

I. COURSE TITLE: Critical Theory

Contact Information

Dr. Ray Horton
rhorton3@murraystate.edu
Dept. of English & Philosophy
FH 7C-18
270-809-4542

Office Hours:

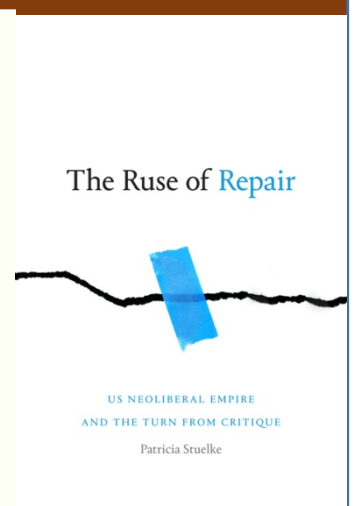
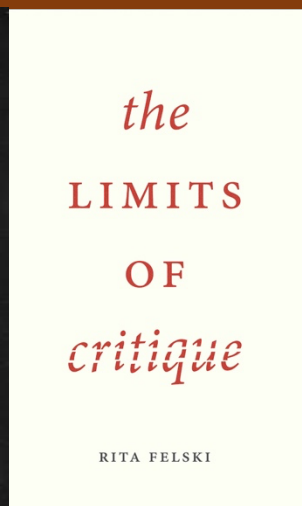
Available to meet via Zoom or
Google chat by appointment.

Course Information

3 Credit Hours
WEB

Criticism and Theory Today

English 609.01 | Summer 2022



II. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITE(S):

An intensive study of critical practices and theoretical approaches to understanding literature.

III. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students who successfully complete ENG 609 will be able to:

- A. demonstrate familiarity with key questions and debates regarding theory and method in contemporary literary studies;
- B. develop strategies for interpreting, applying, and responding to various critical perspectives in literary studies; and
- C. engage in respectful, reasoned dialog with peers about their interpretations of and approaches to significant movements and debates that have emerged in literary studies over the past decade.

“The paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends...on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings. What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmagoric, or even violent? [...] The desire of a reparative impulse, on the other hand, is additive. [...] What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”

IV. CONTENT OUTLINE:

In the introduction to one of the most frequently assigned critical theory textbooks, *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry describes a challenge familiar to anyone teaching or taking a course in literary criticism and theory: how to do justice to a field as heterogeneous as critical theory in a single survey without reducing its many figures, movements, methods, and debates to a handful of names and buzzwords. To illustrate this difficulty, Barry contrasts the “‘moment’ of theory,” the “high-water mark” of the 1980s, with what he calls the “‘hour’ of theory,” the point at which theory “enters the intellectual bloodstream” and “becomes the day-to-day business of quite a large number of people to learn or teach.”

To accomplish the “day-to-day business” of this course, a graduate seminar with an admittedly daunting title compressed into a five-week summer session, we will attempt to sidestep the impossible task of the comprehensive theory survey by instead tuning in to a few of the ongoing debates within literary studies today. Scrutinizing what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as the tension between “paranoid” and “reparative” reading practices, reviewing recent arguments about critical method (“critique” and “postcritique”) that have emerged in the aftermath of the “canon wars,” examining the ongoing conflict—and, at times, synthesis—between formalist close reading and historicist contextualization, considering the politics of thinking about race, class, and sexuality in literature (especially in states facing anti-“Critical Race Theory” legislation), and inquiring into the relationship between literary scholarship and critical pedagogy, we will explore the continued significance of critical theory for students and teachers of literature today.

Our first unit will cover a handful of older, foundational readings whose arguments resurface frequently in recent criticism and theory. For the remainder of the course, we will give our full attention to work written within the past decade, following Barry’s advice, also put forth in *Beginning Theory*, “to read *intensely* in theory [rather than] to read *widely*.” Units two and three will examine a series of interlocking conversations sometimes described as “the method wars,” as a renewed debate between formalisms and historicisms, or as a reevaluation across literary studies of what we mean when we call our work “interdisciplinary.” Unit four will consider recent work on race, class, and sexuality, work that proves particularly urgent in light of recent attempts by cable news personalities, state legislatures, and random people who show up to your local school board meeting to demonize the teaching of any subject one might label “critical [race] theory.” Finally, our fifth unit will conclude the course by considering the diverse audiences—from emerging scholars navigating an ever-contracting academic job market, to the students and colleagues we encounter in our classrooms, to non-academic readers of public-facing critical venues like *The Point* or the *Los Angeles Review of Books*—to which critical theory continues to speak.

