

## ENGH 308.001: Theory and Inquiry. Theories of the Subject

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Fall 2016

Professor Tamara Harvey

tharvey2@gmu.edu

MW 1:30-2:45 p.m., Robinson B122

Office hours: MW 12-1 p.m. and by appointment

Office: Robinson A 421

### A note about this syllabus

We will spend only a short period of time in class discussing this syllabus and the schedule of readings and assignments. Be sure to read it thoroughly on your own and then complete the required syllabus quiz on Blackboard. You can take that quiz as often as you like until you score 100%. If later in the semester you have questions about course requirements that are covered in this syllabus, I will answer them only if you have a perfect score on the syllabus quiz.

### Course description

In this class we will look at theories of the subject in association with approaches to literature that attend to subjectivity in various ways. The “subject” in this context has two somewhat contradictory but interlinked valences. On the one hand, it suggests individuality and self-expression—one’s subjectivity. On the other hand, it suggests being subjected by outside forces—either other people or larger social forces. As we work through these theories, we will be exploring some of the main threads of twentieth century critical and literary theory. We will also consider a central element of language and literary forms—they are expressive and yet also constrained by the limits of convention and the need to communicate with others.

Over the course of the semester, we will use three sets of literary readings to provide focus for our discussion of theories. We begin with sonnets, a poetic form that often seems expressive and autobiographical, but also significantly engages literary conventions and precursors. Then we will look at Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills*, a novella that raises a host of questions about freedom, constraint, social forces, and aesthetics. Finally, we will turn our attention to Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*, a text that also brings together individual expression and autobiography with artistic conventions, historical commentary, and political critique.

### Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- Read works in literary theory and criticism accurately, critically, and analytically and use them to develop critical readings of literary texts

- Describe some of the major debates in critical theory and literary criticism since the late nineteenth century
- Discuss different approaches to the critical study of authors, texts, and readers and the relationships among these three elements of literature
- Write clearly argued, well-supported, and error-free analytical essays using MLA format

## Required texts

Most readings for this class are available as pdfs, either available on our Blackboard site or through databases and web resources. You should also make yourself familiar with MLA style conventions as described on the [Purdue OWL website](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/) (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/11/>).

In addition, I strongly recommend but do not require the following texts:

- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford, ISBN: 978-0199691340) **[I find this text especially usefully.]**
- Palmer, Donald D. *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners*. (For Beginners, ISBN: 1934389102)

## Course requirements

- Weekly responses. 20 points each; 220 points total. 22%
- Three papers (1000-1500 words each). 150 points each; 450 total. 45%
- Midterm exam. 150 points. 15%
- Presentation. 80 points. 8%
- Participation. 100 points. 10%

### Weekly responses:

Before class each Monday, complete a weekly response on Blackboard for that week's readings. Unless otherwise noted, you may write about any one of the assigned **theoretical** texts for that week (not a literary text). Each response should include the following: 1) a one paragraph summary of the main argument and distinguishing elements of the assigned text, including observations about how it builds on or diverges from other texts we have read or that are stressed in the reading itself, **OR**, if you struggle with the reading, a clear, specific explanation of what you find difficult to understand in the text; 2) an important passage from the text, typed into your response paper; and 3) a paragraph explaining why you chose that passage and what exactly you find important, puzzling, contradictory, or wrong in it. **To receive full credit, weekly responses must be turned in on time. Late responses will receive half credit if they are received by the end of the week. After one week has passed, no credit will be given for late responses.**

### Papers:

You will write three formal papers over the course of the semester. More specific information will be provided later in the semester for each of these papers. For each, you may submit an optional draft by the draft deadline for formal feedback from me. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND SUBMITTING DRAFTS, NO MATTER HOW MESSY OR SHORT. I also recommend coming to discuss your papers during office hours. Papers should be double-spaced and follow MLA formatting and citation conventions. All papers should be submitted on Blackboard as attached files. **Late papers will be downgraded 5 percentage points for each week they are late unless you have discussed your situation with me and received permission to turn your work in late.**

### Life happens passes:

Over the course of the semester you can use two “life happens passes” to turn an assignment in 3 days late without penalty. All you need to do is write me at [tharvey2@gmu.edu](mailto:tharvey2@gmu.edu) and let me know that you are exercising this option. If at the end of those three days you are still stuck, you must meet with me to discuss why you are stuck and what you can do to get unstuck.

