



READINGS IN THE LITERATURE OF THE WESTERN WORLD: ENGLISH 265W.08 SPRING 2008—3 CREDITS

INSTRUCTOR:

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OFFICE HOURS:

11:00-12:20 and 3:30-4:00 Tuesday/Thursday and by appointment

CLASS MEETS:

2:00-3:20 Tuesday/Thursday in Room 358 of the Evans Building

TEXTS:

Homer, The Odyssey (E.V. Rieu, Translator)
Aeschylus, The Orestian Trilogy (Philip Vellacott, Translator)
Aristophanes, Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, the Birds,
Lysistrata, the Frogs
Dante, Inferno (R. Durling, Translator)
Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller
Gibaldi and Franklin MLA Handbook
Electronic Reserve Password: worldlit

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS:

What is literature and why should students who may have few if any plans to study literature beyond course requirements care about it? These may be the first questions many students have about this course, and if so, they are well situated for this course as we will be dealing with these questions all term. For now, the best answers are that literature is a category of writing human cultures use for those instances of writing that they find containing value—wisdom, beauty, knowledge—beyond the passing along of information and data. Given such a general definition, one reason for studying literature is to understand better the values that human cultures have had and do have. In other words, it has the capacity to tell us about our species.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITES

What exactly is a course on the literature of the Western World going to be about? Though some mistakenly think of it as a “great books” course, it is more accurately a focus on the tradition of values as it has developed in the Western world

that is the historical root of American culture. Certainly, we will read some “great” or classic books, but we’ll also read around them and follow their development through time. Just as important, this course is also an introduction to how to talk about and write about literature in an academic manner – something most students have attempted, if not always in a particularly systematic manner. Part of our work in this course will be to develop a system for dealing with literature and, in the process, helping students to improve their writing skills.

We’ll do this using as our tools and materials literary works that span recorded human history. We’ll begin reading in some of the foundational texts of early Western culture (Greek epic, Greek drama, the Bible), examine representative texts from the Renaissance and the era of Romanticism, followed by Realism and Modernism. We won’t make it the present day, but we’ll come close. And we’ll end with a novel that questions the value of the western literary tradition itself. It’s more ambitious than a seven-day, eight-country tour of Europe. Hope you don’t mind a little reading.

Of course, to succeed, every student needs to have met the prerequisites set by the University for this course: 6 hours of freshman English. Every student who meets those prerequisites is expected to have mastered basic grammar and argument writing. If you haven’t, this course is your last chance to do so since without those skills you will have a tough time succeeding in college.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In summary, then, the goals of this course are:

- To develop an awareness of how literature differs from other forms of writing.
- To gain a sense of the tradition of Western values and ideas as reflected through literature.
- To learn a systematic way to talk about and write about literature.
- To improve writing skills through writing about literature.

GRADING:

Of course, you’re probably wondering, “How am I going to earn my grade for this class?” The answer is that each student’s grade for the course will be determined by **two** major factors.

EXAMS

First, we will have **three in-class** exams. Each exam will consist of two sections: one section that focuses on literary elements, their definition and work in the readings done for the course; a second section that requires students to write an essay concerning the reading done for the course. Two of these exams will take place during the regular semester, and the third will take place at the time scheduled by the University for the final exam. Collectively, a student’s grades on these exams will determine **one half** of his/her course grade.

QUIZZES/DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

Second, periodically throughout the course, students will be given brief quizzes at the start of class over reading assigned for that day. Each quiz will with worth a maximum of 10 points. This will include a take-home syllabus quiz. A few times, an announced assignment will replace a quiz. At the end of the term, I will add up each

student's points and assign a grade based on that total using the familiar 0-100 grading scale (90-100+ = A; 80-89 = B, etc.). When calculated, this quiz/attendance grade will determine **one-fourth** of a student's course grade.