“In the dominant mode of scholarly intervention that graduate students are often taught to espouse in order to make themselves marketable, scholars still vie for the novelty and significance of the knowledge they produce by saying, albeit in different ways, ‘For a long time the field has thought *p*, but in fact it’s actually *q*,’ or ‘Only if we understand *q* can we truly understand *p*.’ The dominant form of scholarly intervention relies on an understanding of literary-critical knowledge production as predicated on the attribution of previous critical oversights, in many cases suggesting mutually exclusive rather than coterminous argumentative positions. But recent work...suggests a growing desire to engage in forms of critical utterance that don’t rely so heavily on the ‘they say / I say’ formula, in which one must articulate the value of one’s contribution by scanning the existing critical ecology for faults to correct.”

Pardis Debashi, “Introduction to ‘Cultures of Argument’: The Loose Garments of Argument”

V. INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES: In this course, students will:

- A. read assigned texts carefully, commenting on all required readings via online class discussion;
- B. write a critical analysis essay;
- C. write a scholarly article review and (optional) a theory application essay; and
- D. develop a self-directed, research-based final project that links the course content to their own needs and experiences as readers, scholars, and/or teachers.

This is an **asynchronous** online course, meaning that we will not have scheduled meetings as a class. There are, however, regular deadlines built into the course. If your summer schedule will require some flexibility with these deadlines, please keep me informed with as much notice as possible.

Despite being an online class, this will still be a *discussion-driven*, not lecture-driven, course. I will occasionally post short videos and notes to Canvas in order to provide background information or explain confusing concepts. For the most part, however, our conversation will take place on the Canvas discussion board. I will also be available throughout the course to meet one-on-one via Zoom.

VI. FIELD, CLINICAL, AND/OR LABORATORY EXPERIENCES: None

VII. TEXTS AND RESOURCES:

Required Texts:

N/A. All readings will be posted as PDF files on Canvas.

VIII. EVALUATION AND GRADING PROCEDURES:

Grades in this course will be assigned through a system that I call *math free grading*. A modified form of “contract grading” which also draws upon some of the key principles of “ungrading,” this system is based on my belief that grades in a literature course driven primarily by reading, writing, and class discussion should hinge on a student’s overall contribution to the class, not an accumulation of points from assignment to assignment.

On a math exam, there is an obvious difference between a 95% and a 92%. One exam got more answers right than the other. But what’s the difference between a 95% and a 92% on an essay? This “math free grading” liberates both of us from worrying about how many points you receive on each assignment, emphasizing instead whether your performance on each assignment meets, exceeds, or does not meet expectations so that you can devote your attention to learning, questioning, and growing instead of just banking points.

Your final grade for the course will be based on the following four (4) required assignments. You will receive a separate assignment sheet for each with details and due dates. Instead of percentages or letter grades, all assignments will receive one of the following assessments: “meets expectations,” “does not meet expectations,” or “unacceptable/incomplete.”

1. Consistent, weekly participation in Canvas discussion groups for required readings;
2. Critical analysis essay (3-4 pages);
3. Scholarly article review (2-3 pages); and
4. Self-directed, research-based final project (length may vary depending on project).

While each assignment will have a recommended deadline for timely feedback, the formal writing assignments in this course (critical analysis essay, scholarly article review, optional theory application essay, and final project) will officially be due by the last day of the course as part of a comprehensive final portfolio.

If all required assignments meet expectations, your final grade for the course will be at least a “B.” Additionally, you can boost this “B” to an “A” by completing **one** of the following:

1. Theory application essay (2-3 pages + familiarity with recommended readings); or
2. Submitting the critical analysis essay and scholarly article review by their recommended deadlines and substantially revising both before including them in your final portfolio.

Grades for the course will be distributed as follows:

A: All required assignments meet expectations and your final portfolio is complete. Either your (optional) theory application essay meets expectations OR you submitted the critical analysis essay and scholarly article review by their recommended deadlines, substantially revising both for your final portfolio.

B: All required assignments meet expectations and your final portfolio is complete.

C: No more than one assignment “does not meet expectations.” Your final portfolio is complete.

D: No more than two required assignments “do not meet expectations” OR no more than one required assignment was “incomplete/unacceptable” OR your final portfolio is incomplete.

