

SPRING 2008 SEMESTER (3 credits)
ENG 266 — SECTION 15
TIME: T-Th 11-12:20
RM: 260

Course Title: Literary Genres
Instructor: Drew Lopenzina
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 4-5:00

Texts:

1984: George Orwell

Literature: The Human Experience Reading and Writing: eds. Richard Abcarian and Marvin Klotz

The Sandbox: Dispatches from Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan: ed. G. B. Trudeau

The House on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros

(Books are available at SHSU Bookstore)

Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

George Orwell

We have, then, a fair case against the poet . . . his creations are poor things by the standard of truth and reality, and his appeal is not to the highest part of the soul, but to one which is equally inferior. So we shall be justified in not admitting him into a well-ordered commonwealth.

Plato

Course Description:

In George Orwell's classic novel *1984*, we are told "war is peace," "ignorance is strength," "freedom is slavery," and a number of other seemingly contradictory assertions that reverse the way we normally choose to understand the world. Phrases of such a nature, when they appear in our language, fall under a distinctive umbrella. We call them "Orwellian," and they indicate to us the risk a culture takes when language begins to disassociate itself from agreed upon meanings. Regardless of our interest in politics or poetics, we are too often oblivious to the role that language plays in our daily lives. In these strange times in which we live, we are endlessly engaged in the act of communicating, but angle more and more toward a collapsed lexicon, a dialectic shorthand, a means of mainlining speech so we might spend less and less time bogged down in the slow molasses of human interaction, but paradoxically, more and more time reassuring ourselves that there is in fact someone out there on the other end listening to our lack of anything to say. We carry cell phones where ever we go now, compulsively e-mailing, text-messaging, U-tubing, my-spacing, interfacing with media, absorbing the frantic apparitions of disconnected sounds and images that flash across our cognitive hard drives like neon lights over the windshield of a car streaking down the highway at night, only to break and shatter like formless entities in the limitless ether. We are so addicted to instantaneous communication that we hardly pause to absorb content, consider nuance, or think through the possible implications of a given statement or event. It is worth considering, however, that without a proper regard for language, little or no meaning would adhere to our acts, our decisions, our relationships, our lives. When we compromise language, it stands to reason that we also compromise understanding, meanings, decisions, relationships, ourselves. In effect, freedom becomes slavery, peace

becomes war, democracy devolves into a kind of soft tyranny of distinctionless choices.

In this class, which is ostensibly an introduction to the field of literary genres, we will pay close attention to the value of language in our lives today, with all of its compromises, curiosities and complications. Every generation has its own way of speaking, its own way of thinking, and by extension, its own literature. We might understand literature as every generation's attempt to make sense of its place in the world through a considered use of language. With this in mind, we will not only look at literatures of the past, but we will think through the implications of our most recent writings and how they shore up against our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a people in this conceptualized space we call *America*. This semester will take us from the dramatic imaginings of ancient Greeks, to the highly mannered poems of the renaissance, to the latest raw dispatches coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. While we think through issues of form, style and genre, we will also pay close attention to the strengths and limitations of language—either written, spoken, or sung. I will ask you to think deeply about the language that is important to you, the words and phrases that register with your own sense of identity. My contention is that language and how we use it has more to do with who we are and where we've been than we typically acknowledge. If we understand language as a form of commitment, however, we begin to realize how it not only affects our lives, but plays a potentially important role in shaping our futures.

Course Objectives:

- Introduce students to literary genres, traditions, theories and practices.
- Encourage an appreciation for literary encounters.
- Foster strong strategies and techniques for critical reading and writing.
- Develop strategies for critical independent thinking.
- Encourage students to confidently voice opinions and to participate in substantive discussions based on demonstrably informed perspectives.

