

## English 6415: Literary Theory and Criticism

Spring 2021

Thursday 4:30-7:20 Online: Classes held on BigBlueButton via Moodle

Instructor: Professor Swope

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For individual meetings, email me for an appointment

**Required Texts:** *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leitch (3<sup>rd</sup> edition preferably): <https://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad.aspx?id=4294994930>  
*Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord

**Course Description:** This course introduces students to the history of ideas or the schools of thought which have significantly impacted our understanding of and approach to the study of literature. The readings will provide an opportunity for us to address three questions that all students of literature must eventually confront: **Why do we read? What do we read? And How do we read?** With these three questions in mind, we will not approach “theory” as something separate from the study of “literature.” One of the secrets of the English profession has long been that we do not so much teach literature as an approach to literature, i.e., a “theory” of how to read texts. While much of this goes unspoken, even if this marks your first course designed around the study of theory, be aware that in one form or another you have been learning it all along. This course simply engages theories of reading in a more self-conscious manner, allowing us to analyze the pros and cons or social and political implications of various ideas and approaches.

**Requirements:** The obvious requirement is that you **READ**. To varying degrees the readings on our list will challenge both the limits of our vocabularies as well as our capacity to grasp difficult concepts. That is ultimately part of the fun. Being introduced to the history of theory and criticism is much like learning a new language. The experience can be frustrating and alienating, but once we grasp the key words/concepts, a new world of thought becomes available.

Along with the reading I ask you to complete a **JOURNAL** entry for each week. Each journal entry should address the following question: What is at stake or what are the potential consequences resulting from the ideas put forth in this text? More simply, why does it matter? You should consider both the consequences for our study of literature (how might this change the way I read?) as well as for other, possibly broader issues (how might this alter the way I view myself or my world?). You have two options for completing the rest of the entry. You may provide a specific example of a “text” (not necessarily high literature or literature at all) and discuss how the theory in question would impact your reading of that text. Or you may evaluate the merits of each theory/argument. What are its strengths? Its flaws or limitations? You can choose to address either the given week’s readings as a group or to focus on one essay in particular so long as you meet the criteria above. Each entry should be approximately 2 typed pages in length. I will not call for these each week but will expect that you have them available for reference during class discussions.

Each student will also make a 15-20 minute **PRESENTATION** on either a “theoretical

school” or an individual theory/theorist, detailing its components as well as its impact (on literature as well as on society in general). You do NOT need to cover the readings but rather should focus on the author’s biography as well as the historical context or any other pertinent information that supplements the readings themselves.

Lastly, each student will complete both a **Mid-Term Exam** (take home) and a **Final Paper**. For the mid-term I will give you a choice of questions, each of which will ask you to compare/contrast and evaluate specified theoretical ideas. For the final paper I will ask you to place the theoretical/critical essays from this class in dialogue with another “text” of your choosing (again text can mean both traditional works of literature as well as film or other artifacts of popular culture).

Participation	10%
Presentation	10%
Journal	30%
Mid-term	20%
Final Paper	30%

**Schedule:** (subject to revision)

Th 1/21	Introduction to Course
Th 1/28	<b>Marx and the Birth of Cultural Materialism:</b> Marx and Engels 655-59, 667-75; Althusser 1285-1311; Williams 1337-50; Read introductory material on Hegel.
Th 2/4	<b>Psychoanalysis and Literary Criticism:</b> Freud 789-820; Lacan 1111-37; Žižek 2225-42; Read intro to Saussure.
Th 2/11	<b>Poststructuralism and Deconstruction:</b> Barthes 1268-72, 1277-82; Foucault 1394-1409; De Man 1314-26; Derrida 1608-1628; Read intro material on “Structuralism” and Levi Strauss
Th 2/18	<b>Birth of Cultural Studies:</b> Gramsci 929-35; Horkheimer and Adorno 1033-50; Benjamin 976-96; Hall 1705-1717; Hebdige 2309-2316
Th 2/25	<b>New Historicism and Bio-Power:</b> Foucault 1409-1450; read intro material on Greenblatt and New Historicism
Th 3/4	<i>Society of the Spectacle</i> , Guy Debord
Th 3/11	Film (to be decided)
Th 3/18	<b>Mid-term Due</b>
Th 3/25	<b>Feminist Criticism to Gender Studies to Identity Politics and the Body:</b> Cixous 1869-86; Mulvey 1954-65; Butler 2375-88; Harraway 2043-65

- Th 4/1        **No Class: Semana Santa**
- Th 4/8        **Race and Ethnicity:** Gates 2244-52; Anzaldúa 1986-97; bell hooks 2318-25; Gilroy 2391-2410; Nelson 2633-38
- Th 4/15       **Postmodern Theory or Theories of Postmodernism:** Lyotard 1385-88; Baudrillard 1483-92; Jameson 1758-71; Deleuze and Guattari 1374-82
- Th 4/22       **Postcolonial Theory:** Said 1783-1805; Spivak 2001-12; Bhaba 2152-71
- Th 4/29       **New Materialism, Eco-Criticism, and Post-Humanism:**  
Bradidotti 2329-52; Bennett 2434-50; Morton 2621-31  
**Final Class: Journal Due**
- Th 5/6        **Final Paper Due**

The University of Puerto Rico prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in any of its forms including that of sexual harassment. According to the Institutional Policy Against Harassment at the University of Puerto Rico, Certification Num. 130, 2014-2015 from the Board of Governors, any student subjected to acts constituting sexual harassment, must turn to the Office of the Student Ombudsperson, the Office of the Dean of Students, and/or the Coordinator of the Office of Compliance with Title IX for an orientation and/or a formal complaint.

**Sexual harassment policy:** “The University of Puerto Rico prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in any of its forms including that of sexual harassment. According to the Institutional Policy Against Harassment at the University of Puerto Rico, Certification Num. 130, 2014-2015 from the Board of Governors, any student subjected to acts constituting sexual harassment, must turn to the Office of the Student Ombudsperson, the Office of the Dean of Students, and/or the Coordinator of the Office of Compliance with Title IX for an orientation and/or a formal complaint.

Los estudiantes que reciban servicios de Rehabilitación Vocacional deben comunicarse con la profesora al inicio del semestre para planificar el acomodo razonable y equipo asistivo necesario conforme a las recomendaciones de la Oficina de Asuntos para las Personas con Impedimiento (OAPI) del Decanato de Estudiantes. También aquellos estudiantes con necesidades especiales que requieren de algún tip de asistencia o acomodo deben comunicarse con el/la profesor/a.

**Integridad académica:** La Universidad de Puerto Rico promueve los más altos estándares de integridad académica y científica. El Artículo 6.2 del Reglamento General de Estudiantes de la UPR (Certificación Núm. 13, 2009-2010, de la Junta de Síndicos) establece que “la deshonestidad académica incluye, pero no se limita a: acciones fraudulentas, la obtención de notas o grados académicos valiéndose de falsas o fraudulentas simulaciones, copiar total o parcialmente la labor académica de otra persona, plagiar total o parcialmente el trabajo de otra persona, copiar total o parcialmente las respuestas de otra persona a las preguntas de un examen, haciendo o consiguiendo que otro tome en su nombre cualquier prueba o examen oral o escrito, así como la ayuda o facilitación para que otra persona incurra en la referida

conducta". Cualquiera de estas acciones estará sujeta a sanciones disciplinarias en conformidad con el procedimiento disciplinario establecido en el Reglamento General de Estudiantes de la UPR vigente.