I. Course Description: Literary Criticism E316 is an introduction to literary analysis with particular emphasis upon the terminology, language, and techniques of literary criticism, emphasis placed upon direct examination and study of literary texts are special attention is given to skill in close reading of texts. Texts are selected from major works of world literature.

II. Course Rationale:
Since the 1980’s, no field of study has been more influential on language and literature studies—or more reviled—than Literary Criticism. Ten years earlier, the role of literary criticism seemed fairly clear: the job of the literary critic was to determine which works were good, which were great, and explain why. No two critics ever completely agreed on a list or a work, yet there was widespread consensus on who the luminaries were and what were the criteria for greatness (subtlety of technique, unity of form and content, universality of subject matter). No more.

Between them, deconstruction, feminist studies, and culture studies have managed to challenge every cozy notion of what is greatness and who gets to define it, and have exposed any number of previously ignored or overlooked assumptions regarding literary criticism. Despite it all, the anachronistically titled “new criticism” reigns as the supreme orthodoxy of our undergraduate and secondary education classrooms. Thus the study of literary criticism today not only entails the study of clear (and some not so clear) methods for evaluating literature, but also understanding where these methods came from, and what their limitations are.

III. Course overview:

Literary Criticism E316 is a knowledge and skills based survey of the methods of literature criticism the have emerged as dominant since the dawn of formalist “New Criticism,” on up to the post-modern strategies of the present. The goal is to develop knowledge of the ideas and people who have shaped the discussion of literature, and practical skill in applying their methods. Like all of the humanities, English 316 is concerned with presenting the issues that people from diverse backgrounds have represented in the arts. English 316, though, is particularly interested in asking questions such as, to what extent do distinct traditions of writing demand distinct traditions of interpretation? Is the English language the same for all users? Can we ask the same questions of a poem by the Caribbean writer Kamau Brathwaite as we would of the American writer Robert Frost? Do Toni Morrison and Birago Diop use narrative in the same way? Should we read the works of a feminist such as Alice Walker differently than we would a contemporary male writer, such as John Updike?

Do not expect this class to provide easy answers to such questions. It is hoped that you will come up with answers that you can fully justify, but at least it is important that you enter the
classroom aware of the role that such issues may play.

**IV Course goals:**

Upon completion, the student of E316 should be able to

A. understand and apply the methods of New Criticism;
B. understand and challenge the limitations of New Criticism;
C. be able to construct a critique of a literary work from each of the following perspectives:
   1. Jungian criticism;
   2. Freudian criticism;
   3. Structuralist and Deconstructive criticism
   4. Cultural criticism (including post-colonial and African American);
   5. Feminist criticism;
   6. Reader Response criticism;
   7. New Historical Criticism;
D. be familiar with many of the standard reference works regarding literary criticism;
E. be able to show clear knowledge of the major figures and key ideas that have influenced the development of literary criticism in the 20th century;
F. be able to define and explain in lay terms the meanings of key technical terms;
G. be able to write an essay on a work of literature using multiple literary critical perspectives to demonstrate the importance of the text.

**V. Course Content**

Likely Order of Readings:

Week One
Richter, Introduction.
Bressler Chapter one. “Introduction.”

Week Two
Bressler, Chapter Two. “Historical Survey”
Bressler, Chapter Three “New Criticism”

Expect some (anonymous) handouts.
Week Three
In class New Critical Essay.
Bressler, Chapter Seven “Psychoanalytic Theory”
Begin Shakespeare “The Tempest”

Week Four
Continue Shakespeare “The Tempest”
New Critical v. Psychoanalytic view.

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Week Five
Bressler Chapter Five. “Structuralism”
Richter, Barthes, “The Death of the Author.”

