English 170 (86394): Introduction to Literary Study

Talia Schaffer MW 1:40-2:55, RA 106

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Required texts:

About this course:

This course aims to prepare you for literary study in several ways. We will be studying theoretical and critical approaches to literature so that you will be able to decode research in the field; we will be practicing basic close-reading and analytical skills; and we will be working on the structure and style appropriate to upper-level English essays. It will be a lively class, since we will be reading provocative works of cultural theory and interesting recent ideas about bodies: gender theory, queer theory, disability studies, animal studies. We’ll be pairing these readings with a range of texts to give you practice in different genres, including poems (“Goblin Market” and “In Memoriam”) and fiction (*Dracula*), film clips, and contemporary readings. One of the main goals of this course is to train you to read academic criticism, and the essays and some in-class work will be geared towards that goal.

Learning goals

In this course, students will:

1. practice close readings to develop attentive and intensive reading habits

2. develop familiarity with major critical and theoretical approaches

3. learn to decode professional literary criticism

4. become comfortable with writing English essays

Required books

Badmington, Neil and Julia Thomas, *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2008)

ISBN 978-0415433099

Culler, Jonathan, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* 2nd ed (Oxford UP, new edition)

ISBN 9780199691340

Stoker, Bram, *Dracula* (Norton edition, ed. Nina Auerbach)

ISBN 978-0393970128

\*Readings on Blackboard

You will also need to bring in a notebook daily – a small bound composition book would be fine – that is separate from whatever you take notes in. In this book you will do in-class writing, journal entries, freewriting, and it will periodically be turned in for grading.

See library guide for research:

<http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/Library/research/guides/english/index.php>

Course Schedule

W, 8/28 introduction

*Introducing Theory*

M, 9/2 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

W, 9/4 NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH

M, 9/9 Culler, Ch. 1, 2

W, 9/11 Culler, Ch. 3, 4

M, 9/16 Semiotics: Saussure (Routledge)

W, 9/18 Rise of English: \*Eagleton, \*Viswanathan

M, 9/23 Authorial readings: Barthes (Routledge), Culler Ch. 6

W, 9/25 Benjamin (Routledge)

M, 9/30 \*Blake, “Little Black Boy”;

\*Richardson pp239-243, \*Adler

*Culture*

W, 10/2 \*Guerin et al, “Cultural Studies”

**Assign 1 given**

M, 10/7 Foucault (Routledge), \*Williams

W, 10/9 \*Althusser, \*Bakhtin

M, 10/14 NO CLASS: COLUMBUS DAY

(M) 10/15 Drac to p. 71 (through Ch 6)

**Essay 1 due**– on one of these theories plus a short text

*Bodies*

W, 10/16 \*Foucault (“History of Sexuality”)

M, 10/21 Dracula to p. 184 (through Ch. 15)

W, 10/23 Library tour: Room 225 in Rosenthal Library – bring ID!

M, 10/28 \*Sedgwick, Butler (Routledge)

**Essay 1 returned**

*Race*

W, 10/30 Said (Routledge); writing day

M, 11/4 Dracula to p. 262 (through Ch. 22)

W, 11/6 Agamben (Routledge)

M, 11/11 Dracula to end; Craft and Arata articles

**Assign 2 given**

*Margins and Modernity*

W, 11/13 \*Davis, \*Singer

M, 11/18 Mulvey (Routledge); writing day

W, 11/20 Dracula movie clips

**Essay 2 due**

M, 11/25 Haraway (Routledge); Stryker

W, 11/27 NO CLASS: FRIDAY DAY

(11/28-12/1 THANKSGIVING BREAK)

M, 12/2 \*“Goblin Market”

**Proposal for final paper**

*The Future of Theory*

W, 12/4 \*Moretti, \*Underwood

M, 12/9 \*Felski

W, 12/11 Final discussion

**Final paper due**

Grading:

Essay #1 (theory and short text*)* 25%

Essay #2 (theory and Dracula*)* 25%

Essay #3 (your choice) 25%

In-class and other writing 10%

Effort grade (see below) 15%

Writing:

Essays:

There will be three essays of approximately 5-7 pages each, which must be typed and conform to MLA guidelines. I will hand out assignments and you can pick which topic you’d like to write about. I also encourage you to come up with your own topic, as long as you clear it with me first.

For Essay 1 (theory+text), you do not need any sources. For Essay 2 (*Dracula*), you must find one article using the MLA index and use that article in your essay. For Essay 3 (your choice*)*, you must use at least two articles, from a book collection or from any of the following databases: MLA, JSTOR, Project Muse, Academic Search Premier.

