

ENGLISH 303-04 SI: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE
(SPEAKING INTENSIVE - 3 CR.)

Professor Christian Moraru
Spring 2014

MW 2:00 – 3:15 PM; Graham 203
Office: MHRA 3125
Office Hours: MW 3:15 – 4:15 PM
(336) 834-9866
c_moraru@uncg.edu
http://www.uncg.edu/~c_moraru
<http://www.amazon.com/-/e/B001KI91Q0>

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: Required for English majors, English 303 provides an advanced, systematic introduction to literary-cultural study, interpretation, and research, familiarizing students with the fundamentals of modern, largely post-1900 literary and cultural criticism and with the theoretical models on which critical analysis is based.

Specifically, the course surveys and helps students apply *a range of influential approaches to literature and culture*, from the more traditional to the more innovative and recent. Thus, lecture and class discussion in this English 303 section focus on the historical emergence of interpretive methodologies that include psychoanalysis, structuralism and poststructuralism, identity, culture, and postcolonial/global studies; on their philosophical-theoretical sources; and on the schools, movements, orientations, and critical-theoretical vocabularies resulting from these approaches’ proliferation. Thus, English 303 has

- a *historical* component, insofar as English 303
 - a) covers primarily (without being limited to) modern and contemporary forms of analysis and
 - b) helps students get a historical perspective on the rise and development of criticism, theory, and the various directions illustrating them;

- a *theoretical-conceptual* component, for English 303 immerses students in the linguistic,

psychoanalytic, sociological, anthropological, and other theoretical works that have played a foundational role in the emergence of the critical approaches examined; and

- a *critical* component: English 303 ultimately aims to improve students' analytical competency.

That is, the class helps them understand and apply these critical approaches as they

- a) respond to the aesthetic and cultural qualities of texts as competent readers and writers capable of using professional tools of interpretation,
- b) develop, by using such instruments, cogent arguments in adequately researched and well-crafted essays, and
- c) show a good grasp of the relationships of literature and its rhetoric to history and culture.

This class uses both primary and secondary materials to present how critics and theorists view and interpret literature, culture, and their relations to society. To determine how effectively all three components of the course have been pursued, students are assessed on their ability

- a) to describe several (3-5) critical approaches with their pertinent terminologies; and
- b) to apply at least one of these approaches more extensively in a final research paper designed to indicate the extent to which students have met the English Major learning outcomes embedded in the course components.

CONTENT, SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES, AND METHODS: We all are, 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 “pre-critical” stage, as I call it—to professional or specialized criticism or interpretation, that is, to understanding how literary discourse comes to be what it is, how it works, and how and why it moves us. Thus, we will become aware of what literature means, how it does so, what it does to us, and how its effects depend on form and the cultural-historical context bearing on it. Reading of literary and theoretical texts, research, and student work are all keyed to these goals.

Very generally speaking, the course will follow the classical “schools-and-movements” method of presentation, with an emphasis on identifying, understanding, and employing *key critical concepts*—hence the role of theory in this class. Remarkably 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. As we will notice, some approaches dwell primarily on elements such as the context of the text (the historical ambiance of literary production, for example), while others focus on the author or on the text itself and its style. Depending on what these approaches favor, we should be able to differentiate among *distinct interpretive models*. These both dispute each other's claims and share significant premises and concerns. This is why, on the one hand, the distinctions among them are seldom clear-cut and, on the other hand, many of these approaches work best when they are combined with (or are at least mindful of) others. Nonetheless, by the end of the class you should know what these models are; how they work and when they work most effectively; where their limitations lie; and what specific terms are needed to define and use all this methodology.

STRUCTURE, EMPHASIS, AND COURSE MATERIALS: To work out the differences among these approaches, we will study some of the seminal *theoretical texts* they have stemmed from, but we will also go beyond theory. Thus, we will see how several critical models can be applied to our primary (“target”) text, Joseph O’Neill 2008 novel *Netherland*. The critical handbook adopted in the course (Herman Rapaport’s *Literary Theory Toolkit*) will help us come to terms with the notion that the same work can generate a spectrum of competing readings. Our discussion of *Netherland* will not seek so much to touch on all aspects of the novel as to illustrate *certain interpretations*. To produce these interpretations, we will rehearse specific *methods of reading* by drawing from the *theories* behind them (for which we will turn to the Richard J. Lane anthology) and by using the concepts explained by Rapaport’s *Toolkit*.

Overall, the course runs *chronologically, tracing the modern (post-WWI) history of critical theory and methodology* from psychoanalysis through identity studies and 21st-century global studies. The first 10 weeks or so of this English 303 section will be devoted to learning about our critical approaches and understanding how they might yield certain interpretations when applied to our primary text. The last weeks will be spent mostly on research, individual consultations with the instructor, and other kinds of work leading to your final project.

