

English 422: Postmodern Literary Theory
Section 101, Fall 2006
Syllabus & Policy Statement

Surely you must have realized, if only by the way I conduct them, that these sessions are not analogous to so-called scientific meetings. It is in this sense that I ask you to take careful note of the following, that in these open sessions, you aren't by any means on display, despite the fact that we have outside guests, sympathizers and others. You mustn't try to say elegant things, aimed at putting you in the limelight and increasing the esteem in which you are already held. You are here to be receptive to things you haven't as yet seen, and which are in principle unexpected. So, why not make the most of this opportunity by raising questions at the deepest level you can, even if that comes out in a way that is a bit hesitant, vague, even baroque.

--Jacques Lacan, Seminars (III "The Symbolic Universe")

T/R: 2:00 – 3:15
HUMB 160

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Office Hours: T/R 9:00 – 11:00a. I set aside these office hours for you – please feel free to drop during office hours or make an appointment to see me during these hours. It is probably best that you let me know you're coming by, or that you'd like to make an appointment to see me ahead of time, in case of conflicts. If these hours do not suit your schedule, I will make an appointment with you for a mutually convenient time.

Texts:

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
Graff, Gerald. *Professing Literature: an Institutional History*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
Richter, David H. *Falling Into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature*. 2nd Ed. Boston: Bedford, 2000.

Course Goals: To carry on a sustained and focused inquiry into the major schools, figures, and works that have come to define what we mean by "theory" in English departments since 1968, or since the publication of *Das Kapital*, or since Freud, or however one wants to mark the moment when questions of power, politics, and identity became the focus of inquiries into what, how, why, and when we read/know.

I use 1968 to mark this period, because it is the date of the student/worker's revolutions in France. It is also a date that is approximately coincident with the seminal works of postmodernity: Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962; Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, 1967; Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 1969 and *The History of Sexuality I*, 1976; Althusser's "Ideology, Ideological State Apparatuses," 1970; Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," 1975; Said's "Orientalism," 1978, among others. You'll see that one of the foremost postmodern literary critics, Terry Eagleton, dates this "transformation which has overtaken theory in this century" much earlier. Thought it may not seem intuitive to you yet, these historical political and intellectual events mightily influenced—even

transformed—what we mean by literary study. Until quite recently, in any case, one could not refer to this important moment in intellectual history—perhaps best understood by the French as “la pensée 68”—without being assigned a position on the political chess board. However one envisions such a transformation, the primary goal of this course is to piece together an understanding of how various epistemological positions are determined by politics, and vice versa, and how these positions relate directly and essentially to the study of language and literature.

To study “postmodern” literary theory, then, one must be aware that the rise of “theory” as we know it was coincident with the development of departments of English in North America. Because one can say that the process of acquiring ways of speaking “critically” about “literature” as a disciplinary concern is in itself a precursor to and a manifestation of postmodern thought, we will survey many of the major schools, figures, and works that can be grouped under this rubric.

A supporting goal of this course then, is to explore the really quite surprising transformation of what Gerald Graff describes, in the innocent description, as “something one enjoys in one’s spare time” and, in the more knowing description, as “the socialization of a particular class,” into a labor, a study, and finally, a set of recognizable research agendas.

The two-pronged primary goal of this course then, is to gain some context for the idea of “literary theory” itself, and, while learning to recognize that each of the ways we think about literature *is a theory*, to learn to articulate differences and conflicts between theories and to position ourselves in relation them. The underlying assumption here is that we are better off naming the theories to which we subscribe and the beliefs underlying those theories than we are by either assuming there is a single correct way to talk about literature or by pretending that no theory exists to engender our beliefs.

Organization of the course: The course will be run as a seminar, with significant readings due for discussion at each class meeting. In general, we will use Gerald Graff’s institutional history to consider the transformation of University studies in the late 19th century that drew together particular objects of study as worthwhile for the transmission of culture. We then use Terry Eagleton to introduce the classes/schools of theory that were adapted for the analysis of text and to fully explore how politics, power, culture, and identity emerged as the guiding categories of postmodern analysis. Richter’s collection will serve to provide examples of how specific critical approaches inspire postmodern analyses and how particular work actually comes to define the schools of thought.