Assignments:

Reading - As I think it is important for us to grasp some substantive sense of each genre and period that we visit in this class, the reading will be heavy at times but never unmanageable. I've attempted to schedule things so that the reading is generally light when a paper is due, and shorter readings follow longer readings. We may not always be able to discuss each selection that has been assigned, but you will, nevertheless, be responsible for the whole lot. The best way to demonstrate that you have kept up with the course work is to first, bring your books to class, secondly, be able to engage thoughtfully with the readings and be active in classroom discussions, and thirdly, be able to refer to specific passages to back up your points. I advise you to take notes, write in the margins of your texts, highlight important passages—in other words, do all those things necessary to help you to recall what you've read so that you may speak intelligently about the readings in class and contribute to the overall shape of this journey. These practices will also give you confidence towards writing interpretively for the five papers that will be assigned. **When you come to this class, you must bring the reading for that day with you. Failure to do so will result in a marked absence.**

Writing - There are four writing assignments on the syllabus: two short response papers, a longer response paper, and one 6-8 page paper requiring a small amount of research. You will also be asked to write a sonnet and occasionally do some in-class writing. We will discuss the process of revision and learn how to incorporate this process in our work. The first two short papers will showcase your ability to quickly summarize texts and respond to some of the ideas that these texts set in motion, paying attention to such things as specific use of language, representation, genre and metaphor. This is generally called

“close reading” and is a skill that should develop over the semester. The longer response papers should be thesis driven, showcasing your original interpretation of selected works from the class. Understand from the onset that a thesis driven paper does not rely upon plot summaries. Nor is it a review in which you declare whether you liked or disliked the piece in question. Rather it should be something like an attempt to identify tendencies, recurring themes, or structural elements within a text that speak to larger cultural concerns, issues of identity, tradition or politics, and how matters of genre, style, and substance are employed in the overall process. Your original thesis should be clearly stated early on in the paper (this is known as the “thesis statement”). An “A” paper should be cogent, well argued, able to apprehend the various perspectives that adhere to any one issue, stylistically fluid and grammatically correct. Papers should be double spaced, 12 point font, with one inch margins. **You are also expected to hand in your work on time. Failure to do so will result in a grade reduction.**

Participation - Class participation is essential in terms of the grade you will receive and in terms of your own understanding of the works we encounter. I hardly know, myself, what I think about a literary work until I’ve discussed it with someone, or written about it. I understand that we all have different comfort levels in terms of getting involved in group discussions. But the ability to speak in an informed manner about a text, even if reluctantly, is one of the skills I expect you to develop in this class. Hopefully the environment we create will be conducive to open discussions where everyone feels free to express their thoughts. Be aware, however, that your comments should be related to materials that we read in class. You should be able to back up your insights with textual evidence if called upon to do so. In other words, this should be a free exchange of informed ideas and opinions on the readings. I will come into class with strong ideas and opinions of my own. Often we will disagree. I expect this and hope to be challenged, enlightened, and entertained by the views you bring to the table. The quality of your overall participation will be reflected in your final grade.

Attendance:

The rule of thumb is, **anything more than three absences will be sure to effect your grade.** As you are expected to show up to class on time, three lates will count as a missed class. If for some reason you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact me about missed assignments or any materials handed out in class during your absence. There may be one out of class showing of a movie, probably in the evening, that you will be expected to attend.

Grading:

The 6-8 page research paper will make up 25% of your grade. The smaller papers will constitute another 30%. There will be three quizzes over the course of the semester that will account for 30% and an oral presentation that will count for 10%. The remainder of your grade will be based upon your participation, or how well you project a comprehension of the materials worked on in class, and the general spirit of your contribution. Keep in mind that according to SHSU grading procedures:

A= Excellent Work. This is work that stands out above the rest, fulfilling all the required criteria for a given assignment in a cogent and original manner while demonstrating a firm grasp of style and grammar concerns.

B= Very Good Work. Demonstrates a strong grasp of the materials covered in class and an ability to articulate ideas effectively and efficiently. Academic achievement of high quality.

C= Satisfactory Work. Not bad, meets requirements, but maybe lacking in original interpretation of materials or stylistic fluidity.

D= Unsatisfactory. Does not meet the most basic demands required of the assignment.

F= Failure. Naturally any attempt at plagiarism will result in immediate failure of the course.

Keep In Mind: This syllabus is your contract for this class. If you have any questions about policy,

grading, or the overall purpose of the course, refer back to this document.

