

Theories of Literature and Social Justice  
Drown Hall 102A - Wednesday 1:10-4:00pm

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### Course Description

In this course on theories of literature and social justice we will explore questions such as these: What is literature? What is social justice? How are literary forms (and literary criticism) distinctive in the ways in which they grapple with questions of social justice? How do literary works reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies? In what ways do literary works provide tools to map exploitative or oppressive social and economic formations? In what ways do they create practices for imagining human flourishing and more just ways of living? How do literary works produce varying emotions in readers that might serve to promote (or undermine) social justice? What role have literary works played in emancipatory and egalitarian political movements? We will consider a range of reading, writing and teaching strategies as practices of social justice. In pursuing this inquiry, we will pair scholarship by major theorists in the fields of Marxism, Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Postcolonialism, and Environmental Studies with works of literature from the Medieval period to today, and with literary criticism by faculty from the Department of English at Lehigh.

### Required Texts

Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics* (978-0415538077)  
Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (978-1405124768)  
Terry Eagleton, *The Event of Literature* (978-0300194135)  
Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (978-0674068957)  
E. M. Forster, *Passage to India* (978-0156711425)  
Gayle Jones, *Corregidora* (978-0807063156)  
Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (978-0195136470)  
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (978-0679745426)  
Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (978-0684824772)  
Edward Said, *Orientalism* (978-0394740676)  
Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (978-0198760610)  
Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (978-0691152622)

Supplementary readings on Coursesite ([www.coursesite.lehigh.edu](http://www.coursesite.lehigh.edu)). [CS on course calendar]

### Policies

*Academic Integrity:* Lehigh University requires all professors to forward suspected cases of plagiarism to the University Committee on Discipline. Here is Lehigh University's official statement on plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged appropriation of another's work, words, or ideas in any essays, outlines, papers, reports, or computer programs. Specifically, (1) students who use the exact words of another must enclose those words in quotation marks or show through indentation or type style that the material is quoted and indicate the source, either within the text of their work or in a footnote; (2) students who take ideas from another person or written work, but who either paraphrase those ideas in their own words or else make a few mechanical alterations (rearrange sentences, find synonyms, alter prepositions, punctuation, conjunctions, and the like) must also

indicate the source, either within the text of their work or in a series of footnotes clearly indicating the extent of the material paraphrased; (3) students may not turn in as their own work any materials written for them by another person or any commercially prepared materials, such as computer programs and term papers, purchased on or off campus. (see <http://www.lehigh.edu/~indost/integrity.html>)

*Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:* If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, University Center 212 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.

### **Assignments**

1. Participation. (10%)
2. Short papers. (60%)
  - a. Two position papers on literature and social justice, each 2.5 double-spaced pages. The first, on literature, will be due on January 28. The second, on social justice, will be due on February 4. (10% each)
  - b. Two response/critique papers due at different points in the semester that you will sign up for, each 2.5 double-spaced pages. (10% each)
  - c. Two theoretically informed close readings of a literary text due at different points in the semester that you will sign up for, each 2.5 double-spaced pages. (10% each)
3. Seminar Paper. 15 double-spaced pages. (30%)

### **Participation**

Your active participation in the course is vital to everyone's learning experience. To participate effectively, complete the reading and come to class with at least one idea or one passage that you'd like to discuss. The more demanding theoretical readings may require multiple readings and careful note-taking so that you can come to class prepared to participate fully in our conversations. Full participation credit will be given to students who fulfill these expectations in every class meeting.

### **Short Papers**

*Position papers on literature and social justice:* These papers will require you to reflect on and articulate how you define *literature* and *social justice*. In addition to providing your own answers to the questions "What is literature?" and "What is social justice?" you will need to respond to the definitions in the critical works on literature and social justice we will read as a class. Writing these position papers will give you the opportunity to think about the assumptions that motivate you--both personally and professionally--to study literature and social justice. As such, the best papers will involve theoretical investigation into these concepts as well as personal introspection into your commitments to literary study and positive social change.

*Response/critique papers:* For these papers you will choose one of the critical works from the day's readings and write a response to and/or critique of the critic's argument. After *briefly* summarizing the argument's main points, you will then either respond positively or negatively (or some mix of both) to the critic's argument. Do this by providing further theoretical reflection, by analyzing a work of literature according to (or against) the critic's theories, or by citing historical evidence that bolsters (or undermines) the critic's argument. The best papers will be those that hone in on the most relevant points of the critic's argument, and then engage thoughtfully with that argument through theory, analysis, and historical contextualization.