E: Either more than two required assignments “do not meet expectations,” OR more than one required assignment was “incomplete/unacceptable,” OR you did not submit a final portfolio.

I will post instructions for all writing assignments to Canvas. Assignments will be returned, with comments, through Canvas. (A graded assignment marked “complete” in the Canvas gradebook meets expectations.)

IX. ATTENDANCE POLICY: As an asynchronous online course, there is no attendance policy. Regular participation in your Canvas discussion groups is required, however, and it is important that you keep up with all deadlines and notify me at any point that you are worried about falling behind.

X. ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:

Murray State University takes seriously its moral and educational obligation to maintain high standards of academic honesty and ethical behavior. Instructors are expected to evaluate students’ academic achievements accurately, as well as ascertain that work submitted by students is authentic and the result of their own efforts, and consistent with established academic standards. Students are obligated to respect and abide by the basic standards of personal and professional integrity.

Violations of Academic Honesty include:

Cheating - Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized information such as books, notes, study aids, or other electronic, online, or digital devices in any academic exercise; as well as unauthorized communication of information by any means to or from others during any academic exercise.

Fabrication and Falsification - Intentional alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification involves changing information whereas fabrication involves inventing or counterfeiting information.

Multiple Submission - The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work, including oral reports, for credit more than once without authorization from the instructor.

Plagiarism - Intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, creative work, or data of someone else as one's own in any academic exercise, without due and proper acknowledgement.

Instructors should outline their expectations that may go beyond the scope of this policy at the beginning of each course and identify such expectations and restrictions in the course syllabus. When an instructor receives evidence, either directly or indirectly, of academic dishonesty, he or she should investigate the instance. The faculty member should then take appropriate disciplinary action.

Disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to the following:

- 1) Requiring the student(s) to repeat the exercise or do additional related exercise(s).
- 2) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) on the particular exercise(s) involved.
- 3) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) in the course.

If the disciplinary action results in the awarding of a grade of *E* in the course, the student(s) may not drop the course.

Faculty reserve the right to invalidate any exercise or other evaluative measures if substantial evidence exists that the integrity of the exercise has been compromised. Faculty also reserve the right to document in the course syllabi further academic honesty policy elements related to the individual disciplines.

A student may appeal the decision of the faculty member with the department chair in writing within five working days. Note: If, at any point in this process, the student alleges that actions have taken place that may be in violation of the Murray State University Non-Discrimination Statement, this process must be suspended and the matter be directed to the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Access. Any appeal will be forwarded to the appropriate university committee as determined by the Provost.

XI. NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

The following statement shall serve as the official nondiscrimination statement of Murray State University for its Affirmative Action Plan and for all other purposes. This statement supersedes and replaces all others that may have previously existed in any other form or by any other title in University policies, governance and other documents, internal and external communications, correspondence, and all other official materials:

Murray State University endorses the intent of all federal and state laws created to prohibit discrimination. Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, veteran status, or disability in employment or application for employment, admissions, or the provision of services and provides, upon request, reasonable accommodation including auxiliary aids and services necessary to afford individuals with disabilities equal access to participate in all programs and activities.

In particular and without limiting the preceding and pursuant to and consistent with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations 34 CFR 100 et seq.; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its regulations 34 CFR 104; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 USC 1681 et seq., and its regulations 34 CFR 106 et seq; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and its regulations 34 CFR 110, Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, or age in its educational programs and activities. This non-discrimination in education programs and activities extends to employment and admissions and to recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student services, athletics, and housing. Murray State is required by Title IX and 34 CFR part 106 not to discriminate on the basis of sex and the prohibition against sex discrimination specifically includes a prohibition of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Examples of prohibited sexual harassment and sexual violence can be found in the “Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment” which can be accessed via the link referenced in Appendix I.

Inquiries concerning the application of these provisions may be referred to: 1) the Executive Director of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Access/ Murray State University Title IX Coordinator, Murray State University, 103 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071 Telephone: (270) 809-3155 Fax: (270) 809-6887; TDD: (270) 809-3361; Email: msu.titleix@murraystate.edu; or 2) to the Assistant Secretary of the United States Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202-1100; Telephone: 1-800-421-3481 FAX: 202-453-6012; TDD: 1-800-877-8339; Email: OCR@ed.gov

XII. OTHER INFORMATION

Face Covering/Mask Policy

Guidance and requirements for face masks may be revised as conditions change in the state and region. All students are required to abide by the University’s guidance and/or requirements for face coverings throughout the term of this course. Please visit the [Racer Restart](https://www.murraystate.edu/racerrestart/) (<https://www.murraystate.edu/racerrestart/>) page for the latest guidance on face coverings.

