



ARHM 3342: Reading Between the Lines

Day class: Tu/Th 1:00-2:15 in CB3 1.314
Night class: Tu 7:00-9:45 in SLC 2.304

Prof. Ashley Barnes
Office: JO 5.110

This course aims to help you become more conscious of the ways you understand the world around you. It will help you identify different interpretive methods and consider how your approach to a text affects the answers you can find in it. For the sake of simplicity, the course structures these options—whether literary, historical, or aesthetic—along a spectrum from “suspicious” to “reparative” interpretation. As we will find, though, these are far from the only ways to describe or organize your possibilities as an interpreter.

We will read a mix of theory and primary texts. The theories are by practitioners in various humanities fields explaining how they do their work. The primary texts are fictions, poems, works of history and journalism, photographs and film, all drawn from American culture from the antebellum era up to the present. Like the theoretical works, the primary texts reflect on the effort to figure out what X means. Many of them are about solving a crime. That’s an aggressive model for interpretation, but it gives us a dramatic way to reflect on how we understand when things go wrong, so it may help clarify how we understand when things go right. Both the theoretical and the primary texts show different ways of answering the question “what happened there, then?”—a question that seems to entail asking, “what is going on here, now?”

One key assumption of the class is that meaning isn’t just sitting there in the text for you to pry out. On the other hand, you are not free to say a text means whatever you like. Interpretation—saying what X means—is a matter of building an argument for that meaning by showing the steps of your engagement with X. We can judge more and less accurate interpretations, and judge better and worse ways of approaching a given text. By the end of the term, you should be able to make and defend such judgment calls.

COURSE TEXTS

“Benito Cereno” by Herman Melville (Dover Thrift / 9780486264738)

Absalom, Absalom! by William Faulkner (Vintage / 9780679732181)

The Intuitionist by Colson Whitehead (Anchor / 9780385493000)

The Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann (Doubleday / 9780385534246)

Additional required reading is available electronically, either via the McDermott library’s e-book holdings or as pdfs on our class eLearning website.

Recommended resource for writing:

They Say/I Say by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein (Norton / 978-0393933611)

BASIC QUESTIONS to ask as we read:

- How would you describe in a nutshell this interpreter’s approach to the world?
- How does this interpreter respond to or react against other approaches?
- What does the interpreter want to find out from the thing being studied?
- What details of the thing does the interpreter focus on?
- What does the writer’s voice or tone sound like?
- What are the strengths of this particular angle of approach (literary, historical, or aesthetic)? What are its weaknesses as a way of making sense of the world and where we’ve been?
- Can you see yourself approaching things the way this interpreter does? Does his or her approach feel like a useful way to understand the world? Why or why not?

LEARNING GOALS: by the end of the term, you should be able to:

- Say what kind of interpreter you want to be, and explain why
- Describe and analyze the processes and aims of different disciplines' ways of interpreting culture
- Apply the processes and aims of one or more disciplines' way of interpreting culture
- Explain what difference it makes if you interpret things one way versus another way
- Analyze & argue with a variety of texts, both scholarly articles and primary documents

COURSEWORK: You'll demonstrate your progress in the class through the following work:

1. Participation & attendance: Your **attendance** and participation every week is critical. Please arrive promptly. Each student is allowed one "freebie" absence; however, perfect attendance will enrich your learning. **You are responsible for all information given in class.** Excused absences will only be granted with advance notice or for a documented emergency and must be made up with a written reading response. After the "freebie," each unexcused absence will result in a lowered grade. If you have any questions about this policy, please see me at the beginning of the semester.

I encourage each student to see her/himself as a co-facilitator of the discussion: keep an eye on where the discussion is going and actively **participate** in a respectful manner. It is essential for you to come prepared to speak with your classmates about the material. **Bring copies of the assigned reading** with you to class. Several of the readings are available online. It is acceptable to have them onscreen in class. But it is better to print those readings out so that you have a hard copy to mark up and keep on file. **If you are using a laptop or other screen** in class, understand that your use of it must be kept strictly within the bounds of the class's learning goals. If you are doing something else on your screen I will ask you to leave, mark you as absent, and lower your grade.

2. Peer-Response Reading Journal: You will compile a journal built on weekly 500-word reading responses. This journal will comprise your own reactions to the reading, plus your responses to your peers' written reactions. Be ready to discuss what you're writing in class.

- At the beginning of the course, we will split into groups of 3 to 4 students each. We will rearrange groups again later in the term.
- Each TUESDAY BY NOON everyone will email their group, and me, a 500-word informal journal-style response to the reading *for that whole week*. These journals should not be formally structured or read like book reports. Instead, and most importantly, they should represent your struggle with the material. What do you not understand, or what was confusing? How does this reading connect to past material? You may go deep on one point, or bounce between different readings – it is your choice, as long as you wrestle with the material.
- Each FRIDAY BY NOON everyone will email their group, and me, a 500-word response *to each group member's Tuesday entry*. These should be genuine, intellectually engaged responses among equals. Challenge, persuade, react. Feel free to refer to other assigned readings and class discussion. Do not condescend or make generic statements.
- These journals will form an ongoing student-centered conversation. I will carefully read and compile them as a silent observer. To maintain the integrity of the peer-to-peer conversation, I will not return them or respond in any way.
- **YOU MUST PRINT OUT AND MAINTAIN A FOLDER OF ALL YOUR JOURNAL ENTRIES.** That includes your response to the given reading *plus* your responses to your peers.
- Assessment of the responses will be averaged at the end of the semester. Please feel free to meet with me if you have any questions or concerns as we proceed.

