

English 320: Practical Criticism
CRN: 26574
TR 9:00 – 10:50 TA 110
Spring 2014

Marianne Ahokas
Phone: 826-3138
E-mail: mma4@humboldt.edu
Website: <http://users.humboldt.edu/mahokas>

Founders Hall 226
Office hours:
M: 3:00 – 4:30
Th: 11:00 – 12:30
and by appointment

Read this long and intimidating document. It outlines all course policies, and I expect everyone in the class to be familiar with its contents. Ignorance of these policies is not an excuse.

Goals and Outcomes of English 320

This is a course in how to read and, particularly, write. Of course, you've all been doing both of those things for a long time now (or else HSU's admissions standards aren't what they claim to be), but not, perhaps, in the explicit context of the discipline of literary studies. In the next fifteen weeks we'll

- consider the connections between reading and writing—specifically, how we might use writing to improve our interpretive reading skills (and vice versa);
- review the formal features of poetry and fiction in the context of writing critical essays;
- identify some of the common features of a well-constructed piece of literary criticism;
- produce a number of critical essays of our own, and discuss the frustrations of doing so in an academic setting; and
- examine the literary-critical process itself, and some of the theoretical spins people are currently putting on that practice.

In short, we'll read a lot, discuss a lot, and write a lot—all with the aim of becoming more practiced in and more comfortable with our chosen discipline.

Required materials (available at the HSU bookstore, among other places):

- Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. Third edition. You *must* use this specific edition, I'm afraid; we'll be using additional materials included in the book. (This edition has been considerably revised from the earlier version in the Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism series.)
- Angela Carter. *The Magic Toyshop*. Penguin, 1996. Earlier editions of this novel are fine, if you can find them.
- Terry Eagleton. *How to Read a Poem*. Blackwell, 2007.
- Additional readings, which you'll find on reserve on the class web page. You'll need the following information to gain access to the protected reserve readings page:

User name: **mahokas**
Password: **1913hsu**

Suggested text (available at the HSU bookstore)

Mary Klages. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum, 2006. *Not* required, but a good supporting text for some of the more abstruse schools of contemporary critical theory. If you want additional help with the theories that inform the essays we'll be reading on *Heart of Darkness*, this is the text you want.

Major Requirements: We'll discuss the specifics of these assignments as the semester unfolds. I'll provide detailed instructions (handouts are available through the "Major Assignments" page), but you should feel free to ask for additional verbal advice at any stage of preparation. **You must complete all required assignments to**

receive a passing grade. Remember that this is a writing intensive course; be ready to spend a lot of time at the keyboard. **Please refer to the attached calendar for all due dates!**

- Regular attendance and active participation in class. Perfect or near perfect attendance will result in a 10% bump in your final grade. Active participation in discussion will likewise result in a 10% bump in your final grade.
- The completion of written homework assignments during weeks 1 – 5 (15%). These writing assignments will, I hope, help minimize the anguish of producing the formal analysis paper due week 6. These assignments are to be uploaded to Moodle for *every* class session; in addition, you'll be expected to share your work in progress with other class members willingly—even enthusiastically (which means you'll need to have access to your homework, either online or in print form, during class). Individual assignments will be graded on a C/NC basis; the letter grade will be based on the number you successfully complete and submit. There will be a total of eight; to receive an A you must submit all eight; if you submit seven you'll receive a B, six will earn a C, and five will earn a D. **These may not be submitted late! If for some reason you can't upload your file to Moodle for technical reasons, you must email me before class to let me know that you'll be coming to class with a typed hard copy, which you must then hand in.**
- A 1300 – 1500 formalist analysis of a poem (approx. 4 – 6 pages) that will receive a traditional letter grade (20% of final grade), due during week 6.
- A 5 – 7 page response to a critical essay, also to receive a traditional letter grade (20%).
- A final critical project, comprised of the following steps (45% of final grade; see details for full breakdown):
 - A first draft of the paper of at least 1500 words (10% of final grade); you'll need to bring three copies of the draft to class;
 - Written feedback for two drafts written by your peers, to be presented both in class and uploaded to Moodle (10% of final grade);
 - A critical paper of 2100 – 2400 words (approximately 7 – 8 pages) (25% of final grade).

See the "Major Assignments" page of the website for detailed descriptions of these assignments.

Late work: I'm willing to grant *brief* extensions on graded assignments (Formalist Analysis; Response to Critical Essay; Final Paper), but you have to make an *explicit* request for one, either in person or by e-mail, at least 24 hours in advance of the due date. Don't simply decide to hand in a paper late without informing me beforehand that you'll be doing so. If you don't let me know an assignment will be late, you will be penalized. I won't grant extensions for longer than 2 class meetings unless the circumstances are extraordinary.

Extensions will *not* be granted on drafts or on informal assignments; they're due at the start of class on the dates indicated.

Attendance Policy
Read it, learn it, live it.

It's important in a discussion- and workshop-oriented course that class members attend regularly, so I will take attendance at each session. Everyone is entitled to miss four classes—no explanations, no apologies necessary (though it is up to you to find out what you missed and/or what's expected of you for the next meeting). Miss more than four, and your final grade will suffer: a fifth absence will result in a 10% reduction of the final grade; a sixth absence will result in a 20% reduction of that grade. Remember that English majors must receive a grade in the C range to receive credit in core courses. If you miss more than six classes, I'll strongly advise you to withdraw (if it's still possible to do so); it's likely you'll fail the class, in any event.

