

## Narrative Theory, RHET341, 2006

**Dr Catherine Collins**

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**Office Hrs:** MWF 8-9; 10:15-11:15. I write or work with student projects Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Please try not to call during these times; if you drop by and the door is open, however, feel free to come in and talk. I am around most days between 6:30 am and 4:30 pm. My other classes meets MWF 11:30-12:30 and TTh 9:40-11:10. I have labs on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8-9:30.

### **Text**

We have readings on reserve in the library from books and scholarly journals and I will give you handouts of several papers presented at scholarly conferences. If you do not own Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, please purchase a copy.

### **Course Description and Requirements**

This course is designed as an introduction to a major theoretical orientation in our discipline; I will try to encourage you to make it a collaborative seminar. We will read and discuss the research on narrative theory that spans several disciplines in an effort to develop a comprehensive and cohesive approach to using this theoretical perspective to critique discourse. If you are not practiced in reading scholarly articles, this class will help you develop the critical reading skills necessary to understand and critique meaningfully theoretical concepts and their application to rhetorical discourse.

The Course Catalog description reads:

This course surveys significant developments in narrative theory. Narrative in this context is defined broadly, not only as a style or technique of writing, but as a paradigm for understanding human thought and communication at large. Attention is directed to particular case studies that illustrate characteristic functions of narration. Prerequisite: RHET 231.

I am trying to approach narrative theory inductively--letting you discover in a set of narratives the constitutive elements followed by directed readings that flesh out narrative components and their relationships. Not all scholars see narratives as capable of arguing; I do. I believe, consequently, that it is important that we understand how narratives function as symbolic efforts to induce cooperation (Burke's definition of rhetoric/identification/persuasion). We will use films as part of the case study material. In most cases I will ask you to view the film outside of class. Your viewing and notes on the film should be ready the day the film is discussed. There will be viewing quizzes at the beginning of the hour that count toward the course grade. Similarly, there will be reading quizzes over material to be discussed that class session. For a seminar to work, all participants must come ready for discussion. If you have not read the material or viewed the film, you slow down the discussion.

### **Course Policies**

1. The department has an attendance policy. Any absences over three (excluding university excused absences) will result in a lower grade of one mark per day (4 absences would lower an earned B to a B-; 5 absences to a C+).

2. Plagiarism, the theft of another's ideas or writing, is not acceptable. When in doubt, cite the source. If you paraphrase, cite the source to indicate that these are not your ideas or arguments. If you plagiarize a paper you may receive an F on both the paper and in the course. Use APA guidelines for source citations. Everyone should go to the department web site and read the policy on academic community: <http://www.willamette.edu/cla/rhetoric/ethics.html>

3. Due Dates: We will have regular quizzes over the readings and films at the beginning of class sessions (come on time or you'll miss them!). Quizzes cannot be made up. In addition, you will have two exams and a major paper that employs narrative analysis to explore discourse of your choosing. Combined, the quizzes and daily assignments account for 25%, the exams 40%, and the paper 35% of the grade.

The exams are October 2 and 30

The final version of the paper is due December 8

We will be meeting during the exam period for presentation of papers

**Paper Expectations:** Your paper should reflect the following guidelines:

- \* focus on discourse that lends itself to a meaningful narrative analysis
- \* reflect careful research on your artifact, the context in which it is located, and the genre of rhetorical artifact it represents
- \* justify the use of a narrative approach
- \* explain the relevant components of narrative theory that you will employ in assessing the discourse (go beyond a review of the literature on narrative theory)
- \* justify the importance of studying your particular discourse
- \* offer a clear thesis statement and presummary of the arguments that you will make
- \* offer well developed arguments (including solid textual support) that clearly prove your thesis
- \* be well organized and stylistically appropriate
- \* reflect careful editing and reworking of ideas prior to the submission of the final paper
- \* accurately follow APA guidelines for reference citation
- \* include a separate title page
- \* Include an abstract of no more that 100 words on a separate sheet of paper
- \* length: 5,000-6,500 words (using Helvetica or New Roman 10 point this is 11-15 pages; with 12 point it is a 19-25 page paper)
- \* be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word for peer review and for my evaluation through the ClassTools site. Works and Word Perfect do not transfer electronically.

## Approximate Schedule

### August 30-September 1

#### **What is a Narrative? What is the Relationship Between Narrative Theory and Rhetoric? (1)**

Fisher, Walter, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," *Communication Monographs* 51 (March 1984), pp. 1-22.

