Syllabus for English 200: Introduction to Literary Studies

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Course Description:

Our course introduces English majors to the academic discipline of Literary Studies, inviting you to examine critically the chief conventions, methodologies, assumptions, and issues in our field. The course also introduces you to scholarly research in textual studies and acquaints you with relevant databases and reference tools. We begin by examining the nature and definition(s) of literary texts and textuality, including a review of conventional literary genres and terms. As we progress, you will acquaint yourself with the major schools of criticism and theory, even as you apply them to texts. Toward these ends, we will analyze a sampling of representative prose and poetry through the major critical and theoretical approaches.

As a “W,” or Writing Intensive Course, English 200, aside from four formal essays, also involves informal writing as a way to deepen and broaden thinking. Most of our informal writing will in fact be prewriting (i.e. writing to generate ideas for formal essays) and journaling. Recognizing that writing involves a recursive process, we will also try to make you more conscious of and deliberate in that process.

Course Requirements:

Note well: English 200 is NOT a lecture course, but rather a modified seminar. Passivity and non-contribution are not options; rather, students are required to engage fully and conscientiously with the course readings, and to come to class prepared to offer critical questions and insights. There is no separate grade for participation precisely because your full engagement is an understood requirement. You should consider yourself under contract to each of your classmates. Your presentations, journal responses, critical reactions, and questions are crucial to your and their success in the course. Any absence or lateness may diminish your grade. Barring some extraordinary circumstance, more than three absences will mean failure.

Course Objectives:

By term’s end, students will be able:

1. To conceive of literary studies as an academic discipline with distinct history, assumptions, conventions, ends, and methodologies;
2. To recognize and understand major literary genres, vocabularies, and theoretical schools;
3. To read critically through various critical lenses;
4. To critically examine the definitions of literature and literary criticism;
5. To locate and use major research and reference resources in the field;
6. To locate, comprehend, summarize, paraphrase, and evaluate secondary sources;
7. To conceive, invent, draft, and polish an original critical interpretation situated within current scholarly discourse.

Required Texts:

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Grade Guidelines:
Each student will write four essays; also, each student will receive a group-grade for a scholarly presentation on an assigned critical school. I will arrive at a final grade using these guidelines:

- Close Reading Essay 10%
- Researched Critical Essay 20%
- Annotated Bibliography 20%
- Group Presentation 15%
- Reference Works Essay 10%
- Dialogic Journal 5%
- Final Exam 20%

Final Exam:
As noted above, the final (and comprehensive) examination (Thursday, May 3 from 8-10 AM) will account for 20% of your final grade. The exam will ask you 1) to apply to given texts, discrete or excerpted, the skills, methodologies, and theoretical lenses you have practiced, and 2) to metacritically examine your own interpretive strategies. (You will have some choice.) Short-essay answers.
Dialogic Journal:

By the end of week one, you will need to find a partner for a dialogic journal. You and this partner will take turns responding informally but critically to journal prompts and to each other on alternate Tuesdays, starting in week two. For example, Partner A will write a journal entry in response to the given prompt (or to a course-related issue of her/his choosing) by class time on Tuesday of week two, whereupon s/he will exchange the entry with Partner B, who will then do likewise by class time on Tuesday of week three. The format—handwritten, work-processed, IM, or e-mail—is up to the partners, but be sure to keep hard copies in any event. In this way, each pair of journal partners should end up with six entries each by term’s end. Entries should be approximately 300 words in which you address critically and substantively an issue relevant to the readings, the class discussion, or the course content. Keep careful records of your exchanges. Toward the end of term, I will assign one grade to both partners, based on the apparent level of critical engagement and conscientiousness overall.

It may happen that, instead of pairs, some students will work in triads; thus, the partners—A, B, and C—would exchange on a different though still alternating schedule. Triads will end up with fewer total entries (four), and respondents will need to respond to two new entries whenever their turn arrives.

Of course, the success of the journal depends upon the conscientiousness of its writers. Clearly, you should choose your partner advisedly. If, however, that partner fails to maintain the journal or its quality, and if you don’t feel you can solve the problem yourself, you need to tell me as soon as possible, and to make sure you keep up your own part in the meanwhile.

Conferences:
Each of you will confer with me twice: over the close reading essay, and, later, over the researched critical essay; bring all prewriting and drafts to our conferences.

Characterizations:
All students will be asked to volunteer to characterize assigned readings; that is, you will be responsible to 1) very briefly distill the thesis or key points of the day’s reading; 2) assert your own critical response to that thesis; 3) relate the reading to our class discussion. Be responsible to volunteer at least twice during the term. These are to be informal and very brief synopses, intended only to provide the class with a quick point of departure for the class, along with your critical reaction.

