

## Critical Approaches to Literature, Spring 2024

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 12:15-2:00pm; Tuesday 9:45-11:30am; digitally for three hours on Thursday, by appointment.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Sixth Edition.
- *Frankenstein: Norton Critical Edition*, Mary Shelley.
- *Dracula: Norton Critical Edition*, Bram Stoker.
- *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison.
- *Annihilation*, Jeff VanderMeer.
- Additional readings distributed digitally (print and bring to class when applicable).

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is literature? How do we understand this nebulous category, and how can close, attentive, informed reading improve our understanding both of it, and of the conditions of its production? How can works written in past centuries be understood in light of their legacy, tracing a path from the past to the present? How can we identify the implicit assumptions and mechanisms at work, and shed light on how they have shaped our culture and our selves?

This course is designed to provide a survey of major critical methods in use in contemporary literary studies, providing a toolbox full of techniques which can enrich and deepen our understanding not just of literature but of modern discourse in general. **A major focus of this course is demonstrating an understanding of the range of critical methods:** the ability to **apply these methods**, in order to **interpret what the text does on a deeper level**. To do so we will **read both theories of critical analysis** as well as **examples of those theories put to work**. Your insights and interpretations will be the building blocks of our class sessions, asking you to bring new tools to each week's conversation; it will be a dialogue with the past and a meditation on the present, all to an incisive, critical end, exposing the ideologies of self and other, the ways in which our minds and our world is informed by the stories and ideas we sustain through successive tellings and adaptations. You will be expected to articulate your perspective on the texts and engage with other perspectives in a respectful and productive manner. In addition, we will develop the skills of scholarly research (through the reading of critical scholarship) and analytical writing (through the production of your own literary criticism), preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings.

### COURSE GOALS

- Develop critical thinking and critical reading skills
- Understand cultural texts in their historical context, and to engage in comparative consideration
- See our readings in conversation with one another
- Engage with academic writing and critical literary theory
- Analyze literary texts both orally and in writing
- Develop strategies for effective academic writing and research

## TEXTS BY WEEK

Weeks 1/8, 1/17 & 1/22 - *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley.

Weeks 1/29, 2/7, 2/17 & 2/19 - *Dracula*, Bram Stoker.

Weeks 2/19, 2/26 - *S/Z*, Roland Barthes.

## SPRING BREAK 3/2 - 3/10

Week 3/11, 3/18 - Film Unit with Global Cinema.

Weeks 3/25, 4/3, 4/8 - *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison.

Weeks 4/8, 4/15, 4/22 - *Annihilation*, Jeff VanderMeer.

Weeks 4/29 - Literature Reviews and Papers.

\*\*\*\*\***Paper due 5/10 before 11:59 p.m.**\*\*\*\*\*

## ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

Participation - 25%

Daily Reading Notes and Responses - 25%

Literature Review - 10%

Analytical Essay - 40%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D\* 69 and below

**Participation (25%):** Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and your book, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion. Behaviors that damage your participation grade include lateness, having your cell phone out, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

In addition to regular participation, there will also be assigned **seminars** starting on the second major text of the semester. When it is your cohort's turn to lead a seminar, you will work together to spark and guide the conversation. You don't need to have presentation materials, but you should be ready to frame a discussion, demonstrating an understanding both of the text and of the associated critical approach.

**Reflections and Contributions (25%):** The groundwork for class discussion is laid through sharing reflections about the assigned reading within your cohort. You will reflect on the reading by presenting or responding to a well-framed question or interpretation on your online cohort discussion board; you should focus on a specific aspect of the text, using direct textual reference. You should, when applicable, engage with the critical approach under discussion on a given day. Cohorts conducting a seminar are exempt on the day they lead class discussion.

**Literature Review (10%):** As a necessary part of preparation for writing the paper, you must compose a review of some of the most pertinent critical literature surrounding the text you aim to analyze. This will involve selecting no fewer than three (3) works of published literary analysis dealing with your object text, chosen to reflect the particular approach you plan to take when writing your essay. You will present a.) a summary of each of the arguments presented in each piece of critical literature, b.) an assessment of how the work will contribute to your own analysis, and finally c.) how your own essay will address some gap in the critical discussion you have identified. This will be graded on its thoroughness, depth, and applicability to your project.

