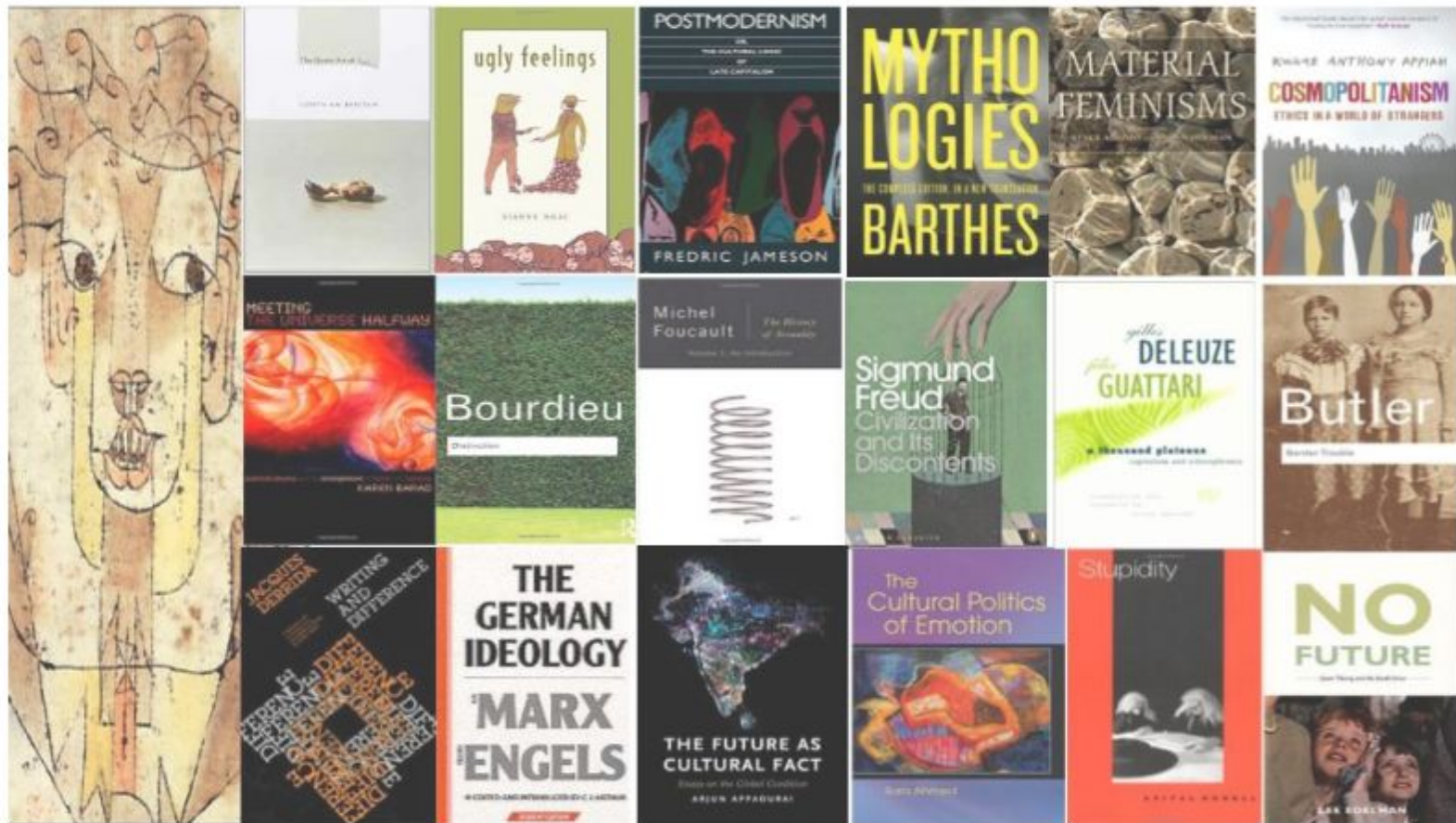


English 682: Recent Literary Criticism (M 4:00 - 6:50)

Professor Christine Hoffmann

Colson 329 (Office Hours Monday 1:00-3:00 or by appointment)

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English 682 surveys the theories of major schools of criticism, including post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, postcolonial studies, affect theory, cultural studies, queer studies, ecocriticism and various historicisms. Participants will have multiple opportunities to apply these theories to selected works, including

Sam Barlow's *Her Story*

Jordan Peele's *US*

Jon Bois's *1776*

China Mieville's *Three Moments of an Explosion*

Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*

Course Texts to Purchase

Beginning Theory | Edition: 4

Peter Barry

ISBN: 9781526121790

Can the Subaltern Speak?:

Reflections on the History of an Idea

Rosalind Morris (Editor)

ISBN: 9780231143851

The Cultural Politics of Emotion Edition: 2

Sara Ahmed

ISBN: 9781138805033

Waste | Edition: 15

Brian Thill

ISBN: 9781628924367

Shopping Mall | Edition: 17

Newton

ISBN: 9781501314827

Course Objectives

To distinguish between major schools of recent literary criticism.