- Please be sure to keep all drafts, peer comments, and returned work in a safe place; also, keep copies/back-up files of all formal writing and journal entries.
- By the second week of class, formally designate one of your classmates as your contact person—i.e. the person who will be responsible to supply you with any missed notes, announcements, assignments, or handouts.
- Please notify me as soon as possible about any special accommodations you require.
- Feel free to contact me with questions; take advantage of my office hours (see above).
- Ours is a Blackboard-linked course; you will need to read your Naz e-mail to keep up on course communications; I will also post course information to our Blackboard site.
Formal Assignments:

This first formal essay asks you to critically analyze the formal features of a given text. You will choose one from a list of possible texts; you will then perform an intensive analysis of the text’s formal features, including linguistic, generic, rhetorical, metrical, and other structures.

2) Reference Works Essay (1-2 pp, excluding works cited page):
Using the Oxford English Dictionary along with at least three other literary reference sources (e.g. dictionaries, glossaries, bibliographies, concordances, etc.) you will historicize and contextualize the same text you treated in the first essay. As with all critical essays, you will need to distill a newsworthy thesis with larger implications, based on your collected reference data and on your own reading of the text in question.

3) Annotated Bibliography (3-5 pp):
Here, you will locate, read, summarize, and evaluate five current scholarly articles on an issue related to a specific text; this bibliography will contain your basic research for the final essay. Each entry begins with a correct MLA citation of the source, followed by a terse but critically substantive summary of its argument, followed by your own likewise substantive critical evaluation of the source. Each entry should be roughly 300 words.

4) Researched Critical Essay (4-6 pp, excluding works cited page):
Here is your chance to break into the scholarly conversation about the text you have researched for your annotated bibliography. Making sure that your five scholarly articles are both current and respected, assess the most recent critical opinions on the text, and respond to them; be sure at least to quibble with those scholars. (You need not reject their arguments wholesale, but may instead advocate a distinctly different emphasis.) Then, stake out your own unique position on the text. Sharply assert your thesis and its implications for our interpretation of the text. Lastly, build your own argument, making references to the text and to your research, carefully observing MLA conventions for format, quotation, and documentation.

5) Group presentation on theoretical approaches to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (75-minute presentation, graded by rubric):
The group presentation allows every student to read, digest, and articulate one major theoretical approach to literary criticism in some depth, and asks each group of students thus, acquainted, to introduce the rest of the class to that theoretical approach. Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* will be the practical text for all five groups. (*Please see special guidelines for group presentations on Page 10, below.)

Having read relevant sections in the Lynn and Fry texts, group members will also read the e-reserve selections below. Then, each group will take up take up one of the following theoretical approaches in a class-long presentation:
Group A: Reader response Criticism
   Iser, “Repertoire” (On E-Reserve)
   Fish, “Is There a Text in this Class?” (On E-Reserve)
   Lynn, Chapter 4: “Creating the Text”
   Fry, “Reader-Response Criticism in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (97-130)

Group B: Deconstructive Criticism
   Foucault, “What Is an Author?” (e-reserve)
   Derrida, “Difference” (e-reserve)
   Barthes, “Death of the Author”
   Lynn, Chapter Five: “Opening Up the Text”
   Fry, Deconstruction and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (261-314)

Group C: Psychoanalytic Criticism
   Freud, “The Dream Work” (e-reserve)
   Lacan, Agency of the Letter, or Reason Since Freud” (e-reserve)
   Lynn, Chapter 7: Psychological Criticism
   Fry, “Psychoanalytic Criticism and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (220-260)

Group D: Historical, Postcolonial, Cultural Studies, and Marxist Criticism
   Marx, “Base and Superstructure” (e-reserve)
   Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (e-reserve)
   Williams, “Authors”
   Lynn, Chapter Six: “Connecting the Text: Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies”

Group E: Gender- and Sexuality-Centered Criticism
   Gilbert, “Literary Paternity” (e-reserve)
   Cixous, “Laugh of the Medusa”
   Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet”
   Lynn, Chapter 8: “Gendering the Text: Feminist Criticism, Post-Feminism, and Queer Theory”
Reading / Writing Schedule

T 1/16  Introduction

R 1/18  Course syllabus; What is literature? Literary Studies? What is a text? Lynn, Chapter 1: An Introduction, Theoretically

T 1/23  Literature as an academic field; journal entry #1 due (A); Hopkins, “The Windhover” (Norton 2162); Larkin, “This Be the Verse” (Norton 2716); literary Terminology (Norton A91); elements of poetry

R 1/25  Choose texts for Essay #1; Lynn, Chapter 2: Critical Worlds: A Selective Tour; conference and presentation sign-up

T 1/30  Joyce, “Araby” (Norton 2503); journal response due (B)

R 2/1   Lynn, Chapter 3, “Unifying the Work: New Criticism

T 2/6   Munro, “Walker Brothers Cowboy”; journal response (A);

R 2/8   Close Reading (Essay #1) Due; Lynn, Chapter 4, “Creating the Text: Reader-Response Criticism”

T 2/13  Hardy, “The Darkling Thrush” (Norton 2320); journal response B


T 2/20  Marlow, Doctor Faustus, Prologue and Scene 1 (460-66); journal response A

R 2/22  Lynn, chapter 6, “Connecting the Text: Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies; Beowulf, Prologue (Norton 31-33)

T 2/27  journal response B

R 3/1   Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale” (Norton 1845)

