Do we need history in order to read literature, or does it simply get in our way? In this class, we will study the potential conflicts between text and context that arise in literary interpretation. Sometimes we feel too uncomfortably close to the small details of the text, while at other times it seems like we pay such scrupulously careful attention to cultural context that we miss “the text itself.” Should we be “close reading,” trying to pay careful, sustained attention to the literary work’s intrinsic nuances of meaning and structure, carefully untangling the different strands of significance knotted up within the first sentence of a novel or the final word of a sonnet? Or should we obey Fredric Jameson’s injunction to “always historicize”, and thus turn our attention to the ways the meanings of the literary work are always produced by and productive of its cultural and historical context? This problem isn’t ours alone. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, historicist scholars of English literature like J.L. Lowes have debated the question with close-reading, form-focused critics like Cleanth Brooks, but without arriving at much in the way of firm conclusions or clear solutions: witness the current attacks on New Historicism mounted by some New Formalists, or the disdain for close reading expressed by today’s advocates for “distant reading” like Franco Moretti. As we examine how several very different critics have interpreted a few major works of literature, will see that in many ways the two approaches are mutually defining and constantly engaged with one another.

Introduction: Literature and Its Histories

Week I
September 3  Welcome and Introduction
September 5  Richards, Practical Criticism preparation: poems I, II, and III
  Writing assignment: close read one of the Practical Criticism poems
September 7  Practical Criticism, “Introduction,” “Part I: Documentation of Poems I, II, and III
  Practical Criticism, Part III, Chapter I: “The Four Kinds of Meaning”
  Sign up for introductory meetings with me
  Writing assignment: close read “The Canonization” with Richards in mind
  Paper #1 assigned

Part I: LITERATURE: INTRINSIC: CLOSE READING

Week II
September 10  Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn, “The Language of Paradox” (3-21)
September 12  The Well Wrought Urn, continued
  Gallop, “The Fate of Close Reading”
September 14  The Verbal Icon preparation: Donne, “A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,” Eliot,
  “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Eliot, “A Game of Chess” from The
  Waste Land (first reading)
  Brooks, “Critical Theory and the Period Course”
  Paper #1 assigned
  Blog: your close reading of some aspect of “Prufrock,” keeping Brooks in mind

Week III
September 17  Wimsatt and Beardsley, ”The Intentional Fallacy” from The Verbal Icon
September 19  J.L. Lowes, from The Road to Xanadu
  Blog: one paragraph giving the key idea of your paper
September 21  7 Types of Ambiguity preparation: Eliot, “A Game of Chess” (second reading)
  Blog: research a reference from “A Game of Chess”

Week IV
September 24  Empson, 7 Types of Ambiguity, “Chapter I” (pp.1-21 only) “Chapter II” ( pages
  48-56, 68-88)
September 26  7 Types of Ambiguity, continued; De Man, “Form and Intent in the American New
  Criticism”
September 28  No class or blog
  Paper 1 due to Moodle by midnight
### Week V
- **October 1**
  - Terry Eagleton, “Structuralism and Semiotics,” “Post-Structuralism”
- **October 3**
  - J. Hillis Miller, “Critic as Host”
- **October 5**
  - *Mythologies* preparation: selected images  
  **Blog:** close read an image from *Mythologies*

### Week VI
- **October 8**
- **October 10**
  - *Mythologies*, continued
- **October 12**
  - *Mimesis* preparation: pages 1-48 of *To the Lighthouse*  
  **Blog:** use the OED to research a word from *To the Lighthouse*
  **Paper #1** revision due to Moodle by midnight  
  **Paper #2 assigned**

### Week VII
- **October break – no class this week**
- **October 15**
  - read *Mansfield Park*
- **October 17**
  - read *Mansfield Park*
- **October 19**
  - read *Mansfield Park*

### Part II: HISTORY: EXTRINSIC: RESEARCH

### Week VIII
- **October 22**
- **October 24**
  - *Mimesis*, “Epilogue”
  - Marotti, from *John Donne, Coterie Poet*
- **October 26**
  - Preparation: *Mansfield Park*  
  **Blog:** historical detail I (from *Mansfield Park*)

### Week IX
- **October 29**
  - Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, “Jane Austen and Empire”
- **October 31**
  - Marilyn Butler, “Mansfield Park: Ideology and Execution”
  - Claudia Johnson, "Mansfield Park: Confusions of Guilt and Revolutions of Mind”
- **November 2**
  - Butler and Jonson, continued; **Blog:** historical detail II

### Week X
- **November 5**
  - Cohn, “Narrated Monologue” *Transparent Minds*
- **November 7**
  **preparation:** *Jane Austen & the Secret of Style*  
  **Blog:** historical detail III
  **Paper #2 due to Moodle by midnight**
### Week XI