To articulate the applications of theoretical criticism to literary texts as well as to social & civic circumstances.

To write valid (that is, professional, persuasive and artful) interpretations of literary texts.

To discover and investigate the possibilities of thinking, speaking, feeling, advocating, resisting and otherwise maneuvering through 21st-century culture with both intellectual sophistication and a practical commitment to ethics and social justice.

Evaluation/Grading

I will evaluate your performance in this course according to the criteria explained in detail below. You won't see point or percentage breakdowns as much as descriptions of the professional habits and behaviors I expect in graduate-level work. If you meet and/or exceed the expectations outlined for the following categories, you'll get an A. If you fail to meet the expectations outlined in any category, you most likely will not get an A.

Participation (2 parts)

1. Attendance, Preparation, Verbal Contributions

You will meet expectations if you attend every class meeting and participate diligently in the discussion. That means speaking up regularly to further conversation, generate debate, ask questions, attempt to summarize material, encourage the contributions of your classmates, etc. There are many ways to participate, and, yes, listening carefully is one of those ways. But in a graduate-level class that meets once a week, **you have to talk**. If we don't hear your voice at all during a class meeting, or only hear it once in ~3 hours, you have not met expectations for the course.

A note on the reading:

As you might expect, there is a lot of reading in this class -- 100-200 pages per week, and some of those pages are very difficult. Obviously, in order to participate substantially in class, you need to do the reading. And to do the reading, you need to pace yourself. Do not try to read everything the night before or even the weekend before. Yes, if you start the week's reading on Wednesday or Thursday, the stuff you read then probably won't be as fresh in your mind as the stuff you read on Sunday night, but that's okay. In any week, you'll digest some parts of the course texts better than others; theory courses and many theoretical texts are set up to reward diligence - a chapter you get to at the end of a book may clarify something you read in the beginning and just could not make sense of.

2. Discussion Questions

You will meet or exceed expectations if each week you **bring to class at least 1 discussion question** that engages some specific aspect of the week's reading that surprised you, baffled you, troubled you, inspired you, etc. By "some specific aspect," I mean you should be able to point to a specific page or pages in the book and say, "This right here! This phrasing, or this far-out claim, or this seeming contradiction, or this Britishism I had to Google, or this instigation to activism, or this cheap shot at a person or group or rival school of thought ... is what got my goat or touched my heart or alienated my lover or ruined my appetite or leaked my brain matter all over the couch but, like, in a good way, this week."

Write your question on one side of a notecard. On the other side of the notecard, write the citation information for the text that inspired your question. Also write the page # or #s that most directly inspired your question, and/or a direct quotation if it's short enough to fit.

Finally, "tag" your card with 2-4 key words. I will collect these notecards at the beginning of each class session, then redistribute them for various activities we may do in class.

example:

Side 1 (Question)

As mythologists, when we identify a myth, does that mean we should or must view it as cynically as Barthes views Romans in the Movies or the Great Family of Man or, like, basically anything that gives joy and comfort to the middle class? I guess what I'm asking is can we identify mythologies without being such jerks about it? Without assuming positions of superiority over all those dumb "true believers?"

Side 2 (Citation + Tags)

"The mythologist cuts himself off from all the myth consumers, and this is no small matter.... [W]hen a myth reaches the entire community, it is from the latter that the mythologist must become estranged if he wants to liberate the myth" (272).

Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today."
Mythologies. Jonathan Cape, trans. Hill and Wang, 1972, 215-274.

#Structuralism #Myth #Barthes #Cynicism

Mid(ish)term Exam

You'll take stock of your progress learning the major distinctions between various critical schools by sitting down for a straightforward vocabulary test. You'll meet expectations if you receive at least an 80% on this test.

Writing Assignments

You will meet or exceed expectations for the course when you complete 1 of the following 3 writing assignments at any point during the semester.

Option 1: Write two short essays of 5-6 double-spaced pages. Each short essay should apply a theoretical approach, one we've covered in class, to one of the works of literature selected for class and listed on the syllabus. You should incorporate the language or ideas of at least 4 secondary sources into your argument. Include a Works Cited page with each submission.

Option 2: Write a 10-15 page essay (double spaced, with a Works Cited page) that applies a specific critical approach to one of the works specifically selected for this course and listed on the syllabus. You should incorporate the language or ideas of at least 8 secondary sources into your argument.

Option 3: Write an Object Lessons essay (1500-2000 words) AND submit a pitch for it to The Atlantic at the link <http://objectsofobjects.com/contact/>. You'll have the books *Waste* and *Shopping Mall* as models, but look at several essays on the website. These are composed specifically for a digital environment (note the hyperlinks); they're also written to be accessible to a non-academic audience, but you'll see they include evidence of research and analysis and other skills you'll be honing in this course. Instead of a Works Cited page with citations, aim to embed at least 8 hyperlinks to relevant content in the text of your essay.

