

English 302b

Critical Practice: Theories of Narrative

Instructor: Dr. Heather Arvidson
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Office hours: M 4.30–6.20 pm in
Padelford A504
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This course begins with the premise that narrative is a world-making enterprise. Narrative is fundamental to human thought and culture formation not because it straightforwardly *transmits* or *reflects* the so-called real world, but because it rivals that world with worlds of its own making. The course will focus on three literary narratives that not only construct vivid aesthetic worlds but that feature world-making as an explicit theme: Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. The course will investigate the possibility that these novels offer theories about both the “real” world and the process of world making itself.

Using tools from the field of narrative theory, we will study the formal characteristics of these novels, the aesthetic effects they create, and the social and political consequences that follow from their strategic crafting of narrative. Said otherwise, the class will examine *what* these narratives do, *how* they do it, and *why* it might matter in a world approximating our own.

Since addressing these questions is essential for work in the discipline of English, the class will further develop foundational knowledge and skills for majoring in literary studies. In particular, you will be building on the close reading and intertextual analysis skills you already have in order to develop a critical practice that integrates formal and cultural criticism. In combining three demanding novels with a selection of narrative theory and critical essays, this class will be reading intensive.

Key questions

- What social and political functions does narrative serve?
- How does narrative serve these functions?
- How does narrative form shape narrative function?

Required materials

- Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*
- Thomas King, *Green Grass Running Water*
- Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*
- Active UW email account
- Access to printing; secondary materials will be posted as PDFs at <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/965056/modules>

Major Deadlines

F May 1
Essay 1, 5 pages (25%)

F May 22 (optional)
Revision of Essay 1

F June 5
Annotated Bibliography (20%)

M June 8
Essay 2, 5 pages (25%)

Class format & objectives

Classes will be based primarily in discussion and will incorporate short lectures and some group work. The learning goals for the course are to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of foundational vocabulary for describing narratives
2. Understand and respond to the approaches to narrative taken by literary critics
3. Analyze the social and political meanings of literary texts in ways that account for the effects of narrative form
4. Build a capacious and flexible understanding of the range of cultural functions that narratives perform

Ethos

Constructing knowledge is a collective process. In this class we will rely on and challenge each other to ask incisive questions, provoke discussion, and test out new points of view by listening actively to what others have to say. To these ends, it is equally imperative that we leave space to hear from everyone in the room and that each person seizes opportunities to speak.

Students of literature confront complex subjects that may challenge prior understandings of cultural categories such as gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, nationality, language background, and ability. To engage this kind of work, respect for diversity of all kinds is vital. So are curiosity and openness to new questions and to reframing cultural knowledge. In committing to this class you are agreeing 1) to approach class topics, texts, and peer contributions with interest and critically-tuned but open minds; 2) to subject your own viewpoints, however natural or normal they may seem to you, to the same scrutiny you would apply to those of others; 3) to be willing to risk your ideas to thoughtful examination by others; and 4) to respect the right of all others to express viewpoints different from your own.

If you feel this agreement is not being observed in the course of our work together, please set up a conversation with me as soon as possible.

Essays (50%)

Formal writing for this class will consist of two essays of about five pages each. Both essays (due F 5/1 and M 6/8) will be based in close reading and incorporate theoretical and critical perspectives from secondary class materials. These essays will also leave room for you to tailor your topic to your particular interests. In order to take your writing further over the course of the quarter, you may opt to revise the first essay (revision due 5/22).

You are not required to use outside sources for your essays, but any source that you consult and that informs your ideas or your language must be cited in a works consulted list and formatted according to MLA.

Assessment

The two essays are equally weighted at 25% each and graded on a 4.0 scale. If you choose to revise the first essay, the revision grade will replace your initial grade. For each essay I will distribute a grading rubric that specifies what I will look for when I read your work. I will provide comments on Essay 1 that are geared towards revision; if you choose not to revise the first essay, you should take my comments into account when you approach the second paper.

Submission

Essays are due as electronic documents on our class Canvas site (see <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/965056/assignments>). I do not accept essays or assignments by email.

As indicated on Canvas, essays are due at 4:00 pm. Unless you have made a prior arrangement with me, essays submitted after this time will be considered late and incur a deduction of 0.2 grade points per day. I do not provide comments on late work. If you find yourself in this position, you should instead arrange to bring your essay to office hours for feedback.

Critical summaries (15%)

Writing is a vital part of active, effective reading, and the success of a discussion-based class hinges on this kind of engagement with class texts. To support these aims, you will be writing **one class preparation assignment per week**. Each of these assignments will consist of a **critical summary** of one secondary text assigned that week. A separate prompt will provide more detailed instructions.

Over the course of the quarter you will complete 8 of these critical summaries, to be graded on completion. Your final score will be assessed according to the following guidelines:

4.0	8 assignments completed
3.8	7
3.0	6
2.5	5
2.0	4
1.0	3
0.7	2
0.0	1 or 0

To receive credit, an assignment must be **submitted to the appropriate Canvas discussion board by 2:00 pm** on the day it is due. Once you have submitted your critical summary, you will have access to those posted by others in the class; it would be a great idea to make a habit of perusing a few other summaries before class in order to deepen your understanding of the text.