PAPERS

Students will be required to write two papers during the semester. The first will focus on a single literary element: character. In writing it, students will display their awareness of the complexity of character as an element and practice using the literary work to support and justify their arguments. It will have as its focus a literary work being read and discussed in class. The second paper will ask students to discover and state a meaning of the literary work with which we end the semester. The complete assignments for both papers are attached to this syllabus on pages titled, "Paper Assignments." The grades on these two papers will be of equal value, and collectively they will determine **one-fourth** of each student's course grade.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

To help insure everyone gets a leg up on the exams, I offer a positive inducement for attendance. Everyday a student attends a **complete** class session, that student earns one extra credit point that is added to his or her next exam. At the same time, students should realize that failure to attend class will have negative results. Excessive absences will not be tolerated. They discourage other students and me. Anyone missing more than seven days of class will see a lowering of their course grade by a minimum of one letter.

MISSED EXAMS / LATE PAPER POLICY

Students who miss an exam for any reason should contact the instructor immediately. In cases involving illness or family crises, I will ask the student to have the reason for the absence verified by the Dean of Student Life Office before rescheduling an exam. In other cases – weather, car problems, stupidity, etc. – I will do my best to accommodate students, but all such cases are matters of grace and mercy, not right.

My general policy is not to accept late papers unless encouraged to do so by the Dean of Student Life office. However, I define late as anytime after 5 p.m. on the day the paper is due, and students may e-mail me a Microsoft Word attachment of their paper before that deadline – with a hard copy given to me later – in order to meet the deadline. Again, students are always welcome to discuss specific issues with me, but they need to realize I will refer all rulings of the validity of excuses to the Dean of Student Life office.

Please note: any student who has major problems fulfilling the requirements of the course (family crisis; unexpected health issues; severe emotional turmoil) should contact the office of Frank Parker, the Assoc. V.P. for Student Services and Dean of Student Life. His phone number is 936-294-1785. This office will help you deal with all your instructors and makes it unnecessary for you to bring me documentation concerning such crises.

LEGAL MATTERS THE UNIVERSITY REQUIRES ME TO INCLUDE:

These are policies that cover the University as a whole. For a more detailed discussion of the five items below, go to this link: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>.

- **Academic Dishonesty:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

In this course, students are encouraged to work together to increase their understanding and insight our readings. However, two particular forms of academic dishonesty will result in a student earning a grade of “F” on the projects involved. These two forms are: (1) cheating on exams by taking answers from notes or other students; (2) plagiarism. This involves taking the writing—either words and/or ideas—of another person—fellow student, published author, or paper seller--and passing them off as one’s own. Students should carefully read the section in the MLA Handbook on plagiarism and how to avoid it.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. All requests for accommodation must be initialed by the student.
- **Religious Holidays:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.
- **Visitors in the Classroom:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to

remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

- **Instructor Evaluations:** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.
- **Classroom Rules of Conduct:** The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline is found at the following link:
<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>. I expect students to show respect for everyone in the classroom—the instructor, students, guests—through both words and actions. I ask students not to do other work during class, to place cell phones on silent mode, and to put away other distractions: ipods, newspapers, etc. If something else needs your attention during class time, don't come to class.
- **Study Tips:** The best way to succeed in this course is to attend regularly having read the assigned work for that day. Ask questions—particularly about terminology and approaches that are unclear. Schedule a time to meet with the professor at some point in the term—preferably early in order to get a better sense of his personality. If you need help with reading, writing, or other study assistance, you may want to take advantage of the resources listed below:

THE SAM CENTER

The Student Advising and Mentoring Center, also known as the SAM Center, offers a wide variety of services for the students of Sam Houston State University. We offer academic advisement and enrichment services to all undergraduate and graduate students. The SAM Center is a resource dedicated to helping students adjust to academic life at Sam Houston State University. Services available include career testing, aid with time management, and study skills. The center has grown rapidly since we've been open and with new programs being offered, our students are taking more advantage of our resources. With a great faculty and staff, all students are encouraged to look into any of the programs we have available. The SAM Center is located in Academic Building 4 (AB4) on the second floor, room 210. AB4 is located on the corner of Bowers Blvd. and Ave. I. For more information, go to http://www.shsu.edu/~sam_index.html. Or call one of the numbers listed below:

Toll Free: (866) 364-5211

Houston Area: (281) 657-6432

Phone: (936) 294-4444

THE SHSU READING CENTER

The mission of the Sam Houston State University Reading Center is to contribute to the SHSU's community growth both personally and academically so that students, faculty, and staff may use their talents more fully to achieve educational and professional goals. The SHSU Reading Center seeks to promote the acquisition of and use of reading strategies and to promote independent learning which will motivate learners to value literacy throughout their lives.