Counseling Resources on Campus

Murray State University has two centers on campus that offer free and confidential mental health services for students. The University Counseling Center is located in Suite C104 in Oakley Applied Science and will be offering both in-person and remote services this year. On-call counselors are available 9:00-3:00 Monday through Friday for walk-in sessions. To schedule an appointment, email them at msu.counselingcenter@murraystate.edu. For more information, call them at 270-809-6851 or visit their website at www.murraystate.edu/CounselingCenter. The Psychological Center is located in Wells Hall and **will be offering primarily in-person sessions**. You can reach them at 270-809-2504 or visit their website at www.murraystate.edu/PsychologicalCenter.

Free mental health self-help resources are available through TAO Connect. To access them, simply go to us.taconnect.org/register and sign in using your Murray State email address.

In a crisis situation, or after hours, please contact Murray State Police at 270-809-2222 or call 911 if you are off campus. You can also call the 24-hour crisis hotline at 800-592-3980 or contact the Crisis Text Line at 741-741.

Students with Disabilities

Students requiring special assistance due to a disability should visit the Office of Student Disability Services immediately for assistance with accommodations. For more information, students with disabilities should contact the Office of Student Disability Services, 423 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071. Telephone: 270-809-2018 (Voice) 270-809- 5889 (TDD).

Email: msu.studentdisabilities@murraystate.edu. Our office will contact professors directly regarding any specific accommodation needs that may be applicable to their particular classroom setting.

Class Absence due to COVID-19

The University will observe the guidance provided by the CDC for the need to quarantine following exposure. Information will be made available on the Racer Restart webpage (<https://www.murraystate.edu/racerrestart/>). **Students diagnosed with COVID-19 will contact their instructors and msu.studentcovidpositive@murraystate.edu immediately.**

Students instructed to quarantine due to exposure should also contact their instructors, and msu.studentcovidquarantine@murraystate.edu immediately. Instructors may make adjustments to due dates or other course requirements to accommodate the severity of the illness and/or the availability of resources needed to complete tasks. If possible, students will continue to check Canvas regularly, and maintain regular communication with their instructors.

Starfish Student Success Network

Your success is important! This course is part of the Murray State University student success initiative that utilizes the Starfish Student Success Network. Starfish may be used to communicate with you about your academic progress and get you help if you need it. Throughout the term, you may receive emails regarding your attendance, course grades or academic performance. To benefit, it is important that you check your Murray State email regularly and follow through on recommended actions. You may also be contacted directly by others on campus who care about your academic success and personal well-being. This may include your academic advisor and staff from Student Engagement and Success and other student support offices across campus. Starfish provides you with the opportunity to “Raise Your Hand” if you need help. Take advantage of this and other features by logging into your Starfish account through myGate. More information can be found at murraystate.edu/starfish.

Racer Safe and Healthy Guidelines

Check the Racer Restart webpage (<https://www.murraystate.edu/racerrestart/>) for the updated Racer Safe and Healthy Guidelines.

1. Get a COVID-19 Vaccine, in consultation with your healthcare provider.
2. Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), face masks are required for all individuals, both vaccinated and unvaccinated.
3. Keeping distance from others is especially important.
4. If you feel sick, stay home.
5. Regularly wash hands for at least 20 seconds and use hand sanitizer frequently.
6. Utilize MSU Health Services (call, visit, or tele-visit)
7. Get a flu shot.
8. Exhibit healthy behavior: Eat Well. Exercise. Get Plenty of Rest.
9. Make good choices. You have a personal responsibility to our campus community.

COURSE SCHEDULE – Subject to Change

Unit 1. The Hermeneutics of Suspicion (July 5-8)

Required:

- James Baldwin, “The Outing” (short story in *Going to Meet the Man*, 1965)
- Fredric Jameson, preface to *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell 1981)
- Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (chapter in *Touching Feeling*, 2002)
- Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?” *Critical Inquiry* (2004)

Recommended:

- Paul Ricoeur, chapter 2 of *Freud and Philosophy* (Yale 1965).
- John Guillory, “The Sokal Affair and the History of Criticism.” *Critical Inquiry* (2002).
- Sharon Best and Stephen Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction.” *Representations* (2009).
- Heather Love, “Close but not Deep.” *New Literary History* (2010).

