

# CCT Classroom Observation Form

## To be completed by the graduate student being observed

*After this section is completed, email this document as Word Doc to your observer.*

Instructor: Ben Richardson

Date/Time: Monday September 24 and Wednesday September 26, 4:40-5:55 pm

Location: Allen 103

No. of Students: 10

Course Title: ENGL 247: Victorian Literature

Topic(s) of Day: Poetry of Alfred Tennyson

### **1) The goal or outcome I have in mind for my students during this class session is:**

I want my students to discuss two poems from Alfred Tennyson, and to understand how these poems deploy the language of colonialism to re-imagine the story of Ulysses.

I want my students to relate their own readings of the poems to the secondary material they have read for class, and also our prior discussions about Victorian colonialism.

I want my students to recognise how both the form and the content of these poems come together to produce a particular story about the idea of colonialism.

### **2) During this class session, I would like the observer to pay particular attention to, and give me feedback on the following:**

Do my students seem engaged with the material? How could I improve student engagement with the material? Do my own contributions to discussion seem productive? Does the language I use seem concise? Does the structure of the class itself appear too rigid or too undefined? Does my overall demeanor seem too formal or too informal?

## To be completed by the observer

*Use your handwritten "field" notes to create narrative answers. Your responses to these questions may vary in length. Focus on what you saw that 1) acknowledges what was done very well in the class session, and 2) provides constructive feedback on aspects of teaching that are actionable. Email this completed observation form (both pages) back to the TA/instructor as a pdf.*

**Your name:** Christina Bejjani

**Date completed:** observation (09/26); form (09/27)

**1) Describe what happened in this class session. What was done by the TA/instructor and/or the students? What teaching methods did you observe? How effective were these activities and methods in achieving the goal or student outcome that the TA/instructor had set out for this class session? Explain.**

The instructor was already present in the classroom fifteen minutes before the start of class, writing discussion questions and background notes for the class on the white board. During the class, the instructor lectured to the students about the contextual background material, broke students into groups to discuss the questions on the board (a kind of think-pair-share), and then reconvened the class so that they could discuss the questions as a class, rather than solely within their groups. I think these were effective in getting students to consider the colonialism theme; I'm not as certain with regard to reimagining Ulysses, but that is likely in part because I am not familiar with the content discussed in the goals.

**2) What "worked" particularly well during this class session? Were there any small-group activities, assignments, or teaching strategies in particular that you think the TA/instructor should continue to use?**

The lecture material was of a perfect length: about 15 minutes, which is around the time that students might begin to lose interest. The instructor referred back to this material when asking students questions about the readings (e.g., what would Browning think about \_\_\_?).

Students seemed familiar with the structure of the class, breaking naturally into groups to discuss the material. Indeed the student who arrived late knew immediately what to do, suggesting a familiarity with the class structure and a certain comfort level with the class. All the students participated in the classroom discussion. The instructor also did a good job rotating amongst the small-group discussions, offering his perspective on the material as well as turning student questions back to them (i.e., well, what do you think of the material?). It was clear that students were comfortable with the instructor.

Almost all the students arrived to the class early or on time. The instructor chatted with the students before the start of class to check with them about how difficult they found the material, which likely also fostered their sense of comfort in the classroom.

**3) Was there a point during this class session when the TA/instructor “lost” student attention? If so, what do you think caused it? How did the TA/instructor react, what did he/she do to regain student attention? Were the TA/instructor’s efforts in this regard effective?**

The instructor lost student attention, I think, towards the end of class. Or at least some of the momentum for the classroom participation. I think this might in part stem from not giving a time limit for each group to discuss the questions on the board (or some kind of heads-up that they'd be returning to the group in 5 minutes, etc.). Some groups seemed further along in their consideration of the questions than others, so that may be why they felt less comfortable discussing the third question on colonialism. I think the instructor reacted well by letting the question sit and then changed how he framed the question, and continued to change the shape of the question for the students.

Another possibility here is to assign students certain sections of the text to answer the discussion questions from and rotate between the groups, and their spokesperson. Although students got to discuss the material in groups, it may help to hold each group accountable for a specific question or section of the material, which may ensure discussion for each of the Qs.

Also, there were a few times when I noticed students were not paying attention on their laptops. One student was scrolling through a shopping(?) site, and another student at the beginning of class definitely seemed to be writing an email or something very typing-intensive. However, both of these students did return their attention to the class discussion after a while.

**4) How did the physical surroundings or environment of the class session affect the learning experience, if at all? (For example, the temperature or set up of the classroom, the time of day, number of students in the class, outside noise, lighting, problems with equipment or technology, etc.)**

The classroom is set-up so that students can easily form groups of their own, dragging their chair/desk into a huddle. The instructor also makes neat use of the whiteboard. The lighting and noise levels were great, and there are more seats than needed for the number of students in the class, but because the set-up is designed for students to move around for group work, it works

well. Of note, however, is that the instructor also sat behind the desk by the projector cables. This felt like a transmission mode of knowledge for the lecture component and when the discussion was brought back to the class from the three groups.

**5) What suggestions do you have for the TA/instructor you observed in terms of expansion of particularly effective teaching strategies, improvement of teaching strategies that didn't work well, solving problems you observed, etc.?**

One suggestion that I have with regard to the small groups is to assess before class students' level of familiarity with previous work or their comfort levels with the material, and then assign students to groups. One thing I noticed was that there were a few students who were more familiar with *The Tempest* than others. In the group that was sitting closest to me, one of the students explained *The Tempest* to others within the group, which helped them to understand more of the diction used. Assigning the groups would allow the instructor to ensure that there is (hopefully) at least one individual who is familiar with such background material within each group. It may also help to mix up students who felt more comfortable with the material with those who felt less comfortable.

One other suggestion that I have is to come down to the students level while walking amongst the focus groups. For the first visit and first group, the instructor did sit in one of the chair/desks, but for all the other visits, stood behind/near the students. It should feel less intimidating for the student if the instructor is sitting at their eye level while listening to their comments, instead of standing behind them. This may not be too much of an issue, as students generally still seemed comfortable asking the instructor questions as he stood there.

**6) Other comments or observations:**

Please take all my suggestions or comments with a grain of salt.

One thing I noted on the syllabus was that there was a classroom policy on "no tech," but at least three students were using their laptops, and two of them, as I noted above, got distracted at least once during class (multi-tasking). Has there been a reminder discussion of the policy?

I found some of the whiteboard writing hard to read. I wondered, given the fact that the instructor had explicit goals for the class, whether it might be nice to make worksheets or explicitly write out the learning goals, then write out the discussion questions. That way, they are in conversation with each other, and students may more explicitly understand the themes or goals behind the questions, especially there seemed to be a wide variety of responses (from

religion to discussing Gollum).

How do the weekly responses factor into their work?

This was perhaps an unintentional side effect, but I noticed that all the students in the front were the women and all the students sitting in the back were the men. It led to some uneven gender distribution among the groups when they were discussing the material.