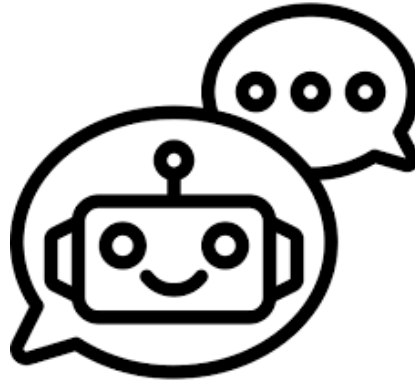


English 090.02 | CRITICAL METHODS

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Chatbot icon (2023)

Description of English 90.01

What is “English,” after all? And what is criticism? And what’s the point of either thing? This course in the theory and method of literary study has two goals that might, at first, seem contradictory: (1) to introduce the conventions of reading, thinking, and creative concept-making crucial to flourishing as a Georgetown English major; and (2) to examine those processes from critical and historical vantages, so as to turn naïve practice into self-conscious method.

To those ends we’ll read literary works by authors like G.M. Hopkins, Bram Stoker, Lewis Carroll, and others alongside critical texts from a range of traditions: Marxism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial studies, formalism, gender and sexuality studies, deconstruction, and ecocriticism. In light of our literary texts, these short interventions will provide new models; ask new questions; and push us to see from new angles the processes of reading, interpretation, and contextualization that are the bread and butter of college English.

Along the way, we will devote time to considering the challenges to humanistic literary and critical activity posed by climate change. To close the term, we’ll use literary reading practices and concepts of “environment” to examine what may be today’s most dominant cultural form, the video game, and examine what some consider to be a doomsday-level challenge to humanistic thought, the artificial intelligence-powered chat engine.

Throughout, our aim will be to develop a self-aware, historically-grounded sense of how we read and why – a particularly urgent problem now, perhaps, when new media forms threaten to diminish forever our capacity to think critically. (Or so we’re told.) No prior exposure to “literary theory” is necessary.

*This semester we will frequently have cause to link our speculations to contemporary events; this may mean our reading lists will change. Our Canvas site, in the section called *Modules*, will always be the authoritative place to look for what we're doing, and what you should read, on a given day.*

General Description of English 090:

This course aims to give students a coherent understanding of various theoretical and critical tools used to interpret texts by introducing them to strategies of close reading and to larger discussions regarding textual analysis. Although the course will not necessarily encompass the entire history of literary and cultural criticism, it will examine a range of schools and methods. These schools and methods will be grounded historically and will be situated and contextualized within larger critical conversations that have developed over time.

Course Goals:

During the semester, we'll read broadly but closely, in genres both "literary" and "nonliterary." At the end of the class, you will be able to:

- *Analyze* multiple genres of cultural expression at the level of both content and form;
- *Do the same* for what is called theoretical or critical writing;
- *Understand* key debates in the history of reading, and remain alert to the fact that reading *is* historical;
- *Speculate* about the role of literary thinking in the 21st century, with attention to its institutional situation, the history of its practices, and the possibilities for its future;
- *Create* critical interventions of your own, in multiple genres, using close analysis of cultural forms to make larger claims about the world and how we live in it.

Course Texts:

Please purchase these directly from the college bookstore, or online. If you purchase them online, be sure to note the ISBN number, otherwise you will end up with the wrong edition and have to buy it twice.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics) ISBN 978-0199538850

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (Penguin) ISBN 9780141439761

Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Norton Critical Editions) ISBN 978-0-393-44181-9

Richard McGuire, *Here* (Pantheon Graphic Novels) ISBN 978-0375406508

Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem* (Norton, ISBN 9781941040638)

Additional Readings:

A good portion of our semester's reading will be posted on our Canvas page; these readings are marked on the syllabus with an asterisk (*). You should plan to budget at least \$50 for printing these files in the required hard copy format. For reasons I'll explain on the first day, you are expected to **print the PDFs in hard copy; read everything on printed paper; and (of course) bring all**

secondary texts to class. A device with a stylus annotation input mechanism will be an acceptable substitute for printed paper, but laptop reading is to be avoided. Readings marked “supplementary” are just that: not required (formally or informally) but available to you should you desire further guidance on the primary texts.

Assignments:

Requirements include collaborative thinking, close reading, and full commitment to the work of the course. There will be periodic reading quizzes, generally unannounced, to ensure our progress on the reading.

