

LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

Dr. Steven Thomas

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office hours:

odd days, 12:30—1:00 pm

even days, 2:15—3:00 pm

and also by appointment

English 243, spring 2012

time: odd days, 11:20—12:30

place: SJU Quad 344

GOALS FOR COURSE

- Become familiar with key theoretical concepts for analyzing literature and culture.
- Learn how to read and write complex theoretical arguments.
- Learn how to apply theory in analysis of literature and/or culture.
- Learn how to see theoretical arguments embedded within literature.
- Practice writing and thinking in a theoretical style about the world.

TEXTS IN BOOKSTORE:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings (W. W. Norton, 2005).

Juffer, Jane. Single Mother. (NYU Press, 2006).

Klein, Naomi. No Logo, 10th Anniversary edition (Picador, 2009).

Mukherjee, Bharati. The Holder of the World (Ballantine, 1993).

Nealon and Searls Giroux. Theory Toolbox, 2nd edition (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

OTHER TEXTS:

On-line through Moodle: <https://moodle.csbsju.edu/login/>

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

Raymond Williams, Keywords, revised edition (Oxford U Press, 1983) and/or Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms (Bedford, 2009).

ASSIGNMENTS:

Worksheets	20%	
Weekly Blogs	30%	
4 Exams	40%	(10% each)
Attendance and Participation	10%	

Worksheets

These will be available on the Moodle site, and they are intended to guide you through difficult philosophical arguments. Print them out and write in pencil or blue pen your answers to each question.

Blogs

You will create a “blog” – or web log – which is essentially an on-line journal to which your classmates can respond. To set up a blog, go to one of the free blog sites on-line (e.g., Blogger or Wordprss.) After you’ve set up your site, e-mail me the URL of your blog site with your blog identity, and I will post it on our course’s Moodle. You may prefer to be anonymous and use a pseudonym for your blog-site.

You will post to your blog for each and every unit (except for the first unit “Why Literature?”). Each unit is approximately a week long. Each blog post must relate an idea from one or two of the readings assigned in that unit to something you’ve observed in everyday life, in society generally, in pop culture, in a piece of literature, or in one of your other English classes. I encourage you to experiment and have fun with your blogs—not to merely respond to the assigned reading, but to use the assigned reading to engage intellectually with the world around you.

You will also read and comment *respectfully* on the blogs of the other members of your blog-group. The quality of your comments affects your blog grade.

In addition, you are encouraged to read and comment on my own blog. In my blog, I will often supplement our assigned reading and class discussion. Sometimes, I will also refer you to blogs and recent articles written by present-day theorists.

4 Exams

Each exam will be one essay. You will not know the question or prompt for the essay until the day of the exam.

You will be graded on (1) how well you articulate a thesis that answers the prompt and engages thoughtfully and critically with the assigned reading and (2) how well you summarize the arguments of the various theorists that we read.

“Summarizing the arguments” means (1) succinctly articulating the author’s thesis or argument, (2) briefly explaining the author’s reasoning and evidence, and (3) comparing and contrasting it to the others.

Attendance and Participation

I expect you to come to class every day, having done the reading and ready to ask questions about it and discuss it. More than three absences will lower your attendance grade.

In addition to class discussion, one can participate on the Moodle site in discussion forums and by engaging respectfully with others’ blogs.

ASSIGNMENTS CALENDAR

Why Literature?

Jan. 16 (Mon) Introductions
Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights, and Literary Theory and Criticism

Recommended: Kirt Wilson, "Memories of King," Tuesday, Jan. 17 at CSB in Gorecki

Jan. 18 (Wed) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 1
George Orwell, "Why I Write" (Moodle)
John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (Moodle)
Operation Ivy, "Sound System" (Moodle)
Worksheet on *Theory Toolbox* and George Orwell's "Why I Write"

What is an Author?

Jan. 20 (Fri) *Theory Toolbox* ch. 2
T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Moodle)
New Criticism (Moodle)
Roland Barthes, "Death of an Author" (Moodle)
Edwidge Danticat, "Create Dangerously" (Moodle)
George Herbert, "The Alter" and "Easter Wings" and (Moodle)
Worksheet on T. S. Eliot, Roland Barthes, and Edwidge Danticat

Jan. 24 (Tue) John Franzosa, "'The Custom House' in *Scarlet Letter*" (*SL*) pp. 387-404
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Custom House," *The Scarlet Letter* (*SL*)

Jan. 26 (Thu) Michel Foucault, selected passages from "What is an Author?" (Moodle)
Michael Winship, "Hawthorne and the 'Scribbling Women'" in *SL* pp. 418-25
Worksheet on Michel Foucault and Michael Winship

blog post #1 due

Readers and Subjects

Jan. 30 (Mon) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 3, pp. 21-8
Scarlet Letter, ch. 1-4
Top 50 Conservative Songs Encore (Moodle)
Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the U.S.A." (internet)

Feb. 1 (Wed) Robert S. Levine, "Antebellum Feminists on Hawthorne" in *SL* pp. 274-290
Stanley Fish, "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One" (Moodle)
William Carlos Williams, "This is just to say" (Moodle)

