

13 September 2021



# **English Literature**

# **Critical Practice:**

# **Criticism**

# **Handbook**

  

# **2021-22**

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Welcome to Critical Practice: Criticism.

These courses have been designed to intensify your awareness of the critical tools central to the study of English Literature. In your Pre-Honours years, you were given a brief introduction to formal and critical discourses in the first semester, and over the rest of those two years you were provided with an overall sense of the historical development of literary forms and genres. Collectively, the Critical Practice (CP) courses build upon that training. The practical skills and range of knowledge acquired over the year will equip you with a command of the precise critical terminology necessary for Honours level study in both third and fourth years.

The four CP courses – Poetry, Performance, Prose, and Criticism – will expand your sensitivity to specific generic conventions and extend your knowledge of associated critical vocabulary. This, in turn, will hone your skills in the close reading, description, and analysis of a variety of texts. In the Performance course in particular you will be encouraged to reflect upon the meaning and effect of texts in relation to their staging, exploring a range of different aspects and styles of theatre.

If you have any specific queries about the courses you may consult the Course Organiser; additionally, you may consult full time members of staff during their office hours. While the CP courses do, of course, count for credit toward your degree in their own right, the skills acquired in them are also designed to be transferable. In particular, the critical terminology acquired should be used to inform your analysis of the texts you study in the rest of your Honours courses, including your Dissertation (where appropriate).

## **CREDIT WEIGHTING**

All Critical Practice courses are worth 10 credits.

Please refer to your respective Degree Programme Table (for those within the School of LLC see [School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures Degree Programme Tables \(DPT\) \(ed.ac.uk\)](#)) to see the ways in which the CP courses contribute towards your overall degree classification.

## **MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT**

In accordance with QAA expectations, as specified in Chapter B6 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the primary purpose of moderation is to ensure that assessment criteria are being applied fairly and consistently and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards that students are expected to achieve. Moderation also provides an opportunity to assure the quality of feedback provided to students on their assessed work, in terms of its sufficiency, clarity, helpfulness and timeliness, and to comment on aspects related to the design and implementation of the assessment that may feed into future enhancements of the

assessment. Critical Practice assessments are sample second marked. Second markers also moderate every piece of feedback produced by the first marker and the mark distribution for their batch to ensure that assessments have been marked in line with the marking scale, that the range of available marks is used appropriately, that the feedback properly explains the grade awarded, and that all problematic scripts (including fail marks, rubric infringements, etc.) have been carefully considered. Critical Practice Course Organisers have overall responsibility for moderation of CP courses. This means second markers can refer individual problematic scripts or script runs to the relevant Course Organiser, who has oversight of overall mark distributions for the course. Moderators at all levels have the power either to confirm or to adjust marks and feedback in consultation with the original markers before final confirmation at the Exam Board. Only moderators can determine the existence of grounds for mark adjustment, and all decisions confirmed by the Exam Board are final. Exam Boards and External Examiners oversee the entire marking and moderation process

### **COURSE INFORMATION**

Course Organiser: Dr Alex Lawrie (alex.lawrie@ed.ac.uk)

Course Administrator: Michael Butler (michael.butler@ed.ac.uk)

### **COURSE RATIONALE**

This course will introduce students to a range of conceptions of the task of the critical theorist and debates about the functions and methods of literary criticism. It aims to provide students with both an appropriate vocabulary and broad conceptual and historical schemata to help them situate, develop, and challenge their own beliefs and practices as critics.

Recorded lectures will describe and analyse various critical approaches with reference to specific examples and will suggest their wider application for students to develop either in their own reading or on other courses where relevant. Students will be free as usual to consult course lecturers, or any other member of staff, during office hours.

The lectures will introduce students to key stages in literary criticism, and encourage them to think about both change and continuity in relation to the history of criticism. Lectures and lecture handouts will make recommendations for further reading as appropriate, and lecturers will make an effort to demonstrate to students both the modes of analysis appropriate to the study of criticism and possible connections and contrasts between different approaches to criticism.

