

English 301
TR 9:30-10:45
44 English Building

Professor Matthew Hart
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Office: 341 English Building
Office Hrs W 9-11 & by appointment

English 301: Critical Approaches to Literature

English 301: Critical Approaches to Literature introduces you to theoretical concepts and interpretive methods that you will encounter in your study of literature. In addition to essays in the disciplines of critical theory and literary criticism, we will read *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon and poems by modern and contemporary writers. In reading literary texts, our goal is to prepare you to participate in discussions about the different ways that people find meaning in literature. We therefore focus on three major themes in the history of literary studies: (1) literariness as a philosophical and disciplinary idea; (2) historical and social criticism; and (3) the performance and representation of gender and sexuality. We therefore take an eccentric route from ancient Greece to the contemporary academy, helping you to identify topics and ideas that will invigorate and lend rigor to your study of literature and its meanings. Assignments include two short papers, a midterm, a final exam, and prepared discussion questions on our daily readings.

Required Texts

The following book has been ordered from the Illini Union Bookstore:

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. Harper Perennial, 2006.
ISBN: 006091307X.

Readings marked [CR] in the course calendar are in a required Course Reader, which you should purchase from Notes n Quotes, 502 East John Street, on the Ground Level of the Johnstowne Centre. Tel: 217-344-4433.

Assignments

- Class Participation 15% (in-class performance & prepared discussion questions)
- 2 Response Papers (circa 4pp each) 40%
- Midterm Exam 20%
- Final Exam 25%

Failure to complete any of these assignments will result in an “F” for the entire class.

Extensions

Unless you have a medical note or letter from an academic advisor, all extensions to assignments are given at my discretion and should not be expected. Contact me by email (matthart@illinois.edu) at least 24 hours in advance of the due date if you will require an extension.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will be lowered by one part of a grade (i.e., from “A+” to “A” or “B-” to “C+”) for every day (including weekend days) the assignment is late without a proper excuse. Only I can decide what merits a “proper excuse.”

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will note all unexcused absences, so please let me know if you cannot avoid missing a class. Because I know that everyone has to miss class occasionally, I allow two unexcused absences over the semester—i.e., two absences where I don’t need a note.

However, missing three or more classes without permission will affect your final grade.

Three absences will lower your final grade by one part, four by two parts, etc. For example, a student with an aggregate grade of “B+” and three unexcused absences will receive a final grade of “B.” Miss five classes (i.e., over two weeks of class) and you fail the course automatically. To have an absence excused, you must provide a letter from the Emergency Dean.

Participation & Preparation

Failure to complete the required daily readings is disrespectful to your classmates, yourself and me. I reserve the right to assign pop quizzes on assigned readings.

Our conversations and arguments will fuel your paper writing. Without testing your ideas, listening to your peers, keeping notes, and fulfilling the required reading, your paper grades will likely suffer. Failure to properly prepare for class discussion will also affect your class participation grade. If you are shy about speaking up in class, email me your thoughts or stop by my office hours. If I know that you are an attentive and enthusiastic student I can award you an “A” for participation even if you are quiet.

Because class participation is difficult to grade fairly, I assign participation grades on a simple three-step scale. Students who show consistent effort and enthusiasm receive a grade of “A”; students who contribute in an inconsistent or dutiful fashion earn a “C”; and students who persistently fail to contribute to class discussions get an “F.”

Plagiarism

The unattributed use of another person’s ideas, language, or data is a serious ethical and methodological offense in the academic humanities. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar with the University’s policy on Academic Integrity. Pay particular attention to the definition of plagiarism laid out in Part IV § 1-402 of the *Student Code* (http://admin.illinois.edu/policy/code/article_1/a1_1-402.html).

Penalties for plagiarism can range from a failing grade for an assignment to expulsion from the University. Please be conscientious in acknowledging any sources (especially online sources) that you consult in writing papers. For information on citing sources, see <www.library.uiuc.edu/egx/guides/citation.html>.

Communication

I am happy to meet you by appointment or to answer your questions in class. Please contact me by email (matthart@illinois.edu) or phone (333-4774) if you have urgent questions about class readings or an assignment, or if you encounter circumstances that adversely affect your participation in class, such as an illness or family emergency.

Emergency Alerts

The University uses text messaging to send emergency alerts. I will bring a charged cell phone to class in order that we may receive any necessary emergency alerts. You may also leave your phone turned on for this purpose, but please set it to silent alert and do not take/make any calls or send texts.

Calendar of Classes

I. Literariness

T 8/25	Introductions
R 8/27	Emily Dickinson, “My life had stood – a loaded gun” [H] <i>King James’ Bible</i> , Book of John 1:1-23 [H] Thomas Jefferson, <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> [H] from Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist” [H]
T 9/1	Plato, from <i>The Republic</i> and <i>Phaedrus</i> [CR]

- R 9/3 Aristotle, from *The Poetics* [CR]
 T 9/8 Terry Eagleton, "What is Literature?" [CR]
 R 9/10 Andrew Bennett & Nicholas Royle, "Voice" and "Figures and Tropes" [CR]
 T 9/15 Ferdinand de Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign" and "The Object of Study" [CR]
 R 9/17 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" [CR]

Response Paper 1 Due Tuesday 9/22, 9:30am

II. Reading for Form and More

- T 9/22 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
 R 9/24 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

III. Historical and Political Approaches

- T 9/29 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, from *The German Ideology* [CR]
 Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [CR]
 Andrew Bennett & Nicholas Royle, "Ideology" [CR]
 R 10/1 V. S. Volosinov, "Concerning the Relation Between Basis and Superstructures" [CR]
 T 10/6 Bertolt Brecht, *The Exception and the Rule* [CR]
 Bertolt Brecht, Documents on Epic Theater [H]
 R 10/8 Catherine Belsey, "Literature, History, Politics" [CR]
 Stephen Greenblatt, Introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* [CR]
 T 10/13 Frantz Fanon, from "On National Culture" [CR]
 Benedict Anderson, from *Imagined Communities* [CR]
 R 10/15 Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language" [CR]
 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, from "The Language of African Literature" [CR]
 T 10/20 Class Debate: The Politics of the English Language
 R 10/22 **No-class: Take-home Midterm Exam**

IV. Gender and Sexuality

- T 10/27 Lillian S. Robinson, "Treasure our Text" [CR]
 R 10/29 Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" [CR]
 T 11/3 Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield" [CR]
 R 11/5 Sigmund Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* [CR]
 T 11/10 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" [CR]

Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body" [CR]

R 11/12 Mina Loy, "Parturition" [CR]

T 11/17 Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" [CR]

R 11/19 Irvine Welsh, "The First Shag in Ages" [CR]

T 11/24 **Thanksgiving Break**

R 11/26 **Thanksgiving Break**

Response Paper 2 due Tuesday 12/1 9:30am

T 12/1 Victor Fleming (dir.), *Gone With the Wind* (in-class screening)

R 12/3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, from *Between Men* [CR]

T 12/8 Final Exam Review Session

R 12/10 Reading Day: No Class