

English 250: The Art of Literature

Instructor:

Office:

Office Hours:

Course Description: This nonmajors' course focuses on literature's interaction with the fine arts (including painting and sculpture, film, theater, music, and dance) as they are traditionally defined. The course includes two parts: in the first half of the course, we will consider the ways that different artistic and literary forms treat a single subject—the Classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. We will focus on developing a vocabulary with which to discuss literary works in different genres (poetry, fiction, and drama) and on considering the relevance of this vocabulary to other artistic genres and media. During the second half of the semester, we will focus more specifically on the interdependence and mutual influence of the various arts in a range of periods (including modernism, when that influence led to multidisciplinary artistic productions) and genres (including the graphic novel). Throughout the course, we will consider the features that literature and the “fine” arts share as well as the ways these modes are distinctive and how they can inform (and have informed) each other. By the end of the course, you should have a greater understanding and appreciation of the relation between a range of artistic forms and genres.

Student Learning Outcomes:

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *use critical and practical concepts to analyze a range of genres and works (CO7)
- *compose well-supported and coherent interpretative analyses of individual literary works in relation to works in other artistic media (CO1)
- *articulate the relation and differences between different artistic media and literary works (CO7)
- *critically evaluate creative performances and adaptations of literary works, including theatrical performances, film performances, and musical adaptations (CO7)
- *compose an original creative literary work that draws on and/or adapts elements of a work in another art form (CO7)

Core Objectives:

This course develops CORE OBJECTIVE 1 – Effective Composition and Communication, which stipulates that students be able to compose written, oral, visual, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly professional, and creative purposes.

This course satisfies CORE OBJECTIVE 7 – Artistic Composition, Interpretation, & Expression, which stipulates that students apply techniques of critical analysis to study and interpret artistic works in the context of culture, society, and individual identity.

Required Texts:

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*
Chevalier, Tracy. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*
Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*
Gardner, Janet. *Writing About Literature*.
Kennedy, X. J., et al. *Handbook of Literary Terms*, 2d edn.
Orr, Gregory. *Orpheus and Eurydice: A Lyric Sequence*
Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice*.
Rushdie, Salman. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*
Tretheway, Natasha. *Native Guard*.

In addition, shorter readings will be available through WebCampus (<https://wcl.unr.edu/>). You must bring all assigned readings to class, but you may bring an electronic device to access WebCampus readings. Please do not attempt to read assigned texts on your phone.

Course Requirements:

Attendance. Attendance is mandatory in this class, as is arriving promptly. Unexplained absences and latenesses will be penalized. It is your responsibility to consult with me regarding any absence within 24 hours of the missed class and to notify me in advance of any preplanned absences. The absences of students participating in official University functions, fulfilling religious obligations, and facing serious personal or medical issues will be accommodated if documentation is provided, which may be obtained from the Office of the Vice President for Student Services (for personal issues) or Student Health Services (for protracted and/or serious illnesses). In such cases, I will determine whether the missed work can be done at a time other than during the regularly scheduled class period. You are responsible for finding out from a classmate what went on in any missed classes and for getting handouts and assignments. Please do not ask me to summarize missed classes.

Participation. As much as possible, this class will be run as a discussion; its success requires your active participation and respect for the ideas of your fellow classmates. Always come to class prepared: do all the reading, remembering that some assignments are long and/or difficult, and be ready to raise questions, discuss particular passages in the reading that interest you, and to link the day's reading to course themes. I will give several unannounced reading quizzes as necessary. Please come to class prepared to speak; I may call on you to do so.

