

ENG 301.01W
Literary Analysis and Critical Theory
MW 7:45-9:00
Engleman D264

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Office Hours: M 6-7; Tu 11-1; Th 11-1; and by
appointment

Course Description

Welcome to “Literary Analysis and Critical Theory.” The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the tools and strategies of literary interpretation. Its goal is to help you thrive, rather than just survive, as a student and reader of literature. ENG 301 can thus rightly be thought of as a kind of “boot camp” for the English major. We will focus this semester on developing, through careful practice and close study, a critical vocabulary for poetry, drama, and prose fiction. Your goal is to internalize that vocabulary – to remember it, practice it, and question it, and to come out on the other side a stronger close reader of literature.

How will we do this? Rather than surveying a particular group of authors or literary period, our focus will be on questions of method: how to read poetic and literary language closely; how to assess the structure of a work as a whole, including matters of genre, influence, and authorship; how to place literature in a variety of critical contexts; and how to write about literary texts with a controlled yet dynamic voice. The texts I have chosen for our syllabus are not random; they are designed to help you develop those skills by tracing lines of thought, and to move, as we progress through the term, from the pastoral “golden world” of earlier poets and critics to the sprawling, varied metropolis of modern fiction and postmodern critique.

In this sense, we will also be using our readings and assignments this term to explore some of the larger, philosophical questions that usually attend any serious study of literature. What is the role of the poet, or author? How does it relate to that of readers and critics? What good – if any – can literary criticism do in the world? These kinds of questions will remain open ones for you throughout your time as an English major, and well beyond. By the end of the semester, however, you should be able to articulate some concrete ideas about *why* they are worth asking, and to have the close reading skills to demonstrate it.

Course Objectives

1. To gain a working knowledge of the conventions of poetry, prose fiction, and drama, and to develop the strategies of close literary analysis.
2. To acquire a critical vocabulary for the study of literature, including a solid command over essential literary terms (with an emphasis on memorization and internalization) and a familiarity with modes of critical inquiry.
3. To improve as writers, and to produce a significant body of written work that demonstrates practice in a variety of genres for engaging with and writing about literature.

Course Requirements

Texts:

Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets and Poetry*, 3rd edn (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010)
Sharon Hamilton, *Essential Literary Terms* (Norton, 2006)
Ross C. Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, eds., *The Bedford Glossary of Literary and Critical Terms*, 3rd edn (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008)
William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Pelican, 2000)
Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Penguin, 2010)
Electronic readings, short stories, and articles posted to VISTA

Assignments:

1. Final Portfolio (75%)

Essays (55%): You will write three papers this term, each essay building on a successively larger unit of analysis.

(i) *Poetry Paper* (4-5 pp. min., plus scansion assignment) – A thesis-driven essay that examines a keyword from one lyric poem, using concepts and terms for formal analysis we have studied in weeks 1-6.

(ii) *Drama Paper* (4-5 pp. min.) – A thesis-driven essay that examines the significance of one speech from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, using concepts and terms regarding the nature of literary and dramatic structure.

(iii) *Fiction Paper* (5 pp. min.) – A thesis-driven essay that develops a close reading of one of the works of fiction we will read in the last unit of our course in order to respond to one piece of secondary criticism on the work.

Working Papers (20%): You will be asked to write short weekly (with some weeks off) response papers. These will be of varying length, though generally around 1-2 pp. each. These are called “working” papers, because they are meant to serve as exercises and building blocks toward your essays. As such, they will not be graded as formal written assignments, but they also constitute more than simply journals or reflective responses. At the beginning of each week, I will give you a specific prompt in Web Vista (in “Assignments”) to complete by the end of the week. Unless otherwise noted, each week’s “working paper” will be due by **Friday, 6:00 pm in Vista**. For more information on the working papers, see the handout “On Writing a Working Paper” in VISTA.

