

## English 398: Critical Writing

“How to Read Literature”

T Th 1:30-3:18, Denney 213

Summer Quarter 2005

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### Dr. Pranav Jani

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Office Hours: W 9:30-12:30 & by appointment

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### Course Description

This version of English 398, subtitled “How to Read Literature,” is a hands-on introduction to the skills you will need in order to succeed as an English major. Through thought-provoking texts from the principal literary genres as well as visual media and popular culture, we will explore the basic questions of critical reading and writing: How do you recognize significant passages in a text? What steps do you have to take to develop an argument out of surface observations? What does it mean to conduct a research paper on a literary topic? What role should a writer’s politics or cultural background play in a literary analysis?

Our focus, therefore, will be on learning *methods* of reading, even as we investigate the *content* of texts from various literary genres, time periods, and locations. Frequent formal and informal writing assignments will allow you to implement those critical methods. In addition, as each of you will be my advisee, we will try to make the class a space for all sorts of practical questions about being an English major, from selection of courses and focus to a discussion of career options.

**Required Texts** – available at SBX bookstore (1806 N. High Street)

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Other readings are either on the internet (see links) or on Electronic Reserve (ER), access via

<http://library.ohio-state.edu/>

### Basis for Evaluation

Participation/Attendance: 20%

Short Response: 5%

Paper #1 (3-4 pages): 20%

Paper #2 (5-6 pages): 25%

Paper #3 (7-8 pages): 30%

## **Course Policies and Guidelines**

### Teaching Philosophy

I would like our classroom to be an interactive space in which discussion of the text and its contexts helps us in our reading, writing, and general comprehension. Indeed, the small size of English 398 is designed to do just that. While some short lectures on my part will still be important in framing the direction of the course, I would like to develop your skills in engaging with your classmates' comments and becoming more confident about expressing your own ideas. We want to generate a vibrant and democratic arena for inquiry and knowledge by doing away with the scenario in which the student, whose main task is to passively absorb enough information to do well and fulfill a requirement, meets the teacher who drones on and on as long as he gets his paycheck. (These characters, in fact, are products of one another: see the opening scene of Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*.) A more dynamic environment, I strongly believe, will aid your critical skills individually even as it enlivens our class as a whole – and we'll need it to go a full quarter through the summer months!

### Participation and Attendance

In this light, I will try to make the material as interesting and relevant as I can, but you must also meet that effort with your own. Students who receive the highest marks in participation will be those whose involvement in the course helps to drive it forward. This involves being alert and attentive in class, being familiar with the day's reading assignment, and making a consistent effort to connect the ideas in your head with those of your classmates. A required classroom presentation and a scheduled debate should also aid these efforts.

Participation, finally, requires being present. More than 2 absences from class will harm your participation grade, with a loss of 1/3 of a grade for each day lost. Emergencies should be reported to me as soon as possible, and may require documentation from the University.

### Writing and Assignments

This class is writing intensive: it requires a short response paper and two drafts of three longer essays. Please use my office hours and/or the help of the writing center (see [http://cstw.osu.edu/writing\\_center/](http://cstw.osu.edu/writing_center/)) for individual discussion of your ideas and projects. I will attempt to return papers as quickly as possible so you can get feedback on how you're doing in the course.

Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

### Help with Disabilities:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. We will coordinate something with the Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, which offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307.

## Course Outline

### Week 1: Introduction

- T 6/21 Introduction: How to be a Literary Critic
- W.B. Yeats, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (in class)
  - Brian Singer, *X-Men* (clips)
  - Panjabi MC and Jay-Z, “Beware of the Boys” (in class)
- Th 6/23 Topic: Defining “Literature”
- Terry Eagleton, “What is Literature?” (ER)
- Sa 6/25 **DUE: Short response on literary criticism** (email as Word attachment to [jani.4@osu.edu](mailto:jani.4@osu.edu))

### Week 2: Non-Fiction/Argument

- T 6/28 Topic: How to Listen to the Text
- Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”
    - [http://douglassarchives.org/doug\\_a10.htm](http://douglassarchives.org/doug_a10.htm)
- Th 6/30 Topic: How to Develop an Argument
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
    - <http://almaz.com/nobel/peace/MLK-jail.html>
    - PDF version (great for printing)  
<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf>

### Weeks 3-4: Drama/Interpretation

- T 7/5 Topic: How to Read Drama
- Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- Th 7/7 Topic: Reading Prospero
- Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- DUE: First Draft of Paper #1**
- T 7/12 Topic: Shakespeare and “Civilization”
- Coppelia Kahn, “Caliban at the Stadium: Shakespeare and the Making of Americans.” (ER)
  - *Further Reading*: Paul Franssen, “A Muddy Mirror” (ER)
- Th 7/14 Topic: Shakespeare and Gender
- Jessica Slights, “Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare’s Miranda” (ER)
- DUE: Final Draft of Paper #1**

### Week 5: Poetry/Close Reading

- T 7/19 Topic: How to Read Poetry
- William Wordsworth, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”
    - <http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww260.html>
  - P. B. Shelley, “Ozymandius”
    - <http://www.bartleby.com/106/246.html>
  - T.S. Eliot, “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”
    - <http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html>

- Th 7/21 Topic: Poetics and Politics
- Suheir Hammad, “First Writing Since...”
    - [www.teachingforchange.org/News%20Items/first\\_writing\\_since.htm](http://www.teachingforchange.org/News%20Items/first_writing_since.htm)
  - Patricia Jabbeh Wesley – poems (handout)
- DUE: First Draft of Paper #2**

**Week 6: Fiction I/Text and Context**

- T 7/26 Topic: How to Read Allegory
- George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
- Th 7/28 Topic: Texts and Contexts
- Orwell, *Animal Farm*
  - Article on Orwell (student research)

**!! Start Reading *Nervous Conditions* !!**

**Week 7: Conducting Research**

- T 8/2 Topic: How to Write a Bibliographical Essay
- Due: Final Draft of Paper #2**
- Th 8/4 Topic: How to Organize for Research

**Week 8: Fiction II/Narrative**

- T 8/9 Topic: How to Read Narrative
- Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
- Th 8/11 Topic: Dangarembga’s Voice
- Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
  - Pauline Ada Uwakweh, “Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in *Nervous Conditions*” (ER)

**Week 9: Pop Culture/Contexts**

- T 8/16 Topic: Hollywood and War
- David Russell, *Three Kings* (film, in-class viewing)
- Due: First Draft of Final Paper**
- Th 8/18 Topic: Hollywood and War
- Discuss *Three Kings*
  - Research: Hollywood and Washington after 9/11
  - Clive Thomson, “Cruel Intentions” (TV and torture)
    - <http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/arts/tv/10966/>
- W 8/24 **DUE: Final Paper**, as Word attachment to [jani.4@osu.edu](mailto:jani.4@osu.edu)