

English 200 Reading Literature

Fall 2010
Section 006
TR 1:30-2:45 p.m.
Carr 223

Prof. Jeremy Wells
jwells@allegheny.edu
Office: Oddfellows 235
Office hours: MTW 11 a.m.-1 p.m. or by appt.
Office phone: x4322

This course focuses on the act of *close reading*, that most essential of activities for higher-level literary study. We will read examples of different genres, including short stories, novels, plays, and poetry. We will also read texts representing different historical periods, our earliest being a sonnet from 1595, our most recent a play from 2004. With all texts, however, our goal will be to move beyond comprehension (*What's going on here?*) and evaluation (*Do I like this or not?*) in order to engage in analysis (*How does this text work? How is it put together? Why might its author have made the choices he or she made in terms of language, structure, point of view, tone, etc.? How does it compare to things we've read before? What makes it "literary"? And so forth*). By asking these questions, we will be pursuing the learning goals common to all sections of English 200:

- mastering the basic terms of literary criticism;
- recognizing the conventions of different literary genres;
- formulating and developing interpretive arguments both in writing and in classroom discussion;
- and recognizing the cultural and literary significances of historically underrepresented perspectives and traditions.

While our focus will therefore always be on the act of critical reading, many of our texts will raise additional questions involving social class and spectatorship, giving our course something of a central theme. This is especially true of the four longer texts (the two novels and two plays) that serve as the focal points around which this course is constructed. In all of these texts (and in a few of the poems, too) individuals are continually looking up to or down at others, both literally and figuratively. As readers we must confront whether we share these perspectives or whether our relations to the text are more ironic. *Point of view*—a literary device we would be discussing at some length anyway—becomes a more interesting concept when contemplated in this light. In addition to giving our course a loose theme and making it easier for us to compare what might otherwise seem unrelated texts, my point in drawing attention to issues of class and spectatorship is to give you some sense of what to expect in upper-division English courses, most of which are more focused and more topical than English 200. My not-so-secret agenda, in other words, is to encourage you to take additional courses in English, for in them you will be able to capitalize on the skills you hone in this course.

Required Texts All texts are on order at the Campus Center bookstore. All except for the poetry anthology and the Sara Ruhl collection should be available now (and since we do not read those until later in the semester, we will be fine; I will notify you when the late texts arrive). If you do not already own copies of the texts ordered for this course, buy the editions listed below. If you happen already to own a different edition of a text and do not wish to purchase another, check with me to make sure your edition is acceptable.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner)
Nella Larsen, *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen* (Anchor)
Anton Chekhov, *Plays* (Penguin)
Sara Ruhl, *The Clean House and Other Plays* (Theater Communications Group)
R.S. Gwynn, ed., *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology*, 6th ed. (Penguin Academics)
M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Wadsworth)

