



English 520-01W || Contemporary Critical Practices in English Studies Fall 2026

Dr. Eralda L. Lameborshi

E-mail: eralda.lameborshi@etamu.edu

Office: Talbot Hall of Languages, 125

Department: Literature and Languages

Phone: 903.468.3260

Preferred Form of Communication: email (see above)

Communication Response Time: within 24 - 48 hours

Office Hours: TR 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm, in person or zoom (email for appointment if zoom)

Meeting: We will meet *every Tuesday via zoom at 5:00 pm – 7:40 pm*

Course Description

Catalogue Description: This course is a study of major trends in critical theory from Plato and Aristotle to the present. Primary focus is on various approaches to analyzing literature, including formalist, psychological, Marxist, structuralist, feminist, reader-response, and new historicism.

Semester's emphasis: This graduate seminar introduces the major approaches in critical theory and guides students on how to apply them. It covers formalism, structuralism, psychoanalytic, Marxist, post-structuralist, reader-response, feminist, queer, New Historicist, postcolonial, and ecocritical criticism. Students apply each approach to literary works, including novels by Mohsin Hamid, Anne Garréta, and Ismail Kadare, plus selected films and shorter texts. Through a literature review, a seminar essay, and an oral exam, students learn to read closely, join scholarly conversations, and make clear arguments in writing and discussion.

Required Texts

1. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2017 (available as an ebook at Waters Library)

2. *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, Robert Dale Parker, 2015 (available as an ebook at Waters Library)
3. *Exit West*, Mohsin Hamid
4. *Sphinx*, Anne Garréta
5. *A Dictator Calls*, Ismail Kadare
6. Selected Films
7. Selected short stories, plays

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Demonstrate a substantial understanding of the major critical theories
- Discuss formalist, psychological, Marxist, structuralist, post-structuralist, feminist, queer, and new historicist approaches with informed, scholarly precision
- Write clear, effective arguments and summaries that convey complex ideas
- Produce written work that engages meaningfully with primary texts and existing scholarship
- Lead and sustain complex oral discussions on approaches to critical theory

Note on Course Content and Academic Responsibility

The reading materials assigned in this course have been selected thoughtfully and purposefully for their academic, literary, and intellectual merit, and strictly for their relevance to the themes and learning objectives of the course. Some texts may contain mature, disturbing, or challenging content that may include depictions of violence, trauma, sexuality, or other difficult subject matter, which reflects the realities of human experience as examined through scholarly and literary traditions.

I encourage you to review and research assigned texts/films in advance of each class session, because it will help you prepare thoughtfully for engagement with the material. If you have concerns about specific content, please reach out to me before the relevant class session, not after.

Discomfort, whether it is intellectual or emotional, is an expected and valuable part of rigorous academic inquiry. The ability to engage critically and professionally with challenging material is a core competency of this discipline and of higher education writ large. Students are expected to approach all assigned materials with scholarly seriousness, even when—and especially when—those materials are difficult.

That said, if you find that specific content significantly affects your wellbeing I encourage you to seek support through counseling services on campus (information on page 6 of this syllabus). I am also available to discuss concerns during office hours. Requests to substitute or omit assigned readings on the basis of content preferences will not be accommodated, as the integrity of the course curriculum depends on shared engagement with the assigned texts.

Grading

Final grades in this course will be based on the following scale, and you can look up your grades anytime on the virtual course space:

- A = 90%–100%
- B = 80%–89%
- C = 70%–79%
- D = 60%–69%
- F = 59% or Below

Weights of the assessments in the calculation of the final letter grade

Assessment	Weight
Weekly Reading Responses	15%
Essay Proposal	5%
Literature Review	20%
Major Essay	30%
Oral Examination	30%
TOTAL	100%

Assignments and Exams

Weekly Reading Responses — These will be brief responses to the week's reading prompts on the online portal's discussion boards. You will need to post your individual responses every Friday evening, and you will need to respond to one classmate by every Sunday evening. I will read through each of your posts and responses to each other; occasionally, I may also respond individually, and more often I will synthesize and highlight the main points raised during discussion. The purpose of these weekly responses is to ensure that you are completing the reading and that you are engaging with it in a meaningful way.

Essay Proposal — This proposal will be a two-page summary of your topic and tentative argument for your major essay; the reasons for your choice of topic and argument, and the preliminary findings/research. Prompt will be posted on the online portal.