### Revision policy:

Any paper you write for this class may be revised. In order to revise a paper you must 1) make an appointment to discuss your plans for revision before you begin revising and 2) make substantial revisions to your prose and argument. Revisions are due two weeks after your graded assignment is returned to you.

### Exams:

The midterm will likely consist of identifications, short answer questions, and an essay question and will cover all material from the first half of the class, with particular stress on those materials not included in paper assignment 1. More specific information will be provided before the exam.

### Presentations:

During the final unit we will have class presentations on approaches to *Lemonade*. I may offer a video option for those who want to prepare something ahead of time.

### Participation:

Ten percent of your grade is determined by your participation in this course. You are expected to participate actively in discussion and all class activities.

### Grading scale

A=93-100	C=73-76
A-=90-92	C-=70-72
B+=87-89	D+=67-69
B=83-86	D=63-66
B-=80-82	D-=60-62
C+=77-79	F=below 60

## Campus resources and policies

### Writing center

The Writing Center is a **free** writing resource. Tutors are available to assist students at any level and at any stage of their writing process. Tutors will not proofread your writing, but they will help you to develop revision and editing strategies. The main Writing Center is located in Robinson A 114A though there are also locations in Fenwick Library, the Johnson Center Library, and on the Arlington Campus. To contact the Writing Center, call (703) 993-1200 or email [wcenter@gmu.edu](mailto:wcenter@gmu.edu). To schedule an appointment, register at <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/policy-agreement>.

### Electronic resources

Blackboard will be our main online space for this class. There you will find all readings and assignments, you will submit your weekly responses and formal papers, and I will post announcements. These announcements will also be sent to the email address associated with your Blackboard account, so please make sure this address is correct and that you check it regularly. **If Blackboard is ever down when you need to submit an assignment, please email it to me directly at [tharvey2@gmu.edu](mailto:tharvey2@gmu.edu).**

### Academic integrity

GMU is an Honor Code university; a full description of the code and the honor committee process is available at <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/>. The bottom line: the work you submit as your own must be your own and when you rely on someone else's work you must properly credit their work in the proper, accepted form.

Plagiarism means using words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. You must cite, using a standard citation format, all the articles, books, online sources, and other sources that your own writing draws on, either directly or indirectly. In addition to listing sources in a bibliography, you must also correctly quote and/or attribute passages and ideas from your sources that you use in the body of your text. Paraphrases and summaries of others' ideas must also be properly attributed. This is a matter of academic honesty, but proper citations and attributions also improve your writing. Your citations can help persuade readers and also give them the information they need to pursue the topic further. Learning how to organize your notes and keep track of your sources so you don't confuse your ideas with others' and are able to quickly cite sources are important writing skills.

Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas,

perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt, please ask for guidance and clarification.

### Disability services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, room 2500; (703) 993-2474; <http://ds.gmu.edu/>). All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

### GMU Nondiscrimination Policy

George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or age. Mason shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

Moreover, in this class we seek to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across the entire range of human identities. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

### Emergency procedures

GMU alerts students, faculty, and staff to emergencies using Mason Alert (<https://ready.gmu.edu/masonalert/>). Emergency guides are available at <http://ehs.gmu.edu/emergencymanagement/plans-guides/>.

### Other Useful Campus Resources

- University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu>
- University Policies: <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>
- University Libraries "Ask a Librarian": <http://library.gmu.edu/ask>
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>
- Learning Services: <http://learningservices.gmu.edu/>
- Career Services: <http://careers.gmu.edu/>

### Enrollment policies and deadlines

- Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class.
- Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes:

Last Day to Add/Last Day to Drop with No Tuition Penalty	September 6, 2016
Last Day to Drop	September 30, 2016
Selective Withdrawal Period	October 3-28, 2016
- After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.
- Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

**See separate file for schedule of reading and assignments**