

**Approaches to Literature
English 826
Summer 2001
Second Four-Week Session—July 2–27
MTWR 10:10–12:10
Rarick Hall 369
Professor: Dr. Will
Office: Rarick Hall 378
Hours: MTWR 9:00-10:00
And by appointment
Phone: 628–5916**

Course Objectives

As the title of the course suggests, we will examine the theories and methodologies behind several different approaches to literature, so that you will have a broader range of critical techniques to call upon as readers, students, scholars and teachers.

One of the most important criticisms that arises from courses like Approaches to Literature is that it lacks a thorough examination of the practical applications of the various approaches discussed. The texts we are reading, though they are often the best articulation of the theoretical basis of the critical practice they espouse, usually deal in abstraction, referring to specific literary texts only occasionally and elliptically. To counter this problem, I have scheduled a practically-applied text from each of the six approaches we will examine. Thus, after discussing two theoretical texts on “Structuralism and Semiotics,” we will look at Louis Marin’s “Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia”—a semiotic reading of the structure of Disneyland. Because it is a text that many English majors have read, I have chosen Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* as the literary touchstone for the class. Thus, everyone will be expected to read this novel prior to the four-week classroom session. You will need to have the edition specified below, since it contains the critical texts we will discuss.

On Reading Literary Theory

The actual number of pages that you are required to read for this course may be less than those required by your other graduate courses. However, I urge you to read the texts for this course before we begin the four-week classroom session as these texts are among the most difficult in our field. You may find some to be virtually unintelligible. Even so, do yourself the favor of slogging through them ahead of time, taking copious notes. When you understand an author’s point, make a note in the margin. When you can’t grasp the author’s point, write a question in the margin. The majority of our classroom time will be spent addressing students’ confusions and concerns with the texts.

In his essay “On Difficulty” George Steiner identifies four forms of difficulty apparent in contemporary literary criticism. The first—contingent difficulty—stems from readers’ unfamiliarity with the terms and references. You can overcome this difficulty rather easily by consulting the optional text for this course—*A Handbook to Literature*. The *Handbook* is like the ultimate footnote. Most of the unfamiliar words, terms, and names you will encounter are explained in the *Handbook*. The second form of difficulty—modal difficulty—comes from readers’ lack of experience with abstract literary theory. Modal difficulty fades with time. The more of these texts you read and the more we discuss in class, the less modal difficulty you will encounter. The other two forms—tactical and ontological difficulty—are an inevitable effect of the ambitious and admirable effort to examine new ways of looking at literature and culture. Tactical difficulty refers to the authors’ efforts to disrupt the readers’ accepted world view, whereas ontological difficulty refers to the cultural gap between authors and readers—as Schleifer and Davis write in the “General Introduction” to *Contemporary Literary Criticism*: “[T]rying to see and feel the world from a perspective other than one’s own—perhaps through the eyes of women, or members of ethnic minorities, or people subject to colonialism” (15). The best way to deal with these difficulties is to read the introductory sections of both *Contemporary Literary Criticism* and the critical section of *The Scarlet Letter*. If, for instance, you have difficulty with Stanley Fish’s “Interpreting the *Variorum*,” look at the introduction to “Rhetoric and Reader

Response” in *CLC* and “What is Reader-Response Criticism?” in *SL*. (For a more detailed discussion of Steiner and “On Difficulty” see pp. 13–16 of *CLC*.)

The emphasis in this class will be quality over quantity. If we need to skip some texts to ensure that we have enough time in the classroom to discuss other texts to your satisfaction, so be it. Nevertheless, the best favor you can do for yourself is to begin the reading early, working through these texts as best you can, obtuse and annoying though they may be.

Grading

Your grade for this course will be based on a final essay of twenty-five to thirty pages. In this essay you will examine a single literary work from the perspectives of three of the approaches discussed in class (the bold headings on the schedule below).

Plagiarism

If you use someone else’s writing, either published or unpublished, without acknowledging the source, you are guilty of plagiarism. Do not allow another student to copy your work and turn it in as his or her own work. Fort Hays State University does not tolerate plagiarism. The penalties are severe. Don’t plagiarize.

Accommodations

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate educational opportunities.

Textbooks

Davis, Robert Con, and Ronald Schleifer eds. *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*. 4th ed. New York: Longman, 1998. ISBN 0–8013–3002–5

Murfin, Ross C., ed. *The Scarlet Letter*. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin’s, 1991. ISBN 0–312–03546–2 (**You will need this specific edition of *The Scarlet Letter* as we will discuss the critical essays included in the book.**)

Recommended Text

Harmon, William and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999. ISBN 0–13–012731–0

Course Syllabus

M July 2	Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer “General Introduction” (<i>CLC</i> 1–17) “Eliot, Formalism, and the Tradition of ‘New Criticism’” (<i>CLC</i> 25–30) T. S. Eliot “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (<i>CLC</i> 33–38)
T July 3	Northrop Frye “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (<i>CLC</i> 39–49)
W July 4	Holiday—Independence Day
R July 5	Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer “What Is Literary Theory?” (<i>CLC</i> 87–99) J. Hillis Miller “The Search for Grounds in Literary Study” (<i>CLC</i> 115–28)

M	July 9	<p>Rhetoric and Reader Response Stanley Fish “Interpreting the <i>Variorum</i>” (CLC 181–96) Patrocinio Schweickart “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading” (CLIC 197–219)</p>
T	July 10	<p>David Leverenz “Mrs. Hawthorne’s Headache: Reading <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>” (SL 263–74)</p>
W	July 11	<p>Structuralism and Semiotics Ferdinand de Saussure Selections from <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> (CLC 265–79) Roland Barthes “What Is Criticism?” (CLC 280–83)</p>
R	July 12	<p>Louis Marin “Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia” (CLC 284–95)</p>

M	July 16	<p>Deconstruction and Poststructuralism Jonathan Culler “Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin” (CLC 331–43) Michel Foucault “What Is an Author?” (CLC 364–76)</p>
T	July 17	<p>Michael Ragussis “Silence, Family Discourse, and Fiction in <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>” (SL 316–29)</p>
W	July 18	<p>Historical Criticism Raymond Williams “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory” (CLIC 489–501) Stephen Jay Greenblatt “Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion” (CLIC 502–35)</p>
R	July 19	<p>Sacvan Bercovitch “Hawthorne’s A-Morality of Compromise” (SL 344–58)</p>

M	July 23	<p>Feminism and Gender Studies Diana Fuss “Reading Like a Feminist” (CLC 580–91) Cora Kaplan “Pandora’s Box: Subjectivity, Class and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism” (CLC 592–610)</p>
T	July 24	<p>Shari Benstock “<i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (a)dorée, or the Female Body Embroidered” (SL 288–303)</p>
W	July 25	<p>Cultural Studies Stuart Hall “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms” (CLC 663–78) James Clifford “The Translation of Cultures” (CLC 679–94)</p>

R July 26 Conclusions

Dec. 14 Essay Due