# **Engl 302A: Critical Practice, Autumn Quarter 2018**

[uw.instructure.com](https://catalyst.uw.edu/workspace/msmliu/18494/)

Department of English, University of Washington

10:30-12:20, M and W in LOW 219

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“The real test of a good literary critic or theorist is to engage with a new work of literature and explain to a broad public why it is important and what its significant qualities (and shortcomings) are.” – Stephen Bonnycastle,

*In Search of Authority: an Introductory Guide to Literary Theory*

OFFICE HOURS: M W 12:30-1:20. Also by appointment.

DESCRIPTION: This course tackles two main complaints about theory: one, that it is alienatingly abstract; and two, that theory doesn’t make sense to people outside the English major. This quarter, we will try forging a different understanding of theory. We will approach it not as a merciless taskmaster, but as critical practice integrally tied into figuring out your relation to the world. Since we are creatures of language, communicating theoretical ideas in “plain English” is of crucial for using critical practice as a form of self-making.

The general theme for this quarter is the relationship between self, creativity, fiction, and truth, and using writing to make and examine these connections. All assignments will be geared towards practice in working theoretical language into a grammar and syntax that makes sense to you, and understanding the relationship between self and critical practice.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

**The following texts are available at the University Bookstore:**

Chabon, Michael. *Moonglow*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.

Grann, David. *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*. New York: Vintage Books, 2018.

Scott, A.O. *Better Living Through Criticism: How to Think About Art, Pleasure, Beauty, and Truth*. New York: Penguin Books, 2016.

Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.

**The following texts are available when you click on “Pages” on our course homepage:**

Chiang, Ted. “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling.” Subterranean Press Magazine, Aug 2013.

Orenstein, Peggy. “Think about Pink,” *NYT* 12 Nov 2010 and “The Trouble with Those Boobies Bracelets,” *LAT* 19 Apr 2011.

Scott, A.O. Selected reviews.

**This reading is available on Canvas under the “files” tab.**

Greenblatt, Stephen J. *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*. NY: Routledge, 1990. Introduction.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

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| 15% Truth and fiction dialogue (*TF, TF*) | 14% In-Class work |
| 15% Critical Stories (*Moonglow*)20% Closed and open writing (*RH*) 25% Comparative Review  | 6% Discussion board responses5% Self-interviews |

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By the end of this quarter, you will be able to write about abstract concepts in both lay and specialized language, as well as think about the why behind writing about ideas in the academic versus essayistic modes. To help us achieve this goal, we’ll be doing informal, creative, and formal writing in order to help us think about the interconnections between art, criticism, and truth.

For six weeks of the quarter, plan to participate in a discussion board based off the readings and themes for the week. Out of the 6 weeks, you’ll participate three times. See the handout called “discussion postings & rubric” under the “Files” tab on Canvas. **No make-ups** for discussion posts.

In-class writings will be on prompts given during class and collected at the end of that same class period. These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. **Please note:** you can miss 2 in-class writings without consequence. **No make-ups** for in-class writings.

The formal writing for this course will take the form of shorter writing assignments meant to help you write the final project, which is a comparative book review. We will workshop and peer review rough drafts in class. Please note that participation in peer reviews will count towards your final grade.

You also have the option of re-writing the three formal assignments once you receive grades back from me. Re-writes are due on the last day of class. Your re-write grade will replace your original grade. If you choose to do a re-write, you must have a meeting with me first, and turn in your original graded assignment with your re-write.

*Late policy*: Timely completion of writing assignments is important to your intellectual engagement and our growth as a class. Therefore, I will accept no late discussion posts or make-ups for in-class informal writing. Late formal writing will be docked 10% and not accepted at all one week after the official due date. Exceptions for any of the writing assignments may be granted for illness, and family or work emergencies, **if you inform me before the assignment is due.** I accept emailed papers only for the time stamp. If you submit electronically, bring me a hard copy at the next class meeting.