Literature Review — Before developing your major essay, it is imperative to understand the field of study with which your essay is engaging in dialogue. This assignment is designed to help you gain command of the topic and the scholarly conversations about it. Prompt for this assignment will be posted on the online portal.

Major Essay — This is a seminar-length paper (12–15 pages); you will need to have a clearly defined topic and argument that you will support through analysis, close reading, and through the use of secondary sources (5–7 required). The argument must be borne out of the texts we are

reading in our course. If there are other primary texts you wish to include in your analysis, they can be supportive rather than central to the discussion. The secondary sources must be scholarly and peer reviewed. Prompt for this assignment will be posted on the online portal.

Oral Examination (Final Defense) — During finals week, each student will complete an individual one-hour oral examination conducted via Zoom. In this defense, you will articulate and sustain a scholarly discussion of the critical approaches studied this semester and defend the argument, methodology, and theoretical framework of your Major Essay in real time. You should be prepared to explain why you chose your critical approach, to situate your work within the scholarly conversation established in your Literature Review, to respond to counterarguments, and to demonstrate fluency with the major theories covered in the course. This is not a recitation; it is a defense, and you will be evaluated on the clarity, rigor, and responsiveness of your reasoning under questioning. A scheduling sign-up and a more detailed rubric will be posted on the online portal.

Weekly Meetings: Our class meets **Tuesdays, 5:00–7:40 p.m over zoom**. Zoom link will be posted online in course content. These meetings are for discussing the previous week's readings, after you have engaged with the materials through the weekly online discussions. I expect everyone to attend and to participate actively in our discussion. For this time to be valuable for all of us, **please set aside this full block, join from a quiet space where you can focus, and keep your camera on throughout**. It matters that we see and interact with one another's faces, not just voices.

Interaction with Me

I am available via email and via Zoom appointments. For Zoom meetings, email to set up a time. If you send an email I will answer it within 24 hours. Please follow proper email etiquette. I do not check D2L email, so only send emails to the university address eralda.lameborshi@etamu.edu

Course Policies

1. All Writing Projects must be turned in on D2L on the due date and time. No make-up work is allowed on major assignments. Late work will be penalized 10% of the grade per day that it is late.
2. All work needs to adhere to MLA format with appropriate documentation.
3. Plagiarism, or turning in work that is not one's own, runs counter to the most basic purposes and presumptions of higher education. The minimum penalty for plagiarism will be failure of the assignment. In repeated cases, the penalty is failure of the course and filing paperwork with the department head (see the Artificial Intelligence Policy and academic integrity provisions below).
4. All students will be graded on their ability to: (1) achieve the goal of the specific assignment; (2) efficiently and effectively communicate through writing; (3) properly format the work; and (4) avoid stigmatized grammatical and syntactical errors. Each assignment will vary, but these four factors will always determine part, or all, of your grade.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

The use of LLMs or generative AI tools (including ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or other ones) to produce any portion of submitted work is strictly prohibited in this course. All work you submit must be your own in its entirety.

Graduate level work requires originality and rigor. The purpose of this seminar is to develop your own understanding and your own critical voice as you engage with critical theory. In addition, it is crucial to gain command of the material, however difficult it may be, and this command cannot be outsourced to an LLM.

Submitting AI-generated work defeats the purpose of the course and constitutes academic dishonesty of the same level as plagiarism. All submissions will be screened using Turnitin's AI-detection tool. Any assignment that is flagged by the tool, will receive a grade of zero. No further substantiation will be provided, and the student's name will be reported to the Department Head and the Dean of the College.

Texas A&M University-Commerce acknowledges that there are legitimate uses of Artificial Intelligence, ChatBots, or other software that has the capacity to generate text, or suggest replacements for text beyond individual words, as determined by the instructor of the course. Any use of such software must be documented. Any undocumented use of such software constitutes an instance of academic dishonesty (plagiarism).

No use of AI tools is allowed in this course.

In any case, students are fully responsible for the content of any assignment they submit, regardless of whether they used an AI, in any way. This specifically includes cases in which the AI plagiarized another text or misrepresented sources.

