

English H398: Writing for English Majors (Honors)
Spring Quarter 2009, MW 1:30-3:18 [call # 08874-9]
Classroom: Denney 245

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DESCRIPTION:

This section of H398 is designed to help students clarify and execute more effectively the sort of tasks typically required in upper-division English literature classes. Looking closely at three or four prevailing theories of literary criticism, we will break each down into how-to steps, then proceed from theory to application by analyzing and writing about a range of texts. Along the way we will also discuss frankly some of the larger (but often unasked) questions about English Studies or being an English major. These questions may range from the hard-nosed ("How am I supposed to interpret Professor X's comment on my last paper?") to the philosophical ("What's the point to reading and analyzing literature? Are there any real grounds for judging good versus bad interpretation or writing, or is it all just the professor's opinion? What historical and philosophical currents have made English Studies what they are today?").

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- (1) Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory*, 5th ed. (New York etc.: Longman, 2007). [ISBN-10: 032144907X / ISBN-13: 9780321449078]
- (2) Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. John Paul Riquelme, *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism* (Bedford-St. Martin's: Boston & New York, 2002). Please note: you need to use this edition of *Dracula*, since it contains critical essays and supplementary matter that we will be using in class. [ISBN-10: 0-312-24170-4 / ISBN-13: 978-0-312-24170-4]

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

- (1) Formal papers. There will be three formal essay assignments, each designed to give practice in some particular approach to literary analysis:
 - Essay 1 (20%): A New Critical paper, 5-7 pp.
 - Essay 2 (20%): A paper demonstrating Reader-Response, Deconstructionist, (New) Historicist, or Gender criticism, 5-7 pp.
 - Essay 3 (30%): A long critical essay on *Dracula*, 12-14 pp., combining secondary research with one or more of the critical perspectives surveyed in this course.

Specific guidelines for paper assignments will be posted on CARMEN (> Content > Assignments) well in advance of each due date. If handed in late, these formal papers will be docked half a letter-grade per day. Re-writes are not allowed except in extraordinary circumstances. See also "Plagiarism," below.

- (2) Informal writing assignments (5% total). Usually these take the form of questions or exercises to accompany reading assignments or in-class activities. These may be collected and marked [S]atisfactory or [U]nsatisfactory, with comments. Since these assignments are preparatory to specific class discussions, late submissions are pointless and will not be accepted; but every student is granted two drop grades from among these assignments.

- (3) Oral presentation (10%): In the second half of term, students will divide into groups, and each group will be responsible a series of short oral reports (approx. 10 minutes per person in each group) on research related to some aspect of Stoker's *Dracula*.

- (4) Attendance & participation (15% total): H398 is designed to be discussion- rather than lecture-based (i.e., the point of most class meetings is to generate and critique our own and others' readings of texts). Obviously, in such a format, it is not possible to make up anything missed due to absence from a class discussion. Attendance and participation are therefore required. The attendance portion of the final grade amounts to 5%. Every student has 2 cuts without penalty, then 0% credit for this category for 3-5 unexcused absences. A student who misses more than 5 classes, without a documentable excuse for each absence, will additionally receive 0% credit for the separate 10% "Participation" category (see below). Missing more than 7 classes for any reason will be considered grounds for an "E" grade.

Attendance will normally be taken at the beginning of class. Because arriving late or leaving early can be very distracting for all, tardies or early departures will, after the second occurrence of either, be counted as absences. We will ordinarily take a 4- to 5-minute break about halfway through each class; unless it is an emergency, please wait until the break to visit the restroom or water fountain, answer phone messages, etc.

Participation: 10% of the final grade will be the student's participation in class- or small-group discussions. "Participation" is defined as coming to class prepared, contributing at least one substantive comment or question aloud to each class discussion, and taking an active part in any group assignments.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Information about the English major at OSU. Many of your questions about the major, requirements, scheduling etc. can now be answered by the new and improved website at <<http://english.osu.edu>>.

Special classroom needs: Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; [OSU Office for disability Services Web Site](#).

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. It is your responsibility to ask the instructor if at any time you are unsure about the interpretation of these guidelines relative to your own work. A random sample from every group of major essays submitted in this section of 398 will be computer-searched for plagiarism. All cases of suspected plagiarism will, in accordance with university rules, be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the [Code of Student Conduct](#).

DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

Overview: The course has three unequal parts. First we will undertake a brief discussion of what English Studies are (and how they got that way). Second, we'll focus on how to do criticism according to various current theories, and we'll practicing those on a small set of short stories and poems. Finally, in the third part of the course we will concentrate on a single novel, Stoker's *Dracula*, which we will discuss and write about by combining several different critical perspectives that we have studied.

