

Literary Appreciation and the Power of Story

*We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the
quarrel with ourselves, poetry.*

W.B. Yeats

Course Description: To appreciate literature is to appreciate stories and intellectual inquiry. This course will address a central question: ‘What does such inquiry reveal of the tensions that reside in the human condition?’ The Irish poet W.B. Yeats believed that opposing states of being—what he described as antimonies—could exist in the one person. Such opposition may engender creativity. This course explores the tensions and oppositions that are revealed in important works of literature including poetry, drama, and fiction. While emphasis will be upon narrative, we will also examine other aspects of literature such as symbol or imagery. Throughout the course, we will concentrate on the representation of the contrarities and contradictions of life (good and evil, heaven and hell, love and hate, white and black). Our objectives are as follows:

- To identify the distinctive features of the literary genres after studying samples of each: fiction, drama, poetry, prose.
- To support personal reactions to literary works using the vocabulary of literary analysis (such as plot, character, setting, point of view, theme, style, figurative language and so on).
- To articulate a personal reaction to a literary work to at least two audiences and in at least two media (written, electronic, oral and so on).
- To generalize meaningfully about several individual works of literature with something in common (author, genre, historical period, place, theme, people).
- To articulate an understanding and an assessment of a literary work within the framework of different schools of literary criticism (Historicisms, genre studies, gender studies and so on).

Method of Presentation: Seminar, student presentation, class discussion and film.

Required Work and Form of Assessment: Students are required to hand in a number of written responses to the course work and to deliver a short oral presentation of 5-10 minutes in class (using notes only) and with an accompanying one-page handout. A series of pre-writing assignments and an essay based on research and of 1,750-2,000 words are also due. Please note that the prewriting of the essay is expected and will count towards your final assessment. Students are asked to follow the MLA stylesheet regarding format of the essay and should also note that late work will not be accepted unless a formal extension has been granted.

Final assessment depends on student participation and attendance (10%), two written assignments and one oral presentation + handout (40% of grade), two prewriting exercises (10% of grade), and final essay (40% of grade).

Attendance: Punctual arrival to class and regular attendance are important in this course. An absence of more than two classes will affect the grade (a half-grade drop). Lateness will also affect the grade and students are asked to arrange their schedules to allow for full participation in the course.

A note on plagiarism: Please keep in mind that use of published material or electronic material without an acknowledgment is plagiarism and will result in failure of the course. Always acknowledge the use of sources.

Schedule

Week One: ‘Without contraries is no progression.’ (Poetry)

Does innocence equal ignorance? Does experience lead to cynicism and the loss of spontaneity? The English Romantic poet, William Blake, studied these questions in *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*. We will look at pairs of Blake’s poem and then turn to consider a later and very important Irish poet influenced by Blake – W.B. Yeats. Yeats’ fascination with Irish folklore and his interest in the spirit world gave rise to some of his most evocative poetry. We will look at writings about Irish folklore to study another kind of tension in poetry, this time between the real and the unreal.

Read from *Songs of Innocence*: ‘The Lamb’, ‘Chimney Sweeper’, and ‘Nurse’s Song’. Read from *Songs of Experience*: ‘Nurse’s Song’, ‘The Sick Rose’, ‘The Tyger’, ‘Chimney Sweeper’.

Read Yeats’ poems: ‘The Song of Wandering Aengus’, ‘The Stolen Child’, ‘Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea’, ‘The Hosting of the Sidhe’, ‘The Mask’.

[Handout with extracts from Yeats’ ‘William Blake and his Illustrations to “The Divine Comedy”’ and ‘The Symbolism of Poetry’].

Week Two: Black and White/ Love and Hate (Tragic Drama)

William Shakespeare’s passionate and terrible tragedy, *Othello*, realizes the extreme dimensions of man’s reality in a literal exploration of black and white: the black Moor, Othello, and his fair wife, Desdemona. The manipulator between these two extremes, wicked and wily Iago, causes mayhem and murder in the course of the play. In our examination of the opposition of black and white/ male and female, we will look at the nature of tragic form and the tragic hero.

Read Acts 1-3 of *Othello*.

Read Aristotle’s ‘Tragedy and the Emotions of Pity and Fear’. [Handout.]

Week Three: *Othello* continued

Read Acts 4-5 of *Othello*.

View selections from Davis' film version of *Othello*.