Bressler Chapter Six, “Post – Structuralism”

PAPER ONE: Compare a New Critical and a Psychoanalytic Reading of “The Tempest”

Week Six
Bressler, “Chapter Eight: Feminism”
Richter: Robison “Treason Our Text”
hooks, “Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Pedagogy”
Expect a sheaf of handouts—feminist and not-so feminist writings!
Week Seven
Richter Kolodny, “Dancing Through the Minefield”

Midterm will ask you to write an essay defending or critiquing a feminist reading of “My Last Duchess,” “The Yellow Wallpaper,” or other assigned readings.
Week Seven
Bressler, Chapter Nine “Marxism”
Guillory, “The Canon as Cultural Capital”

Week Eight
Bressler Chapter Ten, “New Historicism”
Nathanial Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”
Ralph W. Ellison, “Flying Home.” (handouts)
Richter: Herbert Tucker, “Browning’s Historicism”
Achebe, “An Image of Africa”

Week Nine
***
Bressler Chapter Eleven, “Cultural Studies”
Toni Morrison, “Black Matters”
Ralph Ellison, “Flying Home” revisited.

Week Ten
Selected Poetry of Langston Hughes and Kamau Brathwaite (handout)
Richter Gates, “Cultural Formation”
Said, “The Politics of Knowledge”

Week Eleven
Henry Dumas (handout)
Bressler Chapter Four, “Reader – Response Criticism”
Week Twelve
Richter: Stanley Fish, “How to Recognize a Poem When you See One”
Reed Sasenbrock “Do We Write the Text We Read?”

Week the Last
Final Remarks. Open Discussion

Final Projects Due: Approach a work you are WELL familiar with from EITHER a cultural studies, Marxist, or New Historical perspective AND one other perspective. Final Exam.

***Indicates a STUDENT PRESENTATION. These will be assigned in advance.

Students will be responsible for the course readings. In addition to the typed precis, each student will be asked to do at least one oral presentation of an essay or chapter.

VI. METHOD OF EVALUATION/GRADING

GENERAL POLICIES

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. The general college policy is to allow students a total number of unexcused absences equal to the number of times the class meets each week. That is, students who miss the equivalent of one week of classes without a legal excuse should expect that their grades will be lowered as a result. Missing the equivalent of two weeks of classes without legitimate reason shall be considered sufficient grounds for failure.

Absences: Absences can be excused for medical and other legal reasons. Students who miss class to participate in a sport or other scholastic activity are expected to make up class work from their missed classes as soon as they return--an excused absence does not free you from the obligation of class work. Excessive absenteeism, even when excused, can result in a withholding of a final grade. It is the student's responsibility to see that routine dental and medical checkups are scheduled at times which do not conflict with class. No absences will be excused without appropriate documentation--a letter from a doctor, for instance--AND OBVIOUSLY FORGED DOCUMENTS CAN RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST THE STUDENT. If you are going to miss an extended period of time for a family emergency, please get in touch with the dean and ask him to contact your instructors. If you participate in a sport, ask your coach to write a letter stating what classes you will miss. Only those absences your coach says are necessary will be excused.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without giving that person proper credit, and is a serious breech of academic ethics. Depending on the severity of the offense, handing in plagiarized work is grounds for an F on the paper, an F for the class, or even suspension or expulsion from school. If the professor suspects plagiarism, it shall be up to the student to prove that the work is his or her own (by providing notes, sources, where applicable, and a rough draft). In the absence of such proof, the professor shall take appropriate action. This may mean an F on the paper, an F for the class, or, in the case of more flagrant plagiarism, recommending the student for more severe disciplinary actions. On research oriented
assignments, the professor shall collect photocopies of source material for that paper with the final draft. **If an assignment does not specifically call for outside criticism, outside criticism is not allowed.**

**Class participation:** A great deal of the learning that goes on in a classroom comes from students being engaged in the classroom in an active and courteous way. Therefore, class participation will be a factor in your final grade.

**Tardiness:** Plan on being here and being on time. If there is any reason why you cannot meet this very basic obligation, this is not the correct class session for you to be in. Poor planning on your part (i.e., scheduling classes on opposite ends of the campus back to back) does not constitute an excuse.