The SHSU Reading Center is available to all students, faculty, and staff. The primary goal of the instructors is to empower all students with effective reading strategies and the confidence to excel in their classes. The SHSU Reading Center is staffed and equipped to assist students with their expository reading in a variety of learning environments, such as:

- * individual tutoring sessions,
- * small group tutoring sessions,
- * computer assisted tutoring sessions.

For more information, go the Reading Center web page: http://www.shsu.edu/~rdg_www/. Or call 936-294-3114.

THE SHSU WRITING CENTER

The Sam Houston Writing Center helps SHSU students, staff, and faculty and community members. Our goal is to help people become better writers and so develop more confidence in their writing abilities. To this end, Writing Center tutors provide one-on-one and small group writing instruction. We also offer one-session workshops on various topics relating to writing throughout the school year. Students may come in with any type of writing. We help writers on assignments ranging from English composition essays to science lab reports, résumés, scholarship and job application letters, even M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. We do not offer simply an editing or proofreading service. That is, Writing Center tutors will not merely correct a student's writing. Instead, we will help students learn prewriting, revising, and editing skills by working with them on the writing tasks they bring in. The Writing Center is located in Farrington 111. For more information, go to the Writing Center web page: <http://www.shsu.edu/~wctr/>. Or call 936- 294-3680. For e-mail contact, use this address: wctr@shsu.edu.



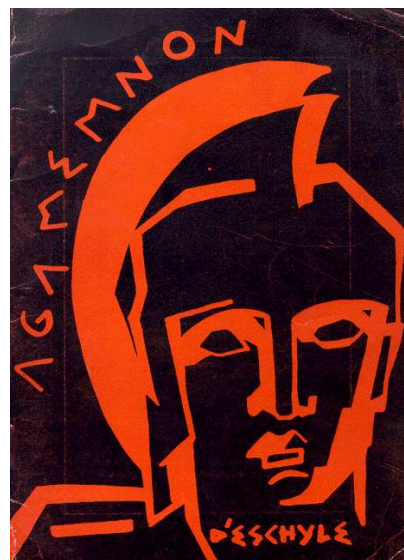
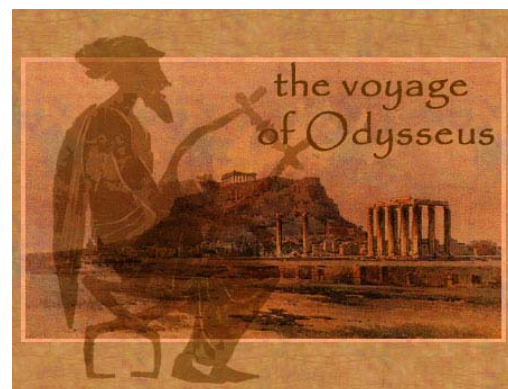
**A WRITER IS SOMEBODY FOR WHOM WRITING IS
MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT IS FOR OTHER PEOPLE.
~ THOMAS MANN, ESSAYS OF THREE DECADES,
1947**



SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNED READINGS:

**BELOW IS THE DAILY CALENDAR FOR READINGS AND WORK STUDENTS SHOULD
PREPARE AND BRING TO CLASS**

Thursday 1/17	Welcome to Class; the Syllabus
Tuesday 1/22	“Revelation”
Thursday 1/24	Homer, <u>The Odyssey</u> (Books/Chapters 1-5)
Tuesday 1/29	Homer, <u>The Odyssey</u> (Books/Chapters 5-10)
Thursday 1/31	Homer, <u>The Odyssey</u> (Books/Chapters 11-15)
Tuesday 2/5	Homer, <u>The Odyssey</u> (Books/Chapters 16-20)
Thursday 2/7	Homer, <u>The Odyssey</u> (Books/Chapters 21-24)
Monday 2/11	Showing of <u>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</u> 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday 2/12	<u>O Brother, Where Art Thou?</u>
Thursday 2/14	Aeschylus, <u>Agamemnon</u>
Tuesday 2/19	Aeschylus, <u>Agamemnon</u> Paper One due
Thursday 2/21	Aeschylus, <u>The Libation Bearers</u>
Tuesday 2/26	Aeschylus, <u>The Eumenides</u>
Thursday 2/28	Exam One



- Tuesday 3/4 Exodus 1-15
(available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/exodus-rsv.html>)
- Thursday 3/6 Luke 1-2
Luke 15
- Tuesday 3/11 Spring Break—No Class
- Thursday 3/13 Spring Break—No Class
- Tuesday 3/18 Dante, Inferno
- Thursday 3/20 Dante, Inferno
- Tuesday 3/25 Dante, Inferno
- Thursday 3/27 Dante, Inferno
- Tuesday 4/1 Shakespeare, Sonnets 18, 29, 73, 138
(available at <http://poetry.eserver.org/sonnets/>)
- Thursday 4/3 Donne, Holy Sonnet Number 74, “Batter my heart”
(Available at www.bartleby.com/105/74.html)
Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress”
(Available at <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1386.html>)
- Tuesday 4/8 Exam Two
- Thursday 4/10 Heine, “The Lorelei”
(Available at http://www.geocities.com/arlindo_correia/090900.html)
Wordsworth, “It is a Beauteous Evening”
(Available at <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/2340.html>)
Wordsworth, “The World is Too Much With Us”
(Available at <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/2380.html>)
Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”
(Available at <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1129.html>)
- Tuesday 4/15 Turgenev, “The District Doctor”
(Available at http://www.shortstoryarchive.com/t/district_doctor.html)
- Thursday 4/17 Chekov, “The Lady with the Pet Dog”
Available at <http://www.turksheadreview.com/library/texts/chekhov-ladypetdog.html>)
- Tuesday 4/22 Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”(Available at <http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/stories/kafka-E.htm>)
- Thursday 4/24 Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller



Tuesday 4/29 Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller

Thursday 5/1 Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller

Tuesday 5/6 Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller

Thursday 5/8 Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller

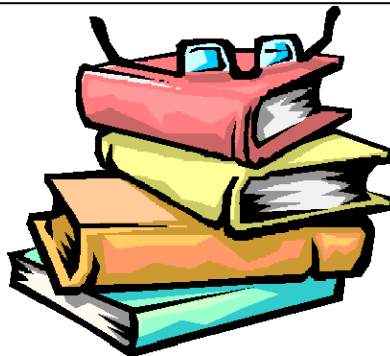
Thursday, 5/15 **FINAL EXAM at 2:00 a.m. or date and hour set by the UNIVERSITY**



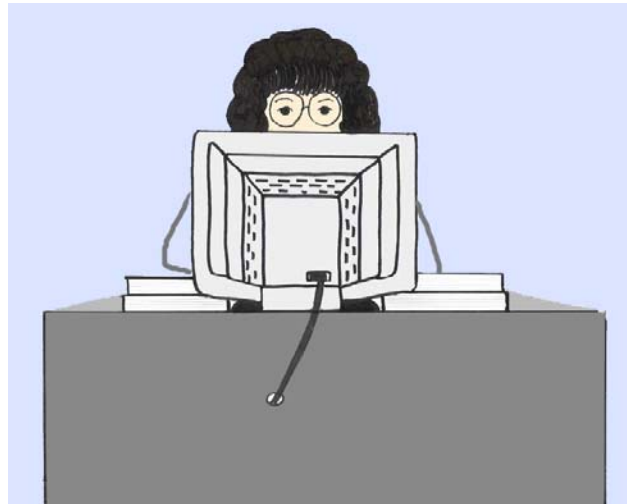
GOD MADE MAN BECAUSE HE LOVES STORIES ~ ELIE WIESEL

THERE ARE ONLY TWO OR THREE HUMAN STORIES, AND THEY GO ON REPEATING THEMSELVES AS FIERCELY AS IF THEY HAD NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE. ~ WILLA CATHER