FORMAT: THIS ENGLISH 303 SECTION IS SPEAKING-INTENSIVE. Accordingly, the course combines opening lectures by the instructor and discussion, with emphasis on the latter. It also requires in-class group work and research of different kinds. In this section, students will present orally, individually and in groups, and will receive training in and feedback on effective public speaking, formal presentation, audience analysis, and related activities. The course requirements listed below generally reflect in-class oral activities and the stress on speaking and speech delivery skills in the context of our learning goals.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. *Class discussion*, with primary focus on broader issues and geared toward more articulated personal contributions. *Attendance and participation* are expected and will factor in the final grade (see below). Since this class combines lecture and discussion and is speaking-oriented, students’ active oral participation is critical. I expect you to come to class with your assignments completed, ready to ask questions, and 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 find yourself in disagreement with them.
2. *Small group discussion* (in class). Group work (4-5 groups for a class of 25) with focus on particular materials, applications of various critical methods to certain literary works, etc. Groups debate a topic and then designate a student to report the findings to the rest of us (5 min.). Presenters take turns throughout the session. This is collective work for which all group members receive the same grade.
3. *Midterm Exam*. This is an oral exam actually (10-15 min. long). During the exam, students are asked to define, describe, or identify several (at least three) of the critical methods learned by the time of the exam and briefly apply one or more of these methods to a short passage, theme, or aspect of our primary text.

4. *Final Oral Presentation:* Each student delivers a final, in-class *oral presentation* on a topic of his or her choice (10 min. followed by 4-5 min. of class discussion and feedback).

How to complete this assignment:

Prior to this presentation, students meet with me individually to select and talk about their topic, research for the project, format, and related matters. They turn in, on the day of the presentation, a *paper*, i. e., the written version of their talk (cca. 5 double-spaced p. altogether), in the typical, thesis-oriented essay form and accompanied by a brief bibliography featuring at least THREE pieces of criticism on the primary text besides this work and any other materials already used in class.

The oral paper must, essentially, *apply a critical method* (studied in our class) to a primary work, both chosen by you. The essay is basically the written version of the presentation. Like the paper itself, it should include: a) an introduction mentioning the work under discussion, the thesis, and the method employed; b) a brief description of the critical model or theory employed; c) an outline of, and any necessary context for, the primary source; d) the argument or treatment of evidence (analysis), which must incorporate criticism and theory; e) the conclusion.

Specifically, the paper/essay must use and reference consistently and explicitly ONE theoretical text (along with its title and author) from the Lane anthology, defining and applying at least ONE major concept or critical model/approach articulated in that text. Students should use the MLA format for the essay, which will be graded, too. Again, the written paper is due in class when the student is scheduled to deliver the presentation. The oral presentation is the most important project in this English 303 section, and we will work toward it individually (I will meet with students on a one-on-one basis once or twice), in groups, and collectively as a class.

Students submit a *1-p., single-spaced proposal* (which should feature all the information under points a-d above), then discuss it with the instructor. Once the proposal has been accepted and they have received feedback, they start working on the presentation. Also, students receive feedback on their presentations (from peers and instructor) in class, right after delivery. Before submitting the abstract, students are urged to consult with the instructor informally.

ORAL COMPETENCY: TRAINING, ASSESSMENT, FEEDBACK

1. As indicated earlier, I will meet with students at least once not only to discuss their final project and overall individual performance; I will also assess their midterm and final presentation, including the essay and bibliography. I will ask students to evaluate and generally respond to the presenters' performance.

2. I will circulate a *standard assessment sheet* indicating that students' formal speaking will be assessed as we go along, on both form and substance, more to the point, on: thesis-argument-conclusion structure (logic), for group and individual presentations; persuasiveness, clarity and accuracy of expression, format (time limits, etc.), body language, and related aspects (for all forms of speaking).

FINAL GRADE: The final grade breakdown is as follows:

Class participation (includes group work):	25%
Midterm exam:	30%
Final presentation (includes written paper):	45%

INSTRUCTION AND FEEDBACK: I will discuss SI issues throughout the session. I will provide feedback to groups as well as to students individually. The format, requirements, and techniques for the a) high-quality oral expression and b) the final presentation will be addressed in detail. I will also ask students to practice the delivery of their final project with a) peers; b) SI Center counselors, and then c) contact me for final revisions and suggestions.

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your work or the course. *I encourage you to make at least one "formal" appointment.* I will also hold a second round of formal conferences, where, besides discussing your final presentation, we will talk about your progress throughout the session.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. No late work 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 submission 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. And because tardiness disrupts class, too, be aware that coming in late 2 times counts as an absence.

