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ENG 4775-600: Studies in Literature, Culture, Theory

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Eastern Illinois University

Spring 2020

Course: **English 4775 (35395)** / **Studies in Literature, Culture, Theory / 3 credit hours**

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Office Hours: **TTh 11-13:00; W 11-12:00 in 1222 Booth Library, and virtually anytime**

This course introduces students to the ways that **theory** can assist in (and sometimes complicate) the study of **literature** and **culture**. By focusing specifically on theories that address how texts address questions of biology and politics—and on "contagion"— we will introduce ourselves to many of the thought-provoking and influential forms of biopolitical theory that have developed over the course of the last few centuries.
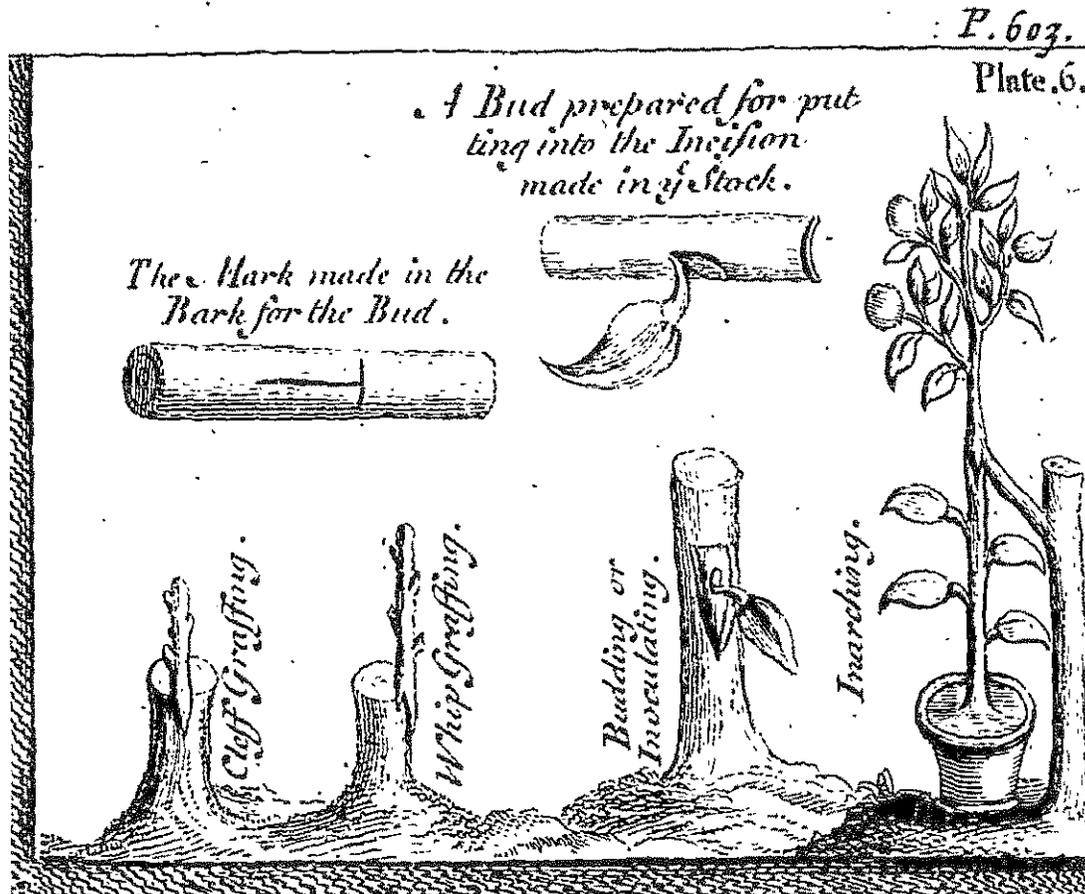
Plate 6, from Richard Bradley's *New improvements of planting and gardening* (1726)

We will be discussing how the placing of biopolitics at the center of human developments since the mid-1700s (at least!) can challenge and enhance the ways we do literary and cultural scholarship. There are a number of thinkers over the past few decades, such as Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida, Roberto Esposito and Peter Sloterdijk, who

consider biopolitics and immunology to be the best approaches to explaining how humans have developed in the ways they have, and come to the decisions they have made. This timeframe, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, coincides with the newly acknowledged period of the "Anthropocene," an era of global history marked by human influence on the global ecosystem through, primarily, the burning of fossil fuels. We will be examining how many recent theorists, by linking our understandings of biology and politics, have argued how we might change how we "read" the literatures and cultures in the Anthropocene era.