Postmodern literary criticism is, to most scholars, clearly a political activity, and English 422 this semester will explicitly consider the possibility, the power, and the political implications and manifestations of the work of studying and theorizing reading and writing. We’ll be concentrating our efforts this semester on the reasons why anyone would care to “critique literature,” what this activity has to do with the university education, and what literature itself has to do with the life of an educated citizen in an increasingly democratized community.

Participation: In a Nutshell—*You must come to class and you must participate in class discussion. If you don’t, you can’t pass the course.*

The main work of this class is the discussion of assigned readings. I will assign a part of your final grade to attendance and participation. A big part of being a literary critic is learning how to rap about literature with your peers. Now is the time to throw off any remaining anxieties and take risks by asking off-the-wall questions and trying out new ideas. Remember, too, that it is a compliment when folks engage in, critically analyze, and make suggestions about your thinking and your work. It’s important that even as we voice our own concerns and interpretations, we work together to create a classroom environment that encourages and supports all viewpoints. This does not mean that either you or I have to 1) agree with

everyone, or 2) keep silent when you don't. In fact, it's only through deep exchange and dialogue that we actually grow as thinkers. Let's create a community of inquiry that makes this course worth the effort.

It is absolutely essential that you come to each class meeting prepared.

It's no coincidence, nor personal preference on the part of the instructor/evaluator, that folks who participate during class time tend to get better grades.

Your enthusiasm for contributing to class discussions should be surpassed only by demonstrations of actual familiarity with the assigned readings.

Attendance: Note that the University's general attendance policy defines excessive absences as missing "two or more consecutive class meetings," and that the University does not recognize any absences as "excused" except for those that are a result of the student being removed from class for attending a university-authorized off-campus function (see *Academic Bulletin*). These "excusable" functions must be cleared by the sponsoring faculty member through the Office of Academic Affairs.

My attendance policy is as follows: You are granted three absences without them counting against your grade. You do not owe me *any explanation* whatsoever for these absences; it's not my job to determine whether your life circumstances constitute "good reasons" or not. Beyond the three absences and those covered by permission from the Office of Academic Affairs, your grade can suffer. If for any reason you miss four or more class meetings (that's two week's worth of class meetings), you may not pass the class. More than six absences will constitute automatic failure of the course. Even students who excel in all other areas are subject to this policy. Use your three absences wisely because you may need them in the event of an emergency.

Please advise me in writing during the first two weeks of the course if you will be missing class in deference to religious obligations.

If you do miss a class, you are expected to turn up prepared for the next class meeting. If this means visiting with me about what you missed, you'll need to make an appointment before the next class meeting. Please don't expect me or anyone else to fill you in during class time.

Major Assignments and Grading Criteria: In addition to keeping up with the reading, this course requires students to complete five additional assignments during the course of the semester. Two of these assignments are cumulative and support and extend the work of the classroom itself: A series of 10 short reading responses compiled as notebook entries and a series of short quizzes. The third major requirement is the essay requirement: an "exploratory" essay due at midterm and a seminar paper due on the last day of class. Fourth, students will prepare a short lecture/presentation for the class. Finally, each student will submit a Portfolio of their work during finals week; this portfolio will include a short cover letter or synthesis essay as an introduction to the portfolio. Graduate students should see me about curricular requirements for graduate credit.

- ✓ Reading Responses
- ✓ Quizzes
- ✓ Exploratory Essay, Analysis Essay (Seminar Paper)
- ✓ Presentation
- ✓ Portfolio

Insofar as each of these assignments should be a natural outcome of your thinking about our readings and classroom work, they are not six separate and discrete assignments. The sequence has been designed in

the hope that you will take the opportunity to link tasks, to build ideas, and to create something bigger than the sum of its parts by the end of the class.

Credit for the course will be assigned as follows.