**VII. EVALUATION**

- Unit + mid term Exams................. 22%
- Final Exam................................16%
- Critical Papers..........................30%
- Research Paper..........................15%
- Quizzes and Oral exams............... 11%
- Class Participation......................6%

**Total**

**100%**

**GRADING SCALE**

- 90-93 A-
- 80-83 B-
- 70-73 C-
- 60-63 D-
- Below 60 F
- 94-97 A
- 84-86 B
- 74-76 C
- 64-66 D
- 98-100 A+
- 87-89 B+
- 77-79 C+
- 67-69 D+

**VII. A Select, Annotated Bibliography**

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 6th edition. NY: HBJ, 1993. There are many glossaries of literary terms available. This may be the most helpful, in that it cross indexes many terms, and offers readers a variety of helpful essays about the concepts behind the terms.


-----Workings of the Spirit.

Almost anything written by Houston Baker is worth reading, though not necessarily easy reading. In these two books he lays out his theoretical understanding of how African American literature in general, and African American women's literature specifically, have developed distinct, literary forms.

By far the most readable, non dogmatic account of the ambiguous world of literary theory. Very thoughtful, with no attempt to be complete, but every attempt to be clear and helpful.


An excellent collection of essays in which some of the most important literary critics of the day confront the question of race, its history, its definition, its importance, and the social forces which have constructed it.


Though its reputation has slowly begun to erode, this book's thesis that the repetition with an ironic difference evident in Jazz music, in folktales about trickster figures, and in the writings of Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Ishmeal Reed, among many others, was and remains a breakthrough work making a connection between African American literature and the theories of the importance of "play" in meaning put forth by post-struturalists.


A groundbreaking collection of essays which look at black literature from a thoughtful feminist/womanist perspective.


A well thought out, well researched attempt to use post-structuralism to inform black literary theory. Gilroy argues that for several centuries, people of African descent have been defined less by national boundaries than by a shared, diasporic culture that criss-crosses the Atlantic.


A comprehensive and extensive guide to literary terms and movements, written by experts in the field. This volume was published to be definitive, and has come close to fulfilling that goal. The essays in here are written with considerable authority and background.


A dictionary of literary terms, with more emphasis on traditional approaches to literature (as opposed to the most recent).


A paperback series which reprints well known texts, articles about various literary movements (reader response criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism, etc.) as well as essays which use those theories to understand the primary text from a variety of perspectives. So for instance the volume on *The Awakening* writes about that novel from feminist,
psychoanalytic, marxist, and other positions. There are also volumes on The Scarlet Letter, The Dead, A Portrait of the Artist, Hamlet, Frankenstein, Heart of Darkness, Walden, Gulliver's Travels, and Walden. Highly recommended.


This anthology remains the most influential collection of the highly theoretical, and very playful form of feminism that French feminists, including Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig, among others, have devised.


Like the Postcolonial movement in literature studies itself, this is a highly sophisticated, theoretically dense collection. It is also the best collection of Post-colonial theory available.


A collection of pieces on applied theory.


A glossary of literary terms which provides reliable definitions for technical terms of current literary theory and criticism.


A widely used bibliography of basic literary research sources. This book will tell you what other books to look for in the library to do your literary research.


An excellent collection for showing the wide diversity of approaches that are grouped together as "New Historicism."


Contains a good overview of important, theoretical essays.


Though now dated, this work was a breakthrough in terms of its attempt to analyze how the concept of "The Orient" has distorted the West's view of itself and others.


An excellent collection of outstanding Feminist writing which looks at literature from a variety of perspectives, highlighting institutions, practice, conflicts, ethnicity, class, history, and autobiography, among other focuses.

Appendix A
Some movements of Literary Criticism

Deconstruction:
A movement of literary criticism that was spearheaded in France by the French philosophy, Jacques Derrida, and in America by the Yale critic, Paul De Man. The central belief of deconstruction is that meaning is elusive and cannot be fixed entirely and completely. Thus, the interpretation of any given text—including poems, novels, laws, philosophy, music, and other forms of art—must inevitably change. Because deconstructionists do not feel meaning can be fixed, their readings are often marked by a sense of playfulness, the idea being that there is an element of play in all language use. Deconstructionists typically try to show that a writer was saying something much more than they apparently thought they were saying, and then ask why has the reading that the clever critic discovered been so long ignored?

