

## English 1115 WA: Foundations of Literary Study

Course Location: RC1002  
Class Times: WF10:00-11:30

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### Instructor Information

Instructor: J.M. Richardson  
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### Course Description/Overview

An introduction to literary study, focusing on texts from the major genres (drama, poetry, prose) within their historical and cultural contexts. Emphasis will be given to the development of skills in critical analysis, research, writing, and documentation. This course is intended to provide students with the analytical, research, and writing skills needed to succeed in literary studies at the university level.

### Course Objectives and/or Learner Outcomes

- Think independently and critically about literature and the issues raised by texts
- Read texts of all kinds critically, and assess their rhetorical, ideological and aesthetic strategies.
- Explain how a text is produced by, and produces, its historical and/or cultural contexts
- explain the role of literature in articulating and creating categories of identity.

- analyze texts from a variety of theoretical perspectives.
- identify the conventions of a variety of genres, both general (such as poetry) and specific (such as the sonnet), and to identify ways in which individual texts work within, or expand the definitions of, that genre.
- identify and assess the social, environmental and ethical themes presented in texts
- analyze specific literary devices and explain how those devices contribute to the meaning of a literary text. These will include scansion and different types of figurative language, among others.
- write well (grammatically correct, clear, effective prose).
- communicate ideas effectively and coherently, in both the persuasive essay, and a variety of other forms.
- use library resources to research a topic and use what they discover to illuminate a text
- apply their knowledge of how literature works to their own writing.

## Course Resources

### Required Course Text(s)

- Kennedy, X.J. and Dana Gioia, eds. *Backpack Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*, 5th edition.
- Booth, Wayne C., et al. *The Craft of Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition
- Shakespeare, W. *Hamlet*. Signet edition

### Course Schedule

**Note:** This schedule is subject to revision (e.g., texts may be added or subtracted; the order of topics/texts covered may be altered if the need arises; instruction aspects of writing may well occur in classes other than those I have set aside for it). I may also introduce and discuss texts that you will not be responsible for on the final exam. In the schedule below, *BL*=*Backpack Literature* and *CR*=*Craft of Research*

Weeks 1-2 (January 4-15): Introduction to course; Introduction to prose fiction; Updike's "A&P" (*BL* 18ff)

Weeks 3-4 (Jan. 18-29): MLA formatting (*BL* 1155ff); Writing instruction (*CR* chapters 3-6, *BL* chapter 29); Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (*BL* 215ff)

Week 5 (Feb. 1-5): "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Feb. 5: Short essay due

Week 6 (Feb 8-12): Writing Instruction (*BL* chapter 30 and *CR* chapters 16 and 17)

Week 7 (Feb. 22-26): Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" (*BL* 235ff).

Feb. 25: Group discussion assignment

Week 8 (Feb. 29-March 4): “The Lottery” and more discussion of the poems used in the group discussion assignment.

March 4: Final Drop Date (without academic penalty)

Weeks 9-10 (March 7-18): More discussion of the poems used in the group discussion assignment

March 18: Long essay due

Week 11 (March 21-25): *Hamlet*

Week 12: (March 28-April 1): *Hamlet*

### Assignments and Evaluation

- The assignments for this course will include a major research essay (7 pages long in a font like Times New Roman 12); one discussion assignment which will also have a written component; and one smaller essay assignment. We may also discuss some of the questions that follow each text in *Backpack Literature*. Even though those questions will not be formal, graded assignments, you are well-advised to look at them, think about them, and try to come up with persuasive answers. Feel free to consult me and/or the T.A. for guidance with those questions.

Assignment	Due date	Value	Length
Shorter Assignment	Feb. 5	20%	3 pages in a font like Times New Roman 12
Long Research Essay	March 18	30%	7 pages in a font like Times New Roman 12
Final Exam	TBA	40%	3 hours
Group Discussion Assignment	Feb. 26	10%	2 pages plus participation in discussion
Total		100%	

## Assignment Policies

- All assignments, unless otherwise specified, are individual assignments and cannot be completed collaboratively.
- Assignments are due by 4:30pm on the dates indicated. If you do not hand in your paper in class, have it date stamped by security and submit it either to the English department office (RB3029), or to the instructor's office.
- If you require an extension, you must ask for one BEFORE the due date and use my Extension Request Form (available on request).
- Policy concerning late assignments: Deadlines for assignments should be adhered to strictly. Unless extensions have been granted, the grades of late assignments will be reduced by 1/3 grade (e.g., from B to B-) on the day after the due date and by an additional 1/3 grade for each subsequent three-day period until the assignments are turned in.
- The final exam must be written on the date scheduled, so do not make travel plans for the exam period until the exam schedule is posted.
- All assignments must be in MLA format, double spaced, with 1" margins, and in 12 point font.
- Exceptions to these policies are allowed only with a doctor's note or other appropriate documentation.

