

English 200: Foundations of Literary Study

Fall Semester 2014

Instructor: Lowell Duckert

Email: Lowell.Duckert@mail.wvu.edu

Meeting Time: 9:30-10:20 AM MWF

Meeting Place: Woodburn Hall G10

Office: Colson Hall 131

Office Hours: 2:30-5:30 PM M and by appointment

Office Phone: (304) 293-9700



(Entrance to the center of the earth,
near Snæfellsjökull glacier,
Arnarstapi, 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)

Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*

Caroline Bergvall, *Drift*

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*

Sir John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Jules Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*

Requirements:

1. *The basics:* Attend class; participate in discussions; complete readings and assignments on time. I expect you to be prepared for every class, meaning that you need to pose thoughtful questions and ideas to the group. This is not a straightforward lecture class! Difficult reading lies ahead, but the challenge, I assure you, will be mutual; I expect 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. Before 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., do 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 Rubric:

Your grade for the course will be determined by adding together the following:

Participation and attendance in class	20
Veerings (12 total)	$2.5 \times 12 = 30$
Essays (4 total)	$12.5 \times 4 = 50$
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 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 (for example: an A becomes a B). **Late work will not be accepted.** At six absences, you fail the course. You may not take an incomplete. The deadline to drop selectively is F 10/24, while the last day to withdraw from all classes is M 12/8.

Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty of any kind will be treated as a serious offense. In most cases, you will fail the course. You can find more on the Student Conduct Code (III.B.1) at http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code

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>.

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

- M 8/18 Introductions
W 8/20 Foundations; Chris Baldick, selections from *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*
F 8/22 Foundations?; Nicholas Royle, "Casting Off" from *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (online)

Week Two

- M 8/25 Royle, "On Critical and Creative Writing"
W 8/27 Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*
F 8/29 Mandeville

Week Three

- M 9/1 No class: Labor Day
W 9/3 Mandeville
F 9/5 Mandeville

Week Four

- M 9/8 Mandeville
W 9/10 Mandeville; essay #1 due
F 9/12 Royle, "Reading a Poem"

Week Five

- M 9/15 Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*
W 9/17 Lucretius
F 9/19 Lucretius

Week Six

- M 9/22 Lucretius
W 9/24 Lucretius
F 9/26 Lucretius

Week Seven

- M 9/29 Royle, "Reading a Novel"
W 10/1 Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*
F 10/3 Verne

Week Eight

M 10/6 Verne
W 10/8 Verne
F 10/10 Verne; essay #2 due

Week Nine

M 10/13 No class: Fall Break
W 10/15 TBD
F 10/17 TBD

Week Ten

M 10/20 Royle, "Veerer: Where Ghosts Live"
W 10/22 Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*
F 10/24 Defoe

Week Eleven

M 10/27 Defoe
W 10/29 Defoe
F 10/31 Defoe

Week Twelve

M 11/3 Royle, "Drama: An Aside"
W 11/5 Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
F 11/7 Shakespeare

Week Thirteen

M 11/10 Royle, "The Essay: A Note (On Being Late)"; Michel Montaigne, "On Cannibals" (online)
W 11/12 Shakespeare
F 11/14 Shakespeare

Week Fourteen

M 11/17 Shakespeare; essay #3 due
W 11/19 Bergvall, *Drift*
F 11/21 Bergvall

Week Fifteen:

No class: Fall Recess

Week Sixteen:

M 12/1 Bergvall
W 12/3 Bergvall
F 12/5 Bergvall

Week Seventeen

M 12/8 Class conclusion; essay #4 due on day of scheduled exam