Anyone who reads imaginative literature and enjoys reflecting on and discussing that experience is a potential literary critic. As an English major (or English concentrator), you have been developing your critical skills as you have read, responded to, analyzed and interpreted various literary works. But do you know what kind of critic you are?

Today, in the academic discipline of English, students and teachers of English have become acutely aware of a number of different, sometimes conflicting, ways to read a literary work. Making distinctions between several critical practices has sharpened our attention to the art of making meaning as we read. This meaning-making act is, in literary studies, the art of interpretation. Furthermore, attending to the way we interpret literature and judge its value can make us aware of some unquestioned assumptions and some deep beliefs we hold about others and about ourselves.

The goals of this course are as follows: (1) To help you become aware of your own critical practices, to develop further your critical skills, and (2) To increase your knowledge in relation to specific works of literature as well as to several possible ways of interpreting and evaluating those works.

This course is required for English majors. **Prerequisites:** At least fifteen credits in English beyond English 101 and 102 or permission of the Chair of the Division of Arts and Letters.

**Required Texts:**


**Required biographical studies on reserve for this course in Curtin Memorial Library:**


Course Requirements:
-- Attend class regularly and punctually.*
-- Prepare for every class in order to participate in a professional manner that will aid your own as well as your colleagues’ intellectual growth.
-- Take quizzes when given, announced and unannounced. Quizzes can come at any time and cannot be made up.
-- Prepare and present a researched, documented term paper as part of a term project that demonstrates (a) your skills in literary research and documented critical writing and (b) your understanding of your own critical practices as they relate to the approaches studied in this course.
-- Take the final examination

* Attendance policy: You should have no absences. If you must miss a class because of illness or emergency, please tell me why in writing. Every absence will negatively affect your productivity and therefore your grade. Being present means being on time and contributing to the learning environment.

Student Outcomes: By the end of the course, you should be able to
-- discuss the characteristics of several contemporary critical approaches to literature
-- name some of the principal practitioners (i.e., important thinkers and critics) of those approaches and have some familiarity with their theories
-- recognize critical approaches in published critical essay
-- prepare and present a substantial, well researched, documented critical essay of your own (using MLA guidelines) on an assigned James tale as part of the term project for this course.
-- demonstrate knowledge of the writers and their works covered in this course and how they relate intertextually
-- understand your own practice of literary criticism at this stage of your academic career

My office is located in the Division of Arts and Letters. Office Hours: T-Th: 2:30-4:00. I encourage you to talk with me about your work in this course during office hours or by appointment. You can contact me by phone (569-3230) or by email saldivar@msmc.edu

Grading: Your grade will be based on assessment of your performance in the following areas:
20% Professional commitment (attendance and participation, both oral and written)
20% Quizzes and response papers
40% Term Project (10% of this grade will be based on panel presentation)
20% Final Examination

Grade Conversion in the Division of Arts and Letters
A   100-95  4.0  Superior
A-  94-90   3.67 Outstanding
B+  89-87   3.33 Excellent
B   86-83   3.0  Very Good
B-  82-80   2.67 Good
C+  79-77   2.33 Above Average
C   76-73  2.00  Average
C-  72-70  1.67  Below Average
D+  69-65  1.33  Poor
D   64-60  1.00  Passing
59-0  0.0  Failing

Academic Honesty: Learning through a collaborative search for knowledge is essential in our culture. Using others’ published words and ideas, however, as if they were your own is a serious academic offense which will lead to failure of this course and possibly to dismissal from the college. Be sure in your papers that you fully and formally (using MLA guidelines) acknowledge your sources for ideas and information that you did not gain from your own observation, experience, and reasoning. You will be asked to read the Division of Arts and Letters’ policy on plagiarism and to sign a “Contract on Plagiarism” that holds you responsible for honesty in your writing.

MLA (Modern Language Association) format and documentation: You will use MLA guidelines to format your papers and to document them. Documentation means formally citing your sources. MLA guidelines can be found on the Curtin Memorial Library web page.

English 415: Literary Criticism/ Spring 2006

Tentative Schedule
Read in advance the assignments to be discussed (and questioned) on the following schedule: (Quizzes can come at any time.)

Week One:
Aug, 29-31  Introduction to literary criticism and Henry James.
The Turn of the Screw: Biographical and Historical Contexts (3-19)
The Turn of the Screw (22-29)

Week Two:
Sept. 5-7  The Turn of the Screw (29-120)
Research exercise: Answering six “key questions” using Cultural Documents and Illustrations (121-186); Note taking and citing sources of new information

Week Three:
Sept. 12  The Turn of the Screw: A Critical History (189-222)
Sept. 14  Oral and written reports due on research assignment on cultural backgrounds for The Turn of the Screw

Week Four:
Sept. 19  The Turn of the Screw and Reader Response Criticism: Wayne Booth (223-253)
Sept. 21  The Turn of the Screw and Psychoanalytical Criticism: Stanley Renner (254-289)

Week Five:
Sept. 26-28  The Innocents (1961). Jack Clayton, Dir. [dramatic film adaptation of The Turn of the Screw]
Week Six:
Oct. 3  Response paper due: “Reading The Innocents.” Discussion.
Term project assignments. Review of library research tools.
Oct. 5  Group meetings. Discussing the assigned tale from a formalist perspective.
Raising research questions.

Week Seven.
Oct. 10 The Turn of the Screw: Marxist Criticism--Bruce Robbins (217-246).
Oct. 12 Review of library research tools.

