CRITICISM AND THE NOVEL:
A SEMINAR ON JANE AUSTEN
AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

English 164     Winter 2014     Tu Th  1:15-3:05     Bldg  20-22k
Professor Terry Castle     313  Margaret Jacks Hall
Office Hours  Tu/Th  3:15-4:45 & by apptmt. Phone: 650 7232635

Books:

Preferred editions: either Oxford World’s Classics or Harcourt Brace paperbacks

Northanger Abbey, Emma and Persuasion by Jane Austen

The Voyage Out, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf

Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace by Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb.
A General Overview:

The Historical Component

In this seminar we will examine three novels by Jane Austen—arguably the most influential and gifted of British female novelists—and three novels by Virginia Woolf, a modern novelist whose debt to Austen (as she knew well and often acknowledged) was immense. Some broad intellectual issues to be taken up: the relationship between women writers and the evolution of the English novel; the extraordinary predominance of the marriage plot in Austen’s fiction (and the various transformations Woolf works on it); the formal and stylistic techniques used by each novelist to convey the thoughts and inner lives of her characters; the role of comedy and satire in women’s writing; the relationship of each novelist to the larger ‘culture’—intellectual, political, social—in which she writes. Austen produced her novels as Britain was consolidating its political, economic, and military power around the world—expanding its overseas empire and experiencing extraordinary growth and economic development at home. (By the time of Austen’s death what would later be called the Industrial Revolution was in full swing.) Woolf, by contrast, wrote at the end of the Imperial and Industrial Age—in the devastating wake of the First World War. We will explore how each writer reflects the cultural ‘mood’ of her time and the larger historical forces that shape her moral, psychological and social concerns.

The Critical Writing Component:

At the same time that we consider historical contexts, we will also have a broader pragmatic issue in mind: how do literary critics do what they do? What styles and gambits make criticism vibrant and powerful? Our practical goal will be to ‘see how it’s done’—how one goes about writing a lucid, intelligent, and convincing piece of criticism about a complex and beautiful fictional work.

Among the practical questions to be explored:
How does one find a critical starting-point-- a textual ‘crux’ or conundrum from which to launch one’s essay? Where, indeed, do interesting arguments come from?

What in turn makes an argument compelling to readers?

How long should one’s essay be and why?

Should one’s analysis be primarily microscopic or macroscopic?

How much should one quote from the work under discussion?

How much should one acknowledge or invoke the opinions of previous critics?

To what degree is biographical or historical information relevant?

What theoretical concepts or approaches seem appropriate with writers from the past?

What sort of critical ‘voice’ or tone should one adopt as a writer? Formal or informal?

Who is one’s imagined reader?

As such questions indicate, the rhetorical focus will be pragmatic and rhetorical, and the seminar itself a workshop or ‘clinic’ in critical writing, with Austen and Woolf as our ‘case studies.’

Requirements:

Important note:

This course may be taken for 3 or 5 units.

Students taking the class for 3 units will not be required to write a final paper.

a) Attendance, Reading, and Class Participation:

Students will complete all readings for the course according to the schedule below. 100% attendance is required; casual absences are not acceptable. (Students absent for any reason are expected to notify the instructor in advance.) More than one absence will affect your grade adversely! All students should be prepared to participate fully in every class discussion. Classroom participation will account for 25% of your final grade. (**Note: no incompletes will be given in this course except in authentic cases of illness or emergency**)

As a courtesy to me and to your fellow students: may I also ask 1) that you make every effort not to arrive late; and 2) that you turn off all laptops and cellphones, etc. at the beginning of class? Thank you!
b) Written Assignments:

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS:

We will have a Course Blog, to which each of you will be asked to contribute at least one or two well-honed paragraphs of writing (i.e., a critical ‘gloss’) each week. (5-6 blog notes total.) (BLOG POSTS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 300 WORDS. PLEASE DO NOT EXCEED LIMIT.) You will post your blog note by 8 pm on Monday night, for the following day.)

The format for each entry will be this: you will select and reproduce a short passage from the assigned reading that you find particularly striking or puzzling or funny or deep or potentially illuminating. You will then ‘gloss’ it: that is, describe as succinctly and compellingly as possible what it is saying and doing in the fictional context, why we should find it interesting or important, what kinds of critical questions and challenges it leads us toward, or indeed, how one might generate from it some more extended reflection, critical statement or even essay topic.

Issues highlighted can be thematic, stylistic, linguistic, formal, reception-oriented, or indeed anything else you might find intriguing. Your entries should do more than simply register your opinion: your goal should be to present a clear idea about the passage in question. All blog entries will be shared with one’s classmates, and students will be asked to keep up with and comment in class on one another’s entries. Blog writing will count as 50% of your final grade.