## COURSE DELIVERY

This year, the course will be delivered via five 2-week blocks incorporating a lecture on a specific critical topic or approach, and a live discussion board:

1. **Reading and the Work of Criticism** (Dr Sadek Kessous)
2. **Post-structuralist Criticism** (Dr Benjamin Bateman)
3. **Criticism and History** (Dr Aaron Kelly/Dr Alex Thomson)
4. **Queer Theory** (Dr Patricia Malone)
5. **Critical Race Studies and Intersectionality** (Dr Sarah Bernstein)

The lectures and Q&A sessions will be supplemented by a Workshop, which each student will be required to attend. These will be skills-based guidance classes, and will provide an opportunity for further discussion about your study and assessment.

Students should ensure that they follow the reading for the lectures each week, and take note of the exact form and nature of the assessment exercise from the start of the course.

Lectures will be pre-recorded rather than delivered in-person.

You will find **lecture recordings** in named folders in LEARN, the virtual learning environment for the course, which is accessed via MyEd.

Each lecture will be split into 3 shorter sections, to suit the video medium. Each video lecture will be accompanied by a further reading guide, and a PowerPoint or handout.

Lectures will be posted by 12 noon on the first Thursday of each block.

For the hour **12pm-1pm, on the second Thursday of each block**, the lecturer will be available to answer questions in a **live chat Q&A session**. This will take place on the course Discussion Board found in LEARN.

Make sure to watch the lectures (a) in the right order; (b) taking notes on the important points and things you don't follow; and (c) in plenty of time to think about what the lecturer has said and to formulate questions to ask them in the Q&A forum. **You can post your question(s) there at any time between watching the lecture and the hour of the session AND/OR during the session itself**; but before you do so, please check that no-one else has already posted the same question! This will help the lecturer make efficient use of the time available.

In the first week there will be a Q & A session with the course convenor for general info and queries about assessment, and in week 11 there will be a short recorded lecture about the final assessment.

The lecture recordings and Q&A chat transcripts will remain available all year.

Further information about the **workshops** will be released in due course.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

**On completion of this course, the student will be able to:**

1. demonstrate a critical awareness of different modes and styles of literary criticism and critical theory;
2. demonstrate the ability to analyse a piece of critical writing in the light of this awareness;
3. show a knowledge of the concepts, theories and practices that constitute literary criticism;
4. situate their own critical practice in relation to major modes and styles of literary criticism.

## FULL PROGRAMME

**Lectures will be available on LEARN on the Thursday of that week, and the Q&A sessions will also be on Thursdays between 12 noon and 1pm.**

Week 1 23/09/2021	Q&A session	Dr Alex Lawrie
Week 2 30/09/2021	<b>Block 1: Reading and the Work of Criticism</b> Lecture available on LEARN	Dr Sadek Kessous
Week 3 07/10/2021	Q&A session on week 2's lecture	Dr Sadek Kessous
Week 4 14/10/2021	<b>Block 2: Post-structuralist forms</b> Lecture available on LEARN	Dr Benjamin Bateman
Week 5 21/10/2021	Q&A session on week 4's lecture	Dr Benjamin Bateman
Week 6 28/10/2021	<b>Block 3: Criticism and History</b> Lecture available on LEARN	Dr Aaron Kelly
Week 7 04/11/2021	Q&A on week 6's lecture	Dr Alex Thomson

Week 8 11/11/2021	<b>Block 4: Queer Theory</b> Lecture available on LEARN	Dr Patricia Malone
Week 9 18/11/2021	Q&A on week 8's lecture	Dr Patricia Malone
Week 10 25/11/2021	<b>Block 5: Critical Race Studies and Intersectionality</b> Lecture available on LEARN Also available: Lecture on final assessment	Dr Sarah Bernstein
Week 11 02/12/2021	Q&A on week 10's lecture  Followed by Q&A on final assessment (1pm-2pm)	Dr Sarah Bernstein  Dr Alex Lawrie

## SET TEXTS

For each block, the lecturer will provide a list of readings they will discuss in the lecture, and links to online versions, where available. They will also supply a list of further readings you might wish to consult in light of the lecture.

## ASSESSMENT

The course will be assessed at the end of the course, with a final assessment due on **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021**. This submission will be made up of two parts:

Part 1 (40%) is an essay of 1,000 words;  
Part 2 (60%) is an essay of 1,500 words.