Week Eight
Oct. 17: The Turn of the Screw: Combining Perspectives—Sheila Teahan (347-363)
Relating Reader Response Theory and Deconstruction.
Oct. 19: Jane Eyre: Biographical and Historical Contexts (3-15)
Concepts: “Intertextuality” (Abrams 317); “Confession” as a form of autobiography and as a fictive narrative strategy (lecture)
Questions: How does knowing something of the social status of governesses in nineteenth-century England affect interpretation of Jane Eyre?
How does knowing Brontë’s 1847 novel Jane Eyre affect interpretation of Henry James’ 1897 novella The Turn of the Screw?
Jane Eyre: Vol. I

Week Nine
Oct. 26 Jane Eyre: Vol. III

Week Ten
Oct. 31 Jane Eyre: A Critical History
Nov. 2 Jane Eyre and Feminist Criticism; Sandra Gilbert (459-501)

Week Eleven
Nov. 7 Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea: A feminist response to Jane Eyre?
Nov. 9 Wide Sargasso Sea (Discussion)

Week Twelve
Nov. 14 Jean Rhys Wide Sargasso Sea and post colonial criticism.
Gayatri Spivak
Nov. 16 Review of concepts.

Week Thirteen
Nov. 21: Group work: Preparing for panel presentations.
Thanksgiving Recess

Week Fourteen:
Nov. 28 Review
Nov. 30 Panels 1 and 2

Week Fifteen:
Dec. 5  Panels 3 and 4
Dec. 7  Panel 5
Term projects due.
Final exam during examination period (Dec. 13-15). Time and place to be announced.
English 415: Literary Criticism Term Project Guidelines/Fall 2006
You will submit at the end of this course a three ring binder containing a four part project based on a work of fiction by Henry James to be assigned to you.

**Part I. Formal analysis and interpretation** (three to five pages): Leading question: What does this work of fiction reveal to you about human life? Using your skills as a reader of fiction and **without doing research**, develop an original critical essay in which you discuss the text’s “formalist” elements (such as setting, point of view, plot structure, character development, uses of irony, uses of symbolism) and show how these elements help you develop a unifying theme for the fiction. We will define “theme” as follows: **The theme is what the story as a whole reveals to you, the reader, about human experience.** You should be able to state that theme in a sentence as a generalization about life. That statement can serve as the thesis of your essay. This un-researched essay goes in the first section of your binder. Include your writing process: free writing, notes, drafts and revisions that generated the final, edited version of your essay. The only documentation necessary in this formalist essay will be of quotations from the story.

**Part II: Research.** This section of the binder is a record of your research. Include here note cards as well as photocopies and print-outs of articles you have found useful in exploring the biographical, cultural/historical, and literary contexts for this fiction, and in answering the following research questions:

A. When, where, and under what conditions did James write this work of fiction? What experiences in his life find their way into this fiction in some form? (Such as people he knew, conflicts he witnessed or experienced, stories he heard). What did he write about this work of fiction in his notebooks, in his Prefaces, or in his letters? (biographical context)

B. What was going on in the world around James when he wrote this work of fiction? (such as, prevailing codes of conduct and social structures, changes in the economy, innovations in technology). In what way is the historical/cultural context important to the understanding of the story? (historical, cultural context)

C. How has the story been interpreted by critics in published essays? You will read and take notes from **at least three published critical essays** dealing with the story (literary contexts)

**Part III. Expanded analysis and interpretation** (about ten pages): Using knowledge you have gained from research, you will expand, alter, or even completely re-write your first understanding of the story in order to produce a substantial, original documented critical essay with a list of works cited. Your thesis will still deal with the theme of the story: what the story shows you about human experience. However, your thesis may change as you learn more.

**Part IV: Reflection on your own critical practice** (about three pages). In this personal essay, describe the process you went through to achieve your documented critical essay. Keep these questions in mind: Did your interpretation and evaluation of the assigned story change as you learned more through research? If so, how and why? If not, why not? Finally, describe the kind of critic you are or have become using what you have learned in this course.

**Additional guidelines:** Literary criticism requires not only an active, personal engagement with a work of literature, but also knowledge gained from research using both primary and secondary
sources. You will locate and then scan (look over quickly) sources (books and articles) to choose those you want to read carefully. Then you will take notes from the most helpful sources. Use note cards (or software that works the same as using note cards). Correct note card technique will allow you to organize and document new information effectively and to avoid plagiarism.

**Primary sources:** These are sources written by the author. For Henry James, you can consult not only his fiction but also his published criticism, published notebooks, and letters, as well as his autobiographies. Works by James are on reserve for you in the Curtin Memorial Library. Requirement: Use at least two primary sources in your expanded critical essay.

**Secondary sources:** These are works written about the author (biographies) and his literary art (critical studies). Four biographies of Henry James are on reserve for you in the Curtin Memorial Library. Requirement: Consult at least three of the biographies on reserve for you: Edel, Gordon, Kaplan and Lewis and use what you learn from them in your documented paper.

Numerous other books and articles deal with some aspect of Henry James’ fiction. A number of these books are on reserve for you.

The most current research and critical writings about James’ fiction appear in scholarly journals, such as *The Henry James Review*, *Studies in Short Fiction*, and *American Literature*. Use the MLA International Bibliography to find articles in these and other journals. Some will have full texts available on line; some you can access through our library data base, others you will need to order using interlibrary loan. Be sure your MSMC email is activated so that you can receive interlibrary loan articles via email.

All the biographies and many of the critical studies give useful historical and cultural information, but you may want to learn more about the culture reflected in your assigned story.

**Reminder:** Include in your binder a photocopy or print out of every source cited in your revised essay. Use MLA style for parenthetical documentation in the body of your paper and for your works cited page. You can find complete MLA guidelines on the MSMC Curtin Memorial Library Home Page. You can find various web sites dealing with literary criticism and Henry James. A good standard for evaluating on-line articles is the quality of the critical essays in the editions of *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw*, required for this course.