Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theories (ENGL 2913 f2020)

Lakehead University

PLEASE NOTE: Assignments and readings are subject to change. In circumstances of conflict, the information in weekly module lists and assignments tabs (rather than this syllabus) should be taken as authoritative.

A. Instructor information

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Office hours: By request.

I am very happy to meet with you one-on-one via Zoom at a mutually agreeable time. Please do not hesitate to email me!

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B. Course preamble

What makes a play truly great? Why do some novels "work" and others don't? What should be the criteria for success in literature? What can a poem written a thousand years ago tell us about our own time? To what extent are works of culture *timeless* (transcendent and universal for all humans) and to what extent are they *timely* (shaped by and for their time and place of origin)? Is the maker's intention the key to understanding a film? How does a creator's identity and the way they are shaped by their society shape their creativity? What works of culture are worth forcing children to learn in school? Does reading make us good, or prevent us from doing evil?

These are the great questions we ask in the field of literary and cultural studies. **Theory is what we do when we pose an answer to some of these questions, not just for this or that "text" (a word we use to describe cultural and creative products), but for texts in general**.

As in the sciences, theory in literary and cultural studies is a story we tell about a pattern we observe. For scientists, a theory is a story about a pattern observed in the material world (eg. the tendency of objects to fall to earth, and for astral bodies to move as they do, is explained by a theory of gravity). For critics (what we call ourselves when we analyze literature and culture) a theory is a story about a pattern observed in within texts and between texts.

But unlike scientific theories, whose merit lies in their falsifiability (being proven correct or incorrect), and which seek to identify fundamental and universal laws of the world, literary and cultural theory is **an open-ended process of *interpretation***. Many conflicting or contradictory literary and cultural theories can be plausible and convincing. We are not seeking universal laws but honing our skills at **asking illuminating questions**.

This, however, does *not* mean that all theories are equally valid or valuable. In this class we will introduce a series of theoretical approaches and terms that we have come to rely on in literary and cultural studies in the past decades. In keeping with the general orientation of Lakehead's English Department, our focus will be on *critical* theories: theories that analyze texts primarily for how they interact with societies past and present, and, specifically, the way these texts interact with *systems of power and domination*. These include racism, sexism, (settler-)colonialism, capitalism and more. There is a strong social justice focus.

This year our theme is **ghosts**. Whether or not you believe in them, it is undeniable that ghosts have a grip on our imaginations. From popular culture to high art, ghosts are a major theme in almost all world civilizations, including our own.

In this class we ask not what ghosts *are* but what ghosts (or the stories we tell about them) *do*. Why are stories about ghosts so powerful, even for those of us who do not believe in the supernatural? By examining literary and cultural works about ghosts and theories about them, we can bring into view the *power of the imagination* and how it works, for good and for ill.

As we shall see, numerous theorists have taken up the power of ghosts as a metaphor for the way in which unequal and violent societies (including our own) grapple with the legacies of oppression, domination and injustice. We are *haunted* by those aspects of our past and present we'd prefer to ignore, both as individuals and as whole societies.

If that is so, then literature and culture are the "haunted houses" of our society. We can "read" texts carefully, beyond the authors' own intentions, for the ghosts that haunt the text and its audiences. Theory can help us, and in exploring the ghostly, we learn more about ourselves, one another, and what we are, together.

C. Required course materials

The titles indicated with an 🔴 are available through the Lakehead bookstore. The rest can be found online, as indicated.