10 points	<u>Attendance and Participation</u> : See relevant sections above.
20 points	<u>Reading Responses</u> : Exactly as they sound. This is a standard-issue assignment, and I hope that most, if not all of you, have had some exposure to short writing assignments that are responses to readings. You will write one response for a week's readings. You may decide the readings to which you would like to respond, but in all, you'll need to have 10 completed by the end of the semester. At least half of these are due by mid-term, and I will not collect any reading responses after week fourteen (14).
10 points	<u>Quizzes</u> : For the purpose of checking reading comprehension and to be used as heuristics for the week's discussions.
15 points	<u>Exploratory Essay</u> : A short, speculative, formal paper dealing with the materials we've covered in class. One uses an exploratory essay to think through topics and ideas; it is often used to build a larger thesis or argument.
15 points	<u>Analysis Essay/Seminar Paper</u> : Your "seminar paper" is the drawing together of ideas from your reading and thinking in an upper-level seminar course. This is a substantial and cohesive research work, and is therefore generally a longer formal paper than the "exploratory" essay. In this particular version of a seminar paper, you will use ideas from specific theorists and theory that you've read to analyze an outside work.
10 points	<u>Presentation</u> : A 10-15 minute "lecture" in which you present to the class one of the essays from the Richter text. Generally, these talks should present a work which we have not covered formally in class, but exceptions can be made in coordination with me.
20 points	<u>Portfolio</u> : A collection, or edited collection, of your work from this class, organized in a manner that would demonstrate what you have learned in the course to someone unfamiliar with our work during the semester. The portfolio will include an original cover letter or cover essay.

*Note: You will always be welcome to structure an assignment for this class as one that could also be used for credit in another class as well. You must receive approval from me for a project of this sort, and you must also get approval from the other invested instructor/s before going ahead with such a plan.

Manuscript Presentation: The style, or presentation of the work you submit for evaluation should be appropriate to its task. The various types of writing we do are obviously of different degrees of formality. But, in general, university work at this level is turned in on substantial paper, double-spaced with one-inch margins, and in 12-point font. It is possible that you hand write your notebook/reading response entries, but that only works if your writing is legible and you don't "let yourself off the hook" a bit with this informal method. Work of a more creative nature may also be submitted for credit, but be sure and check with me about such a project beforehand, to be sure we agree about curricular expectations and evaluation. English scholars prepare their work in accordance with the *MLA Style Guide*, so that's the style we'll be adhering to in this course.

Conferences: I encourage you to make appointment/s for at least one individual conference at or before mid-term. Mandatory individual conferences will be scheduled during the last week of class. At your request, I will provide you an advisory grade in any private conference.

Academic Misconduct / Plagiarism: This is serious business. Issues of Academic Misconduct will be handled according to the University's policy as described by the Student Academic Conduct Policy. Academic misconduct will result in failing this course and possibly other sanctions. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, submitting someone else's work as your own (that person is also subject to sanctions), failing to give appropriate credit to all sources used in your work, submitting a paper of your own for credit in more than one course without the prior consent of both instructors, or in any way distributing drafts of a class member's work without the permission of the author. I will not tolerate any form of plagiarism in this class. I want to read only your work.

Listserv/Web forum: Our class may have its own online discussion list or Web forum. I imagine such a forum as a way of continuing our class discussions. Although I'll "moderate" this area, think of it as your own space as students – an extension of the classroom. You should think of it as a place where you can begin and continue discussion about issues of interest to class readings, writing, and discussions. I'll occasionally use it to post messages of class-wide interest (and you can do the same), contribute to discussions, and, of course, answer any questions specifically directed to me. Because this space is an extension of the classroom, and each of us is an equal member of such an electronic space, please remember that rules of respectful interaction apply here as they do in the physical classroom. Students sometimes find digital "spaces" helpful to classroom work; I'd love to have your thoughts on the matter.

Students with Disabilities: If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to self identify. You can ascertain the steps involved in documenting a disability by contacting the Office of Special Student Services and by providing the required documentation to that office. Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. I'm glad to help you in any way I can with that process. You should also call the OSSS if you have general questions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The phone numbers for the OSSS are 460-7212/7213. If you have a condition which may affect your ability to exit safely from the premises in an emergency or which may cause an emergency during class, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with me and/or the OSSS.