Reading. You should practice active reading in this course. Active reading involves reading all assigned texts slowly and carefully, and, in the case of poems, more than once. As you read, mark your responses in the margin, indicating recurring terms, images, and issues; consider the characters in each work, how we come to know them, and how they change; examine the ways that sentences, chapters, and paragraphs are constructed; indicate places that are confusing and try to figure out why; think about the relation of each text to general categories and terms of the course, to theoretical models we have discussed, and to other texts we have read. At the end of each day's reading, write down 2-3 questions about what you have read for our class discussion—both basic questions about plot, imagery, etc., and more analytic questions about structure, motive, etc.; often we will list and discuss these questions. Practicing these skills (which we will also focus on in class) will lead depth and insight to your written work, keep our class discussions lively and insightful, and (perhaps most importantly) increase your pleasure in the different texts we read. Please note that readings are at times quite heavy and that reading is generally assigned on days that papers are due; read ahead wherever possible.

Presentation. Each of you will participate in a group presentation discussing the connection between a literary and nonliterary artistic work on the same topic. I will distribute more information on presentations soon.

Written Requirements:

Barring verifiable illness, you must hand papers in on due dates. I will penalize late papers harshly. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, and stapled, with numbered pages, one-inch margins, a 10- or 12-point font, and an interesting title (not simply "Explication of Shakespeare"). Papers must be proofread (a process which includes, but is not limited to, spell-checking). Be sure

to keep a copy of each paper you hand in.

Explications/Imitations/Review. During the first half of the semester, you are to write two brief (2-3 page) explications of poems or prose passages assigned for the class; these explications must be handed in before class discussion of those poems (the first is due on or before 2/6, the second on or before 2/27). You are also to compose two imitations or parodies of texts read in class, at least one of which must be a poem (due on or before 2/13 and 3/18, respectively). You also must attend and write a brief (2-3 page) review of a poetry or fiction reading or a theatrical performance sometime during the course of the semester (due by 4/10). I will distribute more information on these assignments soon.

Explications. An explication is a short (1-2 page) essay that closely analyzes the language and form of a poem or an excerpt from a longer prose work. It is not a summary of its “story” or plot. Rather, it identifies the techniques the passage employs (word order, imagery, tone, point of view, etc.), and in particular the literary devices it uses. In your explication, you should show the reader how to read the passage, pointing out what is most important. Choose a short text (no more than 10 lines) for explication.

The most important reason I have assigned explications is to help you develop sensitivity to literary language and a vocabulary with which to express what you notice. Your explication should present a thesis, although this does not need to be as fully worked out as in a formal essay. You may choose to expand one of your explications for the first paper; even if you do not, the skills you develop in writing explications will inform your essays.

Imitations. Writing an imitation of a particular literary work generally involves imitating its style; your subject matter should be at least somewhat different, although you might try to think of a subject or approach that the author you are imitating might have been interested by. If you prefer, you may write a parody of a text we have discussed in class, in which you follow the form but choose a different subject, ideally one that points out the limitations of some element of the original; you may also exaggerate some element of the original’s style in ways that reveal the limitations of the original’s style. Your imitation should be as long or short as you think is appropriate.

Papers. You will write three papers for this course. The first (3-4 pages) will closely analyze a single poem or fictional passage, focusing on its form, technique, and shape. The second (5-7 pages) will make an argument about the differences between literature and another art form by comparing of one literary work to a related work or works in another artistic medium. The third (4-6 pages) will be a creative literary work inspired by a work in another medium, and will include a brief Introduction describing how the non-literary work inspired you.

Grading. This course uses plus/minus grades and the university’s grading system, which is listed below:

| | | | |
|----|-----|----|------------|
| A | 4.0 | C- | 1.7 |
| A- | 3.7 | D+ | 1.3 |
| B+ | 3.3 | D | 1.0 |
| B- | 2.7 | D- | .07 |
| C+ | 2.3 | F | 0.0 |
| C | 2.0 | I | Incomplete |

I will distribute grading criteria for written assignments later in the course. I will give the following weight to your work in calculating your final grade:

15% short assignments (explications, imitations, review)
15% essay 1
30% essay 2
20% essay 3
10% presentation
10% participation

I will post assignment grades on WC and update them periodically throughout the semester.