Your written work in this course will be assessed as a “portfolio,” meaning (a) we will utilize a peer-review process to work on individual papers and to practice the skills of close analysis together, and (b) your “Working Papers” will be graded as a body of work within the final portfolio, rather than individually. Opportunities for revision will also be available.

2. Participation, ELT quizzes, and misc. assignments (15%): This includes regular and thoughtful participation, misc. daily assignments, and quizzes on literary terms. Rather than collect the exercises included in your reading of Hamilton’s *Essential Literary Terms*, I will quiz you on your knowledge of their contents. Sometimes, these quiz questions will be lifted directly from the exercises themselves; sometimes, you will be required to demonstrate your knowledge of the terms and concepts by other means.

You are also required to memorize and recite for me 12-15 lines of poetry by the 11th week of the semester (worth 40 points). Like medicine, this will be good for you; unlike medicine, it will be fun.

3. Final Exam (10%): A comprehensive exam covering literary terms and concepts throughout the course.

Grading

Formal papers, exams, and the “Final Portfolio,” according to the percentages listed above, will receive a letter grade. All other assignments will receive a point total toward your homework grade. *Essential Literary Terms* quizzes (“ELT Quizzes”) will be worth 20 possible points. Rough drafts of formal papers will be worth 30 points.

Working Papers: Weekly “Working Papers” are worth 20 points. There are only two possible point totals for each working paper. If completed in good faith and submitted on time, you will automatically receive full credit. If the assignment is submitted late, it will receive zero points. If the assignment is incomplete or has not sufficiently followed the assignment instructions, it will receive zero points.

It is very important to note that these “Working Papers” have a double grade value: the homework credit for completing each assignment, and the final, letter-grade assessment of your Working Papers as a body of work in the Final Portfolio. Both are important. Your Working Papers will be assessed at the end of the term based on their *progress* in the areas of close reading, writing skills, and attention to assignment goals. I will provide a brief progress report on the quality of your working papers after week 5.

If you fail to upload your working paper in VISTA by the Friday deadline, you have until the beginning of class Monday to complete the assignment for inclusion in the final portfolio. These “Working Papers,” however, will be noted as “late” in the portfolio.

Policies

Attendance: Please arrive to class on time. More than three late arrivals or early departures (more than five minutes) will constitute one absence. Chronic lateness will negatively affect the participation portion of your grade. *You are allowed no more than two absences – *excused or unexcused* - per semester.* Please use them wisely. More than two absences will result in the following grade penalties: 3 absences = reduction in participation grade; 4-5 absences = loss of ½ letter grade; 6 absences = failure of the course. If you are dealing with an emergency or a chronic illness, please contact me via email as soon as possible so we can discuss your situation.

Student Conferences: You are required to meet with me during my office hours or by appointment once before week 6 of the course. Failure to do so will reduce your participation grade in the class.

Papers: All papers should be typed, using a standard 12-point font (Times New Roman), one-inch margins, and proper MLA formatting.

All papers must be handed in at the beginning of class on the due date listed in the syllabus.

Please note: I will not accept papers submitted via email. If you know that you will be missing or absent on the date a final draft of a paper is due, please plan ahead of time to contact me about how to submit the hard copy by other means.

Late Work: Late formal essays will lose ½ letter grade for each 24-hour period they are late. (I.e., if you fail to turn in a paper at the beginning of class, the paper will be deducted ½ letter grade; you have until the equivalent time the next morning to hand in the paper before the paper is deducted an additional ½ letter grade.) Please see the policy regarding the submission of late working papers above.

Email: Responding to your emails in a timely fashion is very important to me. *I respond to student emails as soon as possibly can during the work day (7 am – 7 pm).* If you email me after 7 pm, you can expect a response from me by 7:30 am the next morning, often earlier.