Submit introductions and discussion board responses by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 8.

Unit 2. Judgment and Critique in the Wake of Theory (July 11-15)

Required

- Sianne Ngai, introduction to *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard 2012).
- Rita Felski, introduction to *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago 2015).
- Joseph North, introduction to *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Harvard 2017).
- Michael Clune, “Judgment and Equality.” *Critical Inquiry* (2019).

Recommended:

- Marco Roth. “Tokens of Ruined Method.” *N+1* (2017).
- Timothy Aubry, introduction to *Guilty Aesthetic Pleasures* (Harvard 2018).
- Kandice Chuh, introduction to *The Difference Aesthetics Makes* (Duke 2019).
- Caleb Smith, “Disciplines of Attention in a Secular Age.” *Critical Inquiry* (2019).

Discussion: discussion leader questions by 7/12, responses by 7/14, replies to classmates by 7/15.

Critical analysis essay recommended by Friday, July 15.

Final project prospectus due by Sunday, July 17.

Unit 3. Interdisciplinarity and the Method Wars (July 18-22)

Required

- Stephen Best, introduction to *None Like Us* (Duke 2018).
- David Kurnick, “A Few Lies: Queer Theory and Our Method Melodramas.” *ELH: English Literary History* (2020).
- Jonathan Kramnick, “Criticism and Truth.” *Critical Inquiry* (2021).
- Patricia Stuelke, introduction to *The Ruse of Repair* (Duke 2021).
- Choose one article from *American Literary History* 34.1 (spring 2022 issue).

Recommended

- Nan Z Da, “The Computational Case against Computational Literary Studies.” *Critical Inquiry* (2019).
- Merve Emre, introduction to *Paraliterary* (Chicago 2017).
- Anna Kornbluh, “We Have Never Been Critical.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (2017).
- Kayla Wazana Tompkins, “The Shush.” *PMLA* (2021).

Discussion: discussion leader questions by 7/19, responses and scholarly article summary by 7/21, replies to classmates by 7/22.

Unit 4. The State vs. Critical Theory (July 25-29)

Required

- Map of state-by-state efforts to pass anti-CRT legislation on chalkbeat.org. (Link on Canvas.)
- From *Race and Secularism in America*: Vincent Lloyd, “Introduction: Managing Race, Managing Religion” and Tracy Fessenden, “Afterword: Critical Intersections: Race, Secularism, Gender” (Columbia 2016).
- Jack Halberstam, introduction to *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (Duke 2020).
- Grace Lavery, “Trans Realism, Psychoanalytic Practice, and the Rhetoric of Technique.” *Critical Inquiry* (2020).
- Mary Rambaran-Olm, “A Wrinkle in Medieval Time: Ironing Out Issues Regarding Race, Temporality, and the Early English.” *New Literary History* (2021).

Recommended:

- Judith Butler, “The Criminalization of Knowledge.” *Chronicle* (2018).
- Joseph Darda, “The Thin White Line: Veterans and the White Racial Politics of Creative Writing.” *American Literature* (2019).
- Sangeeta Ray, “Postcolonially Speaking?” *Modern Language Quarterly* (2019).
- Christopher Douglas, “What Fundamentalist Christian Fiction Can Teach Us about Our American Crisis.” *Religion Dispatches* (2020).

Discussion: discussion leader questions by 7/26, responses by 7/28, replies to classmates by 7/29.
Scholarly article review recommended by Tuesday, July 27.

Unit 5. Criticism in Public (August 1-5)

Required:

- 2020 *PMLA* essay cluster: “Cultures of Argument”
- Eric Hayot, “The Sky Is Falling.” *Profession* (2018).
- Laura Heffernan and Rachel Sagner Buurma, introduction to *The Teaching Archive* (Chicago 2021)

Recommended:

- Sheila Liming, “Fighting Words.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*.
- Jessica Swoboda, “Practicing Acknowledgement.” *The Point*.
- John Guillory, “‘Flipping’ the History of Literary Studies.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*.
- Christina Lupton, “What Was the Classroom?” *Public Books*.

Discussion: discussion leader questions by 8/2, responses by 8/4, replies to classmates by 8/5.

Final portfolio, including final project and (optional) theory application essay, must be submitted by Friday, August 5.