

Fall 8-15-2010

ENG 4300-4390-002-098: Literature of/as Detection

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Recommended Citation

Wixson, Chris, "ENG 4300-4390-002-098: Literature of/as Detection" (2010). *Fall 2010*. 120.
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Eng 4300: Literature of/as Detection

fall 2010 / Section 002

Dr. Chris Wixson

syllabus

[The study of literature can provide us with] a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us. *Adrienne Rich*

It is the business of fiction to embody mystery through manners, and mystery is a great embarrassment to the modern mind. *Flannery O'Connor*

course philosophy

While literature often seems to provide "answers" to questions about the human condition, it also feeds our compulsive, insatiable appetite for detection itself. While characters may seek an answer *within* a text, readers also seek answers *about* the text. Detection too has its own shapes and (problematic) assumptions—that "clues" exist and can be discerned, that information is not always on the surface, that evidence will lead to an answer, that an answer might be had. This course will explore the literature of detection as well as literature as detection, particularly in the wake of the well-publicized death of the Author. While our inquiry will begin with short mysteries by Roland Barthes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf, the bulk of the syllabus will contain more unusual suspects, among them contemporary novels by Ian McEwan, Arthur Phillips, Colson Whitehead, and Jeanette Winterson and plays by Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and William Shakespeare. Designed as a course for those who like to read, the course will require rigorous reading (averaging at times two hundred pages a week or so), thinking, and discussion in order to prepare seminarians for assignments designed to stretch their skills of research and interpretive analysis.

As a senior seminar, we will take as a foundational assumption Donald Finkel's idea that "knowledge is grounded in some other process than transfer from an unimpeachable Authority," that our work together is a collaborative process of inquiry. For our endeavor to succeed, there are three preconditions that must be met: everyone must have done the reading and done it critically and carefully; everyone must be willing to take intellectual risks and be open to uncertainty; and everyone must be willing to engage respectfully. At the beginning of each session, we will all contribute thoughtful questions and go from there. Remember this is not MY class but ours, understood as an ongoing conversation. As such, enrollment necessitates a commitment to class discussion (beyond merely showing up) and courageous consideration of ideas about art, interpretation, writing, culture, existence, and desire. Finally, this is a course for those who like to read. The reading pace will be brisk, averaging 150 pages a week once we get going.

Learning Outcomes

1. To write precisely, concisely, responsibly, provocatively, and persuasively about literature.
2. To read literature expressing a wide range of cultural perspectives and values and to think critically and write analytically about them.
3. To engage in reading and writing experiences about literature so as to establish a foundation for continued social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic discovery and appreciation.

course texts

Atonement, Ian McEwan
The Intuitionist, Colson Whitehead
The Song is You, Arthur Phillips
Ashes to Ashes, Harold Pinter
Hamlet, William Shakespeare
The Passion, Jeanette Winterson
The Maltese Falcon, Dashiell Hammett
Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
E-reserve: *The Mark on the Wall*, Virginia Woolf
How Should One Read a Book?, Virginia Woolf
Art Objects, Jeanette Winterson
Battle Royal, Ralph Ellison

contact information

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Office Hours:

assignments

*Short pieces of writing (2-3 pages) called "seed papers" in which you pose a productive question which relates to the inquiry issues of the course about the text and then attempt to answer it. You will be asked to present as part of your contribution to class discussion each of your papers. However, you will be required to write four seed essays total:

- *Two critical papers (7-8 pages) involving research, interpretive analysis, and critical thinking. Writing and topic guidelines will be handed out in advance.
- *A Manifesto
- *Active, Engaged Participation in Discussion — defined as TALKING productively.
- *Developing and sharing productive analytical discussion questions
- *Final Exam

final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

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| Four Seed Papers | 20% |
| Two Critical Papers | 40% |
| Manifesto | 10% |
| Final Exam | 20% |
| In-class Writings/ Quizzes / Questions / Active Participation | 10% |

****You must complete all written assignments and exams to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

attendance

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in discussion. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After two, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by a letter. **More than four unexcused absences will result in a “O” for participation. More than six unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do not get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

class participation

Mandatory.