Let me encourage you to use our course to begin making a practice of ensuring your course emails are about genuine matters of concern. Genuine inquiries or concerns include (but are not limited to) questions about the nature of an assignment, trouble accessing course materials, emergencies, etc. Unnecessary emails include inquiries about what is on the syllabus or what you may have missed by not attending class, as well as lengthy explanations of flu and cold symptoms.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: Do not plagiarize. All work submitted for a grade must be the student's own original work. Any use of published material in your written work must be fully and properly cited. Please feel free to speak with me if you have any questions about the proper use and citation of a source. While students are encouraged to discuss their ideas with fellow students, any act of plagiarism and violations of the school honesty policy is ground for failure in the course and even dismissal from the university. See the SCSU Student Handbook for further information on the Academic Honesty Policy. On recognizing and avoiding plagiarism, see the entry on Plagiarism at the Online Writing Lab ("OWL"): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>.

Students with disabilities: Southern Connecticut State University provides reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act for students with documented disabilities on an individualized basis. If you are a student with a documented disability, the University's Disability Resource Center (DRC) can work with you to determine appropriate accommodations. Before you receive accommodations in this class, you will need to make an appointment with the Disability Resource Center located at EN C-105A. To discuss your approved accommodations with me or other concerns, such as medical emergencies or arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment to meet as soon as possible. My office location and hours are listed at the top of this syllabus.

Cell Phones and Laptops: This is a discussion-based course, so your attention to class lecture and the comments of others is essential for your performance. Cell-phone and laptop use is not permitted in class.

Course Schedule

I. Poetry, Poetics, and Formal Analysis

Wk 1

W 1.18 *Course introduction* - An “endless swarms of rabbits”?: Poems and/as Problems
Focus: Blake, “London” (Vendler, pp. 91-2)

Wk 2

M 1.23 Vendler, Preface and Ch. 1 (pp. xxxix-xliii, 3-26)
Focus: Jonson, “On My First Son”; Dickinson, “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass”; Dove, “Flash Cards”
ELT, pp. 32-43

Working Paper #1
 (Paraphrase) – hard copy due in class Monday

W 1.25

Vendler, Ch. 2 (pp. 27-76)
Focus: Donne, “A Valediction”; Herbert, “Love (III)”; Whitman, “A Noiseless Patient Spider”

Diagram the “shape” of *one* these poems, using one of Vendler’s models in ch. 2; bring your diagram to class.

F 1.27 Working Paper #2
 (Keyword) – Due in Vista

Wk 3

M 1.30 Vendler, Ch. 3 (pp. 77-110)
ELT, pp. 198-225

W 2.1

Focus: Shakespeare, Sonnets #130 (p. 101), #18, 116 (p. 574), and #129 (p. 140)

Bring to class a print-out of one sonnet, marking the metrical feet and stresses for *four* lines.

ELT quiz

F 2.3 Working Paper #3
 (Line/Prosody) – Due in Vista

Wk 4

M 2.6 Vendler, Ch. 4 (pp. 111-38)
ELT, pp. 226-46

Focus – Sonnets: Sidney, #1, 31 (pp. 577-8); Spenser, #75 (pp. 597-8); Donne, “Holy Sonnet 14” (p. 169); Keats, “On Sitting Down” (p. 507); Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” (p. 499)

Bring to class a print-out of one sonnet, marking the rhyme scheme for the *whole poem* and the metrical feet and stresses for *all* lines.

W 2.8

Focus – Ode, Ballad, and Elegy: Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” (pp.144-6) and “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (pp. 506-7), and Roethke, “Elegy for Jane”

(p. 571)

Read entries on “ode,” “ballad,” “ballad stanza,” and “elegy” in *Bedford Glossary*

ELT quiz

F 2.10 Working Paper #4
(Poetic Form) – Due in Vista

Wk 5
M 2.13

Vendler, Ch. 7 (pp. 213-38)
Focus – Pastoral: Marlowe, “The Passionate Shepherd...” (pp. 93-4); Marvell, “The Garden,” (pp. 141-3)
ELT, pp. 54-67, 83-86

