

English 398: Critical Writing

“How to Read Literature”

MW 1:30-3:18, Denney Hall 268

Winter 2008

Dr. Pranav Jani

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Office Hours: M 3:30-5:30 or 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)

Aimee Cesaire, *A Tempest*

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Other course readings will be posted on Carmen.

Log on at www.carmen.osu.edu for

- Interactive Syllabus (including all web links provided below)
- Articles marked “C” on the syllabus
- Dropbox for turning in papers
- Discussion threads for Carmen entries

Note: Important and personal messages requiring a response from me should be sent to jani.4@osu.edu. Please keep the discussion on Carmen focused on themes and questions of general interest to the class.

Course Requirements

Class Participation	20%
Carmen (10 entries)	10%
Paper #1 (3-4 pages)	20%
Paper #2 (5-6 pages)	25%
Paper #3 (5-6 pages)	25%

Grading

- **Class Participation:** Engaged, active participation in the class will be crucial to your grade. This includes, but is not limited to: arriving to class on time, bringing in the texts we're reading that day, being alert during lecture and discussion, raising questions and comments in the discussion period. Multiple absences, as described below, can detract from your participation grade.
- **Carmen:** To receive the full 10% of the grade, you must post at least 10, paragraph-length entries to the discussion threads on Carmen. These may be anything from general observations on the reading to close readings of passages to comments about issues raised in the class but not discussed fully. You may either initiate a new thread or respond to others' comments. Balancing original comments and responses, of course, will help develop online interaction.
- **Papers:** The courses' three papers make up 75% of your grade. Assignments will be posted on Carmen through the quarter, as I tailor my questions to the interests and abilities of the class. The small size of the class will allow us to really work on your writing. **First drafts will be due in class; please bring in two copies to facilitate our workshop-style discussion.** First drafts will not be graded, but their purpose will only be fulfilled if they are substantial pieces of writing. Poor drafts may impact the overall paper grade. **Final drafts** should be formal and analytical, seeking to develop interpretations of the texts we are studying in class. I expect final papers to always include a "Works Cited" page and to employ standard MLA format. **Final papers should be sent to the Carmen dropbox by the deadline.**
- If you have questions about any of this, please ask for help: come by to my office hours, use the writing center (see http://cstw.osu.edu/writing_center/) for individual discussion of your ideas and projects, or at least drop me a line.

Course Policies

- **Absences:** 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.
- **Plagiarism:** 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. Contact the ODS at 292-3307 and see their website at www.ods.osu.edu.

Course Outline

How to be a Literary Critic

F Jan 4

- W.B. Yeats, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” (in class)
- Brian Singer, *X-Men* (clips, in class)

M Jan 7

NO CLASS

W Jan 9

Terry Eagleton, “What is Literature?” (C)
Andrew Adamson, *Shrek* (clips, in class)
Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (C)

How to Read Drama/Interpretation

M Jan 14

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

W Jan 16

DUE: First draft of Paper #1 (see guidelines above)

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Further Reading: Coppelia Kahn, “Caliban at the Stadium: Shakespeare and the Making of Americans.” (C)

M Jan 21

MLK Day—NO CLASS

W Jan 23

Aimee Cesaire, *A Tempest*

Further Reading: Jessica Slights, “Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare’s Miranda” (C)

How to Read Poetry/Form and Content

M Jan 28

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>

W Jan 30

DUE: Final Draft of Paper #1 – MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, 9am

Suheir Hammad, “First Writing Since...”

www.teachingforchange.org/News%20Items/first_writing_since.htm

Lawson Inada, poems (handouts in class)

How to Read Fiction - I/Text and Context

M Feb 4

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

W Feb 6

DUE: First Draft of Paper #2

Orwell, *Animal Farm*

TNT's *Animal Farm* (clips, in class)

How to Read Pop Culture/Audience

M Feb 11 David Russell, *Three Kings* (film, in class)

W Feb 13 Discuss *Three Kings*
Student Research: Hollywood and Washington after 9/11

How to Read Fiction II/Narrative

M Feb 18 **DUE: Final Draft of Paper #2** -- MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, 9am
Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

W Feb 20 Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

M Feb 25 Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
Further Reading: Pauline Ada Uwakweh, "Debunking Patriarchy: The
Liberational Quality of Voicing in *Nervous Conditions*" (C)

W Feb 27 **DUE: First Draft of Paper #3**
Classroom Presentations on Final Papers

How to Read Fiction III/Truth

M Mar 3 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

W Mar 5 Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

M Mar 10 **DUE: Final Draft of Paper #3** - MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, 9am