Course schedule Tentative and subject to change

- Thu. 8/26 Introduction and Course Overview
- Tue. 8/31 Babel, "My First Goose" (handout)
Essential terms (from Abrams): "narrative" (208), "short story" (331-333), "plot" (265-268), "imagery" (150-152), "figurative language" (118-122)
- Thu. 9/2 Twain, "A True Story . . ."; Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" (handouts)
Essential terms: "ambiguity" (12-13), "character and characterization" (42-44), "irony" (165-168)
See also: "fiction and truth" (116), "realism" (302-303), "local color" (178-179), "antihero" (14)
- Tue. 9/7 Jewett, "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation"; Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (handouts)
Essential terms: "point of view" (271-276), "setting" (330), "atmosphere" (17-18)
See also: "modernism" (201-203), "gothic" (137-138)
- Thu. 9/9 Woolf, "An Unwritten Novel" (handout; paper #1 assignment will be provided today)
Essential terms: "stream of consciousness" (345-346)
- Tue. 9/14 Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, chs. 1-3 (pp. 1-64); **paper #1 due in class**
Essential terms: "novel" (226-233)
- Thu. 9/16 Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, chs. 4-6 (pp. 65-118)
Essential terms: "satire" (320-323)
- Tue. 9/21 Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, chs. 7-9 (pp. 119-189)
Essential terms: "motif and theme" (205)
- Thu. 9/23 Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (cont.)
Essential terms: "allusion" (11-12)
- Tue. 9/28 **Conferences** (Class will not meet as usual. Instead students will sign up to meet briefly with me in my office to discuss their work thus far and, if time permits, the upcoming paper #2.)
- Thu. 9/30 Larsen, *Passing*, part I (pp. 163-208)
- Tue. 10/5 Larsen, *Passing*, part II (pp. 209-241)
- Thu. 10/7 Larsen, *Passing*, part III (pp. 242-275)
- Tue. 10/12 *Fall Break: Class does not meet*
- Thu. 10/14 Cullen, "Heritage" (handout), "Incident," "Yet Do I Marvel" (Longman); Toomer, "Georgia Dusk" (Longman); Hughes, "Dream Boogie," "Theme for English B," "The Weary Blues" (Longman), "Johannesburg Mines" (handout)
See also: "Harlem Renaissance" (140)
- Fri. 10/15 **Paper #2 due in my dept. box (Oddfellows 205) by 12 p.m.**
- Tue. 10/19 **Midterm Exam**
- Thu. 10/21 Spenser, "Amoretti: Sonnet 75"; Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book"; Keats, "On Reading Chapman's Homer"; Dickinson, "Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant"; Moore, "Poetry"; Ferlinghetti, "A Coney Island of the Mind, #15"; Ashberry, "Paradoxes and Oxymorons"; Heaney, "Digging"; Tate, "Teaching the Ape to Write Poems"; Alvarez, "Bilingual Sestina" (Longman)
Essential terms: "paradox" (239)
See also: "lyric" (179-180), "sestina" (343)
- Tue. 10/26 Pope, from *An Essay on Criticism*; Blake, "The Tyger"; Browning, "My Last Duchess"; Tennyson, "The Eagle"; Brooks, "We Real Cool" (Longman)
Essential terms: "meter" (194-199), "rhyme" (316-318), "alliteration" (10), "stanza" (340-343)
See also: "prosody" (289), "euphony and cacophony" (105), "dramatic monologue" (85-86), "refrain" (306)

- Thu. 10/28 Shakespeare, "Sonnet 130"; Donne, "Holy Sonnet 10"; Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, 43; Millay, "Oh, Oh, You Will Be Sorry for that Word"; Cummings, "pity this busy monster, manunkind"; Somer, "Women Bathing at Bergen-Belsen" (Longman)
Essential terms: "sonnet" (336-337)
See also: "conceit" (52-54)
- Tue. 11/2 Arnold, "Dover Beach"; Yeats, "The Second Coming"; Brooks, "the mother"; Plath, "Daddy"
Essential terms: "symbol" (358-361)
- Thu. 11/4 *Reading day: Class does not meet*
- Tue. 11/9 Whitman, "A Noiseless Patient Spider"; Williams, "The Last Words of My Dying Grandmother"; Bishop, "The Fish"; Ginsburg, "A Supermarket in California"
Essential terms: "free verse" (129)
- Thu. 11/11 Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
- Fri. 11/12 **Paper #3 due in my dept. box by 12 p.m.**
- Tue. 11/16 Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, acts I-II (pp. 281-317)
Essential terms: "drama" (84-85), "act and scene" (3)
- Thu. 11/18 Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, acts III-IV (pp. 318-346)
Essential terms: "comedy" (48-51), "tragedy" (370-374)
- Tue. 11/23 Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* (cont.: discuss Playshop Theatre production)
The Playshop Theatre will perform the play on Nov. 18, 19, 20, and 21. You must attend one of these performances.
- Thu. 11/25 *Thanksgiving Break: Class does not meet*
- Tue. 11/30 Ruhl, *The Clean House* (reading assignments TBA)
- Thu. 12/2 Ruhl, *The Clean House*
- Tue. 12/7 Ruhl, *The Clean House*
- Thu. 12/9 Conclusion; **paper #4 due in class**
- Wed. 12/15 **Final Exam (2 p.m.)**

Course policies and procedures

Contacting me In addition to my regular office hours (MTW 11 a.m.-1 p.m.), I am available for appointments; you will need to e-mail or talk to me before or after class to arrange one. I tend to do most of my e-mailing in the morning and early afternoon. I cannot be counted upon to check e-mail during the evening, though, so if you're wanting to correspond about an upcoming paper, do not wait until the evening before it's due to contact me.