## Details of Assignments

For any of these assignments, you may well find it helpful to consult with me and/or the TA while you are working on it.

1. Major Paper, worth 30% of the final grade: Write a 7-page research paper on one of the topics below. Follow the MLA format. Due date is March 18. N.B. these are topics requiring research. Feel free to discuss the progress of your thinking and writing with me or with the T.A.

1. Discuss in detail the treatment of women in at least two works we have studied this term. Things you could consider include whether the writer is able to create convincing female characters; how these women are regarded and treated in the society created (or responded to) by the writer; whether or not the writer reflects or challenges the attitudes of his/her own society towards women, etc. (e.g., you could compare the heroic chivalric fantasy of Sammy in "A&P" with the attitudes to women found in Renaissance sonnets). **OR** You could focus on one specific problem relating to female characters in one or more works (e.g., how the medical profession treats women in "The Yellow Wallpaper"; specific familial and societal pressures on women in, e.g., *Hamlet*)

2. At the end of *Hamlet*, Fortinbras says of Hamlet that “he was likely, had he been put on,/To have proved most royal” (5.2.398-399). Would Hamlet have made a good king? Consider the king’s responsibilities, functions, duties, rights, privileges, etc. as well as the character traits desirable in a king in Shakespeare’s day. You might even want to compare Hamlet with Claudius in this respect, since the play allows us to see Claudius in action as a king (as well as his roles of husband and stepfather)

3. Discuss in detail theatricality of *Hamlet*. You will want or need to provide a working definition of “theatricality” for purposes of your paper, but what I have in mind for discussion is the way in which the dramatist exploits the physical resources of his theatre and the structure of the play itself to make a strong impression on his audience (or to control or manipulate the audience)—to “wow” them, to stir them up, to move them to pity, fear, empathy, scorn, etc. Assess the extent to which purely “theatrical” elements of the play contributes to the reinforcement or development of character, theme, atmosphere, etc. **OR** Hamlet, a fictional character created by the words of the text plus the costume, voice, and gestures of an actor, claims to “have that within which passes show” (1.2.85), i.e., which surpasses, goes deeper, than what an actor can represent using the resources of the theatre. He is a fictional character who claims to go beyond mere fiction. Moments like this are said to be “metatheatrical” and when they occur the play, or the playwright, is commenting on itself and its art. There are many metatheatrical moments in the play (e.g., Polonius was an actor when he was young; Hamlet discusses and critiques drama with the players, scripts some new lines to be inserted into the play they put on for the royal court; the play-within-the-play, etc.). Discuss in detail what such metatheatricality contributes to the play itself. You will probably want to focus on just one or two examples and examine them in detail. Feel free to discuss the progress of your thinking and writing with me or with the T.A.

4. Pick a theme, issue, character type, or motif that you think plays a significant part in two of the works studied this term and analyze the ways it is handled by the relevant writers. For example, you could examine social rites and rituals (e.g., the successfully executed horrific ritual in “The Lottery” vs the “maimed rites” in *Hamlet*—weddings, funerals, transfers of political power are all problematic in this play); or the use and abuse of power or authority (parental, political, sexual, economic, etc.); or the representation of “female madness” in *Hamlet* and “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

5. In a number of the works we have studied, words fail, for a variety of reasons, to prevail or to accomplish what the speaker wants them to. Discuss failures of communication in two of the works we have studied. You should consider such things as whether the failure of communication results from the characters’ speaking from completely different sets of assumptions and knowledge or whether it is deliberately engineered by one or more characters, what the consequences of the failed communication are, how, if at all, successful communication is re-established, etc. How does the motif of failed communication function in the works you have selected (in terms of plot development, character, theme, etc.)?

**N.B.** If you wish to write on some other topic of your own devising, please consult me and the T.A. Also, you should note that the reading list on the course outline is the minimum amount you should read of the various authors. You will be able to write a more persuasive and better-informed essay if you read more of the authors' works as well as a fair amount of the secondary literature.