Film: *The Truman Show* No outside viewing required; recommended

### September 6-11

**Narrative Theory in Rhetoric:** (1) Gronbeck, Bruce, "Narrative, Enactment, and Television Programming," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* (Spring 1983), 229-243; (2) Bormann, Ernest, "Symbolic Convergence Theory," *Journal of Communication*, (Autumn 1985), 128-138; (3) Hollihan, Thomas & Riley, Patricia, "The Rhetorical Power of a Compelling Story: A Critique of a 'Toughlove' Parental Support Group," *Communication Quarterly*, 35 (1987): 13-25; (4) Lucaites and Condit, "Re-Constructing Narrative Theory," *Journal of Communication*, (Autumn 1985), 90-108.

Film: *Primary Colors* for September 11

### September 13-18

**The Structure of Narrative:** (1) Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structures in Fiction and Film*, pp. 15-42; 146-158 (on reserve); (2) Deming, Caren, "Hill Street Blues as Narrative," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 2:1, 1-22

Films: *Emma*; *Clueless* View films by September 15.

### September 20-29

**Issues of Character and Individual Identity:** Bal, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, pp. 114-132 (character) and 142-162 (point of view); (2) Duras, Marguerite, *The North China Lover*, pp. 25-39 (on reserve); (3) Collins & Schmid, "Clinton and Dole's Campaign Biographies: The Intersection of Scene and Agent," Sixth International Conference on Narrative, Lexington, Kentucky, November 1997.

Films: *Paul Wynn's Journal* (9/20); *Europa, Europa* (9/25)

### October 2: Exam 1

### October 4-9

**Issues of order:** (1) Genette, Gerard, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 25-35 (on reserve); (2) Collins & Clark, "A Structural Narrative Analysis of *Nightline*'s 'This Week in the Holy Land'," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9 (1992): 25-43.

Film: *Memento* (10/9)

### October 11-18

**Plot and History: Media Narratives of National Identity** (1) Lewis, William, "Telling America's Story: Narrative Form and the Reagan Presidency," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73 (1987): 280-302; (2) Bennett, Lance & Edelman, Murray, "Toward a New Political Narrative," *Journal of Communication*, (Autumn 1985), 156-171; (3) Ettema & Glasser, "Narrative Form and Moral

Force," *Journal of Communication*, 38 (1988): 8-26; (4) Zelizer, Barbie, "Achieving Journalistic Authority Through Narrative," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 7 (1990): 366-376.  
Film: *Forest Gump* (10/16)

#### October 23- 27

**Plot and History: Narratives, Values, And Ethics** (1) Hauerwas, Stanley , *A Community of Character*, pp. 9-35 (on reserve); (2) White, Hayden, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *The Content of the Form*, pp. 1-25 (on reserve).  
(3) Guerrero & Dionisopoulos, "Enthymematic Solutions to the Lockshin Defection Story: A Case Study in Repair of a Problematic Narrative," *Communication Studies*, 41 (Winter 1990): 299-310.  
Films: *Rosewood* (10/23)

October 27: Bring with you a list of three paper topics with a list of research questions or issues related to each topic.

#### October 30

#### **Exam 2**

#### November 3

**Prewriting/Research** At this stage, you should generate a document (to be graded) that includes the following: a list of 3 approaches to the topic for your paper that you find most promising (you should have narrowed it down to a single topic at this stage, but include at least two alternative approaches/artifacts and questions within the broader topic for the paper); a preliminary bibliography of the materials that pertain to your subject; list of preliminary research questions or issues related to each approach. Weight: 10% of the final paper grade. Our last formal class session until December 4. Between November 6 and December 4, I will schedule regular individual meeting with each of you.

#### November 10

**Blocking Stage** At this point, you should have 'blocked' out the major parts of your paper. This may look like an outline of structure with drafted prose for major components of the outline. Alternatively, it may look like extended, less-structured prose that will later be condensed and structured in future drafts. The specific form of the blocks of material will depend on how you write. Regardless of how you write, I expect you to demonstrate significant progress from the previous stage (about half of the paper written (2500-3000 words). Weight: 15% of the final grade for the paper.

#### November 20

**Preliminary Draft Stage** By this point, you should have a polished draft of the entire paper, including all the trimmings (page numbers, title, bibliography, etc.). This is essentially a completed product, albeit one that will be revised based on input from peers. Although this is not a graded assignment, if it is not completed on time it will affect your grade on the Graded Draft Stage.

#### November 22: **Return peer responses**

November 27

**Graded Draft Stage** This is a revision of the Preliminary draft based on the peer response. I will read this draft and suggest theory that needs to be included, tell you if there is a weak application, and whether you need to do some significant reorganization of the paper. Weight: 40% of the final paper grade.

December 4: Class session

December 8: Class Session

**Final Version** This version will be revised based on critiques from another member of the group and from me. Weight: 25% of the final paper grade. **Begin Presentations.**

December 14: 8-11

**Presentations** Everyone is required to be at the final session, not just those class members who are presenting.