Until 2015, this course was called "Literary and Cultural Criticism and Theory." We will discuss during the semester the word placed under erasure in the new title: ~~criticism~~.

On "Contagion"

As I write this course description, allow me to document what "contagion" under a google "news" search reveals:

- A story about UN concerns regarding "jihadist contagion" in West Africa after insurgent activity in Burkina Faso
- Numerous articles about the risks of "financial contagion" due to falling economic confidence in, especially, one of India's largest banks and various Chinese lenders
- Several commentaries documenting a Yale professor's recent claim that political "psychosis" can be transferred between individuals
- An article detailing the uptick in mass shooting in the US during 2019, leading criminologists to cite fears of "a contagion effect" spreading more mass killings
- A report on enhanced health screenings at U.S. airports to check for visitors with a new coronavirus from central China
- A story about a veterinary college's development of a toolkit to help with suicide prevention on campus and to "reduce the risk of suicide contagion"

What do terrorist attacks, mass violence, economic data, potential epidemics, group psychosis, and rising suicide rates have to do with one another? This course will address this question by offering literary, cultural, critical, and historical reasons why we believe that **more than just words are exchanged** when we have contact with each other—locally, and across the globe. How has "contagion" become the vehicle of "biopolitics"?

While English uses of "contagion" have tended to stress its connection to disease, poison, and infection from Early Renaissance plagues through to the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the Latin root of "contagion"—*con-* "together" + *tangĕre* "to touch"—does not definitively connote a negative experience. In this course, we will tend to foreground an alternative narrative of "contagion" that accentuates the benefits of convergence.

Recent critical work in numerous fields of inquiry has identified the concept of "contagion" as a means to bring together cultural and scientific phenomena that seem highly disconnected. By looking at episodes of "contagion" entering into literature and culture in the nineteenth century, we will launch into a transdisciplinary conversation between critical theory and public health, between philosophical reason and global networking, between the

biological and the political. In the new and international ecology of the nineteenth century, how were fears and hopes of intimate contact between all parts of the globe negotiated and managed? How, for example, might we see Jane Austen not as the writer of "the novel of manners," but the first and best recorder of the burgeoning world of biopolitical globalism? We will also look back to some of the founding documents of the eighteenth century (Hume, Smith) and observe how their legacies continue to plague our popular and critical imaginaries in what Patricia Wald calls the "outbreak narrative," in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

After addressing a few introductory texts, the first part of the course will lay the groundwork for our readings of nineteenth-century (and other) texts later in the semester. Beginning with short readings taken from the works of John Locke, David Hume, and Adam Smith, we will examine a growing fascination that manifested itself as both an interested preoccupation with and a burgeoning fear of external "contagion." We will look at short extracts from two seemingly disconnected realms: horticulture and immunology. These disciplines meet in the practice of "inoculation," which, in the eighteenth century, referred primarily to the practice of producing hybrid plants (usually trees), and only later as a precursor to what we now generally refer to as "vaccination." The Plate, above (on the first page of this syllabus), illustrates the preparatory stages ("The Mark made in the Bark for the Bud" and "A Bud prepared for putting into the Incision made in the Stock") for various types of horticultural grafting, including "Budding or Inoculating" (second from the right).

It was in the "discovery" of inoculation as a medical practice that "contagion" could be rethought as a beneficial experience, and not solely as a "corrupting contact" (*OED*).

The purpose of the course is to equip students with an array of theoretical methods for the study of literature and culture. We hope to offer a survey of the most important and influential literary and cultural approaches, though we cannot hope to address all of them. Furthermore, some theorists are difficult to categorize as belonging to one specific camp or method. By the time the course is complete, students should feel prepared to tackle the discourse of literary and cultural theory on their own.

