

ENGLISH 224: APPROACHES TO LITERATURE, FALL 2003 (TTh 3-4:15, K 339)

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Office hours Fall 2003: Mon. 3-4 and Thurs. 4:30-5:30

This course aims to develop skills in practical criticism of fiction, focussing especially on the interplay of aesthetic and social concerns in the production and reception of literature.

Recommended editions of required texts (available in O.C. Bookstore):

James Joyce, Dubliners, Penguin

Robert Louis Stevenson, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Norton Crit Ed

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, The Yellow Wallpaper, Feminist Press

Toni Morrison, Sula, Plume

Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony, Penguin

SCHEDULE

Tu 9/2 Course introduction: a) the author/text/reader triad and its complications

b) critical approaches as options to further your reading interests

c) logic of syllabus

d) attendance, discussion, due dates, honor code (see "POLICIES" below)

UNIT ONE: STYLE AS RHETORIC

Th 9/4 Mid-twentieth century formalist criticism as embodied in the notion of an "implied author" adapting his or her craft to elicit particular cognitive and emotional responses in the "implied reader."

READ: first two pages of excerpts from Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction AND first three pages from "Stave One: Marley's Ghost" in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. (Xeroxes for both readings to be distributed in class 9/2.)

Booth suggests that receptive readers typically develop an "intuitive apprehension" of how "total form" accords with the rhetorical intentions of the implied author. Does it work that way for you? Come to class with questions and ideas about how aesthetic technique in these opening pages of A Christmas Carol serves what you take to be Dickens' aims in shaping your response to a certain set of ideas and feelings. Also: what do you find helpful or confusing in Booth's definition of implied authors and reader? Do you see any way to differentiate Dickens' narrator from the implied author?

Tu 9/9 Strategically variable characteristics of narrators.

READ: remaining two pages of Booth xerox AND remaining three pages of Dickens xerox AND "Eveline" (in Dubliners)

TWO-PAGE CR/NE PREP PAPER DUE IN CLASS: What questions or ideas are raised for you by reading the Booth material alongside the Dickens excerpt and Joyce's "Eveline"? Think of this prep paper as helping to set an agenda for

Tuesday's discussion, either by fleshing out your perplexities/frustrations with the material or by starting to work through some propositions you find fruitful. You could do the prep paper as a list of observations/questions or a discussion of a single point.

Th 9/11 Biographical and background information as offering a boost to stylistic analysis.

READ: pp. vii-xii and xxiv-xxxviii in Terrence Brown's introduction to Dubliners AND excerpts of two letters of James Joyce to Grant Richards (xerox to be distributed) AND the opening Dubliners story, "The Sisters," with footnotes. (Also read footnotes for "Eveline" if you haven't already done so.)

Does the supplementary information help you see "Eveline" and "The Sisters" as using different materials and techniques towards comparable ends? How so? How much does your understanding of these stories depend upon such extratextual information and how do you feel about the issues of accessibility that raises? (P.S. It just occurred to me to wonder: why is "The Sisters" called "The Sisters"?)

Su 9/14 3-4:20 SUNDAY AFTERNOON CLASS, location to be arranged, cookies to be provided, yessirree. (Advance make-up for class cancelled on Thursday, October 16.)

READ "Araby" AND "Two Gallants" in Dubliners.

First hour of class: I'd suggest we compare these two treatments of male desire/sexuality with reference to their beginnings and endings. How do we relate to the opening self-presentation of the first-person recollecting narrator of "Araby," as compared to the way we relate to the two male protagonists presented through a third-person narrative perspective in "Two Gallants"? How do you see each story developing towards a defining moment and how would you compare those defining moments and their effects on you? Do the stories for you raise any further social, historical, or cultural issues you'd like to see discussed, e.g. factors of class, gender, politics, religion, modernism?