Schedule of meetings, topics, and major assignments: Please note: (1) Assignments are listed here next to the date on/by which they are due. If you are absent, it's always a good idea to check with a classmate or e-mail me to find out about possible ad-hoc revisions to the syllabus; (2) Lynn = Steven Lynn's *Texts and Contexts*, 4th edition (2005).

30 March (M): Introduction, syllabus, policies, overview of the course.

In-class diagnostic exercise on grammar & punctuation, literary terminology

1 April (W): Topic: What is/are English Studies today?

Start by reading the introduction and first chapter of Lynn's *Texts and Contexts* (pp. 3-37). These pages set out in basic terms why all texts are open to interpretation, and how different theoretical models may yield quite different meanings for a single text.

To prepare for class discussion, write an informal 1-paragraph response describing where you, as a reader of/writer about literature fit in the critical landscape surveyed by Lynn. If it helps, you could break this down into a series of questions: Which of the theories outlined by Lynn comes closest to describing how you go about analyzing and interpreting literature? Or, if that question is too abstract, try this: how do you write a literary-critical paper? If you follow a definite method, how would you describe that method to someone else?

In the time remaining in class, we will talk about the range of pursuits that go on today under the broad heading "English (Studies)," and we will take up the uncomfortable question of the "usefulness" of studying English at the university level. To prepare for this part of the discussion, please read the recent blogs by famous (notorious?) English professor Stanley Fish:

"Will the Humanities Save Us?" at <<http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/will-the-humanities-save-us/>> and "The Uses of the Humanities, Part Two" at <<http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/the-uses-of-the-humanities-part-two/>>. (These are posted on the New York Times's web site. If you have trouble accessing them, I have also put printed pdf versions up on our class's CARMEN site.) Prepare some thoughts in response to Fish to share in class. Feel free to draw on your own experiences of / conceptions about "majoring in English": What did you perceive English Studies to be when you entered college? Why did you choose English as a major or minor? What, in your view, is the point of reading literature in college and writing papers about it?

6 April (M): Topic: New Criticism. Read Lynn, pp. 39-65. In class we will compare and discuss New Criticism's premises, pros, and cons. Then we will practice how to use New Critical methods to generate theses and develop arguments from a primary text. For practice applying New Critical methods to primary texts, read several times the poems by Clifton (p. 59) and Jonson (pp. 61-2), and do your best to write out answers to the questions accompanying each. Be prepared to share your answers—and any further questions—in small discussion groups in class. From the results of these discussion groups, we will work towards formulating New Critical thesis-statements and supporting arguments about each poem.

8 April (W): Topic: New Criticism (cont'd). Reread Lynn, pp. 48-50 ("How to do New Criticism"). Then print and read all four of the short poems on posted on the handout "Texts I" (posted on CARMEN > Content > Readings). Choose at least *two* of the poems from which to develop a New Critical thesis and supporting arguments. Write out a sample thesis for each of the two poems, then choose one to develop into an outline of subtopics (as you did for the short story last class).

13 April (M): Topic: New Criticism (cont'd). (1) Print and read Welty's short story "A Worn Path" (posted on CARMEN > Content > Readings); to help us when discussing the text, you might number every fifth paragraph or so on your printed-out copy. (2) Write out 2 thesis statements for Welty's story "A Worn Path." Then, of the two theses you generate, choose one to develop into a brief outline of subtopics supporting your thesis. Both your thesis and subtopics should show that you understand and can apply the principles of New Criticism. Be prepared to share your work in class.

15 April (W): Topic: Evaluating Literary-Critical Essays: (1) Print, read and critique the sample essay (posted on CARMEN > Content > Sample Essay). You will compare your evaluation of this essay with your classmates'. Part of your critique of the sample essay should be to judge whether or not it follows New Critical principles. (2) In the second half of class today, we will have a peer-review session for Paper #1, so please bring to class one typed, double-spaced copy of a complete draft of your Paper #1.

[17 April (F): PAPER #1 DUE before 3 pm: submit either in hard copy (to my mailbox in Denney 421) or upload to Carmen. Please note: ALL UPLOADS MUST BE IN MS WORD OR PDF FORMAT.]

20 April (M): Topic: Reader-Response Criticism. Read Lynn, pp. 67-103. To practice different types of Reader-Response Criticism, read the sample texts and questions on pp. 95-102. Write out answers to just one of the sets of sample questions and, as always, be ready to share your answers in class. From these examples and from others that I'll bring into class today, we will practice formulating Reader-Response thesis-statements and arguments.

22 April (W): Reader Response (cont'd). Print out, read, and number every fifth paragraph of Eudora Welty's "Why I live at the P.O." (CARMEN > Content > Readings). Keep a close log of your responses to / questions about the story as you work through it the first time. Following Lynn's steps for one of the common forms of Reader-Response

Criticism, draft two sample thesis statements, and then choose one of those to develop into an outline of arguments. Be prepared to present and discuss your work in groups.