Participation:

Participation is the most important part of our work together. Good participation is being a citizen of the class: it entails attentive listening, careful preparation, and responsiveness to the teacher and to your peers. It does not mean talking all the time, though your thoughtful participation in discussion is always encouraged and welcome. Strong intellectual citizenship can also mean carefully listening and being well-prepared for class, and posting later to one of our platforms with evidence of your thoughtful engagement. Always our watchword is care: your job is to be a good colleague in our mutual intellectual undertaking. Don’t just take up airtime: being prepared, generous, curious and kind – while always rigorous – are the keys.

Occasional quizzes: Simple, fact-based reading quizzes and/or ‘participation slip’ responses designed to keep everyone on pace will be part of your participation grade. They may be announced in advance; they may not be. You are always expected to have put your full commitment into preparing the day’s readings. *However: each person gets two class sessions where they aren’t responsible for this full commitment. Email me that day with a brief note explaining that you’re using a ticket; no explanation is needed, no penalties will be levied.*

Five Canvas posts. (*c. 250 words*). These are informal but intellectually substantial engagements with our reading for the day, turned in *before* class so we can discuss your ideas *during* class. They can take one of two forms: *Summaries* will use strategic citation and paraphrase to convey an overview of a given text’s argument as you understand it. This is an exercise in recapitulating what you’ve read. *Provocations* will work more critically. Here you might, for example, take a passage and perform a close reading of it, unlocking some particular complexity in the prose; you might compare one text with another; or you might pose questions about some knotty element in the reading – a contradiction, a dilemma – while taking time to thicken it with thoughtful reflection from other areas of the course. The key, for these, is to workshop an idea, test an argument; *most important is to show to us that you’ve done the reading with seriousness*. You are also asked to make regular posts in response to others’ postings: these too will be counted in the percentage of the grade devoted to blog posts.

One critical essay. (*3-5 double-spaced pages, normal-looking font.*) This is a short, sharp critical engagement with one or more texts covered in class: an academic paper in the standard form, denuded of excess verbiage, bold of argument, and shined, prosewise, to a glistening polish. It can make use of your own earlier blog posts, but should also turn new ground. You need not do outside research, but you are free to do so if you wish. Prompts will be provided, but you are encouraged to break from them to compose your own questions and topics.

Digital curation assignment. The guidelines for this assignment in careful historical reading and remediation are forthcoming, but in short you will use contemporary digital media technologies—video capture, iMovie, etc.—to *curate* an analog textual object more than twenty years old that you find around you: it could be an old letter whose significance you will illuminate for us, a parent’s high school notebook, an annotation in the margin of a novel you find on the shelf, a yellowed recipe card, or an advertisement you discover in some old magazine (or almost anything else). You will then explain the interest and importance of this historical discovery using new media technologies. This is an experimental assignment in *close, historically-attuned attention to an everyday historical object*, and its outcome is not given in advance: part of your task is to think about what the possibilities might be. I will hand out a detailed guide and grading rubric as the assignment approaches.

AI Chatbot Annotation Project. (2 pages, single spaced.) As a follow-up to the Digital Curation Assignment, you will here use “old” methods of literary-critical analysis to produce a close reading of a recent artifact of digital “writing”—a section of text you generate using an advanced AI chatbot like Chat GPT. Guidelines for this will be developed collectively as we proceed: the gist is that you’ll be asked to engage both critically and intimately with an emergent textual form of the contemporary moment – the AI-generated “essay.”

Take-home mid-term and final exams. Open book, open notes, no Googling. Honor system fully in place. The mid-term is just that: a temperature-taking of your work so far, assessing your capacity to engage imaginatively and substantively with the material to this point. The final is a cumulative, end-of-term assessment designed to allow you to make creative analytic connections from across the semester. These are less formal than the essay, more structured than the blog posts. Here as always, ideas matter most. You have 48 hours to complete them, choosing from among a set of essay questions.

Course Grading Policy:

Your final grade for this course will reflect the quality of work you produce, but also the quality of your participation in the collaborative work of the course. Thus, your thoughtful responses to the texts, your active participation in class discussions, and your level of effort all contribute crucially to your final grade. The percentage breakdown is as follows:

Five Canvas posts & regular online engagement	10%
Digital Curation Assignment	10%
AI Chatbot Close Reading	10%
Critical Essay	15%
Mid Term Take-Home Exam	15%
Final Take-Home Exam	20%
Participation & Class Citizenship	20%

Policy on Late Work:

We are in an ongoing global pandemic, and we are all doing our best. If you have difficulties with deadlines or workload I hope you will contact me as early as you can, so we can open a dialogue about how I can assist you. Still, since much of our work will be collaborative, turning in work late is strongly discouraged: unless arrangements have been made in advance, papers and other assignments will be penalized the equivalent of one letter grade for each day beyond their due date,

with the first 24-hour period beginning immediately. But again: please talk to me when circumstances arise that affect your capacities in the class. We can work it out.