Remaining 20 minutes: Discussion groups on "What is criticism?" (guideline tba)

UNIT TWO: GENRE, CULTURAL STUDIES, FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Tu 9/16 THREE-PAGE PAPER DUE IN CLASS: "What is criticism?" (guideline tba)

READ: "Markheim" in Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, pp. 105-119

We'll begin by discussing this story in terms of the Boothian notion of an implied author aiming to work certain effects on an implied reader—but let's also consider rudiments of the "genre" question: what KIND of story do you take this tale to be? What works does it resemble or remind you of? Does it fit in a particular tradition of short fiction that you're aware of? How do answers to

such questions shape our reading expectations, experience and interpretation, perhaps unconsciously? If there's time, I'll touch briefly also on starting points for cultural studies and feminist concerns. Begin thinking about the significance of publication dates and places: A Christmas Carol was published in England in 1843, "Markheim" in England in 1885, The Yellow Wallpaper in America in 1892, Dubliners (written 1905) in England in 1914.

Th 9/18 Genre ambiguity and the historical moment as frames for The Yellow Wallpaper
READ: The Yellow Wallpaper

First half of class: you'll be grouped in advance into two separate camps for reading this story. If you're someone who enjoys Gothic fiction and horror tales (Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen King, etc.), sign up for the group focussing on reading The Yellow Wallpaper as a late-19th horror story in the tradition of Poe. If you're interested in gender issues, and especially if you've read 19th-century British or American novels in which gender roles figure prominently (e.g. Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Louis May Alcott's Little Women), sign up for the group focussing on reading Gilman's tale as a critique of social expectations for the late-19th century middle-class American wife and mother. In discussion, be ready to speak for the way the focus you signed up for can be seen as making the best ultimate sense of the tale's means and ends. Include some consideration of how you'd define the movement or plot of the tale.

Second half of class: we'll take a look at some primary materials in Mudd relating to expectations for women, e.g. women's magazines and conduct manuals. As a back-up, you'll find on reserve the Bedford Cultural Edition of The Yellow Wallpaper, ed. Dale M. Bauer (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998).

Tu 9/23 COME TO CLASS WITH YOUR FIRST FULL-LENGTH (5-6 PAGE) PAPER: a reading of any story read for the course so far, or else a reading of a Dubliners story not discussed in class. (Especially recommended: "Clay" or "A Painful Case"). More detailed guidelines to be distributed in advance.

The class period will consist of small-group workshops on the papers.

Th 9/25 TURN IN FINAL VERSION OF YOUR 5-6 PAGE PAPER.
Reading tba. The focus will be variant versions of feminist criticism, probably re The Yellow Wallpaper.

Tu 9/30 READ Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, pp. 7-47 (i.e., the first nine of the story's ten chapters). Come prepared to identify what you're most interested in talking about in these nine chapters. Also, what are your thoughts about why this tale is so famous?

Th 10/2 READ remainder of Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, pp. 47-62.
What's Stevenson's strategy in staging this inside view only in the final chapter of

the tale? How does Jekyll's shifting use of "I" and "he" in relation to his double identity complicate or inform meanings or effects? What possible insights do you get into Stevenson's aesthetic or moral intentions when you look at the manuscript variations for the beginning of this chapter listed on pp. 70-71? ("ND"= an early-stage notebook draft version of the tale; "PC"= the late-stage copy Stevenson prepared for the printer.)

READ also pp. 77-79, Summary of Composition and Early Reception; pp. 86-87, Robert Louis Stevenson to John Paul Bocock, mid-November 1887; and pp. 87-91, The Dream Origin of the Tale.

UNIT THREE: APPLIED CRITICISM

Tu 10/7 Jekyll and Hyde: the filters of genre and current scientific thinking. For genre, READ: "The Place of Honour" (95), "The Rev. Dr. Nicholson on 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'" (pp. 102-4), "The Modern Double" (124-26), "Stevenson's Scottish Devil Tales" (126-28), "An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity" (128-31) and "Instabilities of Meaning, Morality, and Narration" (189-197). For scientific thought, READ: "Post-Darwinian Theories of the Ape Within" (132-34), "Multiplex Personality" (134-36), and "Abject Slaves to the Narcotic" (136-38). Come prepared to talk about which selections you found most interesting or thought-provoking, and why.