Cultural Studies Criticism:
Not a single movement, this term is used to group together schools of critical thought which take into account the ethnic origins of the writer, and their effect on the world. Asian-American, Hispanic-American, American Indian, and African American criticism all focus 1) on how the concerns writers of each group are developed in various ways similar and different, and 2) on how characters and concerns of each group are developed in writers of other groups.

The term Black Literature Criticism is frequently applied to discuss the works of writers of African descent, whether the writers were born in Africa, America, England, or the Caribbean.

Feminism: The term "feminism" is applied to a related core of beliefs the writing and interpretation about women's and men's lives has been significantly distorted by the prevalence sexually discriminatory laws, practices, and gender stereotypes. To look at a work from a feminist perspective means to ask: 1) whether male and female characters follow or go beyond traditional sex roles; 2) whether a given work contains an implicit or explicit gender bias; 3) analyzing a work from the perspective of subsidiary female characters; 4) analyzing a writer's total output from the perspective of how he or she challenged or failed to challenge prevailing sexual stereotypes.

Marxism
While traditional Marxism held that literature was one of many cultural forms that was entirely determined by the workings of class interests, contemporary Marxism has developed many far more nuanced approaches to looking at literature. Some fundamental questions that Marxists ask are, how are class interests and class conflicts portrayed in literature? What has been the effect of holding various literary ideals and standards (who has benefited, who has been marginalized)? Perhaps the most important term used by Marxist criticism is "ideology," by which they mean a set of ideas or assumptions which underlay the cultural and political practices of a given place and time.

New Criticism
The word "new" is somewhat outdated, but this name is too well established to argue with, although the more accurate term "formalists" is equally applicable. The central task of the New Critics was to try interpret a literary work as carefully constructed work of art. New criticism is implicitly laudatory; the critic tries to bare the careful workings of the artist. Less careful artist's are often dismissed as not worthy of study. The writer's politics and intent are assumed to be of secondary, or even no, importance.

New criticism has become widely established as the norm in English departments. A student who effectively writes a paper analyzing the use of irony, metaphors, or nature imagery in Oedipus the King or The Scarlet Letter is probably using the methods of new criticism.

New Historicism/Cultural Materialism

These two closely linked movements are both concerned with history, and both began with Renaissance studies, particularly Shakespeare studies, but their methodology has proved useful for analyzing many different texts. include many other

The central concern of cultural materialist criticism is how did the material and historical conditions surrounding a text's production affect the text? Thus, for instance, a cultural materialist interpretation of Hamlet might be interested in how religious instability of the England of Shakespeare's day was reflected in Hamlet's paralysis. Cultural materialists are also interested in who controlled access to presses and the public, and how authors have defied and played to the expectations of this ruling class.

While cultural materialists take their cue from Marxist criticism, New Historicism tends to be post-structuralist in its concerns. Thus, new historicism often finds connections between historically celebrated texts and historically ignored ones, including letters and diaries. The point is not to reduce all texts to a rough equality, but to understand the intertextual relations between writing.

Psycholoanalytic Criticism: There are three common schools of psychoanalytic criticism: Freudian criticism; Jungian criticism; Lacanian criticism. Freudian critics depend upon Sigmund Freud's distinction between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind, the latter of which is dominated by a childlike id (which wants and wants what it wants now) and a restricting superego, which seeks to control. Freudian critics look for unconscious meanings in a text which they highlight as the true text. Such criticism typically looks for symbols of powerful psychoanalytic meaning (a snake with a severed heads might be said to be a symbol of castration, for instance). However, they may also analyze characters and even writers according to their acting upon specific psychological impulses as described by Sigmund Freud. Jungian criticism typically looks for archetypes as described by Carl Jung, often with an emphasis upon looking at how the male and female animus and anima are portrayed. Lacanian criticism is French movement which frequently looks at how a writer or a character attempts to affirm his own existence through controlling other people and/or language, the theory being that individuals live with a deep existential doubt of their own worth, and use language as a means a communicating with others for affirmation.