- 📓(novella) **Henry James (ed. P. Beidler), *The Turn of the Screw*** (3d ed.), 2010 🔴
  This exact edition of the novella is required because it has critical essays essential to this course.
- 📘(novel) **Toni Morrison, *Beloved***, 1987 🔴
  You are welcome to read any edition of this novel and it is also available as an ebook here: Amazon/Kindle[1] or Google Books[2]

[1] https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B000TWUTYG/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1
[2] https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Toni_Morrison_Beloved?id=sfmp6gjZGP8C

- 📗 (play) **William Shakespeare**, ***Hamlet****,* c.1600
  You are welcome to read any edition of this play, and many are available for free online
- 📽️ (film) ***The Shining*****,** 1980
  This is a widely available commercial film and available on certain streaming services or for online rental. Here is a link to it on YouTube[3].
- 📽️ (film) ***Rhymes for Young Ghouls*****,** 2013
  This is a widely available commercial film and available on certain streaming services or for online rental. Here is a link to it on YouTube[4].
- 💻 **Various short texts** linked throughout the term via our class's D2L platform.

D. How this course will work

This class proceeds through 13 weekly modules, each of which consists of a series of activities.

Modules become available first thing Monday morning (i.e. 12:30am) at the latest.

There are three activities for each module:

1. Review course materials

There are several types of course materials

Required texts

These are texts you are responsible for studying. They are clearly indicated in each module.

Module lectures

Each week I provide a lecture in text and audio format. These lectures contextualize the module's required texts and offer additional definitions, information and background.

- All the material in **the main text/audio of the lecture is required** for your review and subject to evaluation.
- All the links, videos and other additional information embedded in the lecture documents is **optional, unless** clearly stated and included in the module's "required texts"

2. Take the module quiz within 14 days

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9TLJQN-v7E
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mywZ72p-UFo

For every module (except 00) there will be a very short quiz, largely intended to help you keep on top of the course and ensure reading and comprehension. Details of the quiz are below. There are 12 quizzes, each worth a maximum of 3 marks for a maximum total of 30, hence it is possible to get full marks having only completed 10 quizzes, allowing you to "skip" two if you choose. Module quizzes are available for two weeks from the launch of the module to allow you flexibility.

3. Contribute to the discussion board twice within 14 days, one each week

Your participation grade (10%) depends on you making two good-faith contributions to the class discussion board, one each week, worth half a point each. For this contribution you may do any of the following:

- **Contribute** a one paragraph response to one of the week's discussion questions.
- **Ask** a thoughtful, one-paragraph question about one of the required readings.
- **Respond** to the contribution of another student in one paragraph.

See the assignments section for guidance on contributing, asking and responding.

NOTE: You do not need to limit yourself to only two posts and are encouraged to be in dialogue.

E. Assignments and Grading

Options

In this course you will have two options for evaluation to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences. Both include module quizzes and discussion contributions, totaling 40% of the grade. You may choose the other 60% of their evaluation.

Option A: Mini-essays

- 30% Quizzes (10x3%), due weekly
- 10% Participation
- 60% Mini-essays (4x15%), due Sept 27, Oct 18, Nov 8 and Nov 29

Option B: Research essay

- 30% Quizzes (10x3%), due weekly
- 10% Participation
- 15% Proposal and annotated bibliography, due November 8
- 45% Final essay, due December 13

Quizzes

- Each week there will be a 3-question multiple choice quiz on D2L that will gauge your comprehension of the week's **required texts**.
- The three questions will be randomly selected from a pool of questions. It is unlikely that any two students will get the same selection.
- You may start and complete the quiz any time within 14 days of the launch of the module. Once you begin you will have 8 minutes to complete the quiz, so while it is technically "open book," you should make sure to work from careful notes. The questions are designed to be fairly easy and intuitive if you've done the readings and taken notes.
- There are twelve quizzes throughout the term. Each question is worth 1 point and the maximum score for any quiz is therefor 3/3. Over the term, you may earn a maximum of 30 points, which is intended to offer you the opportunity to receive full marks even if you miss two quizzes, or to make up for low-scoring quizzes later in the term.