NOTE ON BLACKBOARD MATERIALS: You must go to the English 303 Blackboard website the morning before each class to check if there is a HANDOUT posted for that day. If there is one (usually, there will be) download it and bring it with you to class.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Herman Rapaport, *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011 (“R” in the daily syllabus).
2. Richard J. Lane, ed. *Global Literary Theory: An Anthology*. New York: Routledge, 2013 (“L” in the daily syllabus).
3. Joseph O’Neill, *Netherland*. New York: Vintage, 2009.

Note: 1. Materials in print only (no e-books). Latest paperbacks whenever possible.
 2. Assignments are for the day they come under.
 3. Always bring to class the books needed for that day.

DAILY SYLLABUS:

Week 1

M 01/13 Presentation of the course: topics, goals, requirements, grading, testing, and policies. The steps: theory>method>use of method (by others)>and application or use of method (by you).
 Reading, writing, and research. Our speaking-intensive class. Evaluation of student work; reading groups. 303 Blackboard website. Course syllabus and discussion. Course materials and tools. Start reading *Netherland* (due 01/29).

W 01/15 “Precritical” vs. “critical” reading. Interpretation and methodology: organizing our critical models.
 Assignments: L xxi-xxxii; R ix-16

Week 2

M 01/20 **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday - No Class**

W 01/22 Library & Internet resources workshop #1 (Jackson Library; no readings for the day) CITI (Jenny Dale). During class time.

Week 3

M 01/27 Library & Internet resources workshop #2 (Jackson Library; no readings for the day) CITI (Jenny Dale). During class time.

W 01/29 PSYCHOANALYSIS: Author, authority, meaning
 Introduction to Freudianism
 Assignments: R 41-43; Freud, L 237-267

Week 4

M 02/03 Psychoanalysis

Assignments: Freud (discussion), ctd.

W 02/05 Psychoanalysis
Assignments: Lacan, L 268-273; Felman, L 274-280

Week 5

M 02/10 Psychoanalysis: a philosophical and political critique
Assignments: Deleuze and Guattari, L 296-301

W 02/12 Psychoanalyzing *Netherland*

Week 6

M 02/17 STRUCTURALISM to POSTSTRUCTURALISM
Introduction to the “linguistic turn” in the humanities
From author to text; structural analysis
Assignments: Saussure, L 39-43; R 38; 178-197

W 02/19 From structure to deconstruction and from text to intertextuality
Assignments: Derrida, L 94-106; R 83-85
Discussing the midterm

Week 7

M 02/24 Poststructuralism
Assignments: R 45-46; 197-215
Structural and poststructural analyses of *Netherland*
Signup sheet, oral exam

W 02/26 Identity and culture studies: gender, sex, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, place;
culture and individual/collective experience. The self, the other, and the relation
Assignments: R 46-57; 263-287

Week 8

M 03/03 **Midterm exam (oral): MHRA 3125, 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

W 03/05 **Midterm exam: MHRA 3125, 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM**

Week 9

M 03/10 **Spring Break - No Class**

W 03/12 **Spring Break - No Class**

Week 10

M 03/17 POSTCOLONIAL and GLOBAL STUDIES
Identity, culture, power: the geopolitical, the postcolonial, and the global
Assignments: R 58-64; Said, L 530-539; Spivak, L 521-529

W 03/19 Global studies
 Assignments: L 860-865; Gupta, L 867-875; Brennan, L 876-887
Final presentations: sign-up sheet
Individual conferences: sign-up sheet

Week 11

M 03/24 Global studies
 Assignments: Xie, L 888-901; Ahmed and Donnan, L 902-917
 Postcolonial interpretations of *Netherland*

W 03/26 Global studies
 Assignments: Walkowitz, L 918-929
 Global studies interpretations of *Netherland*

Week 12

M 03/31 Final presentation - individual conferences in my office during and outside class
 time (I): **MHRA 3125, 2:00 PM – 5: 00 PM**
 1-p. proposal due (e-mail)
See signup sheet, final presentation; no class meeting

W 04/02 Final presentation - individual conferences in my office (II)
 1-p. proposal due (e-mail)
MHRA 3125, 2:00 PM – 5: 00 PM
See signup sheet, final presentation; no class meeting

Week 13

M 04/07 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (I)

W 04/09 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (II)

Week 14

M 04/14 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (III)

W 04/16 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (IV)

Week 15

M 04/21 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (V)

W 04/23 Final presentations (in-class; followed by discussion) (VI)

Week 16

M 04/28 Last meeting
 Course overview
 Course evaluations