WE ARE LONESOME ANIMALS. WE SPEND ALL OF OUR LIFE TRYING TO BE LESS LONESOME. ONE OF OUR ANCIENT METHODS IS TO TELL A STORY BEGGING THE LISTENER TO SAY-AND TO FEEL- 'YES, THAT IS THE WAY IT IS, OR AT LEAST THAT IS THE WAY I FEEL IT.' YOU'RE NOT AS ALONE AS YOU THOUGHT. ~ JOHN STEINBECK



PAPER ASSIGNMENTS



In this course, every student is required to write **two** papers. Neither is exceptionally long or has a difficult topic, but both demand correct grammar and format. And I expect students to read and follow carefully the directions I offer here. The surest way to earn a low grade on these assignments is to ignore the directions here and to start at the last minute.

PAPER ONE: CHARACTER ANALYSIS—THE ODYSSEY

Whether a student is writing about fiction or non-fiction, poetry or prose, one aspect of the writing that students need to understand is the nature of the human individuals who are doing the action. That's why our first assignment is focused on character.

Students need to begin the assignment with this definition of literary character in mind: literary character is a personality/psychology/human essence that performs action in a literary work. This means that "character" is something that belongs to agents of action—be they individuals or a group. We often tend to think of characters as the list of names in a cast. We may even say that characters in, for instance, The Odyssey, include Odysseus, Penelope, Athena, etc. But literary character is always more than a name. It is the traits that define that person or group as distinct. Therefore, if a person wishes to understand a piece of writing beyond its surface, he or she must plunge into the variety of traits that define a person or group and understand why those traits are reasonable for that individual. That's what we'll be doing in this paper.

Students are to select **one** of the significant individuals/groups in the Homer's poem, The Odyssey. These include but are not limited to:

- Odysseus
- Telemachus
- Penelope
- The Suitors
- Odysseus' faithful servants
- Odysseus' obstacle to return (the most famous is probably the Cyclops Polyphemus but others would belong to this group)

Then they need to read the poem carefully to find the major passages in which the chosen character appears and reveals aspects of his/her/their personalities/psychologies. For each character, students should find three to five major traits that are emphasized about that character in the poem. For instance, a student analyzing the suitors might conclude that they are generous, ethical, forgiving, and

witty (the student would be wrong on most of these counts, but then this is only a hypothetical example). For each quality, the student would want to:

- Decide the relative importance of that trait to defining the character. Is it the central, dominant trait, a minor positive, a minor but humanizing negative, or something else?
- Collect specific textual evidence that supports the existence of the trait. Be careful not to take one person's word for this unless that person is extremely trustworthy. A student once claimed my mother's species was four-legged and that I didn't bathe often enough, but I declared these things were not accurate. Which of us is believable? In other words, actions are the most reliable evidence, but you must take all you find.
- Seek to understand why each trait exists, how the poem makes it believable (if it does). For instance, a student might conclude from a very poor reading of the poem that the suitors are forgiving because of their parents' excellent potty training strategy. To be honest, Homer, in my view, has little interest or mention of potty training, but he might assign this trait to the suitors because of their belief that forgiveness leads to cash. Whatever the case, be sure to understand the character, not just label him/her/them.

Armed with this information, the student is ready to begin planning the paper. The best way to start is by writing a thesis that uses as much of the information gained from analysis as possible. At the same time, the thesis should not be a junk pile with everything thrown in. A student needs to show judgment in selecting and prioritizing information. Based on the hypothetical analysis I've been using of the suitors, a sound thesis might be:

Because Homer's poem wants to pave the way for the triumph of the suitors, it gives them a character that is dominated by their admirable traits even though it sees these traits as partially the result of a dark materialism.