Readings You should complete the assigned reading before each class and be ready to discuss it. Longer readings are divided into sections, and you are responsible only for those pages assigned for that day.

To borrow a line from a great teacher of mine, you should also think of reading as a contact sport. Active reading requires writing, so be sure to mark your text, noting specific passages, questions, etc. you would like to discuss in class.

Attendance and participation The success of the course depends on the enthusiastic participation of each and every member. I thus expect you to arrive to every class having completed the assigned reading and prepared yourself to contribute to class discussion. Come with responses to the questions I may have posed during the class before. Come also with questions and comments of your own—and, more generally, with a willingness to involve yourself in the give-and-take of that day's discussion. I do a fair amount of preparation to ensure productive

discussions, but my favorite classes are inevitably those that assume lives of their own (which is to say, those in which students take the lead and work collaboratively to address the issues they find most compelling).

You may wish to e-mail or meet with me before or after class if there are specific issues you would like to discuss. I consider these forms of participation, too, though they cannot entirely substitute for active in-class participation.

Your participation grade (15% of your final grade) will reflect how well you make these contributions. The student who does not miss class and comes always prepared, always willing to contribute insights of his or her own, and always willing to respond thoughtfully to the questions and comments of others will receive a grade in the "A" range. The student who does not miss class but contributes less frequently and/or in a less clearly prepared manner will receive a "B." The student who misses class routinely (three or four unexcused absences) will receive a "C," as will the student who shows up but participates infrequently and/or unpreparedly. The student who receives a "D" participation grade likely has five unexcused absences. The student who has six or more unexcused absences simply fails the course.

Excused absences generally involve family emergencies or illness. In the case of illness, you are required to provide a doctor's note. Should you miss class for any reason, you are responsible for knowing what went on, including any changes to the syllabus or revisions to assignments.

Informal assignments I will occasionally ask you to prepare for class by doing a bit of writing and/or research. When I do, I will collect these and return them to you without comments but with a "check," "minus," or "plus" grade to indicate whether the work has been done adequately, inadequately, or impressively. Consistently impressive work will earn you an "A," consistently inadequate or incomplete work a "D" or "F." "B" work will vary between adequate and impressive. "C" work will be for the most part adequate. (5% of your final grade).

Papers You will write four papers for this course, the first of which (5% of your final grade) will be informal, the remaining three of which (15% each) will be formal. We will discuss later what constitutes a successful formal paper, and I will provide you a handout that outlines my expectations and explains what in my book separates "A" from "B" work, etc. The handout for paper #1 will arrive the class before it's due. Handouts for the other papers will arrive at least two weeks before their due dates.

Exams You will take a midterm as well as a final exam. Each will constitute 15% of your final grade. I will use these to test whether you have been keeping up with the assigned reading, including the entries from Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* I have defined as "essential." I will provide you a better sense of what to expect on each exam well in advance of that day you take it.

Plagiarism Article III, section 3 of the Allegheny College Honor Code defines plagiarism as "using the ideas or words of another without citing the sources from which the ideas or words are taken." We will devote a portion of an upcoming class to discussing plagiarism and how to avoid it. Know now simply that I take it very seriously, that it will result in an "F" for the course, and that I will refer any instance of it to the Honor Committee.

Grading Your grade for the course will be computed as follows.

Participation	15%	Paper #3	15%
Informal Assignments.....	5%	Paper #4.....	15%
Paper #1.....	5%	Midterm.....	15%
Paper #2.....	15%	Final Exam.....	15%

Cell phones and other noisemakers Let us remind each other to silence these before class begins. My son currently has mine set to play a heavy metal guitar riff when a call comes in. No one wants to hear that in the midst of a vigorous discussion of an Elizabeth Barrett Browning poem.