From the EIU Course Catalog: ENG 4775 - Literature, Culture, Theory.
Basic principles of evaluating the standard literary genres, or tenets of a specific school of criticism, or the examination of major aesthetic questions. Topics to be announced. (Group 5) WI Prerequisites and Notes: ENG 1002G. May be repeated once with permission of the Department Chairperson. Credits: 3

Requirements

Participation	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Summary/Rationale	10%
Final Writing Project	30%
Final Exam	10%

Participation (20%)

Your Course Participation grade will be determined by your engagement with the course material, as demonstrated in our course discussions. While this will not be determined exclusively by *quantity*, I (and the other participants in the class) would appreciate your "showing up" on a regular basis. What do I mean by this? If you meet the requisite, minimum number of posts that I require for this class, but post them all within a three-week period, you will demonstrate a sustained engagement with neither the class, nor the course material.

That being stated, I will also consider the quality of your posts and responses when evaluating your performance. Posts that are poorly written and/or difficult-to-read (due to lack of revision) will not be considered as valuable to our course as those that demonstrate keen engagement. Consider aiming for the following:

- Demonstrating a willingness to ask questions, and ponder difficult readings;
- Identifying passages that need explication, or generate ideas;
- Presenting insightful analysis through specific and detailed readings of passages;
- Making connections to other examples, whether from other courses, previous reading, or popular culture;
- Speculating on possibilities in a sincere attempt at understanding;
- Offering helpful ideas and suggestions to others;
- Educating us about something we don't know;
- Showing respect and civility;
- Entertaining and delighting with graceful, witty, and perceptive writing.

Not every post or response can offer all of these: they are meant to indicate the myriad ways you can make significant contributions to this course!

Minima: I expect you to make **one substantial discussion post**, as an attempt to offer up insights, commentary, and questions to initiate a conversation on the week's readings (at a minimum of 750 words), make five responses to the discussion posts of others, and to respond by way of suggestions to two abstracts (of the final writing projects) of other students in the class. You are highly encouraged to go beyond these minima—and you may certainly feel equally encouraged to begin formal or informal discussion "topics" on anything that strikes your interest during the course of the semester.

Midterm Exam (20%)
(distributed Thursday, March 12—due Sunday, March 22 at 23:59)

The Midterm Exam (distributed towards the end of Week 9 of the semester) will consist of two sections: a series of terms for theoretical concepts we have learned during the first half of the semester, and a series of brief passages from our readings. You will be asked to explain the terms and, if applicable, identify (author and title of work) their significance. You will need to identify and comment briefly upon the excerpted passages. Each section will be

worth 10% of your final grade. The Midterm will be taken in online, of course, and you will be able to use your course materials to complete the exam.

Final Writing Project (40%)

Summary/Rationale (Saturday, March 28, at 23:59)

As the semester progresses, I will communicate with you individually so that together we may develop a topic for your final writing project. This project will ask you to choose a text that you would be interested to write about using one or more theoretical approaches. Your first assignment toward the goal of the written paper will be to write a short summary (**minimum** 1000 words) of the text you will analyze. Included in this summary will be a rationale for regarding this text as suited for theoretical analysis. That is, I expect you to explain why you think "theory" will assist in reading the text you have selected.

Many of the supplementary texts for this class that you have received from EIU's Textbook Rental are particularly suited for biopolitical analysis. This is why you have received these books: we will not be using them as part of our required course readings.

Proposal/Abstract for your theoretical approach (Monday, April 13 at 23:59)

Nearing the end of the semester, I will ask you for a brief paper explaining the theoretical approach(es) you have determined to use in your analysis. You might think of this assignment as a project proposal or an "abstract" outlining what your final paper will entail. This assignment will have a 350-word **maximum**, and will be shared with the other students in the class.

Final Writing Project (Sunday, May 3 at 23:59)

I will continue to give you more specific instructions during the semester, but for now, you will want to know that the final paper should be **at least** 8 pages in length (10 pages, if you are a graduate student). By mid-semester you should have a solid sense of the topic for your final paper, and will have presented me with a preliminary description of your chosen text. The breakdown for the entire project will be as follows: Summary/Rationale (10%), Proposal/Abstract (5%), Final Product (25%).

Final Exam (10%)

Part One of the Final Exam will consist of *short quiz questions only*. This section is simply a way for you to check up on your level of attentiveness to the course material throughout the semester.