- 27 April (M): Topic: Structuralism and Deconstruction. (1) Read Lynn, pp. 107-42, and work through his specimen texts and questions on pp. 135-6 (the sample advertisement) and pp. 139-40 (poem by Pastan). (2) Bring to class a magazine advertisement (words, images, or both) that, like Lynn's examples on pp. 114 or 136, deconstructs its own intended message(s); be prepared to explain to the class how it does so.
- 29 April (W): Topic: Deconstruction (cont'd). Reread Lynn, pp. 116-22 ("How to do Structuralism and Deconstruction"). Following his steps (distilled in the "Practices" column inside the front cover of your book), prepare Deconstructive readings of the story "I Have Slaved for You" and of one of the poems provided as "Texts II" (both the story and the "Texts II" handout are posted on CARMEN > Content > Readings). As you did for our New Criticism exercises, practice coming up with theses and supporting arguments that follow the principles of Deconstruction. Prepare to submit in writing one sample thesis + outline of arguments.
- 4 May (M): Topic: Feminist and Gender Criticism. Read Lynn, pp. 227-63. As usual, we will discuss the premises and uses of the theory, then look at application. Read through all of Lynn's sample-texts and question (pp. 255-61), but choose just one set of questions to answer in writing and share in class. Whichever sample-text you decide to focus on, try to develop a thesis statement and outline of subtopics to argue.
- 6 May (W): no class today. Continue developing your paper ideas for Essay #2. Also, read Lynn, pp. 133-81, on various types of Historicist approaches to literature. In my opinion, Lynn's exercises (pp. 178-9) aren't too helpful. Instead of writing on any of those, please go back to the two Welty stories we read earlier (see 2 and 11 April, above). Using any of the Historical or "New Historical" approaches discussed by Lynn's Ch. 6, draft a thesis and outline of supporting arguments for a paper on one of Welty's stories. To do this, you will want to read up on Welty's life (there are many good internet sites for this), and perhaps think as well about the wider historical background of her origins (depression-era Mississippi, racial segregation, class and gender expectations etc.).
- 11 May (M): Topic: Feminist/Gender and Historicist Criticism (cont'd). Bring to class your Historicist thesis/outline prepared for the 6 May assignment above. Likewise, for one of the two Welty stories also develop a second thesis/outline using Feminist and/or Gender Criticism. (You may decide to do both theses on the same story or not; if your thesis/arguments using the two different kinds of critical theory overlap to a degree, that is okay: Feminist or Gender Criticism is often historical in orientation, and Historicism often takes account of sex and gender even where those topics are not the primary concern.) You should be prepared to discuss in class and in groups your forays into both kinds of criticism.
- 13 May (W): (1) Peer review for Paper #2 (bring two typed, double-spaced copies).
(2) Grammar and style workshop/Q&A.
- [15 May (F): PAPER #2 DUE before 3 pm: submit either in hard copy (to my mailbox in Denney 421) or upload to Carmen. Please note: ALL UPLOADS MUST BE IN MS WORD OR PDF FORMAT.]
- 18 May (M): For class today, please have read chs. 1-7 (pp. 26-108) of *Dracula*. We will run today's class "seminar"-style, which means that each student will be responsible for coming up with (at least) one substantial discussion question to raise for consideration by the whole class. Write up your question as well as your own (initial) response to it. Some possible foci for reading and discussion: narrative point of view in the novel; "gothic" or supernatural elements; Dracula's physique, class, and racial identity; Harker's character, in terms of nationality, profession, class, gender.
- 20 May (W): Continue *Dracula*, chs. 8-17 (pp. 108-237). Repeat "seminar" preparation as for last time (i.e. formulate and try to answer 1 major discussion question about the text, whether just chs. 8-17 or cumulatively). Some possible foci: "new women," female sexuality, Lucy vs. Mina as types; "manliness" as virtue; insanity & its treatment; Van Helsing's "science."
- 25 May (M): Memorial Day observed—no class

27 May (W): Finish *Dracula*, chs. 18-27 (pp. 237-369). Repeat "seminar" preparation as for last time (i.e. formulate and try to answer 1 major discussion question about the text, whether just chs. 18-27 or cumulatively).. Some foci: Mina's "vamping"; Mina as "medium"; Jonathan's character development; the (dis)satisfying end of the novel; is D. destroyed?

1 June (M): ORAL REPORTS.

3 June (W): ORAL REPORTS.

[Paper #3 due no later than Friday, 5 June 2009, at 3 pm. Please leave a hard copy of your paper in my departmental mailbox (in 421 Denney).]