Professional Development Checklist

You will meet or exceed expectations for the course when you take part in at least 3 of the following professional development activities, at any time during the semester, plus submit the required follow-up materials.

- Attend a department event the topic(s) of which are somehow related to a theoretical approach. Write a one-page response to the event.
- Attend a campus event the topic(s) of which are somehow related to a theoretical approach. Write a one-page response to the event.
- Attend a neighboring institution event the topic(s) of which are somehow related to a theoretical approach. Write a one-page response to the event.
- Apply to a Folger scholarly program. As the Folger University rep, I'll be the one who signs off on your proposal.
- Apply for a Humanities Center grant. Send me a copy of your application and/or forward me the email acknowledging its receipt by the Center.
- Apply for a WV Humanities Council grant. Send me a copy of your application and/or forward me the email acknowledging its receipt by the Council.
- Organize a conference panel. Send me the cfp to which you are responding or with which you will advertise your call.
- Organize a local event (a reading, a viewing, a book club meeting, a protest, etc.). Send me some materials related to your event's advertisement or reception.
- Read an essay or full-length book written by a critical theorist (a book not already included in the syllabus, obvs); submit an idea for a course assignment or a lecture plan that you might use should you ever teach this theorist's work to students.
- Other? (Check with me first about additional activities that you think belong on this list.)

Schedule of Readings

Week 1. August 26: Background on Un-Recent Criticism: Formalism and Structuralism

We'll play Sam Barlow's [Her Story](#) together in class
Optional prep reading: [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 1

Week 2. September 9: Structuralism and Poststructuralism

Read [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 2
Read Barthes's [Mythologies](#), [excerpt](#)

Read [17776](#)

Week 3. September 16: Poststructuralism and Postmodernism

Read [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 3 and Chapter 4
Read [Derrida's](#) "That Dangerous Supplement"
Read [Nietzsche's](#) "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"
Revisit your notes on [Her Story](#) so we can talk about it in class

Week 4. September 23: Marxist Criticism Field Trip

Meet at 4:15 in the Food Court at the Morgantown Mall in Westover

Read [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 8
Read [The Shopping Mall](#)
Read Marx's [1844 Manuscripts](#), pages 28-35 ("Estranged Labor")
Read Althusser's "[Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses](#)," just the last two sections (*Ideology is a 'Representation' ... and Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects*)
Read Benjamin's "[Theses on the Philosophy of History](#)"

Week 5. September 30: New, Newer and Un- Historicisms

Read [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 9 and pages 304-313
Read Greenblatt's "[Invisible Bullets](#)"
Read Foucault's "Panopticism" from [Discipline and Punish](#)
Read Terence Hawkes' "[Telmah](#)"

Week 6. October 7: Affect

Read "[Affect Theory Dossier: An Introduction](#)"
Read Ahmed's [The Cultural Politics of Emotion](#), chapters 1-5

Week 7. October 14: Psychoanalysis

Read [Beginning Theory](#) Chapter 5
Read Freud's "[The Uncanny](#)"
Read [Selection](#)

from Alison Bechdel's [Are You My Mother?](#)

Week 8. October 21: Affect

Meet in Downtown Library Lobby

Finish Ahmed's [The Cultural Politics of Emotion](#)
Read Lauren Berlant, from [Cruel Optimism](#)
Watch [Pan's Labyrinth](#) before class (copy in my mailbox for short-term checkout)

Week 9. October 28: Postcolonial Criticism

Read *Beginning Theory* Chapter 10

Read pages 1-138 in *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea*

Watch Jordan Peele's *US* before class (copy in my mailbox for short-term checkout)

Week 10. November 4: Vocabulary (noteven closeto) Midterm in class

Read Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics"

Week 11-12. November 18: Feminism & Queer Theory

Read *Beginning Theory* Chapters 6 and 7

Read Butler's "[Imitation and Gender Insubordination](#)"

Read Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, [excerpt](#)

Read Munoz's *Cruising Utopia*, [intro](#) and [chapter one](#)

Read Elliot's "[Exploring Rifts in Transgender, Queer, and Feminist Theories](#)"

articles I mentioned about queerness and the nonhuman:

Karen Barad: [Nothingness...](#) and [Queer Performativity](#)

Puar: [Assemblage Theory](#)

Week 13. December 2: Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, Vital Materialism

Read *Beginning Theory* Chapter 13 and pages 335-341

Read *Waste*

Read Mahon's "Posthumanism - A [Dialogue](#) of Sorts" (it's the introduction to the Google book)

Read three stories from China Mieville's *Three Moments of an Explosion*

Read Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, [chapter 3](#)

Week 14. December 9: Theory Free-for-All

Pick a theoretical approach we haven't looked into from [this chart](#); find, read and bring to class an essay that applies it; in class, present (informally) what you think are the key ideas and major distinctions of the approach

Chosen Final Writing Assignments due Friday, 12/13