Part Two of the Final Exam will consist of a series of terms (usually, theoretical concepts) we have learned during the semester. You will be asked to explain the terms and, if applicable, identify (author and title of work) their significance. Each section will be worth 5% of your final grade. The Final Exam will take place on **during the final exam week.**

Please read carefully through this Course Overview. Here, I will introduce the following:

1) purpose and structure of the course
2) netiquette
3) course policies
4) technology requirements and technical skills
5) D2L and other technology learner support
6) prerequisite knowledge
7) information about the instructor
8) learning objectives
9) assessment (or grading policy)
10) instructional materials
11) learning activities

1. Purpose and Structure of the Course

English 5061: Special Topics in Literature and Literary Theory, "Harry Potter and Representation," will be entirely taught and experienced online over the span of fifteen weeks, January 8 — May 4, 2018.

This class will be appropriate for anyone pursuing masters-level work in literary studies or anyone planning to enrich his or her own teaching of issues of representation and interpretation—in the Harry Potter novels and beyond. In particular, the course will introduce students to:

1) historical texts that inform Rowling's series
2) secondary criticism that broadens the scope of the Harry Potter books
3) theoretical works that, when applied to the novels, help illuminate ways of reading that are otherwise elusive for students (e.g., Lacanian psychoanalysis), and
4) advanced methods for teaching Rowling's series at the high school level.

English 5061 is organized into modules, or thematically driven topics centered on representation. These cover early stages of character development (birth, self-introduction, childhood), generic conventions (the Bildungsroman and the gothic), dreams and interpretation, biopolitics (external controls over life functions), and the final stages (of life).

2. Netiquette
Please see EIU's Online Learning Netiquette Guide (https://www.eiu.edu/colsolutions/ss_netiquette.php): In an online course, most communication is done through written messages either in private posts or public discussions. It is important that students in online courses be especially sensitive to how messages and sentiment are communicated and received. Be respectful, clear, and descriptive in your online post assignments.

3. Course Policies

Academic Integrity
Plagiarism—either intentionally or unintentionally passing off someone else's work as your own—will not be tolerated, and will result in a zero grade for the assignment and/or the course. I will also file a Notification of Academic Misconduct Form with the Office of Student Standards, which will become part of your file at Eastern. Please see EIU's Code of Conduct (http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php) for more information on plagiarism and other kinds of academic dishonesty. Students are responsible for adhering to this code.

Students with Disabilities
If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS) (http://www.eiu.edu/disability/). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2022, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

Student Success Center
Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (http://www.eiu.edu/success/) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Late Policy
Essays are due at the assigned times. Late essays will be marked a full grade lower for every day late. Essays turned in a week past the deadline will be given a "zero." If you have reason to believe you will be incapable of completing an assignment on time, please communicate with me as soon as possible.

Essay Format
Your assignments should be submitted via D2L (not by email). They must include page numbers (if applicable), and documentation of cited material. Format: 12-point Garamond font (or similar), double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Always submit your papers using a consistent format, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago

Email Policy
I will try to respond to all emails to ccwharram@eiu.edu within 24 hours of receipt (except Thursday). Please use a descriptive subject line ("question about primary sources," etc.), a proper salutation ("Dear Dr. Wharram"), and a proper closing ("Best, Frankie Avalon," "Thank You, Billie Ellish"). Email professionalism is very important.

4. Technology Requirements and Technical Skills
Students must have access to the Internet using a laptop or desktop computer. Students are responsible for having a backup plan if the primary computer crashes and/or Internet service fails. Mobile devices can be used but are not recommended for timed online exams or quizzes, and certainly not recommended for writing assignments.

Peripheral devices that may be of use include a headset with a built-in microphone (iPhone earbuds with microphone will also work) and a webcam.

All course content and class activities will be in D2L (http://www.eiu.edu/d2l), or on the course blog (https://eiu5061harrypotter.wordpress.com/). Self-help tutorials for D2L are available in the D2L Student Orientation course (login required).

Students must know how to download files and have the ability to install software. Students must have Adobe Acrobat Reader (free download) installed on the computer. Microsoft Word is also required and is available free through Office 365 via EIU Panthermail. Tutorials for using Word and other software programs are available at http://www.eiu.edu/lynda (login required).

Students must be able to

* download, edit, and save Word documents and PDF files
* email using attachments
* navigate D2L

We *may* use Blackboard Collaborate to conduct online discussions. You can also find several resources and instructions for using D2L and Blackboard Collaborate at EIU's Center for Online Learning (http://www.eiu.edu/col/student_resources.php).

5. D2L and Other Technology Learner Support at EIU
If you need assistance with D2L, call **D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778**. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available "My Home Page. If you are experiencing less than optimal D2L Brightspace performance, review the D2L Brightspace Performance Checklist to assess the issue.