In class we will use these glosses as our discussion ‘prompts.’ Not only will they help us identify key themes and topics in the works under discussion, we’ll consider each gloss itself as a piece of concise critical rhetoric to be analyzed. How well has the author conveyed the passage’s significance? What’s the author’s intellectual goal here and how successfully does he or she get it across?

I will not grade blog entries per se, but would like each of you to meet with me at least once to get feedback on blog work, once the quarter is under way. If you would like to rewrite any of your blog posts and resubmit them to me after our class discussions, you are welcome, indeed, encouraged to do so. I will look favorably on your extra efforts when it comes time for me to submit course grades. (I’m also happy, needless to say, to offer one-on-one advice and/or feedback on any aspect of your reading and written work at any point in the quarter.) Don’t be a stranger! Please do take advantage of my office hours!

Please proofread your blogs and treat them as relatively polished statements. I DO notice typos, grammatical errors, diction issues, etc., so do be conscious of your readers, in class and out.

FINAL PAPER:

Students will write one longer final paper, 7-10 pp. in length. (It will be due near the end of the quarter.) It will constitute the remaining 25% of your final grade.

[N.B. My policy on late papers: for every day your essay is late, the final grade will be reduced by a half-step (i.e., B to B-). Policy kicks in immediately, so papers will be due IN CLASS. If essays come in later that same day, the grade will automatically be reduced a half-step.]
A Brief Advisory on Writing Requirements:

1) Just to be clear: all students taking the class realize that they will be obliged to share their short writing assignments (blog posts, possible essay drafts) with other students in the class, as well as the instructor. However, your writing will not be shared without your permission with anyone other than your classmates and myself. We will have a course blog, but it will be strictly private. As for in-class work: everyone will be in the same boat; so don’t be nervous about reading your work aloud or making comments about your classmates’ posts: given the shared responsibility, any hesitation one might have, I hope, about sharing writing and ideas will rapidly fall away. My philosophy of teaching holds that we learn by making mistakes, so don’t fret over much about goofing up or misunderstanding some part of the text you are commenting on. Mistakes are your friends! We welcome them.

gloss: (glós, gls)

n. 1.
   a. A brief explanatory note or translation of a difficult or technical expression usually inserted in the margin or between lines of a text or manuscript.
   b. A collection of such notes; a glossary.
2. An extensive commentary, often accompanying a text or publication.
3. A purposefully misleading interpretation or explanation. (This last definition, needless to say, will not be relevant to your assignments!!!!)

tr.v. glossed, gloss-ing, gloss-es
1. To provide (an expression or a text) with a gloss or glosses.
2. To give a false interpretation to. (!!!!)

[Middle English glose, from Old French, from Medieval Latin glóssa, from Latin glössa, foreign word requiring explanation, from Greek, tongue, language.]
Reading Schedule: EXACT SCHEDULE TO COME.

(These dates/days are from a previous version of the course syllabus, so COMPLETELY disregard DETAILS—they are here simply to give you a rough idea of the pace of our reading. I will update the SYLLABUS/reading schedule before the first class day.)

Sample Reading Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Tu  Jan 8</th>
<th>Introduction: Austen, Woolf, and the English Novel</th>
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<td>Th Jan 10</td>
<td>Austen and Woolf intro. (cont.)</td>
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| Week 2 | Tu Jan 15 | Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, pp. 1-100            |
|        | Th Jan 17 | *Northanger Abbey* (entire)                      |

| Week 3 | Tu Jan 22 | *Emma*, pp. 1-160                               |
|        | Th Jan 24 | *Emma*, pp. 161-269                            |

| Week 4 | Tu Jan 29 | *Emma*, pp. 269-440                            |
|        | Th Jan 31 | Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 29-122                |

| Week 5 | Tu Feb 5  | Austen, *Persuasion*, pp. 123-264              |
|        | Th Feb 7  | *Persuasion* (entire)                          |

| Week 6 | Tu Feb 12 | Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, pp. 1-120             |
|        | Th Feb 14 | *The Voyage Out*, pp. 120-220                  |

| Week 7 | Tu Feb 19 | *The Voyage Out*, pp. 221-375                  |
|        | Th Feb 21 | *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 1-100                     |

| Week 8 | Tu Feb 26 | *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 101-240                   |
|        | Th Feb 28 | *Mrs. Dalloway* (entire)                       |

| Week 9 | Tu Mar 4  | *To the Lighthouse* pp. 1-206                  |
|        | Th Mar 6  | NO CLASS—TC AWAY                               |
Week 10  Tu  Mar 11  Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (entire)
Th  Mar 13  Wrap-up

Final Paper due xxxxx

Vanessa Bell, *The School Room*