Absence and Tardy Policy:

The seminar-style nature of this course makes your presence in class imperative. **Your first two absences (equivalent to a full week of class) will not be penalized.** Every absence beyond the second without prior authorization or a dean's note will result in a 1 percentage point drop in your final grade, i.e. from 91% to 90%. Six absences will result in failure of the course. If you must miss a class session, it's your responsibility to learn what happened in class and to obtain any of the materials distributed that day. If you know in advance you'll miss a day when an assignment is due, you must arrange with me another, earlier, due date. You are permitted **three late arrivals** over the course of the semester. **Every two late arrivals after the first three will count as a class absence.** [Note this was updated 1.18 to replace outdated language accidentally included from a Zoom class!]

Values in the Classroom:

Our class is guided by the principle of mutual respect and an ethic of care. These commitments are particularly important during times of emergency, such as this one, when we will be asked to think carefully about the situations of others and make changes to our own behavior accordingly. We will be called upon to be flexible and kind, and to listen. Our classroom is a space where debate of ideas and substantive disagreement are enabled by the fact that our mutual respect is unquestioned. In keeping with this, I ask that you please inform me of your preferred name and pronouns and I will, of course, use them. Mine are he/him. The Department of English has adopted a statement of principles that states, in part: "The Department of English at Georgetown University stands united in its commitment to the fundamental equality and inherent dignity of all human beings. These values are the foundation of our work in the humanities and transcend political affiliation. They are also embedded in our University's mission and the Jesuit tradition of seeking social justice. As humanists we are committed to the practices of principled argumentation, free inquiry, careful consideration of evidence and fact, and sustained, contemplative engagement. A prerequisite for those practices is respect."

Plagiarism:

Do not do it, ever. If you do, you will (at the very least) fail the course. See the Georgetown Honor System website for guidelines about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. For reasons that will become clear in class, the use of AI-engines to generate student work is banned entirely. Note that, as suggested above, in all matters I expect you to observe the Georgetown honor pledge: *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

Accessibility and Accommodations:

I'm committed to providing whatever it takes to help you be successful in this course. Please talk with me about issues you are facing, whatever the kind, and we will work together to set up a program to help you succeed in the course. This comes from the Georgetown Academic Resource Center: "Georgetown does not discriminate or deny access to an otherwise qualified student with a disability on the basis of disability, and students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable

accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAA) of 2008. However, students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not requested an accommodation and adequately documented their disabilities. Also, the University need not modify programmatic, course, or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction.” Please consult <http://guarc.georgetown.edu/disability/accommodations/>; and do see me early in the term so we can talk about how I can help.

Note on Title IX:

University policy requires me to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct or gender-based violence to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of *fully confidential* professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual violence. These resources include: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC / Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention / (202) 687-0323 / jls242@georgetown.edu; and Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist / Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) / (202) 687-6985 / els54@georgetown.edu. More information about campus resources and faculty reporting obligations can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

Guides for the Lost:

Conceptual writing about literary method can be daunting. Wikipedia is a first place to start, for sure, but various peer-reviewed online guides are better: a first line of defense is the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*; then consult the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. **Please stay away from online summaries not listed here; they are usually wrong.** And as always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions whatsoever about this material. We’re in this together.

CRITICAL METHODS: Course Schedule

[Prepare all readings in advance of the class period for which they are listed. Please note that the calendar is subject to change based on our progress and other exigencies. Our definitive working calendar will always be found on Canvas, under "Modules."]

Week 1

Thursday, January 12th: Introduction: What is literature? What is reading? What is the point, now? "Welcome to Methods" text and Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty"

Week 2

Tuesday, January 17: Jonathan Culler, "What is Literature and Does It Matter?" from *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction**; David Richter, "Introduction" from *The Critical Tradition**, particularly the diagrams; Devin Garofalo, "Critical Theory: A Brief Guide"*; Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Pied Beauty," again, this time while consulting the OED.

Thursday, January 19: G.M. Hopkins, "Inversnaid," "God's Grandeur," and one of the following poems: "As kingfishers catch fire," "Binsey Poplars," "Hurrahing in Harvest," or "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection," annotate using the OED.

