

English 009Z: Literature Against History? (FYS)

English 009Z.01 • Fall 2012 • MWF 9:30-10:20 • LPAC 201

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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.



Gustave Doré. "The New Zealander" in *London : a pilgrimage*, Blanchard Jerrold (ed). London: Grant & Co., 1872. http://www.library.otago.ac.nz/exhibitions/ruins/check_list.html

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"
The Well Wrought Urn preparation: Donne, "The Canonization"
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 1" (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 Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 9-12, 15-28, 34-38, 41-46, 50-57, 74-90, 97-102, 109-159
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 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, "The Brown Stocking"
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 Johnson, continued; **Blog:** historical detail II

Week X

- November 5 Cohn, "Narrated Monologue" *Transparent Minds*
November 7 Moretti, "Austen's Britain," *Atlas of the European Novel*; Zadie Smith lecture in pm
November 9 preparation: *Jane Austen & the Secret of Style*
Blog: historical detail III
Paper #2 due to Moodle by midnight

Week XI

- November 12 D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*
November 14 *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*
November 16 James, "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Real Thing"
Blog: close read a passage from "The Beast in the Jungle" or "The Real Thing" keeping D.A. Miller in mind

Week XII

- November 19 L.C. Knights, "Henry James and Human Liberty"
Preparation: *The Political Unconscious*
November 21 NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break
November 23 NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Break

Week XIII

- November 26 Headnote on PU from *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*
Fredric Jameson, from "On Interpretation," *The Political Unconscious*
November 28 **Final essay exam study guide and presentation assigned**
November 30 **Blog:** beyond history vs literature in James short stories
Paper #2 final copy due to Moodle by midnight

Part III: RECONCILIATIONS AND REFUSALS

Week XIV

- December 3 Moretti, from *Maps, Graphs, and Trees*
Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, "Paranoid and Reparative Reading"
Claybaugh-Dames-Davidson-Kurnick on formalism and historicism
December 5 Presentations
December 7 Presentations

Week XV

- December 10 Presentations and party, study guide for take-home final
December 14 study guide due
December 18 take-home final due

Assignments

Course texts available in the bookstore:

Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001. ISBN-13: 978-1551110981

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang. ISBN: 0374521506

D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen and the Secret of Style*. Princeton. ISBN: 978-0691123875

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>) 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>.