

ENGLISH 731: CREATIVE CRITICISM

Prof. Deanna Kreisel
Spring 2024
Tuesday 6:00-8:30
Bondurant 112W

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[Office Hours](#)
[Zoom Office Hours](#)

Course Description

In this course we will examine, and push against, the boundaries of academic literary criticism, and explore more experimental and creative modes of analyzing and writing about literature. The course will have four “strands” of investigation: 1. the history of literary criticism as genre; 2. examples of literary criticism through the ages; 3. recent creative and experimental interventions; 4. a core group of literary texts we will read together and use to practice creative criticism. Obviously these distinctions are wholly artificial, and many of our readings touch on two, three, or more of these strands. But we will do our best to talk about all of these modes of investigation at each seminar meeting.

Core Literary Texts (*required reading*):

⇒ Please be sure to acquire these editions, so that we’re all (literally) on the same page

- Margo Jefferson, *Constructing a Nervous System* (Pantheon; ISBN 152474817X)
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (Theatre Communications Group; ISBN 9781559363846)
- Robert Lowell, *Life Studies* (FSG Classics; ISBN 0374530963)
- Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Mariner Books; ISBN 0156031515)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf; ISBN 1555976905)

Course Readings (*required*):

The bulk of the course readings will be stand-alone articles and book chapters. They will be available in two different places: 1. as links to electronic library materials; 2. as PDF files in the [course Box folder](#). If there is no link provided on the syllabus, the reading will be in the Box folder.

Course Bibliography and Other Readings (*optional*):

I will maintain a [running bibliography](#) of other course materials you may wish to consult for further reading. Here you will find more writings about creative and experimental criticism, examples of creative and experimental criticism, etc. Please check back often as I will be updating this list as we stumble across more material. Please also feel free to add to this list as you come across useful readings (and add PDFs to the Box folder if you have them). The link allows you to view and edit the document.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Attendance and Participation

Both are expected.

2. Presentation

Every seminar participant will do one classroom presentation. For your presentation, you will do one of the following (your choice): 1. Present, by reading aloud, 4-5 pages of your own creative criticism for feedback and discussion; or 2. Find and present a work by another author of creative/experimental criticism (not on the syllabus) and present it to the class. If you are doing option 1, please send me your pages at least 24 hours before class. If you are doing option 2, your presentation should consist of a summary of the critical piece, and your own analysis and interpretation. For option 2, you are welcome to use presentation tools (such as PowerPoint) and/or provide handouts to organize your presentation. Your presentation (including feedback and discussion) should take no more than 15 minutes. Please email me your preferences for date and format by **2:00 p.m. February 5th**.

3. Course Google Document

We will maintain a [joint Google Doc](#) where we will collaborate to build working answers to two key questions: *What characterizes "traditional" literary criticism?*; and *How can criticism be "creative"?* Please add your thoughts and ideas to the document after finishing each week's reading. Responses are due **Tuesdays at 3:00 p.m.** Additional instructions are on the document.

4. Final Project

For your final project, you will produce a creative/experimental work of literary criticism, focused on one of our four core literary texts. (N.B. Under *very limited* circumstances, I *may* approve an alternative text for your final project. Those circumstances include my already being familiar with the text and feeling competent to assess criticism about it. Please see me well in advance of the due date if you want to propose an alternative text.) Your project need not be a formal written paper, although it may be. You are encouraged to explore other formats for your project, should you wish to do so. We will discuss the form, format, and parameters of your project later in the semester.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication

Email. My email address is at the top of the syllabus. Please feel free to email with quick questions, but for anything complex, weighty, or gnarly, I prefer that you make an appointment to talk to me in person.

Office Hours. I will hold office hours both in person and over Zoom. The sign-up link for in-person office hours [is here](#) and the sign-up link for Zoom office hours [is here](#) (these links are also at the top of the syllabus).

GroupMe. You are *required* to join the [course Group Me chat](#). This is the official place for general communication about what's going on in our course: changes in schedule, announcements, reminders, etc.

Attendance & Absences

Because this is a graduate seminar and we meet weekly, you are expected to attend class, to be on time, and to participate in discussion. Missing even a single week means missing a significant portion of our time together. That said, please do not come to class if you're sick! Your health is more important than a class meeting—stay home, rest, hydrate, and get better. Please send me an email to let me know you are (or were) sick, so that I know what's going on.

Incompletes

Should you wish more time for your final project, you may request an Incomplete in the course. All course requirements (including the final project) must be finished by **June 15th**. (This deadline is for your own good as well as mine! If we let your Incomplete drag on any longer you will have forgotten everything we worked on in class—as will I.)

