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| Dr. Dejan Kuzmanovic  dkuzmano@uwsp.edu  CCC 427  346-4719 | **English 380: Literary Theory**  Tue/Thu 12:35-1:50 pm  CCC 207 | Office Hours:  Mon 5-6, Tue 2-3, Thu 11-12 and  by appointment |

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This course explores the most prominent twentieth-century approaches to studying literature: new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, queer studies, race studies, Marxism, psychoanalysis, new historicism and cultural studies, postcolonial studies, reader response, ecocriticism, and disability studies. We will investigate how these approaches arose from diverse theoretical traditions and yet continue to have profound impact on each other. Finally, we will study how various theoretical ideas are put to use in critical analysis of two specific literary texts: Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and Joseph Conrad’s Heart of *Darkness*.

Literary theory raises fundamental questions about what literature is and what it does, so it is related to the traditional discipline of aesthetics (philosophy of art). But contemporary theory is equally interested in psychological and social issues, as well as in the part literature and culture play in constructing (assigning meaning and value to) various aspects of our day-to-day reality.

The course will help you understand in what sense literary theorist Terry Eagleton defined theory as a “systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions.” Through a mixture of lectures and class discussions, we will examine how theories both interpret and shape our lives and beliefs.

Upon the completion of the course, students will be able to:

* Explain the fundamental insights and key concepts emerging from the most prominent twentieth-century approaches in literary studies.
* Analyze how these theories relate to each other through influence, similarity or contrast.
* Identify how such theoretical approaches inform specific examples of literary criticism.
* Apply several of these approaches in their own analysis of literary works.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

**Rental:** Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, 3rd edition.

Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Antholgy*, 2nd edition

**Purchase:** Nella Larsen, *Passing*, Norton Critical Edition (editor: Carla Kaplan)

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Bedford/St. Martin’s (editor: Ross. C. Muffin)

(**Important**: You need to buy these editions available in the campus bookstore because each contains multiple required readings in addition to the novel itself.)

**Handouts:** Additional readings will be made available as handouts, on E-Reserve, or in D2L.

**REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY**  % of the course grade

**Daily work grade** (attendance, discussion participation, quizzes) 10%

**D2L reports** 10%

**Two short papers** 20% (10% each)

**Midterm paper**  20%

**Midterm exam**  20%

**Final exam**  20%

**DAILY WORK GRADE AND ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Regular attendance and participation in class activities are essential for this discussion-based class. Please do your best to attend all sessions. **I allow two penalty-free absences**, but you should save them for special circumstances. I excuse only absences due to medical emergency or official university business, and they would require written documentation and make-up work.

You should actively **participate in class discussions** and do any homework I might give you. The reading load in this class is fairly heavy, so it is crucial to keep up with the reading schedule. If you fall behind, it will be hard to catch up. Occasional **pop-up reading quizzes** are likely.

Also, each student will be scheduled as **discussion leader** on a specific topic once in the semester. Discussion leader's task is to review for the class a section of the reading assigned for the day and to lead a discussion based on 3-4 discussion questions based on the reading.

I will determine your Daily Work Grade as follows:

**Attendance** **Class** **Participation Quizzes & discussion leading Grade**

1-2 absences frequent outstanding (++) A level

3 absences occasional good (+) B level

4 absences rare mostly satisfying (√) C level

4 absences only when asked mostly unsatisfying (-) D level

5-6 absences F

**With 7 or more absences, you will fail the course, unless make-up work is arranged.**

**D2L REPORTS**

You will post twelve one-page reports **in D2L by 5:00 pm on twelve Mondays throughout the semester.** They are time-specific, and late reports will not be accepted. However, only ten most successful ones will count for the grade. If you are happy with the results of the first ten reports, you may skip the last two. Each report will be based on a specific assignment posted in D2L. The purpose of these assignments is to prepare you for class discussion, provide material for your papers, and help you do well on the exams. For each report you can earn up to four points for a total of forty points.