**Details of the assessment (parts 1 and 2) as follows:**

### Assessment Part 1:

Write a 1,000 word précis/summary of ONE of the following essays from the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. These essays are also available in PDFs/online versions on the course Learn page.

If your essay falls substantially short of the word length required, it is unlikely to be of the required standard, which will be reflected in the mark. Your essay is not likely to receive a pass mark if it is less than half the required length. Excessively long essays will not be marked beyond the word limit.

1. Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'. [NTC: 695-714]
2. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility'. [NTC: 1051-1071]
3. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra'. [NTC: 1556-1566]

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. [NTC: 2114-2126]
5. Simone de Beauvoir, From 'The Second Sex', Chapter XI, 'Myth and Reality'. [NTC: 1265-1273]
6. Frantz Fanon, From 'The Wretched of the Earth'. [NTC: 1440-1454]
7. Tzvetan Todorov, 'Structural Analysis of Narrative'. [NTC: 2023-2031]
8. bell hooks, 'Postmodern Blackness'. [NTC: 2509-2516]
9. Rubin, From 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality'. [NTC: 2377-2402]
10. Lowe, 'Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural Politics'. [NTC: 2519-2535].

**Some guidance:**

A précis is not simply a statement of the author's intention. Rather it is an overview of their argument which considers not only what they set out to do but how they do it: whether they devote space to conceptual analysis or give literary examples. Consequently, you should aim to address the extract as a whole and not just focus on the beginning or on the conclusion. It might also consider the genre of the piece: is it a manifesto or statement of intent? Is it a critical review or polemical riposte to another critic? Is it analytical or impressionistic in form? An effective précis is more than a summary of an extract, it is a critical analysis in its own right because you will be distinguishing central lines of argument or investigation from subordinate arguments or examples. However, this will involve the exercise of your own critical judgement: for example, it would be up to you to identify the key arguments of the extract, and what are merely examples given in support of that argument.

**Assessment Part 2:**

Choose a DIFFERENT essay from the same list and write a 1,500 word critical discussion of it. The essay you use for this part of the assessment MUST BE DIFFERENT from the one you chose for Assessment Part 1.

**Some guidance:**

Having completed a précis in Assessment 1, you are in a position to enter into a critical discussion of another extract. You might bear in mind that just as literary criticism does not mean pointing out flaws and mistakes in a text, so a 'critical discussion' does not require you to find fault with an extract. At a very basic level it means drawing attention to features of interest in the piece, but more specifically it might mean exploring a combination of any number of the following questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the critical argument?
- Are there specific assumptions or circumstances that we need to be aware of before we can understand the argument, or that we need to bear in mind if we wish to make an assessment of its success?
- To what extent are the author of the extract and its arguments products of a particular time and place?
- To what extent are these arguments about criticism still relevant today?

- Is the approach to literature demonstrated by the extract more relevant to some literary forms or periods than to others?
- Is the style of the extract significant?
- If so, why the author has chosen to write in this particular style?
- Does the style of the extract make a difference to the analytical or persuasive force of the argument?

**Each block lecturer will provide information on further reading; the following is intended more as general guidance:**

#### POSSIBLE FURTHER READING

- Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.
- . *Criticism and Literary Theory: 1890 to the Present*. Harlow: Longman, 1996.
- The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. 8 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989-2001.
- Booth, Wayne. *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Bowie, Andrew. *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.
- . *Literary Criticism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Fowler, Roger. *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Groden, Michael & Kreiswirth, Martin. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Hartmann, Geoffrey. *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Hernadi, Paul ed. *What is Criticism?* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.
- Jost, Walter & Holmstead, Wendy. *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Kreiger, Murray. *Theory of Criticism: A Tradition and Its System*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism*. London: Athlone, 1980.
- Lentricchia, Frank & McLaughlin, Thomas eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (2nd edn.)
- Olsen, Stein. *The End of Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

- Parrinder, Patrick. *Authors and Authority: English and American Criticism, 1750-1990*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.
- Vickers, Brian. *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1988.
- Waugh, Patricia, ed. *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Wimsatt, William & Brooks, Cleanth, *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. London: Routledge, 1957.