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and by appointment

English 320: The Practice of Criticism

*Read this long and intimidating document and thoroughly familiarize yourself with its contents.
As they used to say on the old TV cop drama "Dragnet": Ignorance of the law is no excuse.*

Course Aims. This is a course on How to Read and (especially) Write. Of course, you've all been doing both of those things for some 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, then, we'll

- consider the relationship 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 challenges and frustrations (and pleasures and satisfactions!) of doing so in an academic setting; and
- examine the assumptions of the literary-critical process itself, as well as some of the theoretical spins that people in academe currently put 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 and more comfortable in the discipline of English Studies.

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

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 3d edition (Bedford Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism, 2011). Even if you already own a copy of this much-assigned novella, you'll need to get this specific edition, since we'll be making extensive use of other materials that are included in it.
- Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (Penguin, 1996). Any edition of this novel should work.
- Terry Eagleton, *How To Read a Poem* (Blackwell, 2007).
- Additional readings found in an electronic "Course Reader," via the class web page (*not* ONCORES or Moodle). In many instances, you'll be prompted to type in a username and a password in order to gain access to a copyrighted item. The username is **engl320** and the password is **praccrit**.
- A pocket or accordion folder would be handy for carrying around drafts, notes, a yellow legal pad, a reading journal, writing exercises, etc.

Suggested texts. Not required, but worthwhile. The first is available at the HSU Bookstore:

- Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum). A good supporting text for some of the more abstruse schools of contemporary critical theory. If you're looking for additional help with the ideas that inform the essays we'll be reading on *Heart of Darkness*, this is the text you want.

The others may be ordered from a local bookstore or from any number of online sources:

- William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 12th edition (Longman). This will flesh out many unfamiliar terms we might throw around in class. I think it's shockingly expensive, but it's a classic all-purpose general reference work for English majors. If you're considering graduate school in literature or a teaching career in English, you should probably make the investment. The library's copy—of the 9th edition, not the 12th—is in the Reference section on the ground floor (REF PN41 .H355 2003), next to many other handbooks and dictionaries of literary and theoretical terms.
- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition. The Bible of style and format for literary studies—a "must-have" for any self-respecting English major. This will be an

essential reference when we discuss the conventions of scholarly writing and presentation. If you don't already own this book, get it. If you have an earlier edition, replace it with this updated one.

- Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say*, 3d edition (Norton). Writing critical essays in any discipline, including English, is all about joining a scholarly conversation. This book schools you in some of the conventional formulae that structure such conversations. It would be especially useful for the final assignments in this course.

Major Requirements: We'll discuss the specifics of some of these assignments as the semester unfolds, and I will provide more detailed written instructions, as well (via the class web page, under "Major Assignments"), but you should feel free to ask for additional pointers at any stage of preparation. **You must complete all required assignments to receive a passing grade.** Since writing is the principal focus of this course, you should 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 may bump up your final grade; likewise, regular participation in class discussions.)
- Completion of written homework assignments during Weeks 1 – 5. These assignments will, I hope, help minimize the anguish of producing the formal analysis paper due in Week 6. They are to be uploaded to Moodle for *every* indicated 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 CR/NC basis; the letter grade you earn will be based on the number you successfully complete and submit. To receive an A you must submit all eight; seven will earn a B, six a C, and five a D. **These may not be submitted late! If for some technical reason you cannot upload a given file to Moodle, you must e-mail me *before* class to let me know that you'll be coming to class with a hard copy (typed, not hand-written) to hand in.** (15%)
- A 1300 – 1500 word formalist analysis of a poem (approximately 4 – 6 pages), due during Week 6. This will receive a traditional letter grade. (20%)
- A 5 – 7 page response to a critical essay, also graded. (20%)
- A final critical project, comprising the following components (45% of course grade; see details for full breakdown):
 - A first draft of at least 1500 words; you'll need to bring three copies of the draft to class (10%)
 - Written feedback for two drafts written by your peers, to be presented in class *and* uploaded to Moodle (10%)
 - A critical paper of 2100 – 2400 words (approximately 7 – 8 pages) (25%)

I try to be reasonable about granting brief extensions on graded assignments (Formalist Analysis; Response to Critical Essay; final draft of Final Project) in order to accommodate extenuating circumstances (see the "Course Policies" page of the class website), but if we haven't made a deal beforehand—i.e., *more than 24 hours in advance*—I will penalize late work. In no instance will I accept anything that's more than two (2) class periods late. Extensions will *not* be granted on drafts, peer feedback, or informal assignments; those are due at the start of class on the dates indicated.