Meet the length requirements on a weekly basis in the manner requested	B-
In addition to the above: engage with energy, struggle, open up, deal with the difficult	B
In addition to the above: demonstrate significant improvement over the semester	B+
In addition to the above: allow yourself to get swept up in the intellectual exchange; demonstrate intellectual rigor or imagination	A-
Go above and beyond these expectations	A

3. Final essay: You will revise (with your peers' help, and with mine) and build on your journal writing to make a case for what kind of interpreter you want to be. This essay will reflect on the big ideas of the course, analyze specific texts from the syllabus, and incorporate a new text of your choosing. Further details and standards will be provided later in the semester. The revised final essay is due on Tues. Dec. 12.

Extensions are granted only in documented extraordinary circumstances. **Late work** will be graded down a third of a letter grade per day. Please raise any concerns you may have as soon as possible.

I strongly encourage you to visit me during my **office hours** to discuss the ideas of the class, reading and writing, or your studies in general. I look forward to getting to know each student as an individual. **Please make sure to see me at least once**, preferably before mid-semester. My office hours are **Tuesdays 3:00-4:00 pm** and **Thursdays 11:00 a.m. to noon**. We can also set up an appointment for some other time. Feel free to email me, but allow 24 hours for me to respond. Many questions can best be discussed in person, so it is often best to ask during office hours.

CLASS EVALUATION:

60% Peer-response reading journal (30% your journal entries, 30% your responses to your peers' journals)
30% Final essay (including drafting and revision work)
10% Participation & attendance

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All work must be original for this class. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with standards for academic integrity. For more details please consult:

<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/bigfour/>
and/or UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures:
<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

SUPPORT RESOURCES

Me. Please email me (ashley.barnes@utdallas.edu) any time to ask questions or to set up a time to meet; drop by for any reason, or no particular reason, during office hours. I'm happy to talk about what we're reading, what you're thinking or writing about, or how things are going in class.

The Writing Center in the **McDermott Library** (<http://www.utdallas.edu/studentssuccess/writing/>): meet with tutors who ask open-ended questions, offer constructive feedback, and act as an attentive and responsive "audience" for students of all levels at any stage of the writing process. The Center provides writing support in the form of one-on-one tutoring sessions, group tutoring sessions, writing groups, workshops, and other forms of writing intervention.

Resource Connections-Academic Outreach (<https://oue.utdallas.edu/special-programs/resource-connections/>): students may request confidential assistance that is not part of their academic record by making an appointment or completing the online form.

This course is accessible to all types of learners. I strongly encourage students with disabilities to notify me if it will help their learning experience in this course. Students who may need an academic accommodation should initiate it through the **Office of Student AccessAbility**:
<http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/>.

READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Aug. 22 & 24

- 1: introduction: paranoia and reparation, depth and surface
- 2: Establishing a starting point: Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"; Anne Helen Petersen blog post

Week 2: Aug. 29 & 31

- 3: Literary theory #1: Eagleton, "Introduction: What Is Literature?" & "Conclusion: Political Criticism"
- 4: Literary theory #2: Felski, "Introduction" and "In Short"

Week 3: Sept. 5 & 7

- 5: Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (thru pg. 98)
- 6: *Intuitionist* (pgs. 98-140)

Week 4: Sept. 12 & 14

- 7: *Intuitionist* (finish)
- 8: Emily Dickinson, selected poems; Vendler on Dickinson

Week 5: Sept. 19 & 21

- 9: Melville, "Benito Cereno"
- 10: in-class WRITING WORKSHOP: close reading: arguing from text analysis

Week 6: Sept. 26 & 28

- 11: Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (thru end of section 4)
- 12: *Absalom!* (section 5)

Week 7: Oct. 3 & 5

- 13: *Absalom!* (sections 6-7)
- 14: *Absalom!* (finish)

Week 8: Oct. 10 & 12

- 15: History theory #1: Collingwood, "The Historical Imagination" & "Historical Evidence"
- 16: History theory #2: Farge, "Traces" & "Paths"

Week 9: Oct. 17 & 19

- 17: Nat Turner (Gray, ed.), "The Confessions"
- 18: This American Life (podcast), "Kim Possible" (#507, Act 1)

Week 10: Oct. 24 & 26

- 19: in-class WRITING WORKSHOP: they say/I say: arguing with other interpreters
- 20: Native American histories: selections from *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*

Week 11: Oct. 31 & Nov. 2

- 21: David Grann, *The Killers of the Flower Moon* (thru pg. 99)
- 22: *Killers* (pgs. 100-150)

Week 12: Nov. 7 & 9

- 23: *Killers* (pgs. 151-255)
- 24: *Killers* (finish)

Week 13: Nov. 14 & 16

- 25: visual theory #1: Roland Barthes, from *Camera Lucida*
- 26: visual theory #2: from *Thinking Photography*; Brown, "Reading the Visual Record"

Week 14: Nov. 28 & 30

- 27: student presentations, in groups; DRAFT FINAL ESSAY DUE
- 28: *The Diving Bell & the Butterfly* (film, dir. Schnabel, 2008)

Week 15: Dec. 5

- 29: in-class WORKSHOP: revising the draft toward the final essay (due on Tues. Dec. 12)