

English 398: Critical Writing

“How to Read Literature”

MW 11:30-1:18, Denney Hall 262

Winter 2009

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Course Description

This version of English 398, entitled “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 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 and evidence 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?

While questions of power and politics will be at the fore—especially questions of gender, race, class, and empire—our focus will be on learning *methods* of reading. Frequent formal and informal writing assignments and a workshop-style atmosphere will help us to implement those critical methods.

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

Aimee Cesaire, *A Tempest*

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Other course materials will be posted on Carmen. Log on at www.carmen.osu.edu for

- Syllabus
- Articles marked “C” on the syllabus
- Dropbox for turning in papers

Each student will also set up a blog for the class, via Blogger (overview below).

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%
Class blog (3 entries)	5%
Paper #1 (3-4 pages)	20%
Paper #2 (5-6 pages)	25%
Paper #3 (5-6 pages)	30%

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.
- **Blog:** We will discuss how to set up your class blog and specific guidelines in class. To receive the full 5% of the grade, you must respond to the three prompts I have posted on Carmen. Feel free to make additional comments about the reading or the ideas in the class, to comment on others' blogs, to post supplementary material, etc.
- **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, as Microsoft Word documents.**
- 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

Week 1: How to be a Literary Critic

- M Jan 5 W.B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (in class)
 W Jan 7 Terry Eagleton, "What is Literature?" (C)
 Andrew Adamson, *Shrek* (clips, in class)
 Choosing topics for a paper

Weeks 2-3: How to Read Drama/Interpretation

- M Jan 12 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
 W Jan 14 Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- M Jan 19 **MLK Day—NO CLASS**: Collect data for Week 4
 T Jan 20 **Blog Post #1 Due – By 9pm**
 W Jan 21 Aimee Cesaire, *A Tempest*
Further Reading: Jessica Slights, "Rape and the Romanticization of Shakespeare's Miranda" (C)

Week 4: How to Read Media/Representation and Reality

- M Jan 26 **DUE: First draft of Paper #1** (see guidelines above)
 Classroom exercises on drafts
 How did various media outlets cover MLK Day/Obama Inauguration?
- W Jan 28 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (C)
 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" (C)
Further Study: Barack Obama, Philadelphia speech on race (www.youtube.com)

Week 5: How to Read Poetry/Form and Content

- M Feb 2 William Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"
<http://www.bartleby.com/145/ww260.html>
 T.S. Eliot, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
<http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html>
- W Feb 4 **DUE: Final Draft of Paper #1** – MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, 9am
 Suheir Hammad, "First Writing Since..." (C)

Week 6: How to Read Fiction I/Texts and Contexts

- M Feb 9 Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
 W Feb 11 **DUE: First Draft of Paper #2**
 Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
 Classroom exercises on drafts

Week 7: How to Read Film/Representation and Reality

Su Feb 15 **Blog Post #2 Due – by 9pm**
M Feb 16 Paul Haggis, *Crash*, (film, in class)
W Feb 18 Haggis, *Crash*
Valarie Kaur, *Divided We Fall* (clips, in class)
Obsession (clips, in class)
Introduction to Research Databases

Weeks 8-10: How to Read Fiction II/Research

M Feb 23 **DUE: Final Draft of Paper #2** -- MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, 9am
Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
W Feb 25 Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
Student research on Dangarembga/southern Africa/bildungsroman

Su Mar 1 **Blog Post #3 Due – by 9pm**
M Mar 2 Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
Classroom discussion of Paper #3
W Mar 4 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*
DUE: First Draft of Paper #3

M Mar 9 Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*
Student research on Rushdie/South Asia/postmodernism
W Mar 11 Conclusion: Literary Criticism and the English Major

M Mar 16 **DUE: Final Draft of Paper #3** - MSWord attachment to Carmen dropbox, noon