Based on such a thesis, the student should then plan a reasonable organization for the paper. I strongly recommend a simple outline. Given my sadly inaccurate thesis above, I might come up with the following organization:

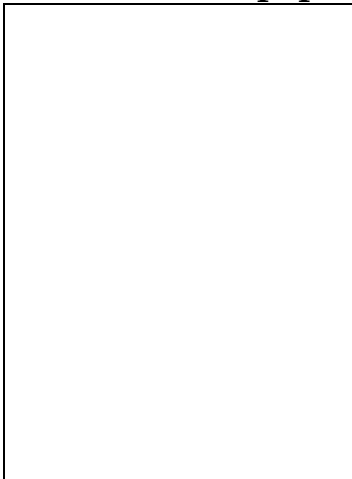
- **Introduction that briefly explains the triumph of the suitors in the poem and ending with my thesis.**
- **Paragraph that proves the suitors have the admirable trait of being witty – a minor but attractive feature.**
- **Paragraph that proves the suitors have the admirable trait of being ethical – something they practice frequently in the poem.**
- **Paragraph that proves the suitors have the admirable trait of being forgiving – something that practice at the moment of crisis in the poem.**
- **Paragraph that proves the suitors have the admirable trait of generosity – a trait that would make them morally above the savage world they live in.**
- **Paragraph that shows these traits seeming to arise from greed and material self-interest.**

- **Conclusion that claims this is important because it enables the poem to offer a moral guide to its culture – one that does not require perfect human beings. This answers the question of “So what?”.**

Once the student has this plan formed, I recommend that he or she schedule a time to meet with me outside of class to go over it. If there is some horrible mistake or misreading, I can prevent a student from writing a paper that starts in the wrong direction.

After a draft is written, I encourage students to allow a classmate to help them with editing and to visit the Writing Center for help with mechanics. Be sure, also, to pay attention to the spelling and grammar checks on your computer. Finally, look at the format guide in the MLA Handbook to be sure your paper follows its model in terms of spacing, title style, etc. When that’s done, print out a copy of the paper, read it aloud once to see if mistakes that have either slipped by or been injected by the word processing, and then, once any final mistakes are corrected, turn it in.

The paper is due Tuesday, February 19.



NO ONE WHO, LIKE ME, CONJURES UP THE
MOST EVIL OF THOSE HALF-TAMED DEMONS
THAT INHABIT THE HUMAN BREAST, AND
SEEKS TO WRESTLE WITH THEM, CAN EXPECT
TO COME THROUGH THE STRUGGLE
UNSCATHED.

SIGMUND FREUD, *DORA: AN ANALYSIS OF A
CASE OF HYSTERIA*

PAPER TWO: MEANING ANALYSIS—THE STORYTELLER

The first paper assignment focused on a single literary element, but by the end of the term, I expect students to be able to work with multiple literary elements including plot, symbol, image, personification, allusion, and irony. Therefore, in the second paper, focusing on the final work we read for the semester, I ask students to use as many of these and other literary elements as possible to devise a meaning statement for that work. **The literary work that will be the focus for this paper is a novel by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, The Storyteller.** In large part, this novel tells the story of the narrator’s life as he learns about one of his friends and about an odd type of storytellers in an obscure Amazonian tribe. It’s a book that will challenge readers and use a lot of the ideas we learn throughout the semester. I can guess that many students will find it one of the strangest books they have ever read, but I want them to see that despite its strangeness, it opens itself up to the system of literary analysis we will learn about and practice throughout the term.