Annotated bibliography (20%)

On the last day of the quarter (F 6/5), an annotated bibliography consisting of **five revised critical summaries** will be due. This bibliography will be graded on a 4.0 scale according to a rubric I will distribute later in the quarter. The five summaries you include will be up to you, but you will want to think about which sources will most benefit the papers you are writing. Revision should be based on what you learn from class discussion, other students' summaries posted to Canvas, and your own careful re-reading of the texts.

Participation (15%)

Participation will be graded holistically. Excellent participation means that you will:

- **Complete the reading and writing assignments** for each class.
- **Annotate** and make note of questions as you read. Questions, uncertainty, and ideas that occur to you are invaluable seeds for discussion, clarifying explanations, and formal writing for the class. Full participation and successful writing rely on this kind of active reading.
- **Attend every class**, equipped with appropriate texts and materials.
- **Arrive on time**; coming late is poor form, interferes with others' learning, and will detract from your grade. If there is a reason you expect to be late on a regular basis you should let me know why.

- **Contribute actively** to discussions and group work. This means ask questions, offer ideas, and take initiative when working in groups; listen attentively when others are speaking; stay on topic and bring stray comments back to the text; take ideas ventured in class seriously.

Especially given the challenge of the literature we are studying, I cannot stress enough how valuable questions or moments of confusion can be: bringing up these moments in discussion is an excellent way to contribute to the class, and we will all be the better for it. Knowing where you get confused is a sign of intelligence, not the reverse. If you are concerned that you will not be able to participate fully in class, you should arrange to meet with me in office hours to discuss alternatives.

- **Demonstrate the preparation you've done** in (irregularly scheduled) in-class writing. Some of these I will take in for credit. In-class writing cannot be made up unless you have alerted me of your absence in advance.
- **Devote your attention** to what is happening in the room. **Absolutely no cell phone use**, texting, or emailing. If you want to use a laptop to enhance your learning please clear it with me first.

Reading

This class involves a significant amount of reading as well as writing. To budget your time, I recommend that you pay close attention to readings that are coming up. You are always welcome to read beyond the texts that the class will cover on a given day—and in fact I strongly recommend you get started on the novels during the first two weeks of class.

Absences

If you need to miss class due to illness or personal emergency, contact me to make alternate arrangements for assignments or class activities. It is your responsibility to make up any missed material, so be sure that you have contact information for several classmates. Assignment and essay prompts and handouts will be posted to the Canvas website.

Schedule

Week 1-3

Narrative theory foundations

** Readings for each day will be available on Canvas under “modules”

Week 4-5

Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*

Week 6-7

Thomas King, *Green Grass Running Water*

Week 8-9

Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

Week 10

Wrap-up

Resources

Office hours

I encourage you to make early and frequent use of my office hours, which I hold in Padelford A504 on Mondays from 4:30 to 6:20 pm. These sessions are casual and low-stakes. If your schedule conflicts with this time, contact me by email to set up an appointment (arvidson@uw.edu).

If you have any kind of concerns about the class, please take them up with me as they arise. I will note that here, as elsewhere at the University, you are entitled to generically communicate any complicating factors (family, work, health, etc.) that may affect your performance in the class if you would prefer not to disclose details.

Accommodations

Please let me know if you need accommodations. I am happy to work with UW Disability Resources for Students (DRS) and am very willing to take suggestions specific to this class. I consider myself to be learning on an ongoing basis how to make my classes more accessible and will appreciate your feedback. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials—just ask.

Writing centers

The Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC) offers free, one-on-one help with all aspects of writing and at any stage in the writing process. Located on the third floor of the Odegaard Library, the OWRC is open Sunday through Thursday; check the appointment schedule for available times. To make an appointment or browse the center's online resources, visit depts.washington.edu/owrc. Appointments fill up quickly—I recommend signing up for a session on Sunday mornings to ensure you get a spot that week.

The CLUE Writing Center in Mary Gates Hall (main level) is open Sunday to Thursday from 6.30 pm to midnight. CLUE is first-come, first-served. In case tutors are having a busy night, arrive early and be prepared to wait. See depts.washington.edu/clue for more information.

Academic Integrity

In written work for this course I am interested exclusively in *your* thinking about our texts and topics. If you are responding to someone else's intellectual work, the distinction between your thinking and theirs must be made absolutely, plainly clear. Academic integrity means rigorously keeping aware of and acknowledging the sources of your ideas.

By contrast, plagiarism means presenting someone else's **ideas** or **writing** as your own—which includes integrating someone else's ideas or writing in an unmarked way. **Any source that you consult, quote, or refer to in your work needs to be cited in MLA format.** This includes any contextual information that you find on the internet: if a source shapes or informs what you write, it needs to be documented. Pragmatically, this means that you should only be consulting reliable, authoritative sources and should be avoiding informal pieces by unknown authors. They will look bad as citations, and yet if omitted from documentation, they may undermine your academic integrity. If you are ever uncertain about appropriately and productively building from and referring to others' work, ask for clarification in class or office hours.

University policy requires that any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing be reported to the College of Arts & Sciences for review. For more information, refer to UW's Student Conduct Code at www.washington.edu/students/handbook/conduct.html. **Holding yourself to the highest possible standard of academic integrity is your responsibility: be sure you know what this means.**