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities; everyone simply must contribute. Participation in a senior seminar means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials and your projects. In addition to your required short papers, what else you bring to share need not be written out but should refer to specific passages in the reading as the basis for formulating a broader discussion topic or questions.

Besides preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what other seminarians share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to promote dialogue between yourself and other seminarians. The goal is to demonstrate growth. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

If you plan on doing any of the following things, you should probably switch into another section of this class:

1. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence by saying you are “just the type of person who likes to sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say.” Certainly, listening is a premium in this class and is a crucial human skill. But real listening only happens in an exchange. Letting everyone else do the talking means that you're not really listening because you are busy keeping yourself safe. Of course, this 'safety' is an illusion.

2. Remaining in your comfort zone and not talking in class and justifying the silence because you assume that you don't know enough to participate in class and other people (especially those who talk) do. To approach the class and the work in a way that suggests that one can speak only about what is already known is not only dangerous, but it's also intellectually lazy.

3. Complaining when everyone does talk that it's a waste of time and inefficient. Or remaining so married to ways you have been taught in other courses and disciplines that you see as a 'tangent' any meaningful, principled discussion or creative exercise.

late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the paper, and it becomes a "0."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** email, news, or box scores, surf the web, use chat applications, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with your computer.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class.** The nature of our scholarly endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). We will discuss how to avoid it. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

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course calendar

** THIS SCHEDULE MAY CHANGE AT ANY TIME ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF THE CLASS. MAKE SURE YOU ALWAYS BRING IT WITH YOU FOR MODIFICATION.

| | | |
|-----------|----|---|
| August | 24 | Introductory Comments |
| | 26 | Winterson's <i>Art Objects</i> Beckett's <i>Breath and Come and Go</i> / Seed Paper #1 Due |
| | 31 | Woolf's <i>The Mark on the Wall</i> Kafka's <i>The Top</i> (handout) |
| September | 2 | Woolf's <i>How Should One Read a Book?</i> Barthes' <i>The Death of the Author</i> (handout) |

"As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared; dispossessed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching, and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing; but in the text, in a way, I *desire* the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*.

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | 7 | Doyle's <i>The Adventure of the Dancing Men</i> Doyle's <i>The Speckled Band</i> / Seed Paper #2 Due Catherine Belsey, "Deconstructing the Text" John A. Hodgson, "The Recoil of <i>The Speckled Band</i> " (Sections 1-4 only) (**Read Doyle's stories BEFORE the two critical pieces) |
| | 9 | Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i> Act 1 / Seed Paper #3 A-M |

14 *Hamlet* Act 2-3 / Seed Paper #3 N-R

16 *Hamlet* Act 3 / Seed Paper #3 S-Z

21 *Hamlet* Act 4

23 *Hamlet* Act 5

28 Winterson's *The Passion*

30 *The Passion*

October 5 *The Passion* – First Critical Essay Due

7 *The Passion*

12 Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* pp.1-65

14 *The Intuitionist* pp. 66-140

19 *The Intuitionist* pp. 145-217 – Manifesto Due

In class: Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*

21 *The Intuitionist* pp. 218-55

26 Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* – Seed Paper #4 Due

28 Phillips' *The Song is You* pp. 3-11 **Listen to Holiday's "Waterfront"

**Develop and bring to class significant, "analytic observational" class discussion questions for each section of Phillips' novel (see handout).

November 2 Phillips' *The Song is You* pp. 13-100

4 *The Song is You* pp. 101-138

9 *The Song is You* pp. 139-232

11 *The Song is You* pp. 233-250

16 McEwan's *Atonement* pp. 1-59

18 *Atonement* pp. 60-116 – Second Critical Paper Due

THANKSGIVING BREAK – Read as much of *Atonement* as you can over break and develop significant, “analytic observational” class discussion questions for each section (see handout).

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| | 30 | <i>Atonement</i> pp. 117-75 |
| December | 2 | <i>Atonement</i> pp. 179-250 |
| December | 7 | <i>Atonement</i> pp. 253-330 |
| | 9 | <i>Atonement</i> pp. 333-51 |

**Final exam date: