

The Way We Argue Now

Introduction to Critical Writing

English 2391, Section 5

11:00-12:20, Tuesdays & Thursdays

course website: <http://thewaywearguenow.wordpress.com>

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9:30-10:30; Thursdays, 3:30-4:30; or by appointment (I encourage you to email and make appointments!)

Course Description: This course will teach critical writing about literature, and just as importantly, give you practice critical writing. You will learn important key terms in literary analysis, practice close reading, and acquire strategies for making interesting, convincing, and unified arguments about literary texts. We will discuss how to move from particular moments in literature to interpretations of literature; how to study literature in ways that help us better understand culture, history, and politics; as well as how to organize sentences, paragraphs, and essays effectively.

Most importantly, this class is about “the way we argue now.” Such a phrase suggests the following:

- 1) that there is a “we” —a community of people, what some scholars might call a “discourse community”—who make, revise, and learn from arguments. For the purposes of this class, the “we” refers to both our class community and the broader field of English literary studies. These communities remind us that arguments emerge from conversations and engagement with other people’s ideas. They also remind us that the shape of our arguments—the rhetorical strategies we employ—often reflect the conventions of a community. For example, we use thesis statements not simply because they express an argument clearly, but also because readers in the field of literary studies expect to see thesis statements.
- 2) that there are different “ways” to argue. This course will explore different modes of argumentation, and different understandings of literature by introducing distinct approaches to literary criticism (focusing especially on formalism, narrative theory, feminism, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies).
- 3) that how we argue about literature (and how we understand literature!) changes over time. The way we argue “now” often differs from the way people argued “then.” This means that our arguments about literature emerge from our own situated positions in history and culture (one reason why it’s important to bring your experiences to class discussion). The novel, once seen as low culture, popular, and even dangerous, is now considered an art form. Contemporary literature, once relegated to the margin of literary study, is now a growing field of study. The canon—or an established body of “great works” passed on from one generation to the next—has been questioned as too restrictive because it

marginalizes (often for political and cultural reasons) some of the best writers and works of literature. Moreover, because of new technology, literature takes new forms—television shows like *The Wire* can be literary, tweets can be poetic, and source code can function as part of rather than outside of a text.

Core Curriculum Statement: This course satisfies the Texas Tech University core curriculum requirements in language, philosophy, and culture.

Statement of Purpose for the Humanities: The objective of the humanities in a core curriculum is to expand the student's knowledge of the human condition and human cultures, especially in relation to behaviors, ideas, and values expressed in works of human imagination and thought. Through study in disciplines such as literature and philosophy, students will engage in critical analysis and develop an appreciation of the humanities as fundamental to the health and survival of any society.

College-Level Competency: Students graduating from Texas Tech University should be able to think critically and evaluate possible multiple interpretations, cultural contexts, and values.

Required texts (available at the bookstore):

1. Sharon Hamilton, *Essential Literature Terms* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc)
2. Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*
3. David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
4. Anna Deveare Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*
5. Additional reading is available online on our course website.

Assignments

Response papers (7)

These brief (300-500 words), relatively informal assignments give you an opportunity to respond to the text as you are reading it. They should demonstrate serious thinking and take up specific language and ideas from the text, but can be a site of 'uncritical reading' and 'non-utilitarian writing.' By this I mean that you can use these response papers to experiment with different modes of making arguments, practice different methodologies, and play with different writing styles (for instance, you can write creative rather than critical responses, discuss personal, affective responses to the text, draw on knowledge from other classes/your experience but it should help illuminate the text). They will be graded with a check, check-plus, or check-minus: a check means that you have fulfilled the expectations of the assignment (written a 300-500 word argument that responds to the text in a thoughtful, engaged way); a check-minus means that you failed to meet the expectations of the assignment, and a check-plus means that you have exceeded the expectations of the assignment by writing (in just 300-500 words!) a particularly original, thoughtful, insightful response. You will be assigned to either Group A or Group B (see attached list) and responsible for writing responses on the days indicated on the syllabus. **Please pay careful attention to the schedule as you will not be allowed to turn in late responses.**

Literary Analysis Papers (2)

In these 3-4 page papers you will **analyze** the construction of the text—its formal devices, use

of language, narrative structure, inclusion of details — **in order to make an argument** about the work as a whole — its central concepts, overarching themes, and political meaning. I will give you prompts and a more detailed assignment sheet that will help you shape your papers. You will be required to turn in a rough draft and, taking into account my suggestions as well as feedback from your peers, a revised final draft. These papers are opportunities to write more polished arguments about the literature that we have read in class and to employ the tools and methodologies of literary criticism.

Participation

Your active, thoughtful, and respectful participation will be essential to this course. You should plan on contributing during each class session (if you have concerns about this, please see me in office hours!) and you should be on-time, enthusiastic, and attentive during each meeting. In-class exercises and group work, such as peer review, will factor into your participation grade. Please be respectful of your classmates: this includes **turning off your cell phones** and **proper use of computers** so that there are no distractions.

Grade Breakdown

Literary Analysis Papers:	45%
Response Papers:	15%
Midterm Exam:	10%
Final Exam:	15%
Participation:	15%

Course Expectations:

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Your active participation is essential for your success and the success of this class. Come to class having finished the reading, with the text in hand, ready to contribute to the discussion. Your grade will suffer if you are not in class or prepared for class. You are allowed two free absences for which your grade will not be marked down. Each additional absence will result in a reduction of your participation grade by a letter grade (i.e. A --> B). A total of five absences will result in a failing grade for the entire course. Be advised that habitual tardiness will also lead to a reduction in your participation grade. If you do miss class, you are responsible for any material covered in class. For this reason, I encourage you to contact me and come to office hours.

Late Assignments

All assignments are due on the day specified. Any late papers or writing assignments will be marked down half a letter grade (eg. B -> B-) for each calendar day past the due date. Papers not submitted within one week of the due date will automatically fail. If you know that you cannot finish an assignment on time, please let me know well in advance and we may be able to work out a solution. If you talk to me after the fact, I can't help you. (note: emailing me 1/2 hour before an assignment is due does not constitute prior notice. You must talk to me at least 24hrs before the deadline or class). I may grant extensions for special cases such as illness or emergency.

Academic Integrity

This course expects students to uphold the standards of academic integrity as outlined on the Texas Tech Academic Integrity website: <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentconduct/academicinteg.php>. Plagiarism, or the use, citation, or paraphrase of someone else's words or ideas without attribution, will not be tolerated.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Fiction

Tuesday, Aug. 27: Introductions, syllabus

Thursday, Aug. 29: Edgar Allan Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Short Story," *ELT* (11-12), "Narration" and "Voice," *ELT* (112-13), "Point of View," *ELT* (113-122).

Tuesday, Sept. 3: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Chapter 1-5 (end page 60), "Novel," *ELT*, (8-11), "Setting," *ELT*, (150-52). *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Sept. 5: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Chapter 6-9 (end page 111), "Characterization," *ELT* (125-31). *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Sept. 10: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Chapter 10-17 (end page 203), "Dialogue," *ELT* (132-140), "Narrative Pace" *ELT* (170-172). *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Sept. 12: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Chapter 18-21 (End page 255), "Tone," *ELT* (156-62). *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Sept. 17: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Chapter 22-end. *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Sept. 19: George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil" (entire story). *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Sept. 24: **First Rough Draft Due (peer review)** George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil"

Thursday, Sept. 26: Nadine Gordimer, "Once Upon a Time"

Unit 2: Poetry

Tuesday, Oct. 1: Emily Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death," "There's a certain Slant of light," "The Soul selects her own Society," "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" "Poetic Forms," *ELT* (226-42). *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Oct. 3: Sonnets, William Shakespeare, 18, 73, 116, 129, 130, 144. *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Oct. 8: **First Paper Due** Sonnets, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, III, XXII, XXIX, XLII; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "A sonnet is a moment's monument"

Thursday, Oct. 10: Dramatic Monologues: Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess;" Langston Hughes, "Mother to Son;" "Dramatic Monologue," *ELT* (15-16). *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Oct. 15: T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Oct. 17: **midterm**

Tuesday, Oct. 22: Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck," "In a Classroom,"
Adrienne Rich, "Defy the Space that Separates" *The Nation* (Oct. 7, 1996).

Thursday, Oct. 24: **Second Rough Draft Due (peer review)** Derek Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa"

Unit 3: Drama

Tuesday, Oct. 29: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Acts 1&2; "Drama," *ELT* (1-7); "Irony," *ELT* (44-47)

Thursday, Oct. 31: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act 3

Tuesday, Nov. 5: **Second Paper Due** *M. Butterfly*, Acts 1&2

Thursday, Nov. 7: *M. Butterfly*, Act 3; "Soliloquy," *ELT* (141-143); selection from *Orientalism*

Tuesday, Nov. 12: Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, "Tragedy." *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Nov. 14: Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*. *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Nov. 19: Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*

Unit 4: Memoir/Creative Nonfiction

Thursday, Nov. 22: Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story." *Response paper due - group B*

Tuesday, Nov. 26: Joan Didion, "Why I Write" *Response paper due - group A*

Thursday, Nov. 28: No class - Thanksgiving break

Tuesday, December 3: Review/Wrap up.

Wednesday, December 11, 1:30 pm: **Final Exam**