**2. Short Assignment worth 20%: Do one of the following. Your responses should be about 3 pages long. Due date: Feb. 5.**

1. Read the articles by Maynard Mack, Robert Ornstein, Carolyn Heilbrun, and Catherine Belsey in the Signet edition of *Hamlet* and choose one of these articles as your focus for this assignment. Then do one of the following options. 1) Write an account and assessment of the article's discussion of a major scene or character in the play. 2) Discuss the article's suggestions of a major theme or motif in the play. Is the claim credible? What sort of evidence and arguments does the author advance to support the claim? What further evidence can you find in the play to either support or contest the claim? 3) Discuss a specific point or claim that the article's author makes; for instance, Belsey argues that "Revenge exists in the margin between justice and crime" (p. 237); Heilbrun argues that one quality that is found in virtually "every speech of Gertrude's in the play,...is the ability to see reality clearly, and to express it" (p.230); Ornstein says that Hamlet is "our moral interpreter" and that "he is the voice of ethical sensibility in a sophisticated, courtly milieu" (p. 216); Ornstein also says that "Life is mysterious and unpredictable in *Hamlet*. Appearances are deceptive, little is what it seems to be, and no man can foresee the consequences of his acts" (p. 217); Mack argues that "every major personage in the tragedy is a player in some sense" (p. 203) and that the world of this play "reverberates with questions, anguished, meditative, alarmed" (p. 194). With these quotations, or another that you may choose to discuss, you will need to consider the context in which the article's author makes the statement, how accurate the statement is in that context and whether it can be extended to other parts of the play, what evidence he/she brings to bear in his/her discussion, and what other evidence both for and against his/her suggestions can be found in the play.

2. Imagine a dialogue between or among characters from two or more of the works on the syllabus and either reproduce this dialogue or report back on it. What sorts of things do these characters talk about? Are they in fundamental agreement on things or are they radically opposed to one another? What conclusions, if any, do they reach? For example, you could imagine a very interesting discussion between Ophelia or Gertrude (*Hamlet*) and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" or of the Duchess in "My Last Duchess". Sammy ("A&P") and Hamlet might even have things to say to each other.

3. Write a short essay in which you review a scholarly article from a journal, or a section from a book, about one of the works in the course. Provide complete documentation for the item you choose, using the MLA format. You should assume that your readers have read the primary texts, but not that they have read the article or part of book that you are discussing. Therefore you will need to give them an adequate account of what the article says as well as an assessment of its relative strengths and weaknesses. In assessing its relative strengths and weaknesses, you should focus the discussion by indicating how much the article or section helped you to understand the work in question and why. Would you recommend it to your fellow students to read? Make sure that you choose something you can understand fully. This assignment will require you to become familiar with the library and how to use it efficiently; specifically, you will need to become familiar with the library's journal holdings (both electronic and hard copy collections) and with the use of print and online bibliographies. Feel free to discuss this assignment with me and/or the TA.

Just for clarification about what exactly this topic entails. All you do is choose one scholarly discussion (that you can understand), of some aspect of one of the works on the syllabus. You do not critique the short story, play, or poem for this assignment (although you can in the longer essay). **You do, however, assume** that the person reading your short critique is familiar with the relevant short story, play or poem (they are known as the "primary texts" while the articles are known as the "secondary texts"). **You do not assume** that your reader is familiar with the article you are critiquing, nor that your reader interprets the primary text in the same way that you or the article's author does. After all, you may want to read *Hamlet* as a play about the corrosive effects of the desire for revenge while someone else may see it as a play about the psychological dynamics of the play's royal family (as, for instance in Olivier's film version. For purposes of this assignment, I am using the term "article" in a fairly generous sense to allow for chapters or parts of chapters in books about the writers covered by the assignment. So, if you are looking, e.g., at a book on Shakespeare and happen to find a chapter or part of a chapter that really clarifies some things for you with respect to *Hamlet*, for instance, feel free to use that for your essay instead of an article from a journal such as *Shakespeare Quarterly* or *Renaissance Drama*. Try to keep the focus on how, and how much, the item you appraise helps you to make sense of the play in question.

Since many articles are lengthy and make a number of claims or points, a perfectly acceptable variation on this option is to focus on a specific point or claim that the article's author makes. You will need to consider the context in which the article's author makes the point, how accurate the claim is in that context and whether it can be extended to other parts of the work, what evidence he/she brings to bear in his/her discussion, and what other evidence both for and against his/her suggestions can be found in the work. This is, of course, a version of option 3 in question 1, above.

### **3. Journal/Group Discussion Assignment, worth 10% of the final grade. Due date: Feb. 26.**

There will be one class in which students will divide themselves up into groups of five or six in order to discuss issues which arise from the texts. A signup sheet will be passed around at least one week in advance so that students may choose one specific text to analyze. On the date that the analysis is due, students are required to bring to class two copies of a short paper (a couple of pages) which records their interpretations of the selection chosen. One copy of the paper will be handed in at the start of the class and students will retain the other copy to aid them in the ensuing discussion. They will function as evidence that students have prepared to participate in the discussions. Students who come to those classes without their papers will lose the term marks correlated with those discussions.