Classroom Etiquette

Please silence your cell phone (or even better, turn it off) and put it away for our time together. I ask that you not use laptops in class, since the tapping is distracting and the screens keep us from engaging with one another. You are welcome to use an e-reader or tablet to access the course readings, but please lay it flat so that it's not interfering with class discussion. You are welcome to bring drinks to class. Unless it's an emergency please refrain from eating during our discussion. We will have one 10-minute break for snacking, restroom visits, etc..

Disability Access and Inclusion

If there are any aspects of the course that result in barriers to your inclusion and participation, or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please let me know as soon as possible. If you are registered with SDS, you must log in to your Rebel Access portal at sds.olemiss.edu/rebel-access-portal to request approved accommodations. If you are NOT registered with SDS, you must complete the process to become registered. To begin the registration process, please visit sds.olemiss.edu/apply-for-services.

Hateful Language

Some course readings may include expressions of hateful and dehumanizing language; such expressions might include racist terminology. While we will encounter these ideas on the page, and will engage with the substance of these ideas in the course, our classroom will be free of hate speech of all kinds. I ask that you not use the N-word or any other slur in the seminar room, even if it appears on the page.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 23 CLASS CANCELED 🧑‍🎓 🧢 🤖

January 30 Reading: Auyong, “What We Mean By Reading”; Guillory, “The Sokal Affair and the History of Criticism”; Wikipedia, “The Sokal Affair”; Emre, “Has Academia Ruined Literary Criticism?”; Woolf, *Orlando* through Chap. 2

February 6 Reading: North, *Literary Criticism*, [Introduction](#) & [Chap. 1](#); Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” and “Culture and Anarchy” excerpts; Woolf, “How Should One Read a Book?”; Ruddick, “When Nothing Is Cool”; *Orlando* through Chap. 4

February 13 Reading: Graff, *Professing Literature*, Chap. 8; Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”; Solnit, “Woolf’s Darkness”; *Orlando* finish

February 20 Reading: North, *Literary Criticism*, [Chap. 2](#); Wilde, “The Critic As Artist”; Bartlett, *Who Was that Man?* excerpts; Jefferson, *Constructing a Nervous System* through Part III

February 27 Reading: North, *Literary Criticism*, [Chap. 3](#); Woolf, “The Modern Essay”; Emre, “Two Paths for the Personal Essay”; Arn, “Dot Dot Dot Dot: Against the Contemporary American Essay”; *Constructing a Nervous System* through Part V

March 5 Reading: North, *Literary Criticism*, [Chap. 4](#) and [Appendix](#); Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Hamlet and His Problems”; Kendi, “The Crisis of the Intellectuals”; Forbes, “‘The Natives of My Person’ or Blood Is Not Enough”; Hayes, “Journal”; *Constructing a Nervous System* finish

March 19 Reading: Guillory, *Professing Criticism*, [Chap. 2](#); Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy”; Rosenblatt, “Efferent and Aesthetic Reading”; Lowell, *Life Studies* through p. 52 (Parts I and II)

March 26 Reading: Guillory, *Professing Criticism*, [Chap. 3](#); Sontag, “Against Interpretation” and “On Style”; Foucault, “What Is An Author”; Barthes, “The Death of the Author”; Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* first half; *Life Studies* through p. 74

April 2 Reading: Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”; Warner, “Uncritical Reading”; Javadizadeh, “The Atlantic Ocean Breaking On Our Heads”; *Citizen* finish; *Life Studies* finish

- April 9** Reading: Felski, "Context Stinks!"; Elias, "Context Rocks!"; Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*; Nersessian, *Keats's Odes* excerpt; Eilenberg, "Living with Keats"; Kushner, *Millennium Approaches* through Act II
- April 16** Visiting speaker David George Haskell
Reading: *Sounds Wild and Broken*
⇒ Seminar is not meeting this day; instead we will attend Haskell's talk and then a dinner reception at my place
- April 23** Reading: Dabash, "Introduction: Cultures of Argument"; Bérubé, "An Audacious Argument for Modesty"; Nabokov, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense"; Smith, "Rereading Barthes and Nabokov"; Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty* excerpts; Kushner, *Perestroika* through Act II
- April 30** Reading: Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, [Chap. 2](#), [Chap. 4](#), [Chap. 5](#), [Coda](#); Harding, "Have We Forgotten How to Read Critically?"; Sehgal, "The Case Against the Trauma Plot"; Chee, *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* excerpts; *Perestroika* finish