Art, Culture, and the Roles of Criticism

English 3890, Fall 2018

M/W 5:30-6:45pm, LA 204
Instructor: Dr. John Charles Goshert
Office: CB 410F; Hours: W 10:30-12:00 and by appointment
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Course Overview

Broadly speaking, “theory” is often perceived as entirely divorced from the “real” or “natural” meanings of art and literature; it can be seen as a practice that muddies the intentions of artists and writers and ultimately devalues art and literature themselves. However, experimental art tends to confound audiences’ expectations for clear meaning and value, especially in the cases of works that use and reference criticism as artistic practice. This section of Contemporary Critical Approaches to Literature explores the relationship between philosophy (critical thinking) and aesthetics (artistic practices and products)—the relationship at the heart of contemporary literary criticism. Semester texts include literary works that begin to blur the line between art and criticism, and critical works that extend the concerns of aesthetic criticism into the fields of science, culture, architecture, warfare, and even nutrition.¹

Although most students will have some background in basic theoretical moves from English 2600, critical theory may still look like a baffling, foreign language. Class time will be spent in fleshing out complex theoretical work to help students discover that engaging with the relationship between aesthetic and critical texts is among the most rewarding experiences in the study of literature. We will be doing a lot of reading over the semester, and, due to the complexity of course materials, we will never be able to cover every element of any text. Students are expected to complete all required readings, and to direct class time through informed questions, discussion, debate, etc.

Assignments include periodic response papers, a take-home midterm exam, a term project (which will demonstrate substantial research on a topic or question of the student’s choice), and—of course—attendance and active participation in class.²

Required Texts—to be Purchased


Recommended Text

A comprehensive dictionary of literary terms and theory, such as:

Required Reserve Materials (Canvas)

Mark Twain. “Passages from ‘Glances at History’.” The Devil’s Race Track 373-75.


Prerequisite Skills

Using reading skills and strategies of argument learned in courses such as Engl. 2600 and 2010, students are expected, from the opening of the course, to be prepared to actively, critically read literary texts, and to respond orally and through writing. This course will add to those skills and strategies through lecture, class discussion, and engagement with current critical approaches of responding to literature.

Response Paper Guidelines

2-3 page response papers are due periodically, beginning September 12. While this paper is, primarily, an expression of your ideas, you should nonetheless develop a cogent, well-written, and evidence-based argument. The best responses take on a specific topic from lecture, class discussions, presentations (or, of course, from your own reading alone), which is then worked out in some critical/analytic detail. Avoid trying to fit an entire week’s reading—an entire novel or other extended text—into your response, since this leaves you with such a broad scope that any detailed examination is rather difficult.

Avoid summarizing the text and, instead, argue for a particular position, for a particular “reading.” Your treatment of whatever topic you choose will be enhanced not only by a strong thesis, but also by your incorporation of specific material from the texts (both literary and critical); that is, present details, such as dialogue or other citations. This is in keeping with that old adage of “showing” rather than “telling” as you work out your argument/position.

Consider also addressing questions you have about the reading—perhaps centered on a scene, event, character, etc. How do specific questions or parts of the novel/essay/poem inform the significance of the whole? You may also think about developing connections between works—how do formal characteristics, topics, characters, etc. resonate across periods and nations, across gender and/or ethnic boundaries? How are those characteristics treated differently and why?
Plan to put your growing critical apparatus into practice. Develop the research and response strategies which will be required for success on your term project. Articulate your agreement with or dissention from critical responses we read, or pursue critical readings on your own which will allow you to enter into an informed conversation on literary, cultural, and theoretical concepts.

The final response paper, a narrative self-and-course evaluation, is due with the final project.

**Term Project Guidelines**

The term project is essentially a researched argument—typically a paper of 10-12 pages—on any topic within the scope of the course (the exploration of critical relationships between art and philosophy). You may use any of the course texts/authors or develop a project on texts, authors, music, films, art, and so on of personal interest with one caveat: ensure in making your choice that your subject matter merits close examination, and that you can develop a research question and a critical apparatus to explore it. Successful students tend to settle on at least a broad subject and begin the research and writing process shortly following the midterm. A term project proposal is due on or before **Monday October 29**.