Due: two-page handwritten response to question 2 or 3 of Aristotle Handout. Audience: your peers.

Week Four: *Bildungsroman* or novel of development: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

From childhood to adulthood, this novel of development traces the struggles of the protagonist as she undergoes a battle between the heart and the head.

Read volumes I and II

Due: two-page response to poetry, drama or novel on the course and examine the use and interaction of two of the following: symbol, image, color, plot, setting, point of view. Audience: your peers and lecturer. (To be assessed)

Week Five: *Jane Eyre* continued and Writing Workshop

Read volume III

Handout on writing strategies. Writing about literature. Research and writing. Using and documenting sources. This week will pay particular attention to group work, individual consultation, in-class writing.

Hand in working essay title with at least three accompanying questions that might be addressed in the essay.

Week Six: The psychological study: Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Master Scottish storyteller R.L. Stevenson studies the contradictory nature of man in his compelling and disturbing tale of the late nineteenth century.

Read novel (it is short!) and concentrate on the depiction of character.

One-page analysis of either character or plot due. Audience: Young teenagers. (To be assessed)

Week Seven: The Living and the Dead (short fiction) Edgar Allan Poe and Katherine Mansfield

We will look at the stories of two very different short story writers – the nineteenth century writer of mystery, Poe, and the twentieth century modernist from New Zealand,

Mansfield. Despite their differences, both are acknowledged masters of the craft and both consider the impact of death on the living.

Read Poe's 'The Masque of the Red Death' and Katherine Mansfield's, 'The Garden Party'. Concentrate on the use of color in both stories.

Essay topic proposal due (to be assessed).

Week Eight: Friends and Enemies (Short Fiction continued)

This week, we look at the complex reality that war and violence provoke as revealed by two great storytellers: the Irishman, Frank O'Connor, and the American southerner, Flannery O'Connor. Flannery O'Connor said that fiction 'leaves us, like Job, with a renewed sense of mystery'. We will consider the nature of fiction and some theories on the short story.

Read Frank O'Connor's 'Guests of the Nation' and Flannery O'Connor's 'A Good Man is Hard to Find'.

and Aspects of the Short Story: Read Frank O'Connor's Introduction to the short story in *The Lonely Voice*. [Handout]

Outline of essay and a secondary source summary due (to be assessed).

Week Nine: Reading and Writing Criticism

We will examine two contemporary critical essays that take different approaches to novels we have studied on the course:

Micael M. Clarke, 'Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and the Grimm's Cinderella', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40.4 (2000) 695-710. (Handout)

Christopher Clausen, 'From the Mountain to the Monsters', *Sewanee Review* 115.2 (2007) 239-250. (Handout)

In-class work on using sources: quoting and paraphrase, citing sources, using secondary sources.

One-page response using quotes/paraphrase from either handout due.

Week Ten: Review

The final week will be devoted to review of the material on the course, any oral presentations still to be given and discussion of writing about literature with some further reading on form and technique to be decided by students.

Essay due week after final class – exact date TBA. (To be assessed).

Sources (please purchase copies of texts with an *).

Poetry [Poetry is available online – see Project Gutenberg for some online material]:

William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, illustrated (Oxford University Press, 1967) ISBN: 0-19-281089-8

W.B. Yeats, Selection of Poetry

Short Story (Handouts available but stories can also be found in following collections):

Frank O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation' (1931), *Collected Stories*.

Flannery O'Connor, 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' (1955), *A Good Man is Hard to Find. Stories* (London: Women's Press, 1980). ISBN 0-7043-3853-x

Katherine Mansfield, 'The Garden Party' (1921), *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*.

Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Masque of the Red Death' (1842) available online.

Drama:

*William Shakespeare, *Othello* (London, New York; Bantam Books, 1980). ISBN 0-553-21302-4 (or any unabridged edition)

Novel:

*Charlotte Brontë. *Jane Eyre* (1847) (any unabridged edition)

*Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) (any unabridged edition)

Some further reading:

Aristotle, 'Tragedy and the Emotions of Pity and Fear' from the *Poetics*.

Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (1972).

Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (1962; Cork: Cork City Council, 2003).

Edgar Allan Poe, 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*' (1842), available online.

W.B. Yeats, 'William Blake and his Illustrations to "The Divine Comedy"' and 'The Symbolism of Poetry', *Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1924), pp.142-79 and 188-202.