Week 3

Tuesday, January 24: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Thursday, January 26: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; Optional: Gilles Deleuze, "Lewis Carroll"*

Week 4

Tuesday, January 31: Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*; preview of Freud & the Problem of Interpretation

Thursday, February 2: Sigmund Freud, "On the Interpretation of Dreams"*

Week 5

Tuesday, February 7: Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; Or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You"*; Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"*; Lewis Carroll, selected photographs*. Optional: D.W. Winnicott, "The Use of an Object"*

Thursday, February 9: No new reading, continue Sedgwick and Sontag. Optional: skim *Through the Looking Glass*

Week 6

Tuesday, February 14: Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course on General Linguistics**

Thursday, February 16: No class today, professor traveling for a talk. Please watch Prof. Hensley's low-budget video on Saussure, on Canvas, and catch up with Canvas posts if you've missed any.

Week 7

Tuesday, February 21: No class today, as classes follow Monday schedule. Please begin reading *Dracula!*

Thursday, February 23: Review of Ferdinand de Saussure, from *Course on General Linguistics*,* and Bram Stoker, *Dracula* [**CRITICAL ESSAY DUE**]

Week 8

Tuesday, February 28: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Thursday, March 2: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, cont'd

Week 9

Tuesday, March 7: NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK (read *Dracula!* Watch vampire movies!)

Thursday, March 9: NO CLASS; SPRING BREAK (read *Dracula!* Watch vampire movies!)

Week 10

Tuesday, March 14: Bram Stoker, *Dracula* – to conclusion. Quiz possible!

Thursday, March 16: Michel Foucault, from *The History of Sexuality*: “The Incitement to Discourse” and “Method”*. Optional: YouTube video of Stefan Waldschmidt on *Dracula* and Foucault.

Week 11

MONDAY, MARCH 20: EXTRA CREDIT LECTURE: BRUCE HOLSINGER, “On Parchment: Animals, Archives, and the Making of Culture from Herodotus to the Digital Age”

Tuesday, March 21: Jacques Derrida, Youtube videos*, “Letter to a Japanese Friend”*, “Signature, Event, Context”*

Thursday, March 23: Karl Marx, from *Capital, Vol. 1*: “The Fetish of the Commodity and its Secret”*; Prof. Hensley video lecture on the commodity*; “The Atlantic Slave Trade in Two Minutes”*; **MIDTERM EXAMS DISTRIBUTED VIA CANVAS / EMAIL**

Week 12

MIDTERM EXAMS DUE BEFORE Sunday, March 26, 8 pm, VIA CANVAS

Tuesday, March 28: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, cont'd (Weather chapter). Petrocultures Collective, “The Arts, Humanities, and Energy (or, What Can Art tell us about Oil?)”*; Robert Hass, “The Problem of Describing Trees”*; Juliana Spahr, “Transitory, Momentary”*

Thursday, March 30: Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*; *New York Times*, “The Insect Apocalypse is Here”* and select articles on environmental justice TBD.

Week 13

Tuesday, April 4: William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey”*; Tommy Pico, from *Nature Poem**; Robert Macfarlane, from *The Lost Words*.* Optional: watch *Gone in a Generation* (*Washington Post*)*

Thursday, April 6: Play *Flower*; criticism on environmental gaming TBD

Week 14

Tuesday, April 11: Class meets in Booth Center for Special Collections, 5th Floor, Lauinger Library
[OPTIONAL REVISION OF CRITICAL ESSAY DUE]

Thursday, April 13: Lisa Lowe, from *The Intimacies of Four Continents**; Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”*; Select documents about slavery at Georgetown*; Student redaction poems; Indigenous treaties from your hometown area, searchable [here](#).

Week 15

Tuesday, April 18: Richard McGuire, *Here* **[DIGITAL CURATION ASSIGNMENT DUE]**

Thursday, April 20: Richard McGuire, *Here*, cont’d; YouTube trailer & gameplay footage for *Everything* (2017)

Week 16

Tuesday, April 25: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, from “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”*

Thursday, April 27: Chat GPT and the problem of originality. Ian Bogost, “Why Chat GPT Is Dumber Than You Think”*; Paul Fyfe, “How to Cheat on your Final Paper: Assigning AI for Student Writing”*; “Chat GPT/LLM Errors Spreadsheet,” moderated by Davis, Hendler, Hsu, Leivada, Marcus, and Witbrock: Technical descriptions of ChatGPT and its financial aims TBD. In class AI poetry exercise.

Week 17: Finale

Tuesday, May 2: Last day of class. What is literary study now? What is the point? Read AI generated poetry projects together in class; G.M. Hopkins, “Ribblesdale.” **[Chat GPT Annotation Project DUE]**

FINAL EXAM DUE THURSDAY, MAY 11, by 11:59 pm, VIA CANVAS