

ENGL 1001W
Introduction to Literature: Poetry, Drama, Narrative
Fall 2009
203 Lind Hall
M T W TH 8:00 – 8:50 AM
Instructor: John Pistelli
Email: piste004@umn.edu
Office: 306B Lind Hall
Office hours: T TH 9:00 – 10:00 AM

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And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been" (Tolstoy). And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.
—Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917)

This course will be an introduction to literary art in some of its most celebrated genres: epic and lyric poetry, classical and modern drama, and modern short fiction and the novel. We will explore the ways that writers across time and space make meaning in imaginative works with an eye toward the shaping power of specific generic traditions and historical contexts. Since this is a writing-intensive course, we'll also investigate the basic techniques of academic argument and of college-level responses to literature. Most importantly, we will pay attention to the fundamental questions creative writing provokes: What does it mean to be alive? What is the best way for people to live—i.e., what does literature have to do with politics? How can charged or heightened language alter consciousness and disclose new worlds? Can literature, both as an attitude and as an institution, help to resist the pervasive violence of our world?

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Required materials (available at the bookstore in Coffmann Memorial Union—please purchase the specified editions so we can all be on the same page)

Christopher Logue, *War Music: An Account of Books 1-4 and 16-19 of Homer's Iliad* (Chicago)
Euripides, *Grief Lessons: Four Plays* (NYRB)
William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (Signet)
Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (Dover)
Emily Dickinson, *Essential Dickinson* (Ecco)
Eavan Boland, *In a Time of Violence* (Norton)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Young Goodman Brown and Other Stories* (Dover)
Anton Chekhov, *Five Great Short Stories* (Dover)
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway (Annotated)* (Harvest)
Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Natal)
Samuel Beckett, *Endgame and Act Without Words* (Grove)
Lynn Nottage, *Ruined* (Theatre Communications Group)

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Course policies

Grading

There are 100 points available in this course. Here is the point breakdown:

- 10 points – Close reading 1
- 10 points – Close reading 2
- 20 points – Essay 1 and revision
- 25 points – Essay 2
- 05 points – Peer review
- 20 points – Final exam
- 10 points – Participation

More information about written assignments and their criteria will be given during the course.

“Participation” means both regular attendance and active engagement in the class; even if you have perfect attendance, you will not earn more than 7 out of 10 points—that is, a “C-” for this assignment—if you do not speak up at least once or twice a week.

The final exam will require you to define keywords as well as to identify the author and source of short quotations from the course texts and to write a short response to each passage.

The grading policy in this course conforms to CLA guidelines. Therefore a “C” is equivalent to basic fulfillment of requirements; to achieve a grade higher than a “C” a student must perform beyond the basic requirements. Please keep the following scale and criteria in mind:

- A (90-100): Outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
- B (80-90): Significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
- C (70-80): Meets the course requirements in every respect
- D (60-70): Worthy of credit, even though it fails to meet course requirements fully
- F (0-60): Work was not completed

Incompletes

A grade of incomplete (“I”) is given only in a genuine emergency, and only for work which is due during the last two weeks of the course. You must make arrangements with the instructor for an incomplete before the last day of class.

Assignments

In order to receive credit for an assignment, you must turn in all required drafts and revisions. A paper copy of each assignment is due in class on the date specified—you have to plan ahead to meet this requirement. Late work will not be accepted; neither will electronic submissions

unless otherwise specified. A late assignment will receive an automatic grade of 0/“F” unless you provide legitimate documentation from a doctor or other authority that you absolutely could not be in class. Back up your work on your computer in case assignments get lost.

Attendance policy

It is your responsibility to be here. I do not directly give an attendance grade and I may not take a formal roll-call for every single meeting, but frequent absence will be noticeable in a class this small and may adversely affect your participation grade. Be advised as well that there will be in-class exercises, assignments and activities in this course that you will miss if you are absent. Also, the final exam is a cumulative test of your engagement in the class and will be very difficult to pass if you do not faithfully attend. If you miss class for any reason, please ask a classmate rather than the instructor for notes or a summary. If illness or other problems require you to miss more than a normal amount of class (2 or 3 meetings), please let me know. Finally, be on time to class—lateness is highly disruptive and it will affect your participation grade.

Student conduct

Please do not engage in behavior that disrupts the learning environment for others. This includes any behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either student learning or my ability to teach. Students responsible for such behavior may be asked to cancel their registration (or have their registration canceled).