Read entry on “pastoral” in *Bedford Glossary*

W 2.15

Vendler, Ch. 6 (pp. 179-96)
Focus – Modern Pastoral?: Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” (p. 561), Williams, “Spring and All” (p. 634), Harjo, “Song for the Deer” (pp. 175-6)
Review *ELT* pp. 239-41

ELT quiz

F 2.17 Working Paper #5
(Problems of Form) – Due in Vista

Wk 6
M 2.20

No class – Presidents’ Day

W 2.22

Vendler, Ch. 10
Dove, “Wingfoot Lake,” (p. 235-6)
Sidney, from *An Apology for Poetry* (.pdf in Vista)

Draft of “scansion” assignment for poetry paper due (1 p.)

ELT, pp. 184-94

F 2.23 Rough Draft of Poetry Paper (4 pp.)
due in Google Docs

II. The Play of Language: Drama, Genre, and Structure

Wk 7
M 2.27

Peer review of poetry papers; bring your partner’s draft(s) with comments

W 2.29

Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, Act 1
Aristotle, excerpt from *Poetics* (.pdf in Vista)
ELT, pp. 1-7, 167-76

Wk 8
M 3.5

Merchant of Venice, Acts 2-3
ELT, pp. 129-43

Poetry Paper Due

W 3.7 *Merchant of Venice*, Acts 4-5

ELT quiz

F 3.9 Working Paper #6
(Speech/Dialogue) - Due in
Vista

Wk 9

M 3.12

Merchant of Venice cont.'d

Northrop Frye, "The Mythos of Summer: Comedy"
(.pdf) (Vista)

W 3.14

Staging Interpretation Exercise

Group performance of selected speeches
(instructions provided in class)

F 3.16 Rough Draft of Drama
Paper due in Google Docs (3-4
pp.)

3.19-3.23 *No Class - Spring Break*

III. Reading Fiction and Criticism

Wk 10

M 3.26

Point of View

James Joyce, "Araby" (Vista)

ELT, pp. 112-27

W 3.28

Characterization

Elizabeth Bowen, "Mysterious Kôr" (Vista)

ELT, pp. 129-44

Drama Paper due

Wk 11

M 4.2

Describing narrative

Continue discussion of Bowen and Joyce

Narrative theory handout (.pdf) (Vista)

ELT quiz

W 4.4

The Novel

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, chs. 1-3

Poetry recitation deadline

F 4.6 Working Paper #7
(Point of View) - Due in Vista

Wk 12

M 4.9

Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, chs. 4-6

ELT, pp. 44-57 and *Bedford Glossary*, "irony,"
"detective fiction"

W 4.11

Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, chs. 7-9

F 4.13 Working Paper #8
(Novel) - Due in Vista

Wk 13

M 4.16

Reading Critically: Authorship and History

Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, ch. 10-end

Read "Author's Note" (1920) (Penguin edn)

Linder, "Conrad, Capitalism, and Decay" (.pdf)

W 4.18 *Reading Critically: Gender, Text, and Identity*
Soane, "The Colony at the Heart of Empire:
Domestic Space in *The Secret Agent*" (.pdf)

F 4.14 Working Paper #9
(Criticism) - Due in Vista

Wk 14
M 4.23 *Reading Critically: Postcolonialism and the Canon*
Jumpa Lahiri, "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine"
(Vista)
Reading handout on the "subaltern" (Vista)
Bedford Glossary, "postcolonial literature,"
"orientalism"

W 4.25 *No class* – paper conferences; bring introduction
and first two pages of fiction paper to meeting

Wk 15
M 4.30 Peer review of fiction paper – bring two copies of
rough draft to class (4-5 pp.)

W 5.2 Course conclusion

F 5.4 Final Portfolio Due (with Fiction Paper)

Final Exam M 5.7 (8:00 am)