

English 389R Popular Literature and the Academy
Spring 2013
MW 2:30-4:10

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Required Texts: Austen, *Northanger Abbey*; Carey, *UnWritten*; Hammett, *Red Harvest*; Kerouac, *On The Road*; Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*; Willingham, *Fables Vol. 1: Legends in Exile*; plus excerpts from *Twilight* and *Hunger Games*, and one or two films

Suggested Texts: The MLA Handbook

Objectives: This course is designed to help you practice and develop your skills in reading, understanding, and writing about fiction. Through the chosen texts, you will learn the many different ways of reading and interpreting works of literature as well as other types of texts, like film and essay. We will discuss the texts in terms of their rhetorical arguments, their historical context, and readers' responses to them. The course material is designed around the complex question of how the "Academy" determines which works are worthy of intellectual study and which are not. Since this is an English class, we are primarily concerned with text-based art forms, but the question is relevant to many disciplines in the Humanities. Is it possible for a text with widespread popularity and appeal to be or become "serious" literature? Can young adult literature be considered serious? What makes one book more artistic than another? Maybe you have participated in a conversation in which someone disparaged a popular book, film, or song, pointing out its inferiority to the "Classics" or to an obscure film with subtitles. Perhaps you have even looked down upon certain works you considered less intelligent or not "deep" enough. In this course, we will read a variety of works that either are now or were in their time deemed less worthy than more "high brow" literature: We will read and analyze these texts in terms of their themes/arguments, and in addition, we will discuss some of the criteria that go into making such a judgment.

Attendance: Because understanding the literature we read is reliant upon participation in active discussions, attendance is an important aspect of this class. **Therefore you will be allowed a maximum of two absences.** Your final grade will drop three points for each absence after the second. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.

Deadlines for Assignments: Assignments are due on Blackboard by the time and date specified on the itinerary. Late assignments will drop three points for every day they are late.

Plagiarism: All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented using MLA format. Remember that you are to adhere to the Oxford College Honor Code and that your signature on any assignment submitted in this class indicates that you have neither given nor received unauthorized information on the work. You can find a copy of the Honor Code in the Oxford Catalog. Remember that it is your responsibility to understand the Code and what constitutes plagiarism.

Requirements and Grading: All work will be graded and every assignment will count towards the final grade. I grade on a plus/minus scale. Your final grade for this course will be figured as follows:

15%	Discussion Posts and Leading Discussion	10%	Leading Discussion
20%	4 RAs	15%	Final Exam
40%	2 5-7 page papers (20% each)		

Discussion Posts: You should post to the Blackboard Discussion Lists by midnight the day before class on the reading for that class. You will use the following format for your posts:

SUBJECT: State at least two subjects (or motifs) that are dealt with in the reading. These should be as specific as possible and preferably stated as a phrase rather than a single word. For example, *heroism* would not be specific enough, but *the relationship between sacrifice and heroism* would be. Remember that most texts are dealing with multiple subjects at a time.

QUESTION: Choose one of your subjects above and restate it as a question about the author. For example, "What is Rowling saying about the relationship between sacrifice and heroism in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*?"

THEME: Answer your question about the author and the subject in a complete sentence. This is the theme of the work. Just as a text often has many subjects, it may also have multiple themes.

QUOTATION/EXAMPLE: Give a quotation or specific example from the text that illustrates this theme.

EXPLANATION: Explain in 4-7 sentences how that quotation or example expresses the author's theme. Remember that we don't all see the same things in quotations; for that reason, this explanation is both the most essential and the most interesting part of the post. This is where your argument is.

Assuming you post for every reading assignment according to the guidelines and assuming you are starting at 100%, you will be marked down by 3% for every post you skip or for which you miss the deadline (12am the night before the assignment should be read). At the end of the semester, you will turn in a one-page paper that states your grade based on these numbers and argues why you deserve this grade, a lower grade, or a higher grade based on the quality of your posts.

Leading Discussion: You will be asked to lead discussion with a partner for the first 30 minutes of class two times during the semester. I will post a sign-up sheet here. Your job for this class period will be to read the posts by other students and use them to guide class conversation. You will turn in to me right before class (either by email or in hard copy) a set of discussion questions based both on the posts and on our class conversations about criteria for judging Literature. Your grade will be based on the quality of your questions and on your ability to keep class discussion running smoothly.

Rhetorical Analyses: These are 2 page analyses of the literature. You must stay within the page limit and **USE NO OTHER SOURCES**. This means you should not quote another source or even consult any sources. These are to give you practice analyzing the literature **ON YOUR OWN**. You should write on the assignment due for the day you turn in your RA. Be careful not to summarize in these papers. To analyze the literature, you must have a thesis that answers a *question at issue* about the text. The Discussion Posts are designed to help you narrow your topics. You should consider these papers an extension of the posts, with 3 or more quotations/examples with full explanations. You will turn these in on Blackboard by attaching either a .pdf or .doc file. There will be many possible due dates for the 4 RAs. You can choose which books you'd like to write on and turn your RAs on the due dates listed for each book. You must turn in at least 2 of your 4 RAs before Spring Break.

Long Papers: These are 5-6 page papers on the literature. We will come up with specific questions for these papers as a class, and they will focus on one text in particular. For these papers, you may consult reliable academic sources and cite them in your writing. These too will be turned in on Blackboard.

Final Exam: The exam is scheduled for Monday, May 6 from 2-5. Please do not make plans to travel before this time.

Other Things to Know:

No laptop computers. Tablets are okay because they do not interrupt face to face conversation. Silence cell phones. Throw nothing away.

If I am late and there is no notice at the door, you should wait fifteen minutes before leaving. Prepare the next day's assignments for the next meeting.

I reserve the right to amend or modify anything on this statement by means of future hand-outs

Readings and Assignments

1/16

Introduction

Begin reading *Northanger Abbey*. Because it is a long weekend, you should be able to read to the end of Volume I. Pay close attention to the irony. Austen is at her most sardonic in this book.

1/23

Austen, Volume I

1/28-1/30

Austen Volume II

RA due by 11:59pm on 1/29

2/4-2/6

Hammett

2/11-2/13

Hammett

RA due by 11:59pm on 2/12

2/18-2/20

Kerouac

2/25-2/27

Kerouac

RA due by 11:59pm on 2/26

3/4-3/6

Paper 1 draft due by 11:59pm on 3/3

Rowling

RA due by 11:59pm on 3/5

3/11-3/13

SPRING BREAK

3/18-3/20

Rowling

Paper 1 due by 11:59 on 3/19

3/25-3/27

3/25: excerpts from *Twilight*

RA due by 11:59pm on 3/24

3/27: excerpts from *Hunger Games*

RA due by 11:59pm on 3/26

4/1-4/3

UnWritten

4/8-4/10

UnWritten

RA due by 11:59pm on 4/9

4/15-4/17

Fables

4/22-4/24

Fables

RA due by 11:59pm on 4/23

4/29 Paper 2 due by 11:59pm on 4/28

5/6 FINAL EXAM 2:00-5:00