Students need to begin the assignment with a clear definition of “literary meaning statement” in mind. The best I can offer is this: a statement that presents a complete idea about human existence or experience that the literary work seeks to communicate. The word “complete” reveals that a meaning statement will not simply tell what the literary work is “about.” Therefore, the statements “Homer’s Odyssey is about love” and “Homer’s Odyssey is about 400 pages long” are both flawed as meaning statements. In the same way, the use of the phrase, “human existence or experience” means that statements of empirical fact are also not meaning statements. Thus “Homer’s Odyssey shows that water boils at 100 degree Celsius” is not a good meaning statement. A good meaning statement ties the literary work to a philosophical – usually debatable--idea – something such as “Homer’s Odyssey suggests heroic individuals often suffer as they attempt to come to terms with the everyday world.” Because the title of the literary work – Homer’s Odyssey-- is mentioned, the statement is tied to a literary work. It is not a statement of empirical fact but an opinion or idea communicated by the poem. Finally, it is complete – every major aspect of the idea is included in the statement. This is the kind of finding this project asks students to make, and when they do, they will have the thesis for their papers.

So how does one find meaning?

First, realize that meanings are not “found” but “built.” They are built from the concepts derived by analyzing literary elements discovered in a literary work. This means that students’ second step is to find literary elements in Vargas Llosa’s novel. Because it is a novel – a lengthy work of prose fiction – the Storyteller has many elements. Most obvious are the ones that exist over the entire work: plot, major characters, and possibly some image or symbol patterns. Other elements may occur only at moments, but these, too, may be important: irony, imagery, allusions, etc. Every literary element is trying to tell the reader something – what I call “concepts.” For instance, the plot of Homer’s Odyssey is one of returning home, thus the concept it suggests is “returning home.” If a work has a clock in it that symbolizes “time,” then the concept being suggested is “time.” Students will look at all the elements they can find in a text and clearly identify the concepts each produces. This will give them a giant pile of concepts.

Once this pile is in place, the student must use as many of the pieces as possible to build a meaning statement. Imagine for a moment, that you analyzed a literary work – Eric Idiot’s The Big Maybe-- and found the following list of elements and concepts:

- Plot – return home
- Symbol – time
- Setting – primitive nature
- Character of Joe – weak and greedy
- Character of Sally – resourceful and heroic
- Image pattern -- beauty
- Image pattern – broken machines

A student would play with these to come up with a meaning statement that might resemble this one: **Idiot’s the Big Maybe suggests resourceful heroes may return home to a beautiful if primitive natural world despite greed-generated obstacles.** Notice, I didn’t manage to use every concept, but I built a meaning statement from the materials I generated through analysis. A little more effort might include other elements or I might

have to leave those to another student in the class. Whatever the case, I have a meaning statement that can work as a thesis for my paper.

But before I begin to write, I need to look at that statement carefully and be sure I think it actually fits the book. It's possible to build a meaning statement that is simply wrong or false to the obvious experience of reading the literary work. As with math problems, you need to check your work.

However, once you are convinced your meaning statement is valid – and a meeting with the professor is a good idea at this point – you are ready to begin writing the paper. This can be done rather easily if you simply follow the word order in the meaning statement, giving at least one paragraph per concept found through analysis. For instance, a paper using my thesis statement for The Big Idiot would be organized this way:

- **Introduction ending with a thesis**
- **Paragraph – maybe two-- explaining that Sally's character is that of a resourceful hero.**
- **Paragraph – maybe two – explaining that The Big Idiot has a plot of returning home.**
- **Paragraph – maybe two – explaining that the work has an image pattern of beauty.**
- **Paragraph – maybe two – explaining that the work is set in a primitive, natural world.**
- **Paragraph – maybe two – explaining that the Joe's character is that of a greedy person who causes problems.**
- **Conclusion explaining "So what?"**

Once the paper is written, have another student in the class help you read it for mechanical errors, and visit the writing center for their aid as well. Remember, using correct MLA format for the body of the paper and for documentation is crucial, and you want to avoid making any hysterically stupid grammatical mistakes.

Once you've made any corrections and revisions to your draft, print out a copy and read it aloud to yourself taking one last look for obvious typos and errors – as well as those spacing mistakes that only a machine can make. When you're satisfied you have a winner, submit the paper to me for evaluation.

This paper is due Thursday, May 8.

**"What is written
without effort is in
general read without
pleasure."
– Samuel Johnson**