Feb. 3 (Fri) *Theory Toolbox* ch. 4
Franz Kafka, "In the Penal Colony" (Moodle)
Michel Foucault, selected pages from *Discipline and Punish* (Moodle)
Worksheet on *Discipline and Punish* (Moodle)

blog post #2 due

Ideology and Demystification

- Feb. 7 (Tue) *Theory Toolbox* ch. 5-6
Scarlet Letter ch. 5-8
Public Enemy, “Don’t Believe the Hype” (internet)
- Feb. 9 (Thu) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 7
Hawthorne, “Endicott and the Red Cross” in *SL* pp. 172-8
John Nickel, “Hawthorne’s Demystification of History in Endicott...” in *SL* pp. 680-93
- Feb. 13 (Mon) Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, “No Logo at Ten” and “Introduction” and ch. 1-2
Plot overview of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (Moodle)
Karl Marx, excerpt from “The Fetishism of Commodities” from *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moodle)
Worksheet on Karl Marx

blog post #3 due

- Feb. 15 (Wed) **Exam #1**
comments on your group-members’ blogs due

Signs and Deconstruction

language and tropes

- Feb. 17 (Fri) Hans Bertens, “Language as a System of Signs” from *Literary Theory* (Moodle)
Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter* ch. 9-13
Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 3
- Feb. 21 (Tue) Millicent Bell, “The Obliquity of Signs in *The Scarlet Letter*” in *SL* pp. 451-63
Scarlet Letter ch. 14-22
- Feb. 23 (Thu) Hayden White, “The Theory of Tropes” from *Metahistory* (Moodle)
Theory Toolbox pp. 29-32
Kate Chopin, “Silk Stockings” (Moodle)
Sigmund Freud, “The Work of Condensation” and “The Work of Displacement” from
The Interpretation of Dreams, focus on pp. 311-19 and 338-44 (Moodle)

blog post #4 due

psychoanalysis

- Feb. 27 (Mon) lecture and discussion

Recommended: anything by Slavoj Žižek
- Feb. 29 (Wed) Rolling Stones, “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” (Internet)
Jacques Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious...” (Moodle)
Worksheet on “The Agency of the Letter” (Moodle)

- Mar. 2 (Fri) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 23-4

blog post #5 due

SPRING BREAK . . . Mar. 3, Saturday—Mar. 11, Sunday

posts and hyphens

- Mar. 13 (Tue) Bertens, “Anthropological Structuralism,” from *Literary Theory* (Moodle)
Toolbox ch. 9
Michael Bérubé, “Just the Fax, Ma’am: or Postmodernism’s Journey to Decenter”
- Mar. 15 (Thu) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 12
Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play” from *Writing and Difference* (Moodle)
Worksheet on Derrida’s “Structure, Sign, and Play” (Moodle)
Jennifer Lopez, “Jenny from the Block” (internet)
- Mar. 19 (Mon) Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Minister’s Black Veil”
J. Hillis Miller, “The Problem of History in ‘The Minister’s...’” in *SL* pp. 708-17
Tribe Called Quest, “Sucka Nigga” (internet)
Mos Def, “Mr. Nigga” (internet)

blog post #6 due

- Mar. 21 (Wed) **Exam #2**
comments on group-members’ blogs due

Agency and Representation

- Mar. 23 (Fri) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 10
Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write about Africa” (Moodle)
Nina Baym, “Revisiting Hawthorne’s Feminism” in *SL* pp. 541-58

watch in class *The Celluloid Closet* (movie)
- Mar. 27 (Tue) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 11
Jane Juffer, “Introduction” and “Keyword: Everyday Life” in *Single Mother*
worksheet on Jane Juffer

Recommended: Wednesday, March 28, Binyavanga Wainaina, 7:30 pm, Gorecki A & B, CSB

- Mar. 29 (Thu) Juffer, ch. 1 “Representing the Single Mother”
Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 4

blog post #7 due

Space

- Apr. 2 (Mon) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 5-8 (focus on ch. 5 and 8, and merely skim ch. 6 and 7)
Juffer, ch. 2 “The Corporate University,” *Single Mother*
- Apr. 4 (Wed) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 9
Theory Toolbox, ch. 8
Juffer, ch. 3 “The U.S.-Mexican Border,”

EASTER RECESS . . . Apr. 5, Thurs.—Apr. 9, Mon.

- Apr. 11 (Wed) Juffer, ch. 4 “Puerto Rican Chicago”
“Marriage in America,” *The Economist* (26 May 2007) (Moodle)

Apr. 13 (Fri) Juffer, ch. 5 “Mothers and Sons”
Klein, *No Logo* ch. 10-11
Marx on alienated labor from *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Moodle)

blog post #8 due

Tactics and Strategies

Apr. 17 (Tue) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 13
Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 12-16

Apr. 19 (Thu) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 17-Afterword
Juffer, ch. 6 “Choice” and Conclusion
Worksheet on Klein and Juffer

blog post #9 due

Apr. 23 (Mon) **Exam #3**
comments on group-members’ blogs due

SCHOLARSHIP AND CREATIVITY DAY . . . Apr. 25, Wed

Appreciating Literature

Apr. 26 (Thu) Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World*, pp. 1-61
Review authors and readers

Apr. 30 (Mon) *Holder of the World*, pp. 61-138
Review ideology and history

May 3 (Wed) *Holder of the World*, pp. 139-208
Review signs and deconstruction

blog post #10 due

May 5 (Fri) *Holder of the World*, pp. 209-286
Review agency, space, and strategy
comments on group members’ blogs due

Exam #4, date, time, and place to be announced