# **Engl 302B: Critical Practice, Winter Quarter 2020**

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

Department of English, University of Washington

10:30-12:20, M and W in DEN 212

Prof. Michelle Liu, msmliu@uw.edu, Padelford A-420

“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 12:30 pm-2:00 pm & W 12:30-1:00 pm; 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.

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

Shields, David. *Nobody Hates Trump More Than Trump*. New York: Thought Catalog Books, 2018.

Vuong, Ocean. *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*. New York: Penguin, 2019.

**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*) | 15% In-Class work | | 15% Critical Stories (*Moonglow*)  15% Closed and open inquiry (*OEWBG*)  25% Comparative Review | 10% Discussion board & response papers  5% Self-interviews | |

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-upsfor discussion posts.

There also will be occasional response papers that everyone should respond to prior to coming to class. As with the discussion board, no make-ups for missed response papers.

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-upsfor 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** |
| M Jan 6 | Introduction: What is Critical Practice? | * Pages: Peggy Orenstein, “Think about Pink,” and “The Trouble with Those Boobies Bracelets” |
| W Jan 8 | Genres of Critical Practice  Intro 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) |
| **WEEK 2** |  |  |
| M Jan 13 | Genres of Critical Practice | * Pages: Ted Chiang, “The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling” * Scott, “The Critic as Artist and Vice Versa” |
| W Jan 15 | 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’ |
| **WEEK 3** |  |  |
| M Jan 20 | **MLK Day: no class** | * Michael Chabon, *Moonglow*, chpts. 1-8 (pp.1-90) |
| W Jan 22 | Discussion of T & F dialogue;  The personal as critical | * Chabon, chpts. 9-17 (pp. 91-194) * PDF: Greenblatt, rest of the “Introduction” (skip “Literary Pleasure and Historical Understanding) * **Due:** Self-interview |
| **WEEK 4** |  |  |
| M Jan 27 | Workshop draft of T& F dialogue | * *Moonglow*, chpts. 18-23 (pp. 195-271) |
| W Jan 29 |  | * *Moonglow*, chpts. 24-30 (pp. 271-341) |
| **WEEK 5** |  |  |
| M Feb 3 | Critical Stories prompt intro  **Class starts at 11:10 today** | * *Moonglow*, chpts 31-36 (pp. 342-428/end) * Pages: A.O. Scott, review of *Django Unchained*   (skim for a refresher)   * **Due:** Truth & Fiction dialogue |
| W Feb 5 | Discussion of Critical Stories prompt |  |
| **WEEK 6** |  |  |
| M Feb 10 | Workshop of Critical Stories draft | * Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*, part I (pp. 1-71) * Scott, “Self-criticism (a further dialogue)” |
| W Feb 12 | Open v. Closed Inquiry prompt intro  **Class starts at 11:10 today** | * **Due:** Critical Stories assignment * Vuong, part II (pp. 73-160) |
| **WEEK 7** |  |  |
| M Feb 17 | **President’s Day: no class** |  |
| W Feb 19 | Open v. Closed Inquiry discussion | * Vuong, part III (pp.163-244) * Scott, chpt. 5 “How to Be Wrong” * Scott, “Practical Criticism (another dialogue)” |
| **WEEK 8** |  |  |
| M Feb 24 | Workshop Open v. Closed inquiry drafts | * David Shields, *Nobody Hates Trump More Than Trump*, first 2 chapters * Pages: A.O. Scott, “Serving Truth with the Imagination” *NYT* reviews |
| W Feb 26 |  | * Shields, chapters 3-4 |
| **WEEK 9** | *wrap up second sequence* |  |
| M March 2 | **Class starts at 11:10 today**  Comparative review assignment prompt intro;  2nd self-interview prompt intro | * Shields, chapter 5 * **Due**: Open v. Closed Inquiry * Scott, “The End of Criticism (A Final Dialogue)” |
| W March 4 | Brainstorming for book review and 2nd self-interview | * David Shields author visit * Shields, chapter 6 * Pages: A.O. Scott, “The Luxe Life” *NYT* reviews (for reading in class) |
| **WEEK 10** | *don’t forget to give course evaluations* |  |
| M March 9 | Workshop rough drafts of comparative review | * **Due:** rough drafts of comparative review * **Due:** 2nd self-interview |
| W March 11 | Individual appts in lieu of class | * I will send out a doodle.com for signups on Monday, 3/9 |
| FINALS |  |  |
| M March 16 |  | * **Due:** comparative review in my office PDL A-420 by noon |