In-class writing:

Frequently we will begin class by doing a few minutes of free-writing on the theoretical reading for that day. I will also have you occasionally take the notebook home to answer a query (like a blog, but in the notebook). This notebook will be turned in and graded on the basis of how seriously you try to answer the question – points deducted for minimal effort or flippancy.

In-class e-etiquette rules:

• You may not use alternative versions of these texts; you must use the versions on Blackboard. The original texts are much longer, and if you use a different version, it may have been abridged or cut in different places, so you will not have the same material as the rest of the class.

• if you are reading the Blackboard materials on a machine in class, minimize the distraction to other students. Keep the lid low or sleep the screen when you are not using it. A glowing colorful screen draws all eyes.

• you may *only* use your machine to read the course reading. You may not use it to check email, Facebook, Twitter, etc, to play online poker, to download music, etc. Doing so is highly disrespectful to the rest of the class. It distracts people sitting around you, it disregards what I and your fellow students might want to say, and it degrades the class discussion. Besides, I know you’re doing it and I am silently, resentfully, and busily deducting points from your effort grade all the time.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means the unacknowledged copying of someone else's ideas or words, no matter whether the original material is on the web or in print. It is theft. You are unjustly taking credit for something that you did not produce. This damages you; you're not learning anything if you're just copying someone else's stuff. It damages the other person, who's not getting any credit for her work. And it wastes my time, because I'm making comments that don't help you. If you plagiarize, you will automatically get an F on that paper and you may well fail the course. So if you are in doubt, cite! Put quotation marks around *anything* you copy word for word. Put the reference at the end of the sentence if you paraphrased someone's work or derived this idea from it. It's better to put in unnecessary references than to plagiarize inadvertently. It is perfectly okay to have friends help you with your essays as long as you acknowledge them at the end of your paper, ie, “thanks to my friend Pam Smith who helped me get rid of extra commas.”

Effort grade (attendance, participation):

This grade rewards those who come to class regularly, participate, and put in the extra work needed to make their writing and reading improve. Your effort grade will drop disastrously if you a) miss many classes without a valid excuse, b) do not participate, or act uninterested or apathetic in class, c) frequently come in late or leave early, d) show no signs of taking writing advice seriously, e) do not complete writing assignments (including blogs). The effort grade is worth 15% in itself, and I will also use it to adjust your overall course grade up or down.

*Attendence*: When you sign up for this course you commit to being here unless some unforeseen emergency arises. Respect the class times. Arrive on time and leave only when the class ends, and if you have to be absent or leave early, tell me about it first. That shows a sense of responsibility and some respect for me. But remember that telling me about it does not mean it is an excused absence. Legitimate excuses do *not* include: taking a relative to/from the airport, meeting another professor, doing an extra shift at work, forgetting something and going home to get it, oversleeping, working on another course’s assignments.

*Participation*: This seminar really depends on your willingness to participate and share your ideas! I know that some people feel uncomfortable speaking in public, but if you do not like to talk, I expect you to demonstrate participation in some other way -- by looking interested, coming to office hours, attending all classes, etc. I can tell when someone is involved in the class or not.

*Acting appropriately*: When you are in class, you must look as if you are paying attention (even if you’re not) and you must permit others to pay attention. This means you may not read, pass notes, whisper, do homework, check email, etc.

*Accommodations:* Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Late papers:

Now, this is something I’m strict about. I will not have papers dribbling in for weeks and weeks. If you have a legitimate reason for needing an extension, contact me and set up a new deadline. I expect the paper to come in by that new date. If you do not get in touch with me, or if you do not meet the new deadline, your paper will drop by *one grade* for every day that it is late. Thus a paper which would normally get a B but is three days late drops three grades (B-, C+, C) and ends up a C.

*Writing Guide:*

Quotes:

I. Picking quotations:

Pick only the words that work best for the purpose; don’t quote huge swaths of prose when only a sentence or two is necessary. You need to give a quotation in the following cases:

A. To back up a controversial point (you don’t have to ‘prove’ basic facts about the book, but you do have to prove arguments)

B. To do a close reading

C. To use the author’s marvelous language instead of your own workaday prose

II. Formatting in-line quotations:

A. In the MLA style, you use parenthetical documentation in the body of your paper, with author’s name and page number *only*. Please note that the period goes *after* the parenthetical reference:

“My metaphor was horticultural,” one character explains (Wilde, 10). OR:

He claimed, “my metaphor was horticultural” (Wilde, 10).

B. Put a list of Works Cited at the end of your paper, with the full references:

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest.* London: Penguin Books, 1966.

