

Critical Approaches to Literature, Spring 2021

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Office hours are **online** and **by appointment**. E-mail me to set up a time, **TWRF, 2:15 to 5:00 PM**.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Sixth Edition.
- *Frankenstein: Norton Critical Edition*, Mary Shelley.
- *Dracula: Norton Critical Edition*, Bram Stoker.
- *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad.
- *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

## Topics by Week

Weeks 1/4, 1/11 & 1/18 - *Frankenstein*.

Weeks 1/25, 2/1, 2/8 & 2/15 - *Dracula*.

Weeks 2/22, 3/1 - Film Unit with Global Cinema

### **SPRING BREAK 3/8 - 3/14**

Week 3/15 - Literature Review and Paper Workshop.

**\*\*\*\*First paper due 3/20 before 11:59 pm\*\*\*\*\***

Weeks 3/22 & 3/29 - *Heart of Darkness*

Weeks 4/5, 4/12 & 4/19 - *The Bluest Eye*

Weeks 4/26 & 5/3 - *Annihilation*

**\*\*\*\*\*Second Paper due 5/12 before 11:59 p.m.\*\*\*\*\***

## ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

Participation - 20%

Daily Reading Notes and Responses - 20%

Literature Review - 20%

Analytical Essays - 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 (20%):** 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** (at least once per major text, sometimes more). When it is your turn to participate in a seminar, you will present your assignment to the class, helping to spark and guide the conversation. You don't need to have presentation materials, but you should be ready to frame a discussion.

**Daily Reading Assignment (20%):** For every reading assignment, you will be asked to compose a response. This will include a.) a quotation of interest from the text, b.) a question or comment to contribute to the discussion and c.) an analysis of some aspect of the text. Make sure to bring your response into class each day, in a form which can be handed in, and with your full name at the top. I will

grade these chiefly on their completeness, as long as they show adequate effort and thoughtfulness. They should also be legible!

Reading notes need to contain the following: your analysis of the way the writer communicates a particular concept or theme using elements of the text (language, symbol, allegory, setting, motif, etc.). Ask yourself: What is the text doing on a deeper level? How does it communicate and execute that concept through various elements within the play or poem?

**\*\*\*\*\*Make sure all of the words and ideas in your reading notes are your own. Using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism.\*\*\*\*\***

**Literature Reviews (10% each):** As a necessary part of preparation for the writing of each 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 Essays (20% each):** These papers (at least 1500 words) will be exercises 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. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

**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.**

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### MASK POLICY

The Indiana Academy will follow [Ball State University's mask policy](#). Effective July 1, 2020, all people on campus—including faculty, staff, students, vendors, contractors, suppliers, and visitors—should wear face masks (covering nose and mouth) while inside campus buildings. Face masks are specifically required in the following situations:

1. When in the presence of others (indoors or outdoors) and physical distancing is difficult to maintain, such as in hallways, elevators, stairs, public spaces, and common areas;
2. When in a classroom or laboratory;

3. When using campus transportation (such as a shuttle bus);
4. When multiple individuals are in a University vehicle.

Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to bring their own mask. Masks will be provided to anyone who is unable to bring a mask or their mask is damaged.

Non-compliance: If a student declines to wear a face mask as required, the student will be referred to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. If the situation occurs in a classroom or other academic setting, it is considered a classroom management issue, and the teacher will remind the student of the requirement and give the student a chance to comply with it prior to referring the matter to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. Wearing masks is crucial to preventing the spread of COVID-19 to others.