby; Tyson 197-237

Fri Sep 14

No class (work on 1st essay). I will attend a conference at UNC-CH

**Week 5**

Mon Sep 17

From author to text  
 Assignments: Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, Lodge 2-9;  
 Barthes, "The Death of the Author," Lodge 146-150  
**1st essay due** (bring 2 copies)  
 Writing workshop

Wed Sep 19

From "structure" to "deconstruction." Structuralism vs. poststructuralism.  
 Deconstructing The Great Gatsby  
 Assignments: Tyson 241-274

Fri Sep 21

From "text" to "intertext," "play," and "the undecidable"  
 Assignments: J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," Lodge & Wood 255-262  
 Discussing your 1st essay

**Week 6**

Mon Sep 24

Hands-on: Conrad, "The Secret Sharer," Schwarz 24-60. Optional, J. Hillis Miller, "Sharing Secrets," Schwarz 232-252  
**2nd essay assigned**

Wed Sep 26

From text to reader. Reader-response criticism  
 Assignments: Schwarz 112-144 (includes Phelan's essay)

Fri Sep 28

Hands-on: The Great Gatsby; Optional: Tyson 177-190

**Week 7**

Mon Oct 1 Hands-on: "A Rose for Emily." Optional: Crosman, "How Readers Make Meaning"\*

Wed Oct 3 **2nd essay due** (bring 2 copies)  
Writing workshop  
**Midterm evaluations**

Fri Oct 5 Text and psyche  
Assignments: Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper"\*

**Week 8**

Mon Oct 8 **Fall Break - no class**

Wed Oct 10 The unconscious and other concepts in psychoanalysis. Freud and after.  
Assignments: Tyson 13-44  
Discussing your 2nd essay

Fri Oct 12 Hands-on: "The Birth-Mark."  
Start reading Hwang (due Oct. 24 )

**Week 9**

Mon Oct 15 Hands-on: "A Rose for Emily"

Wed Oct 17 From text to cultural discourse. Old and "New" Historicism  
Assignments: Tyson 277-299  
**2nd essay, revision due**

Fri Oct 19 Poststructuralism and the New Historicism  
Assignments: Greenblatt, "The Circulation of Social Energy," Lodge 495-511

**Week 10**

Mon Oct 22 Hands-on: The Great Gatsby. Optional: Tyson 299-315

Wed Oct 24 Identity, interpretation, politics. From "style" to gender, sex, class, race, and ethnicity  
Assignments: Hwang, M. Butterfly

Fri Oct 26 Gender and reading  
Assignments: Schwarz 175-198

**Week 11**

Mon Oct 29 A feminist theory of reading  
Assignments: Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," Lodge & Wood 425-447



**Final project assigned**

- Wed Oct 31 Hands-on: "The Yellow Wall-paper"
- Fri Nov 2 No class. Work on final project. I will attend a conference in Tulsa.
- Week 12**
- Mon Nov 5 The politics of gender and empire  
Assignments: Hwang, M. Butterfly  
Edward Said, "Crisis [in orientalism]," in Lodge & Wood 272-286.
- Wed Nov 7 Gender, sexuality, empire  
Assignments: M. Butterfly. Optional: Tyson 317-345
- Fri Nov 9 Gender, sexuality, empire, power  
Assignments: M. Butterfly. Optional: Eve Kosofsky  
Sedgwick, "The Beast in the Closet," Lodge & Wood 449-474
- Week 13**
- Mon Nov 12 Hands-on: M. Butterfly
- Wed Nov 14 Final project - individual conferences  
**1-p. proposal due**
- Fri Nov 16 Final project - individual conferences  
See M. Butterfly (the movie: due Dec. 3)
- Week 14**
- Mon Nov 19 **Final project (draft #1) due**
- Wed Nov 21 **Thanksgiving Holiday - no class**
- Fri Nov 23 **Thanksgiving Holiday - no class**
- Week 15**
- Mon Nov 26 Gender, race, empire  
Assignments: Gordimer, "Town and Country Lovers"\*
- Wed Nov 28 Postcolonial and African American criticism  
Tyson 363-401
- Fri Nov 30 Hands-on: "A Rose for Emily"
- Week 16**
- Mon Dec 3 Cultural studies and popular culture: film  
M. Butterfly: The text, the play, the movie

