

## LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM

### Dr. Steven Thomas

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office: Quad 352-B

office hours:

odd days: 4:30—5:00 at the Local Blend

even days 2:15—3:00 in Quad 352-B

and also by appointment

**English 243, spring 2008**

time: odd days, 11:20—12:30

place: Benedicta Arts

Center, room 118

### 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Picador, 2002).

Nealon and Searls Giroux. Theory Toolbox (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

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

Žižek, Slavoj. How to Read Lacan (W. W. Norton, 2006).

### OTHER TEXTS:

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

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

Raymond Williams, Keywords, Revised Edition (1983)

### COURSE WEBSITE:

<http://www.employees.csbsju.edu/swthomas/engl243.htm>

### ASSIGNMENTS:

Worksheets	10%	
Weekly Blogs	20%	
4 Exams	60%	(15% 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 or diary to which your classmates can respond. To set up a blog, go to one of the free blog sites on-line. After you’ve set up your site, e-mail me your blog site with your blog identity, and I will post it 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 read and comment *respectfully* on each other’s blogs.

## **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. 14 (M) Introduction
- Jan. 16 (W) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 1  
George Orwell, "Why I Write" (Moodle)  
John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (Moodle)  
Operation Ivy, "Sound System" (Moodle)

### What is an Author?

- Jan. 18 (F) *Theory Toolbox* ch. 2  
T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Moodle)  
New Criticism (Moodle)  
Roland Barthes, "Death of an Author" (Moodle)  
George Herbert, "The Alter" and "Easter Wings" and (Moodle)
- Jan. 22 (T) John Franzosa, "'The Custom House' in *Scarlet Letter*" (SL) pp. 387-403 ???  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Custom House," *The Scarlet Letter* (SL)
- Jan. 24 (Th) Michel Foucault, selected passages from "What is an Author?" (Moodle)  
Michael Winship, "Hawthorne and the 'Scribbling Women'" in SL pp. 418-25  
Worksheet on Foucault and Winship

### Readers and Subjects

- Jan. 28 (M) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 3, pp. 21-8  
*Scarlet Letter*, ch. 1-4  
Bruce Springsteen, "Born in the U.S.A." (internet)
- Jan. 30 (W) 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. 1 (F) *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)

### Ideology and Demystification

- Feb. 5 (T) *Theory Toolbox* ch. 5-7  
*Scarlet Letter* ch. 5-8  
Public Enemy, "Don't Believe the Hype" (internet)
- Feb. 7 (Th) 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  
Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, ch. 1
- Feb. 11 (M) Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, "Introduction" and ch. 1-3  
Plot overview of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Moodle)  
Karl Marx, excerpt from "The Fetishism of Commodities" from *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moodle)

Feb. 13 (W) **Exam #1**

**Signs and Deconstruction**

**language and tropes**

Feb. 15 (F) Hans Bertens, "Language as a System of Signs" from *Literary Theory* (Moodle)  
*Scarlet Letter* ch. 9-13

Feb. 19 (T) Millicent Bell, "The Obliquity of Signs in *The Scarlet Letter*" in *SL* pp. 451-63  
*Scarlet Letter* ch. 14-22

Feb. 21 – 2 / 24 Long Weekend

Feb. 25 (M) 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)

**psychoanalysis**

Feb. 27 (W) *How to Read Lacan*, ch. 2-4

Feb. 29 (F) 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. 4 (T) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 23-4  
*How to Read Lacan*, ch. 5-6

**posts and hyphens**

Mar. 6 (Th) Bertens, "Anthropological Structuralism," from *Literary Theory* (Moodle)  
*Toolbox* ch. 9  
Michael Bérubé, "Just the Fax, Ma'am: or Postmodernism's Journey to Decenter"

Mar. 10 (M) Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" from *Writing and Difference* (Moodle)  
Worksheet on "Structure, Sign, and Play" (Moodle)  
Jennifer Lopez, "Jenny from the Block" (internet)

Mar. 12 (W) 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)

Mar. 14 (F) **Exam #2**

Mar. 15-24 Easter Recess

### Agency and Representation

- Mar. 26 (W) *Theory Toolbox*, ch. 10-11  
Nina Baym, "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism" in *SL* pp. 541-58
- Mar. 28 (F) Jane Juffer, "Introduction" and "Keyword: Everyday Life" in *Single Mother*
- Apr. 1 (T) Juffer, ch. 1 "Representing the Single Mother"  
Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 4

### Space

- Apr. 3 (Th) 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. 7 (M) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 9  
*Theory Toolbox*, ch. 8  
Juffer, ch. 3 "The U.S.-Mexican Border,"
- Apr. 9 (W) Juffer, ch. 4 "Puerto Rican Chicago"  
"Marriage in America," *The Economist* (26 May 2007) (Moodle)
- Extra credit: watch and write a one page single spaced essay about how the play "All in the Timing" being performed at St. Ben's from 4/10 to 4/19 relates to theory
- Apr. 11 (F) Juffer, ch. 5 "Mothers and Sons"  
Klein, *No Logo* ch. 10-11  
Marx on alienated labor from *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Moodle)

### Tactics and Strategies

- Apr. 15 (T) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 12-16
- Apr. 17 (Th) Klein, *No Logo*, ch. 17-Afterword  
Juffer, ch. 6 "Choice" and Conclusion
- Apr. 21 (M) **Exam #3**

### Appreciating Literature

- Apr. 24 (Th) Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World*, pp. 1-61  
Review authors and readers
- Apr. 28 (M) *Holder of the World*, pp. 61-138  
Review ideology and history
- Apr. 30 (W) *Holder of the World*, pp. 139-208  
Review signs and deconstruction
- May 2 (F) *Holder of the World*, pp. 209-286  
Review agency, space, and strategy

### **Exam #4**