4 points: Exceptionally good work. The student fully understood the reading and responded to the assignment thoughtfully and clearly. The report could serve as a model for other students.

3 points: Good work, on par with most students in the class. The student understood the reading fairly well and responded to the assignment correctly, without too many confusing statements.

2 points: Below average work. The students understood the reading partially and responded to the assignment with some accuracy, but also with substantial confusion and/or vagueness.

1 point: Barely acceptable work -- sketchy, very vague or confusing, or largely inaccurate

Only failure to turn in a report, plagiarism, or complete miscomprehension will yield 0 points.

The D2L reports grade will be determined in the following manner:

36-40 A

34-35 A-

32-33 B+

30-31 B

28-29 B-

26-27 C+

24-25 C

22-23 C-

20-21 D+

18-19 D

16-17 D-

0-15 F

**TWO SHORT PAPERS (Likely due dates: March 3 & May 12)**

Each of these three-page papers will focus on a specific theoretical approach covered in class (Paper 1: New Criticsm, Structuralism, Deconstruction, Feminist Theory, or Critical Race Theory; Paper 2: Queer Theory, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, New Historicism, Postcolonial Theory, Ecocriticsm, or Disability Studies). Each paper will explain how and why the chosen theoretical approach is valuable for the study of literature. You can approach that question in any way that strikes you as insightful, but addressing some of these questions could be helpful:

1) What is the essence (the fundamental insight) of this theoretical approach?

2) What are 2-3 key concepts that emerged from this approach? Why are they important?

3) Which idea(s) from this theoretical tradition proved useful for studying literature? How so?

4) How has this theoretical approach transformed the way we understand or study literary texts?

5) In what ways has this approach influenced other prominent theories in literary studies?

More detailed guidelines and a grading rubric will be provided several weeks before due dates.

**MIDTERM PAPER (Likely due date: March 31)**

In this five-page paper, you will apply three different theoretical approaches of your choice in an analysis of Nella Larsen’s novel *Passing*. You will imagine that you are writing the introduction for a critical edition of the novel. Your paper will be the part of that introduction in which you explain how the three chosen critical approaches contribute to our understanding of the novel.

You will both refer to existing scholarship exemplifying one or more of these approaches and include your own application of specific theoretical ideas in analyzing certain aspects of the novel. You will receive more detailed guidelines and a grading rubric for this assignment.

**EXAMS (Midterm: March 10; Final: May 18)**

The exams will consist of different kinds of questions: multiple choice, explanation of concepts, identification of passages, and brief responses. The questions will be based on the information in the required readings as well as on lectures and class discussions, so please take notes. You will receive detailed instructions and a study guide in advance of each exam. The midterm exam will focus on the material covered in weeks 1-7 and the final exam on the material covered after that.

**ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND RIGHTS**

**Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct are serious violations.** Please familiarize yourself with UWSP Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures (<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf> ). If you are unsure whether certain action is appropriate or not, please feel free to talk to me about it.

In addition to academic responsibilities, you also have certain **rights as members of the campus community, including the right to be free from physical or verbal harassment of any kind.** You should become familiar with UWSPCommunity Bill of Rights and Responsibilities: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf>.

There is also a **Bias/Hate Incident Report Form** (<http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Bias-Hate-Incident.aspx>), which you can use to report (anonymously, if you prefer) any bias/hate incidents you may have experienced or witnessed (sexual assault or blatantly racist/homophobic behavior). Bullying of any kind is unacceptable at UWSP, and it is your right and duty to report it.

In accordance with the American with Disabilities Act, UWSP provides accommodations allowing people with disabilities to participate in and benefit from all its programs and services. I am committed to **accommodating students with a documented disability**, so do not hesitate to talk to me if you need to make special arrangements of any kind. For the procedure and paperwork, please contact UWSP Disability Services (Learning Resource Center, Room 609, [datctr@uwsp.edu](mailto:datctr@uwsp.edu), <http://www.uwsp.edu/disability/Pages/toQualifyForDisabilityServices.aspx>).