In order to avoid disruptions, please observe the following policies: 1. Turn cell phones off and put them away before coming to class. 2. During class, your attention should be directed toward whomever is speaking or to your assigned task; this means no talking to your neighbor, no texting, no cross-word puzzling, etc. 3. I strongly discourage use of laptops during class time as they tend to isolate the user; if you have a pressing need to use one, come and talk to me about it. 4. During classroom discussions, robust debate and the voicing of all opinions are encouraged, but avoid abusive speech, personal attacks and generally offensive language.

Contact

The best way to contact me with questions or concerns about the course is to come to my office hours. If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, please let me know so that we can arrange to meet at another time. Feel free to email me with brief, fact-based questions, but please allow 24 hours for a response. Don't rely on email—face-to-face communication is best.

Use of computers

All workshop and revised drafts of major assignments must be done on a word processor. Students can use the University's public computer labs, including the ones in Wilson, Walter, and McGrath Libraries. No fee is charged, except to use lab printers. Students may also use one of the sixteen Macs in the Center for Writing in 15 Nicholson. University Technology Training Center (<http://uttc.umn.edu/training/>) schedules regular training sessions. Students who think that computer access will present a serious difficulty should talk to the instructor immediately.

Students with disabilities

Any student with a documented disability condition who needs to arrange accommodations should contact the instructor and Disability Services (626-1333) at the beginning of the semester.

Scholastic dishonesty

The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows: “Scholastic Dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.”

(<http://advisingtools.class.umn.edu/cgep/studentconduct.html>)

Plagiarism, representing someone else’s intellectual work as your own, will result in a failing for the assignment, and may result in a failing grade for the course. Plagiarism can include submitting a paper: 1. written by means of inappropriate collaboration; 2. written by you for another course, submitted without the permission of both instructors; 3. purchased, downloaded, or cut and pasted from the Internet; 4. that fails to properly acknowledge its sources through standard citations.

Student writing support

Students can get one-to-one-consultations on any course paper or writing project at Student Writing Support. Student Writing Support has several campus locations, including the main location in 15 Nicholson Hall. See <http://writing.umn.edu/sws/index.htm> for details about locations, appointments, and online consultations.

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Schedule of readings and major assignments (subject to change)

T 09/08 – Introductions

W 09/09 – Miller, “What Is Literature?” (.pdf—please print)

1. Ancient epic, modern epic

TH 09/10 – Homer, *The Iliad*, book one (.pdf—please print)

M 09/14 – Logue, *War Music*, pp. 5-59

T 09/15 – Logue, pp. 63-104

W 09/16 – Logue, pp. 104-145

TH 09/17 – Logue, pp. 145-215

2. Classical and early modern drama

M 09/21 – Euripides, *Grief Lessons, Hekabe*, pp. 7-9, 89-128

T 09/22 – Euripides, pp. 129-159
W 09/23 – Euripides, *Hippolytos*, pp. 163-208
TH 09/24 – Euripides, pp. 208-242
M 09/28 – Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, “An Overview,” Act 1
T 09/29 – Shakespeare, Acts 2-3
W 09/30 – Shakespeare, Act 4
TH 10/01 – Shakespeare, Act 5

3. Modern lyric

M 10/05 – Rossetti, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, “Goblin Market”
**Close reading 1 due in class.
T 10/06 – Rossetti, “Dream Land,” “At Home,” “A Triad,” “Remember,” “After Death”
W 10/07 – Rossetti, “An Apple Gathering,” “Winter: My Secret,” “No Thank You,
John,” “Song,” “Up-Hill,” “A Portrait”
TH 10/08 – Dickinson, *Essential Dickinson*, introduction and poems 214, 258, 327, 507,
520, 627, 986
M 10/12 – Dickinson, poems 199, 249, 288, 303, 593, 613, 754, 1732
T 10/13 – Dickinson, poems 185, 216, 315, 435, 449, 501, 632, 712, 1719
W 10/14 – Dickinson, poems 67, 241, 280, 341, 465, 561, 709, 712
TH 10/15 – Boland, *In a Time of Violence*, “I. Writing in a Time of Violence”
**SU 10/18 – At 4:00 PM Anne Carson, poet and our translator of Euripides, will deliver the
Joseph Warren Beach Lecture in the Coffmann Union Theatre, free to the public. Attend and
report for 2 extra credit points. <<http://english.umn.edu/alumni/AnneCarson.html>>
M 10/19 – Boland, “II. Legends”
T 10/20 – Boland, “III. Anna Liffey”
**Essay 1 draft due to peer review partner
W 10/21 – Boland wrap-up
TH 10/22 – **Peer review due (2 copies), partner conference during class time