Participation

- Your participation grade (10%) depends on you making two good-faith contributions to the class discussion board within two weeks of the beginning of each module, one each week, worth half a point each. For this contribution you may do any of the following:
    - **Contribute** a one paragraph response to one of the week's discussion questions.
    - **Ask** a thoughtful, one-paragraph question about one of the required readings.
    - **Respond** to the contribution of another student in one paragraph.
- See the advice section for guidance on contributing, asking and responding.
- Evaluation is based on the following criteria:
    - The posts demonstrate a knowledgeable engagement with course materials
    - The posts demonstrate thoughtfulness
    - The posts help generate discussion
- For your two contributions per module you can ear a maximum of one point. Over the term, you may earn a maximum of 10 points, which is intended to offer you the opportunity to receive full marks even if you miss commenting on two modules.
- NOTE: You do not need to limit yourself to only two posts and are encouraged to be in dialogue.

Mini-essays (option A)

- If you select this option, you will submit four mini-essays, between 750-1,000 words in length each, over the course of the term. These will take the form of a

response to any one of the **discussion questions** from the following modules of the class:
    - Mini-essay 1, due October 4: Select a discussion question from modules 01-03.
    - **Mini-essay 2, due November 1: Select a discussion question from modules 04-06.**
    - Mini-essay 3, due November 22: Select a discussion question from modules 07-09.
    - Mini-essay 4, due December 15: Select a discussion question from modules 10-12.
- The purpose of this assignment is primarily to demonstrate your firm and nuanced grasp of the subject material. Your mini essay should significantly draw on at least two class significant theory texts (indicated in the syllabus by a blue diamond 🔷) *in addition* to the primary text about which the discussion question is posed.
- The criteria for evaluation are:
    - 50% clear demonstration of a complex, sophisticated, nuanced and informed grasp of the texts under consideration
    - 25% clarity and thoughtfulness of argumentation
    - 25% writing style and precision

Essay (option B)

- If you select this option, you are to submit a proposal and annotated bibliography (by October 18) and a 3,000-3,500 word essay (by December 13) on one of the significant creative texts we have read this term (indicated in the syllabus by an orange square 🟧).
- This essay is a comparison between three peer-reviewed academic journal articles or book chapters that you are responsible for sourcing that directly address the creative text or, in some cases, more broadly the author or genre. For instance, if you choose to write your essay on *Beloved* you must find three academic journal articles or book chapters that are dedicated to that book.
- PART A: To ensure you're on the right track, you are required to submit, by October 13, a document that includes
    - An annotated bibliography of the three academic journal articles or book chapters you plan to analyze, with a one-paragraph summary of their key arguments and theoretical orientations, *in your own words*.
    - A one or two paragraph description of the approach you will take to making your argument.
- The objective of this assignment is to build skills in reading, recognizing and comparatively analyzing multiple theoretical perspectives on a single text.
- You may be advised, in feedback on PART A of this assignment, to select different academic journal articles or book chapters. You should follow this advice.
- PART B: Based on the feedback on PART A of this assignment, you are to craft a 3,000-3,500 word essay that does the following

    - Clearly summarize, in your own words, the key arguments of the three articles/chapters you have selected.
    - Identify the confluences and differences between the theoretical paradigms and approaches these three articles/chapters take.
    - Assess their benefits and drawbacks.
    - Advance your own position on the creative text, based on or in contrast to the three articles/chapters.
- If you are lucky, the three articles/chapters you select will draw on theories already introduced in class, but in many cases you will be unfamiliar with the paradigms they present. This may require you to undertake extra/supplementary reading.
- The criteria for evaluation are:
    - 50% clear demonstration of a complex, sophisticated, nuanced and informed grasp of the texts under consideration
    - 25% clarity and thoughtfulness of argumentation
    - 25% writing style and precision

