

Social Theory Foundations
REL 501—Fall 2020
Wednesdays 1:30-3:20

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“A ‘term’ is a boundary line, a line of demarcation.”

—*Critical Terms for Literary Study*

Course Overview/Description:

This graduate seminar introduces students to some of the terms and methods used in social theory and cultural analysis. As such, it presents the academic study of religion as an inevitably interdisciplinary field that draws from a host of various thinkers and texts. We will focus our readings and discussions around critical concepts important to studies of identity, text, and society.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students in REL 501 will:

- 1) gain a historical understanding of various influential schools in critical theory, especially from the 20th century
- 2) write academic prose that presents a critical concept as it has traditionally been understood and applies it to a particular topic relevant to their research projects
- 3) present effectively their analyses of readings and examples orally in class
- 4) practice applying different theoretical frameworks to literary and cultural texts
- 5) debate the cultural and critical value of different theoretical approaches

Texts/Web Resources:

*Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds). *Critical Terms for Literary Study*

*Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

*Blackboard (for other readings and assignment completion)

Statement on COVID-19:

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at <https://studentaccounts.ua.edu/> and <https://financialaid.ua.edu/>.

All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at <http://ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability/>), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can

be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

****how this affects REL:** See [this blog post](#) by Department Chair Russell McCutcheon, outlining REL's approach and response to UA policy and safety measures.

****how this affects our class:** We will be meeting together synchronously on zoom during class time each Tuesday, having a regular out-of-class assignment every Thursday—a written response to provided questions/prompts—that you'll complete on your own time. These responses will help guide the following Tuesday's discussion.

Requirements and Course Policies:

- **Participation:** Participation is required in a grad seminar: each unexcused absence will cost you 10 points on your final grade (a full letter grade). If you know you will need to miss a class meeting, please email me in advance and still turn in your writing for that week. I expect everyone to do the readings and to speak up during our meetings. Be prepared to ask questions about the readings and class material and/or contribute your own ideas.
- **Reading and Responses:** You are expected to read all assigned material (and/or watch any required films) before class. *By 5pm on Tuesdays*, post a précis (of no more than 2 pages) in response to assigned texts, including suggestions for discussion and questions you'd like to see addressed in class. Everyone should read each other's précis before the next day's class.
- **Final Paper:** The final paper in this course will be an essay of no more than 15 pages that presents your own entry to a critical concept/term as applied to an element of your research topic. Specific guidelines will be discussed before the midpoint in the semester. The term relevant to your work will be determined at the beginning of the semester based on your research interests.

Grading:

Participation (discussion + weekly précis): 50%

Essay: 50%

Grading Scale:

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|---|----------|
| A | 90-100 |
| B | 80-89 |
| C | 70-79 |
| D | 60-69 |
| F | below 60 |

**no grades of 'I' (Incomplete) will be assigned in this course*

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

All academic work must be the product of the student submitting it. Plagiarizing the work of someone else (quoting or summarizing another person's ideas or intellectual labor without giving them credit through proper quotations, citations, and acknowledgment) is a serious offence. Suspected cases of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic misconduct will be referred to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You are bound by UA's Honor Code in this class.

Classroom Environment:

In this small group setting, students are responsible for contributing to both their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the learning process, any behavior that creates an uncomfortable learning environment will not be tolerated. This includes interrupting others while they are talking, or making comments that could be perceived as offensive in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, etc.

Meanwhile, in cases when a student might unintentionally offer up commentary that is deemed offensive, it is expected that all students will understand the moment as a teachable one that affords us, as a community of scholars, the opportunity to bring our diverse perspectives to bear on creating a classroom space governed by civil discourse. Please make every effort to maintain an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing and responding to ideas.

Names & Pronouns: (Adapted from [Wooster College, Sample Syllabus Statements](#))

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. I include pronoun introductions, recognizing that our own identifications do not always correspond to how we are perceived or read by others. I will do my best to address and refer to all students by the names and pronouns that they share in class, regardless of what is listed on the roster.

Consultations/Safe Zone:

All students are encouraged to email me or arrange a conversation with me for assistance or with any questions (socially distant outdoor meetings are possible if a virtual meeting is not viable or preferable). Please speak with me well in advance if you are having difficulties satisfactorily completing the course's requirements on time or if you have any other concerns I can help with. Although I cannot guarantee that accommodations can be made, speaking with me before a problem arises will greatly enhance my ability to address the situation in a way that is both fair to your classmates and beneficial to you. Also, please note that I am a Safe Zone Ally, one of many resource people on campus who provide an open door for individuals seeking information or assistance regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, harassment, and/or discrimination. Feel free to talk to me any time if you or someone you know has questions or concerns.

** The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides a list of reporting channels that can be used to report incidences of illegal discrimination, harassment, sexual assault, sexual violence, retaliation, threat assessment or fraud.*

Disability Accommodation:

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit Houser Hall, Suite 1000, to register for services.

UA Severe Weather Protocol:

UA's primary communication tool for sending out information is through its web site at www.ua.edu. In the event of an emergency, students should consult this site for further directions. In the event of an emergency, I will provide additional course information via email. If you have not done so already, please set up your weather advisory through Connect-ED--faculty, staff and students (sign up on myBama). Alternatively, you can listen to weather advisory broadcasts over WVUA 90.7 FM, Alabama Public Radio 91.5 FM or use WVUA 7 Storm Watch, which provides a free service you can subscribe to that allows you to receive weather warnings for Tuscaloosa via e-mail, pager or cell phone.

Tentative Calendar

(subject to change based on the direction our discussions take)

August

- 19 Introduction to course; Introduction to Critical Terms for Literary Study
Diana Fuss, "Teaching Theory"
*in class: Post-Structuralism Explained with Hipster Beards
- 26 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 1 & 2 (**Culture**, Sonya; **Value/Evaluation**, Kyle)

September

- 2 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 3 & 4 (**Narrative**, Erica; **Interpretation** or **Canon**, Peyton)
- 9 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 5 & 6 (**Gender**, Emma; **Performance**, Jacob)
- 16 Presentations/Discussions: Critical Terms 7 & 8 (**Race**, Marco; **Imperialism/Nationalism**, Joe)
- 23 Presentation/Discussion: **Popular Culture** (Judah) and general discussion of the genre of critical term essay
- 30 *A Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (film)

October

- 7 Craig Martin, "Habitus" (pdf on Box)
Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method"
- 14 Donald E. Pease, *Author* (ch. 8, *CTLS*)
Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"
Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?"
- 21 Desire (or Intention...?)
- 28 Daniel T. O'Hara, *Class* (ch. 28, *CTLS*)
*something from Adolph Reed; or "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," bell hooks (1992)

November

- 4 *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison
- 11 *Playing in the Dark*, cntd.
- 18 *Examined Life* (film)
*Discuss annotated bibliographies toward final essays
- 25 Jack Halberstam, "The Power of Unknowing" (pdf in Box)
*Discussion of final papers

December

- 2 Frank Lentricchia, "In Place of an Afterword—Someone Reading" (*CTLS*)
***Final essays due by 5pm: upload to Box folder**