**Grade Distribution/Notes**

- Response papers: 30%
- Take-Home Midterm: 20%
- Final Project: 30%
- Attendance/Participation: 20%

- Course materials are determined by standards of academic inquiry and a commitment to the exchange of ideas; materials will not be “rated G” or censored in any way.
- If you have any disability that may impair your successfully completing this course, “Students who need accommodations because of a disability may contact the UVU Accessibility Services Department (ASD), located on the Orem Campus in LC 312. To schedule an appointment or to speak with a counselor, call the ASD office at 801-863-8747. Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals, email nicole.hemmingsen@uvu.edu or text 385-208-2677.” Appropriate Academic Accommodations are granted for all students who have qualified documented disabilities.
- Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and the possibility of administrative action.
- Attendance is required. You should plan to attend and be prepared for each class meeting. Because we will take a discussion/workshop approach to the course, attendance and participation will weigh significantly in your grade. In order to facilitate class participation, **laptop computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices may not be used during class time**.
- All written work will follow MLA style guidelines; late work will not be accepted.
- Per UVU policies: “Each student is expected to take an active role in the learning process by meeting course requirements as specified in written syllabi” (VII.A). Thus, the course syllabus comprises a contract between instructor and students, who will be held to its terms and expectations, for “The right to receive academic credit and/or academic degrees when all specified requirements and course work have been satisfied” (V.I). In other words, the student has the right to receive credit for work that meets or exceeds satisfactory performance; however, the student also has the right to fail based on those same conditions of performance.
- It is not only your right, but also your responsibility to ask questions, to raise challenges, to discuss readings, and to otherwise participate in the class as it unfolds over the semester.
• Students will activate their UVU email accounts, which can be automatically forwarded to any preferred account.
• The course website (http://research.uvu.edu/goshert/uvu389q.pdf) will direct students toward additional resources for research, documentation, and bibliographic conventions. Sample student papers will also be archived, as available, throughout the semester.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS
Additional readings may be assigned as appropriate

August
M 20 Course introduction
W 22 *Pudd’nhead Wilson* ch. 1-11
   Barthes *S/Z* excerpt (handout)
M 27 Complete *Pudd’nhead*
   Twain (reserve)
W 29 *Those Extraordinary Twins*
   Barthes (reserve)

September
M 3 No Class
W 5 Foucault (reserve)
M 10 Sundquist (reserve)
W 12 *White Noise* (1-84)
   **Response paper #1 due**
M 17 *White* (85-189)
W 19 *White* (190-295)
M 24 Complete *White Noise*
   Baudrillard (reserve)
W 26 Hutcheon (reserve)

October
M 1 *Middle Passage* (1-98)
   **Response paper #2 due**
W 3 *Middle* (99-182)
M 8 Complete *Middle Passage*
   Thaden (reserve)
W 10 Laub (reserve)
   Midterm prep
   **Response paper #3 due**


**Term project introduction**
Research seminar (class meets in FL 207)

*Midterm assigned*

**W 17** Film screening: *La jetée*

**M 22** Term project Q&A

*Midterm due at class time*

**W 24** Consultation (open office hours)

**M 29** *Postmodern Condition* (3-27)

*Project proposal due*

**W 31** *Postmodern* (27-67)

**November**

**M 5** Complete *Postmodern Condition*

**W 7** Bourdieu (reserve)

**M 12** Dean (reserve)

*Response paper #4 due*

**W 14** *First as Tragedy* (1-37)

**M 19** No class

**W 21** No class

**M 26** *First as Tragedy* (37-131)

**W 28** Complete *First as Tragedy*

**December**

**M 3** Butler (reserve)

**W 5** Niedzviecki (reserve)

*Response paper #5 due*

**M 10** Exam Week

**W 12** Exam period:  
**Term Project due**

*Response paper #6 due Deadline: 5:00pm*

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i Provides in-depth study of one contemporary theoretical and critical approach to literature using primary texts. Explicates how interpretive techniques function within the discipline of English Studies. Includes lectures, screenings, student presentations, assigned readings, written reports, exams and a research essay that employs MLA documentation. Required for English majors. Should be taken beginning of junior year.

ii Distinguish major theorists in contemporary theory. Recognize the tenets of one major theoretical approach to literary theory. Use critical vocabulary persuasively in written and spoken discourse. Analyze cultural and literary texts according to one major theoretical approach. Compose written analyses of cultural and literary texts using a specific, contemporary theoretical approach.