Assignment Policies

- **DUE DATES**: All due dates are programmed into D2L. There are absolutely no exception to deadlines set by D2L except where required by university policy (eg. pre-registered accommodations). There is a great deal of flexibility built into the course.
- **FORMATS**: Unless otherwise specified, all assignments must be submitted
    - Via the D2L platform
    - In PDF format
    - Formatted for regular 8.5x11 paper with 1" margins, using a basic 12pt font (eg. Times New Roman or Ariel), double-spaced.
    - Use MLA format for citations.
- **STANDARDS:** All assignments will be marked in accordance with the English Department Marking Standards[5] except in cases otherwise specified.
- **COLLABORATION/PLAGIARISM:** Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words and/or ideas. Not acknowledging your debt to the ideas of a secondary source, failing to use quotation marks when you are quoting directly, buying essays from essay banks, copying another student's work, or working together on an individual assignment, all constitute plagiarism. Resubmitting material you've submitted to another course is also academic dishonesty. All plagiarized work (in whole or in part) and other forms of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean, who is responsible for judging academic misconduct and imposing penalties. The minimum penalty for academic misconduct is a 0 on the assignment in question. It might also be subject to more severe academic penalties. See the Student Code of Conduct[6]

[5] https://www.lakeheadu.ca/programs/departments/english/marking-standards
[6] https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/student-life/student-conduct

F. Modules and readings

This schedule is subject to change. Please keep up-to-date on D2L. If there is a discrepancy, the module subpages on D2L should be taken for the authoritative guide.

🟧 Significant creative text (for the purposes of assignments)

🔷 Significant critical text (for the purposes of assignments)

00 - Course introduction (Sept 8-13)

Required texts

1. 📎 [News Article] "Why Some People See Ghosts and Other Apparitions[7]," Frank T. McAndrew, from *Psychology Today,* 9 July 2015.
2. 📄[academic article] "**A social anthropology of ghosts in twenty-first-century America**," Joseph O. Baker and Christopher D. Bader, in *Social Compass* 61 (4), 2014. 🔷

01 - Ghosts of futures past (Sept 14-20)

Required texts

1. 📽️[film] *The Shining,* dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1980. 2h26min 🟧
2. 📎[news article] "The ghosts of our lives[8]," Tom Whyman, from *New Statesman*, 31 July 2019.
3. 📄[essay] "A future with no future[9]," Mikkel Krause Frantzen, from *LA Review of Books*, 16 December 2019. 🔷
4. 📺[YouTube] "Hauntology, Lost Futures and 80s Nostalgia[10]," 2018. 11min

02 - The uses of ghosts (Sept 21-27)

Required texts

1. 🎭[play] **Hamlet**, *William Shakespeare*, c. 1600 🟧
2. 📄[chapter fragment] **"Revenge fantasy"** and **"Hamlet's interregnum**" from the conclusion of *Revenge Capitalism*, Max Haiven, 2020. 🔷
3. 📋[explainer] "**Elizabethan context for Hamlet[11]**," Isabel Smith-Bernstein, 2019.

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[7] https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/out-the-ooze/201507/why-some-people-see-ghosts-and-other-apparitions
[8] https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2019/07/ghosts-our-lives
[9] https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/future-no-future-depression-left-politics-mental-health/
[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSvUqhZcbVg
[11] https://www.bard.org/study-guides/hamlet-elizabethan-context

4. 📎[news article] "***The Lion King* is a fascistic story. No remake can change that**," Dan Hassler-Forest, *Washington Post,* 10 July 2019.

03 - Becoming ghosts (Sept 29-Oct 4)

Required texts

1. 📖 [short story] "**Newton's Sleep**," Ursula K. Le Guin
2. 📄 [academic chapter] "**Becoming Ghost**," Richard Gilman-Opalsky 🔷

04 - Ghosts of discourse (Oct 5-11)

Required texts

1. 📄 [academic chapter] "**Discourse and Power**" and "**Representing the Other**" (The West and the Rest) Stuart Hall
2. 📄 [academic chapter] "**Colonizing knowledges**" Linda Tuhiwai Smith, from *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2nd ed), 2012 🔷
3. 📺[short film] *Babakiueria*[12], dir. Don Featherstone, 1986.