- Wed Dec 5 Cultural studies and popular culture: the world of advertising (video screening; discussion and group work); the Benetton campaign.
- Fri Dec 7 Cultural Studies and popular culture: TV, the media, and related genres (sitcoms, cartoons, drama, soap opera, etc.) (group work in cultural analysis: you will use your own examples)
- Week 17**
- Mon Dec 10 Last meeting  
Course overview  
**Final project, final draft due (in class)**  
Final evaluations

Note: I would like to think of the syllabus as final. Nonetheless, your input is most welcome, and we may make some changes as we move on.

#### APPENDIX: RECOMMENDED RESEARCH TOOLS (\*= Highly Recommended)

##### I. Guides to Literary Research:

- 1.\* Baker, Nancy, and Huling, Nancy. A Research Guide for Undergraduate Students. English and American Literature. 4th ed. New York: MLA, 1995.
- 2.\* Harner, James L. Literary Research Guide. A Guide to Reference Sources for the Study of Literatures in English and Related Topics. 2nd ed. New York: MLA, 1993.
3. Barzun, Jacques, and Graff, Henry F. The Modern Researcher. 4th ed. San Diego, HBJ, 1985.
4. Gibaldi, Joseph, ed. Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures. 2nd Edition. New York: MLA, 1992.
5. Greenblatt, Steven, and Gunn, Giles, eds. Redrawing the Boundaries. The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies. New York: MLA, 1992.

##### II. Bibliographies and Serial Bibliographies:

6. Bibliographic Index: A Cumulative Bibliography of Bibliographies. New York: Wilson, 1937-.
7. Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature. Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Assoc., 1920-.

##### III. Literary Histories; Companions and Literary Guides:

8. The Penguin History of Literature (English and American) (and The Penguin Bibliography)
9. Cambridge Guide to Literature in English. Ian Ousby, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP; London: Hamlyn, 1993.
10. Emory Elliott, General Ed. Columbia Literary History of the United States. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.
11. Hart, James D. Oxford Companion to American Literature. 6th ed. Oxford, New York; Oxford UP, 1995.

V. Handbooks, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias (Themes, Subjects, Terminology):

- 12.\* Harmon, William, Holman, Hugh C. A Handbook to Literature. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.
13. Holman, Hugh C. A Handbook to Literature. 6th ed. New York: Macmillan; London: Collier: 1992.
- 14.\* Wiener, Philip, P., ed. Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas. New York: Charles Scribner's, 1973 (5 vol. + index).
- 15.\* Seigneuret, Jean-Charles., ed. Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs. New York: Greenwood P, 1988 (2 vol.)
16. Coyle, M., et al., eds. Encyclopedia of Literature Criticism. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
17. Cuddon, J. A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory. 3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
18. Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia. 4th ed. Bruce Murphy, ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
19. Lentricchia, Frank, and McLaughlin, Thomas, eds. Critical Terms for Literary Study. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.

VI. Electronic Databases and Search Tools:

- 20.\* Wilsonline H. W. Wilson. Offers access, among others, to:

Art Index;  
Bibliographic Index;  
Biography Index;  
Book Review Digest;

Humanities Index, and especially

21.\* Modern Language Association (MLA) International Bibliography. New York: MLA, 1921-

22. Dialog Information Services. Offers access, among other databases, to:

National Newspaper Index;  
Arts and Humanities Citation Index;  
Dissertation Abstracts Online;  
Philosophers' Index

23. Charles Bressler, Literary Criticism. An Introduction to Theory and Practice. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999 (for web sites)

#### VII. Writing Tools:

24. Anson, Chris M. and Schweigler, Robert A. The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers. New York: Longman, 1997.

25.\* Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Latest Edition. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995.

26. [www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org): online MLA documentation style (continuously updates Gibaldi)

27. Cook, Catherine Clark. Line by Line. How to Improve Your Writing. New York: MLA & Houghton Mifflin, 1985.