13.99.99.R0.03 Undergraduate Academic Dishonesty

13.99.99.R0.10 Graduate Student Academic Dishonesty

Accessibility and Accommodations

I am committed that every student has full and equal access to this course. ETAMU provides accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you have, or believe you may have, a disability that affects your participation in this course, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services to arrange accommodations. If you have an accommodation already, SDS will contact me early in the term, and then we will meet to establish the necessary accommodations together. In addition, I am available to speak with you confidentially about barriers you encounter in the course, and I will work with you to find you the right support. Accessibility needs and issues may arise at any point in the semester, and I am committed to supporting you in the course and through the university's infrastructure. Below you will find more information about SDS:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce

Velma K. Waters Library Rm 162

Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835

Fax (903) 468-8148

Email: studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu <https://www.tamuc.edu/student-disability-services/>

Mental Health Services

The Counseling Center at A&M-Commerce, located in the Halladay Building, Room 203, offers counseling services, educational programming, and connection to community resources for students. Students have 24/7 access to the Counseling Center's crisis assessment services by calling 903-886-5145. For more information regarding Counseling Center events and confidential services, please visit www.tamuc.edu/counsel

Technology and Course Logistics

Technology Requirements

We will often use D2L, and in the case of web-based courses, D2L will be our virtual classroom. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have all technology requirements met for a successful interaction with online learning spaces. For more on technology requirements see here: <https://inside.tamuc.edu/facultystaffservices/academictechnology/readiness-for-online-courses.aspx>

Access and Navigation

You will need your campus-wide ID (CWID) and password to log into the course. If you do not know your CWID or have forgotten your password, contact the Center for IT Excellence (CITE) at 903.468.6000 or helpdesk@tamuc.edu.

Note: Personal computer and internet connection problems do not excuse the requirement to complete all course work in a timely and satisfactory manner. Each student needs to have a backup method to deal with these inevitable problems. These methods might include the availability of a backup PC at home or work, the temporary use of a computer at a friend's home, the local library, office service companies, Starbucks, a TAMUC campus open computer lab, etc.

Communication

If you have any questions or are having difficulties with the course material, please contact me via email: eralda.lameborshi@etamu.edu

Technical Support

If you are having technical difficulty with any part of Brightspace, please contact Brightspace Technical Support at 1-877-325-7778. Other support options can be found here: <https://community.brightspace.com/support/s/contactsupport>

Syllabus Change Policy

The syllabus is a guide. Circumstances and events, such as student progress, may make it necessary for me to modify the syllabus during the semester. Any changes made to the syllabus will be announced in advance and an updated copy will be posted online.

University Policies and Required Statements

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. The Code of Student Conduct is described in detail here:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/campuslife/campuservices/studentRights/Code%20of%20Conduct.aspx>

Student Grievance Procedure

Students who have concerns regarding their courses should first address those concerns with the assigned instructor in order to reach a resolution. Students who are unsatisfied with the outcome of that conversation or have not been able to meet individually with their instructor, whether in-person, by email, by telephone, or by another communication medium, should then schedule an appointment with the Department Head or Assistant Department Head by completing a Student Grievance Form (available in the main office, HL 141). In the event that the instructor is the Department Head, the student should schedule a meeting with the Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Humanities after following the steps outlined above; if the instructor is the Assistant Department Head, students should schedule a meeting with the Department Head. Where applicable, students should also consult University Procedure 13.99.99.R0.05 ("Student Appeal of Instructor Evaluation").

Attendance

For more information about the attendance policy please visit the attendance webpage:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/admissions/registrar/generalinformation/attendance.aspx>

Academic Integrity

Students at Texas A&M University-Commerce are expected to maintain high standards of integrity and honesty in all of their scholastic work. For more details and the definition of academic dishonesty see the following: <https://www.tamuc.edu/college-of-business/integrity-policy/>

Nondiscrimination Notice

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained. For more on this see here:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/aboutus/administrativeoffices/academicAffairs/handbook2016/section-iii.aspx>

Campus Concealed Carry Statement

Pursuant to PC 46.035, the open carrying of handguns is prohibited on all A&M-Commerce campuses.

Report violations to the University Police Department at 903-886-5868 or 9-1-1.

For more on campus carry policy see here:

<https://inside.tamuc.edu/aboutus/CampusCarry/FAQs.aspx#:~:text=to%20carry%20guns%3F-,Any%20individual%20who%20holds%20a%20current%20and%20valid%20license%20to,where%20permitted%20on%20university%20property.>

Collection of Data for Measuring Institutional Effectiveness

In order to measure the level of compliance with the accreditation, throughout the semester I may collect some of the ungraded texts you produce solely for an assessment of program effectiveness that in no way affects students' course grades or GPAs.