Regular monitoring of the course Moodle & Updates pages: Any homework assignment for the next class session will appear on the class Moodle page or (after Week 5) on the "Updates" page of the class website, normally by 8:00 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. When you miss a class, you're expected to be prepared for the next one, just the same. I'll post announcements and minor schedule changes to the "Updates" page, too, though I will also alert you about changes to the course calendar in class and I will consult with you before making any *radical* changes. Just the same, you should check the Updates page regularly in case you missed an in-class announcement or forgot to note it in your own schedule.

Attendance: I know that at the college level, checking “attendance” can seem condescending. Still, it’s important in a discussion- and workshop-oriented course that everyone attend regularly. That’s why you get credit for showing up, and it’s also why I will circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each session. (You should make sure you’ve signed it.) You’re entitled to miss **four** (4) classes to cover all the contingencies of life—no explanations, no apologies, no penalties. Miss more than four, and your final grade will begin to suffer; the more you miss, the more it’ll hurt. If you’re gone more than six times (that’s 20% of the course!), I will strenuously encourage you to withdraw, assuming it’s still possible to do so. Routine absences should not include sessions when assignments are due.

On a related note: please get to class on time, don’t wander in and out, and don’t leave early. And bear in mind that it’s *especially* bad form to arrive late on a day when a major assignment is due.

Grading: Here’s where the oppressive substructure of my seemingly benign classroom shows through. I try to grade by the book, which was written before the days of rampant grade inflation: “A” is reserved for truly stunning and outstanding work; “B” work goes solidly beyond minimal expectations for basic competency; and “C” is “standard” and “normal”—i.e., it meets the basic course requirements in every way. “D” is technically worthy of credit, but barely, and I guess we all know what “F” means. If you’re taking the class CR/NC, you need the equivalent of a “C” to pass. I don’t expect to give any Incompletes.

Disabilities: Please let me know of any documented disabilities and recommended accommodations that would promote your success in this class.

Plagiarism: I take academic dishonesty very seriously. Passing off part or all of someone else’s words or ideas as your own will result—at the very least—in a failing grade for the course. The university definition of and policies regarding academic dishonesty can be found in the HSU catalog. Please be aware that plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty can result in expulsion from the University.

Office Hours: I strongly encourage you to stop by and see me face-to-face, early and often. At the very least, find *one* time during the semester to drop in; we can talk about your progress and prospects, a specific assignment, or nothing in particular. You should *certainly* come see me 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 know that many of you won’t be able to make my scheduled office hours, but if you absolutely can’t rearrange your schedule and *really* need to see me, you can always ask about arranging to meet at some other mutually convenient time.

If a personal disaster befalls you in the course of the semester—your home burns down, your computer crashes, you’re plagued by mental or physical health issues, a marauding horde carries off your livestock—please let me know. I can direct you to campus resources that may help; at the very least, we may be able to figure out a plan to get you through the semester in one piece.

FOR ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES AND FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING ATTENDANCE, CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, MINIMUM OUTSIDE PREPARATION REQUIRED FOR THIS COURSE, PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT & DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR, SAFETY INFORMATION, ETC., ALL PRESENTED IN EVEN MORE EXCRUCIATING DETAIL, SEE THE “COURSE POLICIES” PAGE ONLINE AT [HTTP://USERS.HUMBOLDT.EDU/MSELDRI](http://users.humboldt.edu/mseldrige/ENGL320/320POLICIES.HTM)

GE/ENGL320/320POLICIES.HTM

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STUDENTS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS INFORMATION.

CALENDAR

(Danger! All quantities approximate! Subject to explosive change!)