Perfect or near perfect attendance (no more than one absence) will boost your final course grade by 10%.

Office hours: I strongly advise you to come and talk with me one-on-one, early and often; at the very least, come by once in the semester. And certainly do so if you're falling behind in the class, feeling as though you're not "getting" something, or just having an unspecified problem, mild or severe. I assume most of you won't be able to make my scheduled office hours, so don't hesitate to stop me after class to set up a meeting at some other time convenient for us both.

Grading: For better or worse, my letter grades conform to official guidelines: "A" gets tacked onto truly stunning and outstanding work; "B" is awarded to work that goes (qualitatively) beyond mere course requirements; "C" indicates "standard" and "normal"—i.e., work that meets the basic course requirements in every way. "D" is worthy of credit, but just barely, and I guess we all know what "F" means. If you're taking the class C/NC, you need the equivalent of a "C" to pass. I don't expect to give any incompletes.

Topic and Reading Calendar (Volatile; subject to changes!)

Below is the schedule for discussion topics and reading assignments. Please refer to the updates page of the website for further instructions (including details for informal writing assignments, which are not included here).

All dates indicate the day on which we'll discuss in class the specified reading (in other words, you'll need to have read Vendler's "The Play of Language" and "Constructing A Self" when the class meets on Tuesday, January 28th). But it's vital that you not only keep up with the required work, but that you look ahead as well. I'm including in this calendar suggested dates to begin the longer texts we'll be reading this semester.

This calendar includes due dates for **major** written assignments. Those dates will not change without discussion.

Week 1: Jan 21 -23	
T	Helloes, housekeeping, and a practical-critical experiment.
R	Interpretation: Its Function and Practice. Online reading: Mailloux; Barnet; also Eagleton 1.1, 1.2, 5.1, 5.2 (excerpts available online). Homework assignment posted to Moodle.
Week 2: Jan 28-30	
T	Poetry: the speaker and situation. Vendler: "The Play of Language: Implication" and "Constructing A Self." Formalist Analysis of a Poem introduced.
R	Poetry and Rhetoric. Eagleton Chapter 4 and 5.3 – 5.8.
Week 3: Feb 4-6	
T	Meter, Rhythm, and Rhyme. Eagleton 5.9; 5.10; prosody handout (online). Types of poems. Vendler: "Describing Poems"; Guide to Verse and Stanza Forms (both online).
R	Beyond Literalism: Poetic Language. Meyer ("Images"; "Figures of Speech"; "Symbol, Allegory, and Irony") (online); Eagleton 5.11.
Week 4: Feb 11-13	
T	Putting It Together: Constructing Arguments about Texts. Eagleton chapter 2; 6.2.
R	<i>Rough</i> draft of formal analysis due. In-class discussion of drafts. Read, online, "Lit Crit Papers: What Faculty Know But Don't Always Articulate." [Start reading <i>Heart of Darkness</i>]
Week 5: Feb 18-20	
T	Formal Properties of Fiction. Hawthorn, 65 – 86.
R	Formal Properties of Fiction continued. Formal Analysis of A Poem due!

Week 6: Feb 25-27	
T	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> . Finish, if possible; read through at least section II.
R	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> .
Week 7: Mar 4-6	
T	Reading dense theoretical texts. Response to a Critical Essay introduced.
R	Feminist and gender criticism intro. "What Are Feminist and Gender Criticism?" in <i>HoD</i> ; "Feminism" and "Queer Theory" in Klages (recommended).
Week 8: Mar 11-13	
T	Smith: "Too Beautiful Altogether: Ideologies of Gender and Empire in <i>Heart of Darkness</i> ." <i>HoD</i> 189 – 204.
R	Smith continued.
S P R I N G B R E A K (a good time to get a jump on <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> . . .)	
Week 9: Mar 25-27	
T	Postcolonial criticism intro. "What Is Postcolonial Criticism?" in <i>HoD</i> ; "Race and Postcolonialism" in Klages (recommended).
R	Brantlinger: " <i>Heart of Darkness</i> : Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?" <i>HoD</i> 303 – 324.
Week 10: Apr 1-3	
T	"What Is Queer Theory?" and additional readings.
R	Andrew Michael Roberts. "Epistemology, Modernity, and Masculinity: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> ." Available online.
Week 11: Apr 8-10	
T	Angela Carter: <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> (available HSU bookstore).
R	<i>The Magic Toyshop</i> continued.
Week 12: Apr 15-17	
T	<i>The Magic Toyshop</i> continued. Considering critical approaches to <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> .
R	Response to a critical essay due. Come to class with ideas for the final paper.
Week 13: Apr 22-24 (Schedule is flexible for final three weeks)	
T	First draft, final paper due! Discussing work-in-progress and providing feedback.
R	In-class peer consultations; revising workshop. Feedback letters due to your colleagues—in class and on Moodle!
Week 14: Apr 29 – May 1	
T	Revised draft due in class; review "Lit Crit Papers." For the remainder of the semester, bring the latest version of your final paper with you to class, in print or electronic form. You must have access to it, and you must be able to hand it off to someone else (even if that means handing your laptop to someone).
R	Revising workshop.
Week 15: May 6 - 8	
T	Revising workshop. Proofreading; handling quotations; formatting.
R	FINAL PAPER DUE!