*Theoretically informed explication papers:* For these papers you will analyze a brief passage from a literary text--either the literary text we are reading for that day or another text approved by Professors Foltz and Whitley--according to the theoretical methods explained in the works of one of the critics we have studied in class. The goal of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive interpretation of an entire literary text, but to test out the analytic power of a theoretical method in a short but cogently argued paper that makes a claim for how to read a passage of literature from this theoretical perspective and then provides clear textual evidence to support that claim.

### **Seminar Paper**

Your seminar paper will be a culmination of the short papers written throughout the semester in that it should be conceived of as (a) a position paper on literature and social justice that (b) engages with the work of several different theorists and that (c) illustrates your position on literature and social justice through the close reading of passages from one or more literary texts. While it is expected that your seminar paper will build upon your short papers, it should be more than a cut-and-pasted assemblage of these shorter works. Rather, these short papers should be thought of as discovery drafts that move you towards a final position paper on some aspect of literature and social justice that resonates with you both personally and professionally. In addition to citing the work of theorists and critics studied in class, your seminar paper should include a works cited page with at least five critical sources from outside of the syllabus.

### Course Calendar

#### **Jan. 21: Course Introduction**

- Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*
- Lehigh Literature and Social Justice Mission Statement (CS)

#### **Jan. 28: What is Literature?**

- Eagleton, *The Event of Literature*
- Position paper on literature due*

#### **Feb. 4: What is Social Justice?**

- Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, introduction and chapters 1, 2, 5, 6
  - Jackson, "The Conceptual History of Social Justice" (CS)
  - Barry, "Social Justice: The Basics" (CS)
  - Sen, "An Approach to Justice" (CS)
- Position paper on social justice due*

#### **Feb. 11 Marxist Criticism: Envisioning Possibilities for Literary Engagement with Economic Injustice**

- Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Part II chapters 4-10 and Part III chapters 1-3.
- Williams, "Culture is Ordinary" (CS)
- Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" (CS)

#### **Feb. 18 Marxist Criticism**

- Whitman, "Song of Myself" and "A Song for Occupations" from *Leaves of Grass* (CS)
- Lawson, "'Spending for Vast Returns': Sex, Class, and Commerce in the First Leaves of Grass" (CS)
- Vanity Fair* and the figure of the counter-jumper (CS)
- Hughes, "Cubes" (CS)
- Moglen, "Modernism in the Black Diaspora: Langston Hughes and the Broken Cubes of Picasso" (CS)

-Crassons, Introduction and Epilogue to *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (CS)

### **Feb. 25 Literature After Feminism**

-Plain and Sellers, eds., *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* Introduction and chapters 1-7, 9-10, 12, 14-17 (CS)

-*The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theory* chapters 2-4 (CS)

-Lay, from "Beyond the Cloister: Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Book Culture" (CS)

### **March 4 Feminism**

-Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*.

-Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1976): 875-893. (CS)

-*The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theory* chapter 7 (CS)

### **March 11 Spring Break**

### **March 18 Feminism**

-Jones, *Corregidora*

-Goldberg, "Living the Legacy: Pain, Desire, and Narrative Time in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*" (CS)

-Li, "Love and the Trauma or Resistance in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*" (CS)

-Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales* (CS)

-Edwards, "The Rhetoric of Rape and the Politics of Gender in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the 1382 *Statute of Rapes*" (CS)

### **March 25 The Impact of Critical Race Theory on the Study of (US) Literature**

-Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

-Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* chapters 1-4

### **April 1 Critical Race Theory**

-Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*

-Gates, *Signifying Monkey* "Introduction: Hip-Hop and the Fate of Signifying" and Chapter 6

-Peterson, *The Hip-Hop Underground and African American Culture*, readings TBD (CS)

### **April 8 Postcolonial Literary Criticism**

-Said, *Orientalism* Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 3 part 1

-Said, *Culture and Imperialism* Chapter 1 and "Narrative and Social Space" from Chapter 2 (CS)

-Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (CS)

-Singh, "An Introduction to Edward Said, Orientalism, and Postcolonial Literary Studies" (CS)

### **April 15 Postcolonial Literary Criticism**

-Forster, *Passage to India*

-Singh, "Reorienting Forster: Intimacy and Islamic Space" (CS)

-Sharpe, "The Unspeakable Limits of Civility" from *Allegories of Empire* (CS)

### **April 22 Environmental Criticism**

- Buell, from *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*
- Foltz, from *American Shit* (CS)

**April 29 Pedagogical Approaches**

- Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapters 1-2 . (CS)
- hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, Chapters 1-5 and 7-9 (CS)

-Faculty panel on pedagogy: Beth Dolan, Michael Kramp, Ed Gallagher

**May 13** -Seminar Paper due by noon-