**Appropriate classroom conduct** **ensures that the classroom is a safe space for all students.** Showing respect for each and every individual – regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity, religious or political opinions, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other forms of difference – is essential for everyone’s success and wellbeing. Treat others as you would like to be treated.

UWSP is committed to **inclusiveness and civility** within our increasingly diverse community. At times we will discuss controversial issues on which class members may strongly disagree, so we must cultivate an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable expressing their views while respectfully addressing the views of others, even when questioning or challenging them.

Please **let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name** from the one in the class roaster or if you identify with **pronouns other than “he” and “she”** (ex.: “ze” or “they”). I invite you all to join me in doing our best to respect other people’s self-identification choices.

**Please turn off all electronic devices** unless you use them for the sole purpose of taking notes. Texting, emailing, or Web browsing in class is not allowed because it will distract both you and others from class activities. Being inattentive will adversely impact your Daily Work Grade.

# Check your e-mail regularly for any updates, and feel free to email me with any questions.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (subject to changes, of which I would notify you in advance)**

Please always read all pages and/or handouts before the session for which they are assigned. As needed, I will give you weekly or biweekly revised schedules with updated information.

## **PART I: Formalist Theories: New Criticism, Structuralism, and Deconstruction**

# 1/26 Introduction. What is theory?

1/28 Read Parker 11-23

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2/2 Read Parker 30-37

2/4 Read Parker 43-50 and Rivkin & Ryan 56-64 (Culler & Saussure)

2/9 Read Parker 65-74 and *Passing* 5-35 (Volume I)

2/11 Read Parker 77-83

2/16 Parker 85-94 and *Passing* 35-59 (Volume II)

2/18 Parker 94-108 and Rivkin & Ryan 278-86 & 303-10 (Derrida)

**PART II: Identity Theories: Feminism, Race Theory, Queer Theory, and Psychoanalysis**

2/23 Parker 148-60 & 178-83 and *Passing* 59-82 (Volume III)

2/25 Parker 317-21 and critical essays about *Passing* (pages to be announced)

3/1 Parker 185-93 and Rivkin & Ryan 900-11 (Butler)

3/3 Parker 195-200 & 205-213

3/8 Critical essays about *Passing* (pages to be announced)

**3/10 Midterm Exam**

3/15 Parker 111-22 and Rivkin & Ryan 418-36 (Freud)

3/17 Parker 137-46 and Rivkin & Ryan 447-60 (Lacan)

**SPRING BREAK**

**PART III: Social Critique Theories: Marxism, New Historicism, and Postcolonial Theory**

3/29 *Heart of Darkness* (Introduction and Volume I)

3/31 *Heart of Darkness* (Volumes II & III)

4/5 Johanna M. Smith’s & J. Hillis Miller’s essays on *Heart of Darkness*

4/7 Parker 220-25 and Rivkin & Ryan 659-73 (Marx & Gramsci)

4/12 Parker 230-41 & 248-52

4/14 Parker 259-70 & 277-83 and Rivkin & Ryan 1242-46 (Horkheimer & Adorno)

4/19 Brook Thomas’s & Tony C.Brown’s essays on *Heart of Darkness*

4/21 Parker 285-308

4/26 Chinua Achebe's and Patrick Brantlinger’s essays on *Heart of Darkness*

4/28 Gabrielle McIntire essay on *Heart of Darkness*

**PART IV: Recent Developments: Reader Response, Ecocriticism, and Disability Studies**

5/3 Parker 330-35, 340-51

5/5 Parker 354-67 and an example of ecocriticism (to be announced)

5/10 Parker 367-79 and an example of disability studies (to be announced)

5/12 Catching up, wrapping up, prepping for the exam

**FINAL EXAM will take place on Wednesday, May 18th, 10:15-12:15**