III. Formatting block quotes: use this style if you are citing something more than four lines long. Indent it ten spaces on the left (without changing the right-hand margin), single-space it, do not use quotation marks, and you may also make it a smaller font size. In a block quote, for some reason you *do* put the parenthetical reference after the final period, unlike a regular quote.

Since Wilde was a remarkably charismatic and popular individual, he had many friends, but when the great crash came in 1895, few of those friends defended him. He became perhaps the most infamous man in England. His very name was unspeakable. His erstwhile friends vied with each other to pillory him in the public press, and each critique was more cruel than the last. (Smith, 90)

Other writing issues (ie, Things I Hate and You Shouldn’t Do):

I. Word choice: ‘Demise’ does not mean doom; it means death. ‘Blatant’ means offensively, in-your-face obvious – don’t use it if you intend to praise someone. It’s better to say what you mean rather than look for fancy words whose meaning you’re not clear about. Do not trust your on-line thesaurus or grammar checker.

II. Generalizations: The only time anything is ‘truly human’ is if it’s not possible for an animal to do it (ie using opposable thumbs); the only thing that happened at ‘the beginning of time’ is the Big Bang. Don’t use lazy formulations like ‘in those times’ or ‘there’ when you can specify date and place: ‘in the 1850s, in England.’ It sounds much better. Don’t resort to vague, huge assertions to make your argument sound more important. Instead, try to figure out why your argument really does matter and explain that.

III. Conclusions: In your conclusion you do not need to summarize, unless the paper is exceptionally long or complex. Instead, you should show why your argument is interesting or important. That means really thinking about why what you have written is valuable, why it was worth the reader’s attention.

IV. Organization: Do take a few minutes to jot down the main points of your argument on a scrap of paper before you begin writing. This will save you from going off on tangents, changing your thesis halfway through, getting bogged down, forgetting to mention key points, and a huge number of other problems.

VI. Thesis: Try to pick something that really interests you and explore it. An essay is a chance to work something out, to delve deeper into the reading. Do not simply pick something that is obviously true and go through the motions of proving it, which will bore both me and you.

Final advice:

I. Remember that fundamentally, an essay is you telling me what you think about something. Don’t fixate on rules; instead, try to think of the most interesting thing you can say to me, and say it the best way you can. I want original, complicated, ambitious arguments. I want to see you thinking.

II. Buy and use a writing handbook, if you don't already have one. I recommend the MLA Guide or Diana Hacker’s handbook. Or use the very useful website, the OWL at Purdue: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Questions will come up that I can't answer, and you'll be glad to have someplace to look them up.

Grading standards:

These will vary slightly depending on the class’s level, but here is a good general guide.

*A level papers: especially great ideas, and no major writing problems*

A+ = this paper is extraordinary – ambitious, original, and beautifully written -- and it has taught me something new. Thank you.

A = this paper is virtually perfect, or so outstandingly original its tiny flaws don’t matter.

A- = this paper has made the leap into something special; it is outstandingly original or insightful; but it has some minor writing flaws (ie, occasional word choice problems, a misunderstanding of one aspect of the text).

*B level papers: good ideas, but some writing problems*

B+ = a very good, well-written paper, but doesn’t have the spark of originality necessary to put it in the A range; or a brilliantly original paper that would normally be an A- but the writing flaws are too great (frequent word choice problems, a lot of passive voice, a poor conclusion).

B = a good paper, solid, well-organized and well-supported. Flaws are usually sentence-level, but they run throughout the paper (passive voice, word choice, tense problems, comma problems, simple declarative sentences, unsatisfying intro or concl.).

B- = good ideas, but writing problems are apparent. Flaws are starting to appear at the level of structure (organization and paragraphing may be shaky), or the problems I’ve listed for a B paper are here but in a more serious form.

*C level papers: acceptable but problematic ideas, and real writing problems*

C+ = ideas are acceptable, and you’ve done some work, but there are real writing problems at the level of thesis, organization, etc. A major self-contradiction, an entire lack of documentation, no thesis, systematic sentence fragments, or problems with comprehensibility can put you in the C range.

C = ideas are acceptable, but it needs a lot more work. This paper may have any of the problems of the C+ range but the problems are worse, and there may be substantial misreadings of the text.

C- = barely acceptable, and I take it only because there’s some glimmer of some effort in it. These tend to be hastily dashed off, badly misunderstand the text, and have serious writing problems.

*D, F level papers: unacceptable ideas and writing*

D = not really acceptable -- very serious writing problems and inadequate ideas. Basically: you handed in something that more or less looks like the assignment, so it’s not an F. I don’t give D+ and D-, on the grounds that a D is already so low it’s ludicrous to make distinctions.

F = not acceptable at all.