T 3/6   MLA Documentation Style (Faigley 245-310); journal response A


***SPRING BREAK***
T 3/20  Lynn, Chapter 7, “Minding the Work: Psychological Criticism”; journal response B

R 3/22  Lynn, Chapter 8, “Gendering the Text: Feminist Criticism, Post-Feminism, and Queer Theory

T 3/27  Annotated Bibliography due; journal response A; Fry, Part Two: Case Study “Reader Response Criticism and ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ (79-130)


T 4/3  Group B Presentation: Deconstructive Criticism; journal response B

R 4/5  Lynn, Chapter 9, “Investigating the Work: Research and Documentation; conference sign-up; Fry, “Psychoanalytic Criticism and ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’” (220-260)


R 4/12  Group D Presentation: Historical, Postcolonial, Cultural Studies and Marxist Criticism

T 4/17  Group E: Gender- and Sexuality-Centered Criticism; journal response B

R 4/19  Workshop: Bring three copies of your critical essay draft

T 4/24  Researched Critical Essay due

R 4/26  Last Day of Class
Rationale and Guidelines for Group Presentations:

As noted above, I intend the group presentation to achieve two learning objectives: 1) It will acquaint all students with one critical-theoretical approach in greater depth; 2) Each group’s presentation, in turn, will clarify the whole class’s understanding of that critical orientation. At the same time, I’m anxious to avoid, as much as possible, the usual complaints about group work and group grades. Here’s a list of guidelines, toward that end:

a) Each member of the group is required to contribute equally to the discussions, preparations, and presentation, although the group members may decide among themselves how to divide the tasks.

b) If problems arise that members feel they cannot remedy, they must let me know immediately;

c) On the class meeting following your presentation, each group member must turn in a one-page, double-spaced evaluation of his/her own contributions to the group, and of the other group members; I reserve the right to adjust individual grades based on these evaluations if I deem the evidence sufficient.

d) While I expect each group to research, analyze, and comprehend critical concepts on their own, groups or individual members are welcome to meet with me and/or seek help from other Naz resources; of course, all the usual rules for citing sources apply.

e) Because the groups will be dealing with very sophisticated and, at times, downright obscure concepts, members should seek to clarify those concepts in their presentations; e.g. consider visual representations, handouts, activities, concrete examples, etc.
Journal Prompts

(You and your journal partner are free to pursue your own issues in the journal, as long as those issues pertain to the course content. I offer the list of prompts below only as default suggestions.)

1. What is literature? Literary Studies? Name an eminent example of a literary text: What makes it so? Can any cultural artifact—e.g. a quilt, a billboard sign, a garden—constitute a text? What makes a text literary or non-literary? Cite examples and explain.

2. What is the cultural importance of literature? What is the essential role of the literary critic? What is “The Western Canon”? How is it created? By whom? Does canonicity have any value? Explain:

3. Define and exemplify: 1) The intentional fallacy; 2) The autobiographical fallacy. What is/was new about “The New Criticism”?

4. Where does the final meaning of a text reside? With the author? With the Reader? With the Text? Somewhere between?

5. For a deconstructionist critic, where does a text’s final meaning reside (see prompt #4, above)? How does deconstructive criticism differ from a) New Criticism? B) reader-Response Criticism?

6. Take a fairly well-known children’s story as a starting point (e.g. “Cinderella,” “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”; “The Frog Prince”) and imagine how it would be interpreted, in turn, by a) a New Critic; b) a Reader-Response Critic; c) a Deconstructive Critic; d) a psychological critic; e) a Marxist/New Historicist/Postcolonialist critic; and f) a Feminist and/or Queer-Theorist Critic.

Journal Partners (1/18):

Diana Tedone / Kim Krula
Kellie Schiavone / Sohana Nasrin
Nicole Hyziak / Isaac Figueras
Abby Crain / Lauren Udicious
Heather Butterfield / Jessamyn Slon
Trisha Eccleston / Molly McDonough
Nate Parker / Laura Fiore
Evan Smith / Tyler Smith
Blanche Fox / Lexie Hilliard
Maya Esperson / Sarah Provenzano
Janet Santos / Tracy Edelstein
Melissa Nolan / Angela Thompson / Janet McCurdy
Presentation Groups:

Group A: Reader-Response

Tracy Edelstein
Janet McCurdy
Angela Thompson
Melissa Nolan
Janet Santos

Group B: Deconstructive Criticism

Kim Krula
Diana Tedone
Sarah Provenzano
Heather Butterfield
Sohana Nasrin

Group C: Psychoanalytic Criticism:

Maya Espersten
Nicole Hyziak
Isaac Figueras
Jessamyn Slon
Nathaniel Parker

Group D:

Historical, Postcolonial, C.S., and Marxist Criticism

Lauren Fiore
Molly McDonough
Trisha Eccleston
Tyler Smith
Evan Smith

Group E: Gender- and Sexuality-Centered Criticism

Blanche Fox
Kellie Schiavone
Lexie Hilliard
Abby Crain
Lauren Udicious