Th 10/9 Jekyll and Hyde: focus on political and social framework. READ four selections: "London in the 1880s" (141-44), "Dr. M'Jekyll and Mr. O'Hyde" (145), "Hypocrisy" (146-49) and "An Unconscious Allegory about the Masses and Mass Literacy." COME WITH PREP PAPER IN HAND: a response to Patrick Brantlinger's reading of the tale (unconscious allegory about mass culture). More particularly: SITUATE YOURSELF in relation to Brantlinger by identifying what in his argument you find most rewarding or most questionable, given how you've been thinking about the story, or how you'd like to develop your thinking about it.

Tu 10/14 Jekyll and Hyde: sex and gender issues. Why does Stevenson place Jekyll in a circle of unmarried middle-aged professional men, with only a few nameless women glimpsed in the margins? Do you have any clues about whether sexuality or something like sexual perversion figures in Jekyll's unnamed pleasures? How might all this fit with Stevenson's saying in his letter to Bocock that it's hypocrisy and not sexuality that's the source of the harm in Jekyll? READ: Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges (101), "This Aberrant Inclination in Myself" (138-40), Nabokov on possible homosexual innuendoes (187), and at least the beginning of my "Sex, Secrecy, and Self-Alienation" essay (204-213). Consider also the possibilities of a Freudian reading of Hyde as an expression of unresolved Oedipal anger and sexual aggression.

In this class, I'll circulate sign-up sheets for Sula research groups (see below). To

ease your re-entry after Fall Break, consider using the break week to read ahead on any of the remaining three works to be covered in the course: “The Dead” (final story in Dubliners), Sula, and Ceremony.

Th 10/16 No class; covered by early make-up class on 9/14.

FALL BREAK: WHOOPEE!

Tu 10/28 No class; to be made up on 11/2

Th 10/30 “The Dead” in Dubliners. COME WITH A PREP PAPER IN HAND in which you try to work up your own reading of “The Dead.” It can be sketchy, as befits a prep paper, but aim to refer to some textual specifics in talking about what you might posit as a way to make sense of the whole (meanings, effects, etc.), or, alternatively, what puzzles you the most in this story.

Su 11/2 Make-up class: Reader-response criticism and New Historicist criticism of “The Dead” (based on sections in Bedford Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism edition of “The Dead” which I’ll aim to make available via e-res).

Tu 11/4 Feminist criticism of “The Dead,” also from Bedford reader.

UNIT FOUR: READING & RESEARCHING ACROSS CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Th 11/6 READ: Sula, to p. 48 (end of “1921” chapter). In the first half of class, we’ll aim to get our bearings on the opening section of the book via discussion. In the second half, we’ll divide up into groups under headings of topics to be investigated alongside the novel, and map out choices for how to research, read, and report.

I can give you a start on research resources, but I’d encourage you to use OBIS or a reference librarian for further assistance. The key is to think of this as a mere apprentice exercise for which you limit yourself to something like 20-50 pages of reading. The trade-off for the extra reading is that your written assignment at the end of the two weeks on Sula will be not a paper, but a two-item bibliography

(see

11/18 on syllabus).

Possible topics for investigation:

a) Toni Morrison: interviews, biography (e.g., what educational, intellectual or artistic trajectory leads her to Sula, and what does she have to say about what she had in mind in writing it?)

b) Sula re The Bluest Eye (what can reading this prior Morrison novella do for your reading of Sula?; recommended only for people who’ve already studied Sula.)

c) The big-picture background on black history in the years the novel covers, i.e. 1919-65. (What are a few of the basics, e.g. Jim Crow laws, lynching practices, dates for the civil rights advances made by Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King? How does our

inevitably amateurish squint at these things nevertheless push our thinking about what Morrison is up to in her dates-as-chapter-titles scheme?)

d) Specifically female perspectives on life in America 1919-65, e.g. via Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

e) The lives of such black women artists as Morrison suggests that Sula had it in her to become. (How did they succeed in finding their medium? And at what price?)

f) Published criticism about Sula (a good chance to find out how to research articles on a particular book or topic via the PMLA bibliography).

f) Further ideas that you might have?

The plan will be for you to work in groups of anywhere from two to six people, first to find some very MODEST readings and divvy up responsibility for them before the weekend of Nov. 8-9; second to get together to digest findings the week of Nov 10 and decide what to highlight about them in a very brief (5-10 minute) class presentation. The presentation could involve putting some information or quotes on paper to distribute and comment on; it could involve oral presentation of an especially powerful or useful passage from your reading, etc. In any case, try to make CONNECTIONS BACK TO SULA.