READING SCHEDULE (subject to change for class needs)

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| **WEEK 1** | **in class**  | **Reading Assignments/due dates** |
| W Sept 26 | Introduction: What is Critical Practice? | * Pages: Peggy Orenstein, “Think about Pink,” and “The Trouble with Those Boobies Bracelets”
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| **WEEK 2** |  |  |
| M Oct 1 | Genres of Critical PracticeIntro of self-interview prompt | * Pages: “This is America,” Childish Gambino
* Pages: A.O. Scott, “Everyone’s a Critic, and That’s How it Should Be”
* Scott: Introduction: “What is Criticism? (a preliminary dialogue)
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| W Oct 3 | Genres of Critical Practice | * Pages: Ted Chiang, “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling”
* Scott, “The Critic as Artist and Vice Versa”
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| **WEEK 3** |  |  |
| M Oct 8 | Truth and Fiction prompt intro;Workshop self-interview drafts | * Scott, “The Critical Condition” excerpt (pp. 234-240 Start at the sentence that beings 8 lines from the bottom of the page)
* Pages: A.O. Scott, review of *Django Unchained*
* “TF, TF” discussion cont’
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| W Oct 10 | Discussion of T & F dialogue;The personal as critical | * Michael Chabon, *Moonglow*, chpts. 1-8 (1-90)
* PDF: Greenblatt, rest of the “Introduction” (skip “Literary Pleasure and Historical Understanding)
* **Due:** Self-interview
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| **WEEK 4** |  |  |
| M Oct 15 | Workshop draft of T& F dialogue | * *Moonglow*, chpts. 9-18 (pp. 91-207)
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| W Oct 17 | **Class starts at 11:10 today** | * *Moonglow*, chpts. 19-28 (pp. 208-314)
* **Due:** Truth & Fiction dialogue
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| **WEEK 5** |  |  |
| M Oct 22 | Critical Stories prompt intro | * *Moonglow*, chpts 29-36 (pp. 315-428/end)
* Pages: A.O. Scott, review of *Django Unchained*

(skim for a refresher)  |
| W Oct 24 | Discussion of Critical Stories prompt |  |

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| **WEEK 6** |  |  |
| M Oct 29 | Workshop of Critical Stories draft | * Shields, *Reality Hunger*, chpts. a-g, pp. 1-80
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| W Oct 31 |  | * Shields, chpts. h-p, pp. 81-139
* Scott, “Self-criticism (a further dialogue)”
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| **WEEK 7** |  |  |
| M Nov 5 | **Class starts at 11:10 today**Open v. Closed prompt intro  | * Shields, chpts. q-z, pp. 140-205
* Scott, “Practical Criticism (another dialogue)”
* **DUE:** Critical Stories assignment
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| W Nov 7 | Open v. Closed assignment discussion | * Author visit & *Reality Hunger* discussion
* Scott, chpt. 5 “How to Be Wrong”
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| **WEEK 8** |  |  |
| M Nov 12 | **No class: Veterans’ Day** |  |
| W Nov 14 | Workshop Open v. Closed assignment drafts | * Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, part I (pp. 1-108)
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| **WEEK 9** | *wrap up second sequence* |  |
| M Nov 19 |  | * Grann, *KFM*, part II (pp. 109-258)
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| W Nov 21 | **No class: T-Day Break** |  |
| **WEEK 10** | *don’t forget to give course evaluations* |  |
| M Nov 26 | Comparative review assignment prompt intro2nd self-interview prompt intro | * Grann, *KFM*, part III+acknowledgements (pp. 259-321)
* Scott, “The End of Criticism (A Final Dialogue)”
* Pages: A.O. Scott, “The Luxe Life” *NYT* reviews (for reading in class)
* **DUE:** Open v. closed assignment
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| W Nov 28 | Discussion of book review assignment | * Pages: A.O. Scott, “Serving Truth with the Imagination” *NYT* reviews (for reading in class)
* **Due:** brainstorming for book review
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| **WEEK 11** | *don’t forget to give course evaluations* |  |
| M Dec 3 | Workshop rough drafts of comparative review | * **Due:** rough drafts of comparative review
* **Due:** 2nd self-interview
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| W Dec 5 | Individual appts in lieu of class  |  |
| FINALS |  |  |
| M Dec 10 |  | * **Due:** comparative review in my office PDL A-420 by noon
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