**Analytical Essay (40%):** This paper (at least 1500 words) will be an exercise in analysis: you will make an insightful and analytical claim about the text and then prove it by analyzing evidence from the text (connect the evidence to your claim). You will be asked to use one or more of the critical approaches we have learned about in class; this is the true test of your comprehension, asking you to show how a given critical lens reveals hidden depths of a work of literature on the reading list. Whether or not you wholeheartedly endorse a given method is less important than that you demonstrate an understanding of how that method operates. You don't need to be an avowed Freudian, for example, to perform a psychoanalytic reading. Note well! This is not merely an exercise in applying a tool to an object; respectfully reflect on where the literary text resists and forces revisions of the theory, allowing the work to be a source of 'criticism' itself. Just as all theory can itself be regarded as literature, all literature can be its own kind of theory.

For both papers, you will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website. **Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your paper are your own.**

## **COURSE POLICIES**

**ATTENDANCE:** Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day.

**LATE WORK:** Late assignments will not be accepted without an in-person discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. I will collect your reading assignments in class and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we do not discuss a plan for, you risk receiving no credit for it. Please make every effort to make sure assignments are timely, and that you meet the deadlines as outlined in the syllabus. **If you must miss a class, plan**

**ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

TECHNOLOGY: Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class. Keep other electronic devices, such as laptops and iPads, in your bag and off your desk. **Exceptions can be made upon request.**

### **INDIANA ACADEMY UNEXCUSED ABSENCE POLICY**

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor.

\*You are expected to attend every class. You are allowed one unexcused absence without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will be penalized as follows: Unexcused absence (1) = 1-point subtraction from final grade. Unexcused absence (2) = 3-point subtraction from final grade. Unexcused absence (3) = 5-point subtraction from final grade. (For example, if you have an 89 final average with (3) unexcused absences your final grade will be 84). Four (4) or more unexcused absences will lead to academic and residential consequences beyond the scope of this class determined by the Office of Academic Affairs (i.e., residential groundings, parent/principal conference, and/or detention).

\*\*Any minor assignment/test/project/presentation missed due to an unexcused absence will be handled according to the late work policy of this class. You will be given an opportunity to retake any missed assignment/test/project/presentation worth more than 20% of the final grade but will be docked a full letter grade as a result.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

## APPROPRIATE USE OF LLM/‘AI’ TECHNOLOGY

### Official Humanities Division Statement:

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.

### Instructor Statement:

Large language models (more colloquially known as AI chatbots) are powerful tools which are rapidly altering the landscape of humanities scholarship. As with many such devices, there are benefits and drawbacks. Take for example motorized transport: automobiles made remarkable things possible for transit and logistics. It has also fostered a sedentary lifestyle, with all the concomitant health problems (i.e. driving instead of walking causes your legs to wither, your heart to weaken, your lifespan to contract).

Similarly, while large language models can accelerate a number of tasks, **it risks replacing invaluable skills and leading to the atrophy of the very capacities this class is meant to exercise and refine.** Letting an LLM write for you will not only produce mediocre, intellectually vacuous work, it will also cause your own abilities to shrivel precisely when they should be developing. It is also a priori plagiaristic: **all the words a LLM uses are drawn from uncredited, uncompensated sources.** It is not a voice from nowhere; it is stolen language. I want you to use your own words and ideas, and credit the words and ideas of others when you use them.

For the purposes of this class, **LLM/AI chatbots can be legitimately used for research purposes:** you can ask them questions (though always double check, since they frequently ‘hallucinate’) to increase your awareness of a topic, with the understanding that proper sourcing and citation must follow. **They may not be used to produce prose that represents itself as your own.** If you have doubts about the appropriate use of this technology, simply get in touch with me and we can clarify.

## LITERATURE NOTE

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life’s mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of his/her times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a

respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences.

**If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor.** Alternative texts are available.

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY**

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>. As such, it is important to ensure that your comments and behavior in class is respectful and inclusive. Discriminatory comments or behavior will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with Indiana Academy and Ball State University policy.

## **DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The [Office of Disability Services](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at **765-285-5293** or **dsd@bsu.edu**.