Tu 11/11: Sula, 1922, 1923, 1927 chapters (pp. 49-87). Special attention to “1922.” Reports on Toni Morrison via biography and/or interviews; reports on black history or oral history relevant to the 1920s.

Th 11/13: Sula, 1937, 1939. Consider especially the narrator’s move from an outside to an inside view of Sula on pp. 118-124, and the way this relates to issues of Sula vs. community, insiders and outsiders. Reports on the lives of black women artists active in the 1930s; reports on black history or oral history relevant to the 1930s; reports on The Bluest Eye.

Tu 11/18: Sula, final chapters (1940, 1941, 1965). Reports on published criticism of Sula. Our own reckoning with the ending. WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE THIS CLASS:

TWO-ITEM BIBLIOGRAPHY. This should be about a 2-page write-up in which you a) list your two items in standard bibliographical format, b) give a brief synopsis of each, and c) indicate what in these items has for you been most interesting or worthwhile towards what literary ends (e.g. insight into the book and how so? Background for reading African-American fiction generally and why? Better understanding of a certain critical approach and how so?)

Th 11/20 Ceremony, pp. 1-69. Be forewarned: everyone finds the opening confusing on first reading. Stick with it, watching for circumstantial clues about how to sort out the chronology and pondering what to make of the shifts between inset folkloristic poems/tales and the main story line. Consider how much the difficulties have to do with cultural unfamiliarity, and how much with an aesthetic strategy of making us feel WITH Tayo.

Tu 11/24 Ceremony, pp. 69-131. Discussion questions for this and remaining two Ceremony classes will be suggested along the way, as well as reserve readings from Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook, ed. Allan Chavkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Tu 12/2 (after Thanksgiving weekend): Ceremony, pp. 131-197.

Th 12/4 Finish Ceremony, pp. 197-261.

Tu 12/9 No class; instead will hold extra office hours for conferences on papers.

Th 12/11: Last class. Please come for wrap-up and course evaluations.

Monday, December 15: FINAL PAPER DUE (six pages, graded). Choose between either of the following two options:

a) Explore some aspect of any text read in the course using a relevant extra-textual source as a point of entry, whether by rebutting, qualifying, or building upon the source. It could be a critical article, an interview with the author, a contemporaneous text, etc. (The reserve shelf will offer a lot in the way of critical materials and bibliographies.) Be clear about what KIND of evidence your extratextual item affords, why and how it's useful to you, and how that usefulness translates into an enriched understanding of the text you're dealing with.

b) Compare any two works read in the course along the lines of some particular critical issue or perspective. Be clear about what the critical angle is (a genre category like horror story or novel of development? An issue of cultural milieu such as authorial adherence to or rebellion against gender, class, or race ideology of the day? A formalist interest in matters of narrative strategy, style, imagery, etc.?)

POLICIES

1) Attendance: you'll be allowed only two unexcused absences without damage to grade, so **SAVE THEM FOR WHEN YOU NEED THEM.**

2) Discussion: I ask you to work on the arts of listening well, building interactively on one another's comments, crediting past speakers where you're indebted to their ideas, and encouraging parity in floor time. Of key importance for good discussion: **READ ACTIVELY RATHER THAN PASSIVELY, AND TRY TO REVIEW YOUR UNDERLININGS, MARGINAL COMMENTS, ETC. SHORTLY BEFORE CLASS.** Though discussion is hard to assign a numerical value to, I do take overall quality of discussion and attendance into account in determining final grades.

3) Due dates: discussion prep papers **MUST** be ready in time for the discussion they cover. Other papers can only be given an extension through advance permission based

on a valid, foreseen need for extra time; otherwise they will be downgraded at the rate of one-third of a full letter grade per day.

4) Honor code: all work is to be done under provisions of the Oberlin College Honor Code. Ideas and language that you know to be derived from someone else's work should be given full attribution. All help (from other students, from other instructors, etc.) must be acknowledged. Written assignments should conclude with your signing the honor pledge.