4. Modern short story

M 10/26 – Hawthorne, *YGB and Other Stories*, “Young Goodman Brown”
**Essay 1 due in class
T 10/27 – Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”
W 10/28 – Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter”
TH 10/29 – Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful”
M 11/02 – Chekhov, *Five Great Short Stories*, “The Black Monk”
T 11/03 – Chekhov, “The House with the Mezzanine”
W 11/04 – Chekhov, “The Peasants,” “Gooseberries”
TH 11/05 – Chekhov, “The Lady with the Toy Dog”

5. Modern novel

M 11/09 – Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 3-55
T 11/10 – Woolf, pp. 55-101
W 11/11 – Woolf, pp. 101-147
TH 11/12 – Woolf, pp. 147-190
M 11/16 – Woolf wrap-up and catch-up day
T 11/17 – Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, pp. 1-27
W 11/18 – Mpe, pp. 27-62
TH 11/19 – Mpe, pp. 63-91
M 11/23 – Mpe, pp. 93-124

**Essay 1 revision due

6. Modern drama

T 11/24 – Screening of *Endgame* from *Beckett on Film*

W 11/25 – Conclude screening of *Endgame* and discussion

TH 11/26 – No class, university holiday

M 11/30 – Beckett, *Endgame* (read whole play)

**Close reading 2 due in class.

T 12/01 – Beckett

W 12/02 – Beckett, *Act Without Words*

TH 12/03 – Nottage, *Ruined*, Introduction and Act 1

M 12/07 – Nottage, Act 2

T 12/08 – Nottage, wrap-up

W 12/09 – Reading TBA

TH 12/10 – Conclusion and course evaluations

M 12/14 – No class, study day

T 12/15 – No class, study day

W 12/16 – No class, study day

**Essay 2 due to piste004@umn.edu by midnight.

**Final exam: Tuesday 12/22, 1:30-3:30, in our regular classroom

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Note on readings and discussions: A proverb says that we should never talk about divisive matters like sex, politics or religion in polite company. However, since great literature is usually about what publicly concerns and privately obsesses us, most of it seems to be about sex, politics and religion. If you are offended by frank portrayals of these topics, another course might be for you. When discussing the portrayals of these topics in the classroom, we will strive to be a polite company by refraining from attacks on the beliefs of individuals or groups and by not using rude, dismissive or hateful language while expressing our own beliefs. Finally, if a specific author's treatment of these or any other issues offends you, keep in mind that the writing skills you will learn in this course will enable you to make clear, logical and eloquent arguments against the position that you reject.

On active reading

There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (1837)

Do not forget that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information.

—Ludwig Wittgenstien, *Zettel* (1970)

Reading a poem or novel or play or story is more like a walk down the street or a dinner with friends than it is like reading anything else—for instance, the business section of the newspaper or a lab report. Literature gives you not just a set of propositions or facts, but an *experience*, and the meaning of the work can be nothing less than the meaning of the experience. How writers construct these experiences will be the question our criticism will ask. That means we have to pay attention not only to what a literary work says, but *how it says it*. You can prime yourself for achieving this kind of criticism through what Emerson calls “creative reading.” A doctrine about how to read creatively would of course be contradictory, but I can give you a few helpful hints.

1. Often, a literary work will begin in confusion, in the middle of things. This is deliberate—it’s not done to condescend to us or make us feel stupid, but rather to alert us that we’re being taken out of the normal world and its logic to another world with new logic. But good literature always teaches us to read it, i.e., always lets us know over the course of its unfolding what its logic is. That means if you’re confused on page one or line one, *keep reading*, very fast if you have to, until you begin to get a sense of the big picture. Then the puzzling little details will begin to fall into place.
2. Look for patterns. Is a word, image, metaphor, event repeated over the course of the work? Are there sets of words, images, metaphors, events that seem to be parallel?
3. Read for feeling. What kinds of emotions are being communicated through the tone of the language—not just through the events described? For instance: are horrible events being represented in a comic tone? Conversely, if the tone is clearly in line with what’s described, how is language used to create the appropriate feeling?
4. Pay attention to what the writer’s trying to tell you about the world outside the text. Read introductions, prefaces, endnotes and footnotes to get filled in on references to history, politics, science, religion, other literature, etc. If you’re reading a newer book without notes or other scholarly apparatus, take advantage of the fact that you’re alive in the Age of Google and do some research on your own. Also—and this is very important—look up *all* unfamiliar words!
5. With literature, there is no reading, only re-reading. This means that, as implied in no. 1 above, you have to get the whole picture before the details make sense. If you have time, re-read the whole text. If you don’t have time to do that, be sure to re-read whatever scenes, passages, poems, etc. that you plan to write about.