Reading week (Oct 12-18)
05 - Digital ghosts (Oct 19-25)

Required texts

1. 📖 [short story] "**Smile Dog**[13]," Anonymous, at *CreepyPasta,* 28 April 2010.
2. 📄 [academic article] "'**Spread the Word**': Creepypasta, Hauntology, and an Ethics of the Curse," Line Henrikson, in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 87(1), 2018. 🔷
3. 📽️ [TVepisode] "**Be Right Back**," *Black Mirror* (Season 2, Episode 1), 2013. 44min. *this video is available via Netflix*
4. 📎 [news article] "What happens to our online identities when we die?[14]" Amelia Tait, *The Guardian*, 2 June 2019.

06 - Reading *The Turn of the Screw* (Oct 26-Nov 1)

Required texts

1. 📓 [novella] "**The Turn of the Screw**," Henry James, 1900. 🟧 [The complete text of the novella is included in the Beidler edition]

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[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUMpPgMGCe8
[13] https://www.creepypasta.com/smile-dog/
[14] https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/jun/02/digital-legacy-control-online-identities-when-we-die

2. 📖 [book chapter] "**Reader-Response Criticism and The Turn of the Screw**" in Beidler, ed. pp. 271-301. 🔷

07 - The Spectres of Marx (Nov 2-8)

Required texts

1. 📖 [book chapter] "**Marxist Criticism and The Turn of the Screw**" in Beidler, ed. pp. 360-389. 🔷
2. 🎙️ [podcast] "**Reclaiming Marxism in an age of meaningless work**[15]" CBC Ideas podcast, 14 June 2019. 54mins.

08 - The Haunted House of Gender (Nov 9-15)

Required texts

1. 📖 [book chapter] "**Gender Criticism and The Turn of the Screw**" in Beidler, ed. pp.333-359. 🔷
2. 📄 [academic article] "**Affecting Activist Art: Inside KillJoy's Kastle, A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House**[16]," Genevieve Flavelle in *InVisible Culture* 27, 28 November 2017. 🔷
3. 📺 [YouTube] "**KillJoy's Kastle: A Lesbian Feminist Haunted House**[17]," 23 October 2015.

09 - The uncanny (Nov 16-22)

Required texts

1. 📖 **[book chapter] "Psychoanalytic Criticism and *The Turn of the Screw***" in Beidler, ed. pp. 302-332. 🔷
2. 🎙️ [podcast] "**Wishful dreaming: Freud and the discovery of our inner life**[18]" CBC Ideas podcast, 5 November 2019. 54mins.

10 - *Beloved* (Nov 23-29)

Required texts

1. 📕 [novel] ***Beloved***, Toni Morrison, 1987 🟧

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[15] https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/reclaiming-marxism-in-an-age-of-meaningless-work-1.5175707
[16] https://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/affecting-activist-art-inside-killjoys-kastle-a-lesbian-feminist-haunted-house/#fn-6594-18
[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4S-OORBj9o
[18] https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/wishful-dreaming-freud-and-the-discovery-of-our-inner-life-1.5348179

2. [academic article] "**Black Feminist Hauntology[19]: Rememory the Ghosts of Abolition?**" Viviane Saleh-Hanna in *Champ Pénal/Penal Field 22*, 2015. ◆
3. [video] "Ellen Sebastian Chang and Amara Tabor Smith present 'HouseFull'" 8mins

11 - Ghostly matter: prisons (Nov 30-Dec 6)

Required texts

1. [academic article] "**Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity**," Avery Gordon, *Borderlands* 10(2), 2011. ◆
2. [podcast] "**Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition[20]**" two parts: 55min and 31min

12 - Haunted lands (Dec 7-13)

Required readings

1. [film] *Rhymes for Young Ghouls,* ■ **dir. Jeff Barnaby, 2014, 88mins.
2. /[poem and reading] "Jiibay or Aandizooke," Leanne Simpson
3. [academic article] "Glossary of haunting, " Eve Tuck and C. Ree, in *The Handbook of Autoethnography*, 2013. ◆

G. Important advice

Stay organized and on-time The course is designed to balance flexibility with measures to keep you on track with workload. Still, it will be important to manage your time effectively. Lakehead's Student Support Centre's Academic Support Zone[21] has resources to help.