Academic Conduct. Plagiarism (copying all or part of someone else's work and passing it off as your own) is a serious form of academic misconduct and will not be tolerated in this class. The following definitions and possible courses of action are taken from the Academic Standards section of the university catalog:

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion. . . . □ Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following: (1) filing a final grade of "F"; (2) reducing the student's final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.

The policy in this course is to file a final grade of F. All incidents of plagiarism are reported to the Office of Student Conduct and become part of the student's academic record. Please review the definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in a writers handbook and note that plagiarism may include partial and inadvertent as well as deliberate misrepresentation of one's own work.

Disability Services. The University of Nevada, Reno is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact the instructor or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

Audio and Video Recording. Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.

Academic Success Services. Your student fees cover use of the Tutoring Center, the University Writing Center, and the Math Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services as needed.

Tutoring Center: ph. 784-6801 or visit www.unr.edu/tutoring

University Writing Center: ph. 784-6030 or visit www.unr.edu/writing_center

Math Center: ph. 784-4433 or visit www.unr.edu/mathcenter

Schedule of Assignments

this schedule is subject to change

WC: Webcampus page
HLT: Handbook of Literary Terms

Week 1: Introduction

WC: Statements about the relation between art and literature

Literary Genres and Forms: Retelling the Story of Orpheus and Eurydice

Week 2: Introduction

Versions of the Orpheus Myth: Homer, Ovid, Hamilton
Brief survey of depictions of this myth in other media:

Poetry

Week 3

Introduction to poetry and language

HLT: genre, lyric, free verse, figure of speech, image

Gardner: pp. 2-9

WC: poems by Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Keats, and Williams about art and artistic making; poems based on paintings; paintings based on poems

Week 4: Visual Imagery, Movement, Musicality

Orr

HLT: metaphor, simile, symbol, allusion, personification, rhyme, meter, foot, assonance, alliteration, narrator, persona

Gardner, pp. 44-47

WC: Rilke, HD; paintings by pre-Raphaelites; Rodin sculpture; Arcade Fire album

Fiction

Week 5: Narrative

HLT: plot, foreshadowing, exposition, complication, climax, denouement

Rushdie—first half

WC: Cocteau, *Orpheus*; Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo* (excerpts)

Week 6: Emotional Arcs

Rushdie—to end

HLT: rising action; falling action; myth and archetype; climax

WC: Oates, *Where Are You Going*; Munro, *The Children Stay*; Balanchine ballet (excerpts)

Drama

Week 7: Dramatizing Narrative

HLT drama, tragedy, tragic flaw, character, character development, irony, irony of fate, catharsis, hubris, soliloquy, hero, stock character:

Ruhl

WC: stage sets for Ruhl play, images from other productions

Gardner: pp. 92-3

Updates and Versions of Orpheus and Eurydice

Week 8

film: *Black Orpheus*

group presentations

due: essay 1: close reading passage analysis

Literature and the Other Arts: Mutual Influences

Modernism

Week 9 *Subject Matter: Rites and Myths*

Eliot

WC: Stravinsky, *Rite of Spring*; *Nijinsky's Last Dance* excerpt; Bidart poem; Graves on the fisher king myth

Week 10 *Form: Cubisms*

WC: Picasso, Duchamp, Stein poems, Mallarmé poems; Gide, *Counterfeiters* excerpt; music by Satie, Thomson; film excerpts by Melies

Contemporary Literature and the Visual Arts

Week 11: *The Artistic Process*

Chevalier

due: essay 2: argument about literature's relation to another medium

Week 12 *Ekphrasis: Poems about Artworks*

Tretheway

Week 13 *The Graphic Novel*

Bechdel

Literature and Film Adaptations

Week 14

Novel TBA

Week 15

Film adaptation

Conclusions and Topics for Further Study

Week 16

due: essay 3: a creative literary work that draws on or incorporates elements from another artistic medium