Tentative Calendar

Subject to change. We read the three novels in Weeks 1–3, then study one critical approach per week, pairing a chapter from *How to Interpret Literature* (Parker) with an illustrative primary reading from *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Rivkin & Ryan), and applying that approach to one of the novels. The Rivkin & Ryan selections listed are representative samples; exact selections and page ranges will be posted on the online portal with a link to the library location since both are at Waters Library as ebooks.

Week	Dates (Mon–Fri)	Readings	Assignments & Notes
Week 1	August 20 – 21	Novel: <i>Exit West</i> (Hamid) 1. Read <i>Exit West</i> (entire) 2. Parker, ch. 1 (Introduction)	First class day Aug 20 (partial week) No meeting this week
Week 2	August 24 – 28	Novel: <i>Sphinx</i> (Garréta) 1. Read <i>Sphinx</i> (entire) 2. Weekly response	Weekly response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 3	August 31 – September 4	Novel: <i>A Dictator Calls</i> (Kadare) 1. Read <i>A Dictator Calls</i> (entire) 2. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 4	September 7 – 11	Formalism & New Criticism — apply to <i>Exit West</i> 1. Parker, ch. 2 (New Criticism) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Shklovsky, “Art as Technique” 3. Weekly Response	Labor Day Mon Sept 7 Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm

Week	Dates (Mon–Fri)	Readings	Assignments & Notes
Week 5	September 14 – 18	Structuralism & narratology — apply to <i>A Dictator Calls</i> 1. Parker, ch. 3 (Structuralism) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Saussure, from <i>Course in General Linguistics</i> 3. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 6	September 21 – 25	Psychoanalytic criticism — apply to <i>Exit West</i> 1. Parker, ch. 5 (Psychoanalysis) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” 3. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 7	September 28 – October 2	Marxist criticism — apply to <i>A Dictator Calls</i> 1. Parker, ch. 8 (Marxism) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 3. Weekly Response 4. Essay Proposal Due	Essay Proposal due Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 8	October 5 – 9	Post-structuralism & deconstruction — apply to <i>Sphinx</i> 1. Parker, ch. 4 (Deconstruction) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 3. Weekly Response	Fall Break for Thu Oct 8 only Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 9	October 12 – 16	Reader-response theory — apply to <i>A Dictator Calls</i> 1. Parker, ch. 11 (Reader Response) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Iser, “The Reading Process”	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 10	October 19 – 23	Feminist theory — apply to <i>Sphinx</i> 1. Parker, ch. 6 (Feminism) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” 3. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm

Week	Dates (Mon–Fri)	Readings	Assignments & Notes
Week 11	October 26 – 30	Queer theory — apply to <i>Sphinx</i> 1. Parker, ch. 7 (Queer Studies) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Butler, from <i>Gender Trouble</i> 3. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 12	November 2 – 6	New Historicism — apply to <i>A Dictator Calls</i> 1. Parker, ch. 9 (Historicism & Cultural Studies) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Greenblatt, from “Invisible Bullets” 3. Weekly Response	Literature Review due Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 13	November 9 – 13	Postcolonial theory — apply to <i>Exit West</i> 1. Parker, ch. 10 (Postcolonial & Race Studies) 2. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Said, from <i>Orientalism</i> 3. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 14	November 16 – 20	Ecocriticism — apply to <i>Exit West</i> 1. Rivkin & Ryan sample: Ecocriticism selection (posted) 2. Weekly Response	Weekly Response Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 15	November 23 – 27	Thanksgiving Break No class meetings; independent essay research	Thanksgiving Break
Week 16 — Classes	November 30 – December 4	Synthesis & essay workshop Review of major approaches; no new assigned reading	Major Essay due (Fri Dec 4) Last Class Day (Fri Dec 4) Weekly Meeting Tuesday at 5 pm
Week 17 — Finals	December 7 – 11	Oral Examinations Individual one-hour Zoom defenses	Oral Examination Finals Week; graduation Dec 11

Weekly Reading Responses run each week the class meets: post your individual response by Friday evening and reply to a classmate by Sunday evening. Selected films and shorter works

will be assigned as supplementary application examples during the theory weeks. Specific prompts and readings will be posted on the online portal.