

English 200: Foundations of Literary Study

Spring Semester 2016

Instructor: Lowell Duckert

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Meeting Time: 1:00-2:15 pm TR

Meeting Place: Woodburn Hall 106

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Office Hours: 2:30-5:30 pm T and by appointment

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(Seismicity, near Vatnajökull glacier, Iceland)

What are the foundations of literary study? “Foundation” is a late-Middle-English word that comes from Old French *fondation*, from Latin *fundatio(n-)*, from *fundare*, “to lay a base for.” In an etymological sense, then, this course is designed to hone your critical reading and writing skills by grounding you in the *basics* of literary study: terms like metaphor, symbolism, meter, tone, setting, and plot; genres such as poetry, the novel, the essay, historical fiction, science fiction, and drama. A better understanding of literary bases allows you to build upon them; terms, after all, *determine*. Yet we will also investigate how these (supposedly stable) foundations quake at their cores. We will explore: how key literary terms are defined, but also how they are insufficient—how literature both exposes terms’ limitations and gestures to their capaciousness; how texts conform to genres while at the same time problematizing the act of categorization in their very indeterminacy, their reluctance to stay still; and how experiencing moments of deviation (or veering) in and through texts may help us *found* new worlds and realms of possibility in our own. Consider this a foundations course *on the move*: you will not only recognize how literature unleashes meaning(s), but you will also be able to *participate* in this process through in-class discussions and creative writing assignments.

The learning objectives for this course follow the English B.A. Program Goals. After taking this class, you will be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts
 - a. by identifying genre conventions and analyzing their effects.
 - b. by identifying and analyzing effects of complexity or ambiguity.
 - c. by locating texts in social / economic / political / literary histories.
 - d. by connecting texts to other literary or cultural texts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Required Books: (available from the WVU Bookstore; it is important that you purchase the exact edition specified)

Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford, 4th ed.)

Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (Nightboat)

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Penguin)

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things* (Penguin, trans. Stallings)

Sir John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels* (Oxford, ed. Bale)

Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh; available through Ebrary)

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Folger Shakespeare Library)

Jules Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (Barnes and Noble)

Requirements:

1. *The basics*: attend class; participate in discussions; complete readings and assignments on time. I expect you to be prepared for every meeting – meaning that you need to pose thoughtful questions and ideas to the group. (This is not a straightforward lecture course!) Difficult terrain lies ahead, but the challenge, I assure you, will be mutual. I want us to grapple with the readings, deviate at times, and pose more questions than answers.
2. *Veerings*: because this course fundamentally examines the foundations of literary study (and the terms that comprise them), you will post on eCampus two paragraph-length responses (15-20 lines) for **each** text (12 posts total). I will serve as moderator and respondent. When we begin each of our required books, we will discuss a section of Royle's *Veering* that corresponds with the (upcoming) genre. I will choose several terms from Baldick's *Dictionary* to serve as prompts. You will choose **one** of the terms and discuss its significance to/in the text: once at the beginning, once at the end. (You may post more than twice, of course.) Each submission will be graded pass/fail according to length and relevance to the reading (i.e., whether you cite and expand on the text rather than merely summarize it). I encourage you to converse with your peers and create wavy lines of (deviating) dialogue online. Your posts will also be valuable springboards for your essays.
3. *Essays*: From the Old French *essai* ("trial"), your written essays are just that: experiments rather than masteries. Each 2-3 pp. essay will ask you to respond to the course material in innovative ways (e.g., "What's My Clinamen?"). Detailed

information about the essays will be available in advance, and you will have ample opportunity to work out ideas in section.

Grading:

Participation and attendance in class	15%
Veerings (12 total)	25%
Essays (4 total)	60%

Attendance Policy and Code of Courtesy:

I define “present” as arriving on time with your cellphone silenced; bringing the appropriate book to class; giving me and your peers your full attention; and remaining in the room until the class ends. Laptops are allowed only for note-taking purposes. I will allow **three** absences: after that, your grade drops a letter for each additional absence (e.g., an A becomes a B). **Late work will not be accepted.** At six absences, you fail the course. If you foresee a scheduling conflict, please notify me as soon as possible. Incompletes will be considered only if you apply to me before the end of the term; once I agree, we will negotiate the conditions under which the grade of “I” will be changed to a letter grade and sign a contract. Incomplete work will be submitted before the last day of class of the following semester (at the latest).

Academic Integrity:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Catalog at <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#academicintegrity> text. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Inclusivity Statement:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. **Any attempt to disrupt the nondiscriminatory environment of this class will not be tolerated.** If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Adverse Weather Commitment:

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use their best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Students who cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions must contact their instructors as soon as possible. Similarly, instructors who are unable to reach the class location will notify their students of any cancellation as soon as possible, through the many means at their disposal, to prevent students from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If students cannot get to class because of weather conditions, instructors will make allowance relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests or quizzes. Safety should be the main concern.

Contact:

I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours (information above), and feel free to email/call me at any time. Never hesitate to ask a question, express a doubt, or request clarification. Make sure that your MIX email address is operational; I will frequently notify you about what to read for a given day, and I will occasionally post documents online (for one).

Schedule of Readings (subject to change):

Week One

T 1/12 Introductions
R 1/14 Foundations(?); Chris Baldick, selections from *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*; Nicholas Royle, "Casting Off" from *Veering: A Theory of Literature*

Week Two

T 1/19 Royle, "On Critical and Creative Writing"; Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*
R 1/21 Mandeville

Week Three

T 1/26 Mandeville
R 1/28 Mandeville

Week Four

T 2/2 Royle, "Reading a Poem"; Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*; essay #1 due
R 2/4 Lucretius

Week Five

T 2/9 Lucretius
R 2/11 Lucretius

Week Six

T 2/16 Royle, "Reading a Novel"; Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*
R 2/18 Verne

Week Seven

T 2/23 Verne
R 2/25 Verne

Week Eight

T 3/1 No class; essay #2 due
R 3/3 Royle, "Veerer: Where Ghosts Live"; Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Week Nine

T 3/8 Defoe
R 3/10 Defoe

Week Ten

T 3/15 Defoe
R 3/17 Royle, "Drama: An Aside"; Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Week Eleven

No class: Spring Recess

Week Twelve

T 3/29 Shakespeare
R 3/31 Royle, "The Essay: A Note (On Being Late)"; Arthur Golding, *A Discourse upon the Earthquake* (online)

Week Thirteen

T 4/5 Shakespeare

R 4/7 Shakespeare; essay #3 due

Week Fourteen

T 4/12 Bergvall, *Drift*

R 4/14 Bergvall

Week Fifteen:

T 4/19 Bergvall

R 4/21 Bergvall

Week Sixteen:

T 4/26 Individual conferences (optional)

R 4/28 Class conclusion; essay #4 due F 5/6 at 5:00 pm (day of scheduled exam)