Read longer works ahead

Some texts, notably *The Turn of the Screw* and *Beloved* are longer-form. It is advisable to start reading these in the weeks prior to the class where they are assigned so you're not trying to speed through them. There are also excellent audiobook versions of both, though a text copy is important to retain for reference.

Read carefully and more than once

Theory is difficult and for many students this is the most difficult course of their whole degree. The language and concepts we study can be intimidating. The key is to read

[19] https://journals.openedition.org/champpenal/9168
[20] https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/
[21] https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/academic-success/student-success-centre/academic-support-zone

carefully, and read more than once. If you find yourself confused, my advice is to highlight the confusing passage and move on to read the rest of the piece. Then come back to the highlighted passage at the end and see if it's clearer.

Read the lectures first

In the lectures I will try and offer a broad overview and contextualization of the theoretical texts we will be reading. This will hopefully help a great deal in giving you a frame within which to read the more difficult theoretical texts.

Take notes

Probably the best way to take notes on reading is to copy down key passages in texts and then annotating those passages in two ways: (1) put it in your own words as best you can; (2) make a reflective comment on what the passage, as you understand it, makes you think about, or link it to something else we've read in class.

Ask questions and seek help I am ready to meet with you one-on-one during scheduled office hours or at another convenient time. It would be my pleasure (and also my job) to work to help you understand difficult materials. Alternately, please use the class discussion boards to ask questions. There really are no bad or stupid questions, and if you have the question it is almost certain others do as well.

H. Course Objectives and Policies

Objectives

- Develop competency in a close and critical reading of theoretical texts and an ability to apply them to an analysis of literacy and cultural texts, as well as broader societal contexts.
- Develop critical and analytic thinking skills, especially as regards the manifestations of various intersecting forms of power.
- Deepen understandings of and sensitivity to difference, oppression and social justice themes in contemporary theory, literature and culture.
- Develop clear, concise and effective writing skills to summarize and respond to complex texts and approach theoretical ideas in critical and analytic ways.
- Develop the facility to speak and communicate clearly and cogently about complex, abstract and challenging material.
- Develop a historical and contextual understanding of the origins and resonances of theoretical, cultural and literary texts.

Communications

- Due to the number of students and other pressures, I, the professor can only strive to respond to emails and other messages within 48 hours.

- Students are advised to communicate with one another and the professor within the D2L system (which includes a chat function) or by Lakehead University email.
- All messages and emails to the professor should be written in professional prose.
- Any and all technical issues with the D2L platform should be reported to the Help Desk.
- Students are strongly advised to post their questions to the D2L discussion board as it may help others who have the same question.

Expectations

All students will:

- Read/view all the required materials
- Submit materals for evaluation on time and in a professional manner (eg. proofread)
- Participate in class with an open, compassionate mind
- Practice respect for the opinions and approaches of others
- Be willing to question and challenge one's own beliefs and ideas
- Regularly participate in class discussions informed by the required and supplemental readings
- Undertake assignments with enthusiasm and curiosity

University Policies

- Students in this course are expected to conform to the Student Code of Conduct - Academic Integrity[22].
- **Accommodations**: Lakehead University is committed to achieving full accessibility for persons with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code[23]. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the course. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. If you think you may need accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS)[24] and register as early as possible.

[22] https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/student-life/student-conduct/academic-integrity
[23] http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code
[24] https://www.lakeheadu.ca/students/student-life/student-services/accessibility