A word to the wise: the listed topics and readings for each class session indicate what I expect you to have read and be ready to discuss *by the start of that class* (e.g., you'll need to have read Vendler's "The Play of Language" and "Constructing A Self" when the class meets on Tuesday, September 2nd). Please refer to the updates page of the website for further instructions (including details for informal writing assignments, which are not included here.) It's vital, however, that you not only keep up with the required work from day to day, but that you also look and plan ahead. To that end, I've included suggested dates [in square brackets] for beginning the longer texts we'll be reading this semester. This calendar also includes due dates for **major** written assignments; those won't change without prior notice.

Week 1: August 26 & 28	
T	Hellos, housekeeping, and a practical-critical experiment.
Th	Interpretation: Its Function and Practice. Online reading: Mailloux; Barry. Also Eagleton 1.1, 1.2, 5.1, 5.2 (excerpts available online). Post first homework assignment to Moodle.
Week 2: September 2 & 4	
T	Poetry: the speaker and situation. Vendler, "The Play of Language: Implication" and "Constructing A Self" (online). Formalist Analysis of a Poem paper introduced.
Th	Poetry and Rhetoric. Eagleton Chapter 4 and 5.3 – 5.8.
Week 3: September 9 & 11	
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).
Th	Beyond Literalism: Poetic Language. Meyer, "Images," "Figures of Speech," and "Symbol, Allegory, and Irony" (online); Eagleton 5.11.
Week 4: September 16 & 18	
T	Putting It Together: Constructing Arguments about Texts. Eagleton Chapter 2; 6.2.
Th	Rough draft of formal analysis due. In-class discussion of drafts. Read "Lit Crit Papers: What Faculty Know But Don't Always Articulate" (online). [Start reading <i>Heart of Darkness</i> !]
Week 5: September 23 & 25	
T	Formal Properties of Fiction. Hawthorn pp. 65 – 86.
Th	Formal Properties of Fiction continued. Formal Analysis of A Poem due!
Week 6: September 30 & October 2	
T	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> . (Make every effort to finish; failing that, read through at least section II.)
Th	<i>Heart of Darkness</i> , cont'd.
Week 7: October 7 & 9	
T	Reading dense theoretical texts. Response to a Critical Essay paper introduced.
Th	Feminist and gender criticism intro. "What Are Feminist and Gender Criticism?" (in <i>HoD</i>); "Feminism" and "Queer Theory" (in Klages [recommended]).
Week 8: October 14 & 16	
T	Smith, "Too Beautiful Altogether: Ideologies of Gender and Empire in <i>Heart of Darkness</i> " (<i>HoD</i> 189 – 204).
Th	Smith, cont'd. [Start reading <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> !]

Week 9: October 21 & 23	
T	Postcolonial criticism intro. “What Is Postcolonial Criticism?” (in <i>HoD</i>); “Race and Postcolonialism” (in Klages [recommended]).
Th	Brantlinger: “Heart of Darkness: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?” (<i>HoD</i> 303 – 324).
Week 10: October 28 & 30	
T	“What Is Queer Theory?” and additional readings.
Th	Andrew Michael Roberts, “Epistemology, Modernity, and Masculinity: <i>Heart of Darkness</i> ” (online).
Week 11: November 4 & 6	
T	Angela Carter, <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> .
Th	<i>The Magic Toyshop</i> , cont’d.
Week 12: November 11 & 13	
T	Class cancelled in observance of Veterans Day holiday.
Th	Considering critical approaches to <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> . Response to a Critical Essay due. Come to class with ideas for the final paper.
Week 13: November 18 & 20	
T	First draft, final paper due! (Bring three hard copies with you!) Discussing work in progress and providing feedback.
Th	In-class peer consultations; revising workshop. Feedback letters due to your colleagues—in class and on Moodle!

T H A N K S G I V I N G B R E A K

Week 14: December 2 & 4	
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 each day, 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).
Th	Revising workshop.
Week 15: December 9 & 11	
T	Revising workshop. Proofreading; handling quotations; formatting.
Th	Catch-up (if nec’y). Final words and tearful farewells.
Week 16: December 16	
T	FINAL PAPER DUE! Class “meets” in my office, FH 168, 1240-1430.