For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the **ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357** during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at https://techsupport.eiu.edu/. If you have a question regarding course content, please contact your instructor.

6. Prerequisite Knowledge
This course is designed for graduate and undergraduate students who are eager to learn about literary theory and literary history, all through the frame of biopolitical theory. While no previous knowledge is required, it will be advantageous for students to have some background in literary history—mostly because of the time constraint. No previous knowledge of literary *theory* is required to take this course, but a willingness to learn new and difficult material is recommended!

7. Information about the Instructor
Here is some formal information about me (https://www.eiu.edu/english/faculty.php?id=ccwharram) on EIU's website.

8. Learning Objectives

The primary aim of this course is to introduce you—through reading, writing, and discussion—to the study of literature, culture, and theory. In this course, I expect that you will:

- be introduced to some important writers and movements from the history of literary and cultural theory;
- gain an awareness of some of the major modern theoretical schools of thought;
- communicate effectively in both oral and written transmissions;
- reflect upon your own considerations about "literature" and "culture," "biopolitics" and "contagion" while considering the viewpoints and arguments of others;
- develop basic strategies used by theorists of literature and culture such as attentive reading practices, research into previous critical and theoretical analyses, and effective argument;
- economically incorporate and correctly document sources of ideas and information.

9. Assessment

Grade Value	Assessed Work
Your course grade will be calculated out of a total of 1000 points. Each percentage point for the class is equal to 10 points.	You may find your grades and instructor's feedback on D2L for all assignments, except for Participation in Seminar Discussion, which is ongoing.
200 points or 20%	**Midterm Exam**
200 points or 20%	**Regular Participation in Seminar Discussion**, including: One **formal discussion response** (graded), and holistic score for a *minimum* of **five *Responses*** to Discussion Posts (and two responses to other student abstracts)
100 points or 10%	**Summary/Rationale for your final essay** (March 28, at 23:59)
50 points or 5%	**Proposal Abstract for Final Essay** April 13 at 23:59
300 points or 30%	**Final Essay** May 3 at 23:59
100 points or 10%	**Final Exam** TBD (May 4-7)

The Grading Scale is as follows:

    90-100% = A
    80-89.9% = B
    70=79.9% = C
    60-69.9% = D
    0-59.9%   = F

Grading Time Frame

I will try my very best to respond to and grade your formal response assignments, midterms, and proposal abstracts within the following time frame: 3 days (ideally) to 7 days.

10. Instructional Materials

The materials we will use in this course are all available as pdfs on D2L. This includes a number of full-text theory books and anthologies, many of which I have made available simply because I have them at my disposal, and they may be difficult to find in local libraries. These are to be considered supplemental materials, and are made available for use in furthering your understanding of certain schools of thought and certain writers, and may be beneficial in working on your final projects. You have received a number of texts via EIU's Textbook Rental Service that I deem worthy of "biopolitical analysis," but, again, these should be considered supplementary materials, and I do not expect you to choose from these in preparing your final project. There are a number of texts available in pdf on D2L that we will use to help elucidate theoretical approaches to literature. There may be some video available, as well, which you arenot required to watch for this class.

11. Learner Activities

This is both an undergraduate and a graduate-level seminar for which **class discussion will be vital** to developing a greater understanding of theoretical texts. To make discussion possible in an online setting, you will write one more-or-less formal, but certainly *substantial,* discussion post (Discussion Posts) for sharing with our class on the D2L website. You will not only create a substantial discussion post, but also write several Responses to Discussion Posts on a regular basis—at least five, but I hope you engage on a regular basis. Everyone will also upload an Abstract for a final project, and you will be expected to make helpful responses to the abstracts of the other course participants.

Sign-up sheet for assignments posted online:
    You will be required to sign up for the substantial discussion post on a google doc (TBA).

For discussion assignments:
    We will use the D2L interface for our discussions. I apologize in advance: the interface
    for these discussions is less than ideal. I prefer to use a separate blog site (e.g.,
    WordPress), but some students prefer to have all course material available in one place.

For lectures related to course materials:
    Using D2L, you may access lectures via presentation software or learning modules that
    contain recorded lectures using multimedia software. You will also access through D2L
    assigned readings, links to multimedia, discussion threads, other written assignments,
    rubrics, and an electronic drop box.