

English 200: Foundations of Literary Study

Fall Semester 2016

Instructor: Lowell Duckert

Email: Lowell.Duckert@mail.wvu.edu

Meeting Time: 10:00-11:15 am TR

Meeting Place: Woodburn Hall G11

Office: Colson Hall 131

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

Office Phone: (304) 293-9700



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, beast fable, fairy tale, 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 defective; 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; please note the exact edition specified)

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

Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (Nightboat)

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

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

Marie de France, *Lais* (Baker, trans. Hanning and Ferrante)

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

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Folger Shakespeare Library)

Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Penguin)

Requirements:

1. *The basics:* attend class; finish assigned readings on time; participate in discussions. I expect you to be prepared for every meeting, which means that you need to pose thoughtful questions and ideas to the group. This is not a straightforward lecture course: whether or not you meet these criteria determines how many participation points you receive. Difficult terrain lies ahead, but the challenge, I assure you, will be mutual. I want us to grapple with the texts, engage in spirited conversation, 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. Whenever we start a required book, we will discuss a section of Royle's *Veering* that corresponds with that book's genre. I will choose several terms from Baldick's *Dictionary* to serve as prompts. You will pick one of the terms and discuss its significance to/in the text: once at the beginning of the reading schedule, once at the end. (You may post more than twice, if you wish.) Each submission will be graded pass/fail according (1) to length and (2) relevance to the reading: i.e., if 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., "Being-Quake"). 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
Total	100

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: <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermclassification/#academicintegritytext>. 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: (304) 293-6700. For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

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.

Schedule of Readings (subject to change):

Week One

R 8/18 Introductions

Week Two

T 8/23 Chris Baldick, selections from *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*; Nicholas Royle, "Casting Off" from *Veering: A Theory of Literature*

R 8/25 Royle, "Reading a Poem"; Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*

Week Three

T 8/30 Carroll

R 9/1 Carroll

Week Four

T 9/6 Carroll

R 9/8 Marie, *Lais*; essay #1 due

Week Five

T 9/13 Marie

R 9/15 Marie

Week Six

T 9/20 Royle, "On Critical and Creative Writing"; Haruki Murakami, "super-frog saves tokyo," from *after the quake* (online)

R 9/22 Royle, "Drama: An Aside"; Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Week Seven

T 9/27 Shakespeare

R 9/29 Shakespeare

Week Eight

T 10/4 Shakespeare

R 10/6 Royle, "The Essay: A Note (On Being Late)"; Thomas Moffett, *The Silkwormes, and their Flies* (online); essay #2 due

Week Nine

T 10/11 Royle, "Reading a Novel"; Stoker, *Dracula*

R 10/13 Stoker

Week Ten

T 10/18 Stoker
R 10/20 Stoker

Week Eleven

T 10/25 Royle, "Veerer: Where Ghosts Live"; Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*
R 10/27 Defoe

Week Twelve

T 11/1 Defoe
R 11/3 Defoe

Week Thirteen

T 11/8 No class: Election Day
R 11/10 No class; essay #3 due

Week Fourteen

T 11/15 Bergvall, *Drift*
R 11/17 Bergvall

Week Fifteen

No class: Fall Recess

Week Sixteen

T 11/29 Bergvall
R 12/1 Bergvall

Week Seventeen

T 12/6 Class conclusion; final paper due T 12/13 at 5:00 pm (day of scheduled exam)