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>D. A. Miller, <em>Jane Austen and the Secret of Style</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>November 14</td>
<td><em>Jane Austen and the Secret of Style</em></td>
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<td>November 16</td>
<td>James, “The Beast in the Jungle,” “The Real Thing” <strong>Blog:</strong> close read a passage from “The Beast in the Jungle” or “The Real Thing” keeping D.A. Miller in mind</td>
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### Week XII

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>L.C. Knights, “Henry James and Human Liberty”</td>
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<td>Preparation: <em>The Political Unconscious</em></td>
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<td>November 21</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 23</td>
<td>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break</td>
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### Week XIII

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 26</td>
<td>Headnote on PU from <em>Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</em> Fredric Jameson, from “On Interpretation,” <em>The Political Unconscious</em></td>
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<td>November 28</td>
<td><strong>Final essay exam study guide and presentation assigned</strong></td>
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<td>November 30</td>
<td><strong>Blog:</strong> beyond history vs literature in James short stories <strong>Paper #2 final copy due to Moodle by midnight</strong></td>
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### Part III: RECONCILIATIONS AND REFUSALS

### Week XIV

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 3</td>
<td>Moretti, from <em>Maps, Graphs, and Trees</em> Sedgwick, <em>Touching Feeling,</em> “Paranoid and Reparative Reading” Claybaugh-Dames-Davidson-Kurnick on formalism and historicism</td>
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<td>December 5</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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<td>December 7</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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### Week XV

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 10</td>
<td>Presentations and party, study guide for take-home final</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 14</td>
<td><strong>study guide due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>December 18</td>
<td><strong>take-home final due</strong></td>
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Assignments

Course texts available in the bookstore:


You are also welcome to buy these books online or at a different store. If you do this be aware that you need to have your own copy of the specific edition of each of the books listed above; make sure that the ISBN numbers above match the ISBN number on the books you order.

All other course texts will be available in our Dropbox. I will send you a Dropbox invitation after class today. Please be sure to print out assigned electronic texts and bring them to class with you.

Reading assignments

The reading load for this class is fairly modest because I want you to have time to read certain texts (the poems in particular) more than once and to be able to devote time to your writing. The major exception to this low-reading-load rule will be our weeks on *Mansfield Park*. Do try to get started on that novel ahead of time, or plan to read it over fall break.

Short writing assignments via blog

Most weeks you will write a very short response (about 250 words) to some question related to the day’s reading. These short pieces of writing will not be graded individually, though they will be evaluated as part of your class participation grade. They offer you an opportunity to experiment with various forms of reading, as well as to work on developing your own reading style and learn important research skills. They are designed so that each set of entries feeds into one of the longer papers; this means that you are welcome and encouraged to draw on your entries as you write the more formal papers. Each blog entry must be posted by midnight the day before the class for which it is assigned. You will be invited to join our Wordpress blog in the first weeks of class.

Papers

These two different essay assignments (of two drafts each) will be discussed in detail in class. You will turn them in to our class Moodle site. In addition to the work on writing and revision our class and our class WA (Writing Associate) will provide, you may wish to visit the Writing Center (more information at [http://www.swarthmore.edu/x9317.xml](http://www.swarthmore.edu/x9317.xml)) for additional help.
Policies and Advice

Grading
25% class participation (includes quizzes and blog entries)
45% 2 short essays (paper 1 = 20%, paper 2 = 25%)
15% final presentation and study guide
15% short take-home final

Attendance and due dates
Because this is a discussion-oriented class, attendance is essential. Missing more than three class sessions will result in a lowered grade (1/3 of a grade per additional unexcused absence) unless you have a valid excuse confirmed by your advisor or class dean. (Remember to reserve some of your absences for the possibility of missing class due to routine illness like the flu or a bad cold.) Late papers will incur a penalty (1/3 of a grade per class day late) unless you have a similarly valid excuse. So if a paper is due on Friday and you don’t turn it in until Wednesday, that’s 2/3 of a grade late, making an actual B+ paper, for example, into a recorded B-.

Laptops and phones
This policy is constantly in flux for me, but this year in this class I am going to ask that you do not use a laptop, tablet, or phone for note-taking (or anything else) during class time. I’ll also ask that you silence and put away your mobile phone for the duration of class. Disability accommodations requiring the use of a computer are not covered by this policy.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is a very serious offence. It includes both the direct copying of the words of another person without crediting him or her and paraphrasing the ideas of another person without giving credit. See the English department’s guidelines on how to properly cite sources here:
http://www.swarthmore.edu/x10027.xml
If you have any questions about how to properly cite another person’s work, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Accommodations for disability
If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 130) or e-mail lhempli1@swarthmore.edu to set up an appointment to discuss your needs. Leslie Hempling is responsible for reviewing and approving disability-related accommodation requests. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities an Accommodation Authorization Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible. For details about the Student Disabilities Service and the accommodations process, visit http://www.swarthmore.edu/student-life/academic-advising-and-support/student-disability-services.xml.