And, Finally: You are responsible for abiding by the terms set forth in this Policy Statement and any subsequent additions and amendments; consider it a contract. As such, it is to your distinct advantage to fully comprehend this and other documents. To this end, if anything about course policies, procedures, and/or scheduling seems fuzzy, or disturbing, or confusing, please ask me to clarify.

English 422, Section 101

EH422 Postmodern Literary Theory
 University of South Alabama
 Fall 2006
 Dr. Moira Amado Miller

Skeleton Day-by-Day Schedule

[This schedule is a working document and is subject to meaningful revision throughout the semester. We will plan changes together, so you will be given verbal notice of all changes during class time. Please make revisions directly on this schedule.]

Week 1

Tuesday 22 August Why talk about literature? What's literature? How do we talk about literature?

Thursday 24 Graff: Chapter 1 "Introduction: The Humanist Myth"
 Eagleton: Prefaces, Introduction

Week 2

T 29 August Graff: Chapter 2 "The Classical College"

R 31 August Graff: Chapter 3 "Oratorical Culture and the Teaching of English"
 Richter: "Introduction"

Week 3

[M 4 September: Labor Day Holiday]

T 5 September Eagleton: Chapter 1 "The Rise of English"

R 7 September Richter: Introduction to "Part One: Why We Read"

Week 4

T 12 September Graff: Chapters 4, 5, 6, & 7 "The Early Professional Era: 1875-1915"

R 14 September Richter: (Vendler, 31; Graff 40)

Week 5

T 19 September Eagleton: Chapter 2 "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory"

R 21 September STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (Viswanathan, Freire, hooks, Himmelfarb, Ohmann, Daring)

Week 6

T 26 September Graff: Chapters 8, 9, & 10 "Scholars versus Critics: 1915-1950"

R 28 September Richter: (Menand 103)

Week 7

T 3 October Eagleton: Chapter 3 "Structuralism and Semiotics"

R 5 October Richter: (Scholles 111)

Week 8

T 10 October Graff: Chapters 11, 12, 13, & 14 "Scholars versus Critics: 1940-1965"

R 12 October **EXPLORATORY ESSAY DUE**

Week 9

- T 17 October Eagleton: Chapter 4 “Post-Structuralism”
- R 19 October Richter: (Herrnstein Smith, 147; Deleuze and Guattari 167)

Week 10

- T 24 October Graff: “Problems of Theory 1965 – ”
Richter: Introduction to “Part Two: What We Read”
- R 26 October BRING TO CLASS “*la pensée 68*” CONTRIBUTION

Week 11

- T 31 October Eagleton: Chapter 5 “Psychoanalysis”
- R 2 November STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (Robinson, Gates, Radway, Purves, Gillory, Bloom)

Week 12

- T 7 November Eagleton: Chapter 6 “Conclusion: Political Criticism”
- R 9 November Richter: (Kosofsky Sedgwick; 183, Said 189)

Week 13

- T 14 November Richter: Introduction to “Part Three: How We Read”
- R 16 November Eagleton: “Afterword” – *Find a topic for your analysis essay/seminar paper based on an idea from this chapter, or add to your existing ideas with Eagleton’s work here.*

Week 14

- T 21 November Richter: (Barthes, Fish, Dasenbrock)
- R 23 November [Thanksgiving Holiday]

Week 15

- T 28 November Richter: (Moi, Kolodny, Morrison, Spivak)
- R 30 November STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (Rabinowitz, Gilbert and Gubar, Achebe, Harris, Booth, Nussbaum, Tucker)

Week 16

- T 5 December **Last Day of Classes**
SEMINAR PAPERS DUE
- R 7 December Final Exams Begin
PORTFOLIOS DUE
SCHEDULE FINAL CONFERENCE FOR THIS WEEK

Saturday 9 December Commencement

Week 17

- T 12 December Final Day of Exams Week
FINAL DAY for STUDENT CONFERENCES: WEDNESDAY, 13th
- F 15 December Final Grade Web Entry due by 10:00a