#### **GUIDELINES**

1. Read all the texts to be dealt with in this assignment, and sign up for the text you would like to discuss.
2. You may choose to focus on any aspect of the text. You may examine the literary and rhetorical techniques employed by the author and/or the content of the text. Base at least part of your response on your own insights into the text. Be sure to make appropriate and effective use of examples and quotations from the text to support your thoughts.
3. Bring to class **two** copies of a short paper which records your interpretations of the selection chosen.
4. Students will then break up into small groups and to participate in a discussion by listening to each other's thoughts, by asking questions, making comments and offering criticisms that will contribute to the larger class discussion. One group member will record the group's collective thoughts.
5. The class will reassemble and each group will present a few of the points introduced in smaller groups, to the class for discussion.

#### **Texts to choose from:**

Robert Browning: "My Last Duchess" (*BL* 373)  
 Anne Bradstreet: "The Author to her Book" (*BL* 382)  
 William Shakespeare: Sonnet 18 (*BL* 448)  
 William Shakespeare: Sonnet 116 (*BL* 501)  
 William Shakespeare: Sonnet 130 (*BL* 614)  
 John Donne: "Batter my heart..." (*BL* 405)

**NOTE: I may later provide other materials, such as bibliographies for some of the authors/texts. If so, I will probably either provide them in hard copy, or by email.**

**FINAL EXAMINATION: Worth 40% of the final grade.**



Part of your final exam will be a poem for you to analyse, as you did for the group discussion assignment. You can however do a bit of prepping for this section. **Two** of the following four poems will be on the exam, and you will be asked to analyse **one** of them: “London” by William Blake (p.422); “Facebook Sonnet” by Sherman Alexie (p.504); “We Wear the Mask” by Paul Laurence Dunbar (p.507); and “When I consider how my light is spent” by John Milton (p.604). The Milton poem is often called “On his blindness.”

Your textbook gives you some information about Sherman Alexie on page 246.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was an African-American poet, novelist, and playwright whose parents were slaves in Kentucky before the American Civil War. Dunbar began publishing poetry at the age of 16.

William Blake (1757-1827), was an English poet, painter, and printmaker and an important figure in the English Romantic age. “London” is part of a collection called *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and is from the experience section. Pages 423-424 give some assistance in interpreting the poem.

John Milton (1608-1674) was an English puritan poet best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), on the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. During the interregnum Milton had a fairly major position in the government of Oliver Cromwell. He became completely blind by 1654 and was forced to dictate most of his major works.

The exam is structured as follows. It is in three parts.

### **PART A (30 marks)**

The instructions read: Place two (2) of the following passages in context, and discuss the function and significance of each of these two within its context. Take into account such things as the passages’ contribution to theme, character, and plot, as well as any notable figures of speech, images, phrasing, pauses, etc. There are 12 quotations, of which you deal with two.

### **PART B (40 marks)**

The instructions read: Write a well-organized essay to answer ONE (1) of the following questions. Be as specific and precise as possible in your answers (e.g. provide specific and concrete examples to support your points and your claims; avoid unsubstantiated generalizations). There are eleven questions, of which you do one.

### **PART C (30 marks)**

The instructions read: Write an essay that performs a close reading/analysis of ONE of the following poems. You can comment on such things as themes, imagery, form,

diction (choice of words), meter, location of pauses (both major and minor ones) and the effects these have. There are two poems, of which you do one.

### **Marking Standards**

All assignments will be marked in accordance with the English Department Marking Standards.

### **Collaboration/Plagiarism Rules**

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's words and/or ideas. Not acknowledging your debt to the ideas of a secondary source, failing to use quotation marks when you are quoting directly, buying essays from essay banks, copying another student's work, or working together on an individual assignment, all constitute plagiarism. Resubmitting material you've submitted to another course is also academic dishonesty. All plagiarized work (in whole or in part) and other forms of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean, who is responsible for judging academic misconduct and imposing penalties. The minimum penalty for academic misconduct is a 0 on the assignment in question. It might also be subject to more severe academic penalties. See the Code of Student Behaviour.

### **Course Policies**

In order to keep the environment as conducive to learning as possible, students are expected to attend class regularly, and behave in a respectful and professional manner. All work is to be done individually, not collaboratively (except in the case of shorter assignment, option three).

### **University Policies**

- Students in this course are expected to conform to the Code of Student Behaviour:
- Lakehead University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the course.

This course outline is available online through the English Department homepage.