Prerequisite Courses: 6 hours of Freshman English

Course Objectives:

- Gain knowledge of history and literary traditions of Native Americans.
- Learn to think critically and to analyze and evaluate ideas arguments and points of view.
- Acquire a broader understanding and appreciation of different literary forms and genres, and a sense of how these cultural products influence and inform our lives.
- Develop skill in expressing oneself both orally and in writing.

University Policy on Academic Dishonesty:

All students are expected to engage in 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, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

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.

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, and in 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.

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 instructor does not discourage visitors in the class as long as I am informed of the visit prior to class.

Instructor Evaluations:

You will be asked to complete a course evaluation at the end of this semester.

Code of Conduct:

Classroom rules of conduct for the University can be found at <http://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

Section 5.2.22 defines classroom disturbances.

-Cell phones must be turned off prior to entering this class.

-No movies, photos, tape recordings, or artists' renderings of the instructor or anyone else in the class are allowed without prior permission from the instructor.

-I do not allow open laptops in this classroom or the use of handheld portable electronic devices.

-All luggage must be stowed in the overhead compartments.

-According to University policy, no alcoholic beverages, firearms, or weapons of mass destruction allowed in the classroom.

Schedule

Jan.	17	Introductions Ulysses
	22	You Must Have <i>The Human Experience</i> in Hand Corinthians 1:13 (1257)
	23	Thomas King from <i>The Truth About Stories</i> (handout) Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl" (750)
	29	Language Is Commitment George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (1-106)
	31	George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (107-163)
Feb.	5	George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (163-269)
	7	George Orwell, <i>1984</i> (finish)
	12	Paper Due (2 pages) Irena Ratushkinskaya from <i>Grey is the Color of Hope</i> (handout)
	14	Poema <i>The Human Experience</i> (184-193)
	19	Quiz 1 <i>The Human Experience</i> (13-19) Additional Reading: John Donne, "Death, Be Not Proud" (1382), Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymyndias" (1382), Shakespeare Sonnets (1095-1096), Billy Collins, "Sonnet" (1128)
	21	<i>The Human Experience</i> : Andrew Marvel, "To His Coy Mistress" (1102), W. B. Yeats "Leda and the Swan" (163), Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz" (1113), Ann Sexton, "Cinderella" (800-803), Robert Frost, "Birches" (164) and "The Road Not Taken"(165), Muriel Rukeyser, "Myth" (491)
	26	Sonnet Due <i>The Human Experience</i> : Bruce Bennett "The True Story of Snow White" (178), Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess" (155), Bertolt Brecht, "War Has Been Given a Bad Name" (487), Gary Soto, "Oranges" (1138-1139), Molly Peacock, "Say You Love Me"

- (1131-1132), Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est" (1394)
- 27 **Paper Due** (2 pages)
In Class Work
- Mar. 4 **Confessions of a Bronze Age Drama Queen**
Sophocles, *Antigone*, (514-528)
- 6 Finish *Antigone*
Spring Break
- 18 **Oral Presentations Begin**
Selected Shorts:
Ambrose Bierce, "Chickamauga" (handout).
Ernest Hemingway, "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" (107-110)
- 20 Sherman Alexie, "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix Arizona" (768-776)
Smoke Signals
- 25 **Quiz 2**
James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (704-727)
Ursula LeGuin: "The One's Who Walk Away from Omelas" (423-427)
- 27 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (997-1008),
Kate Chopin, "The Storm" (992-996).
- Apr. 1 **Language of Identity**
Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (3-57)
- 3 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (58-110)
- 8 **Paper Due** (3-5 pages)
Lewis Thomas, "The Iks" (964-965)
Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to Be Colored Me" (953-956")
Wole Soyinka, "Telephone Conversation" (809-810)
- 10 Virginia Woolf "What if Shakespeare Had Had a Sister?" (944-951)
- 15 **Curtain Calls:**
Margaret Edson, *Wit*
- 17 **Research Topics Due**
Kurt Vonnegut, from *Slaughterhouse Five* (handout) (Change to Shooting an Elephant)
Tim O'Brien "How to Tell A True War Story" (handout).
- 22 **Quiz 3**
Dialing 911
Mark Twain "The War Prayer" (633-635)
Steve Earle, "Rich Man's War" (512)
- 24 *The Sand Box.*

29 *The Sand Box.*

May 1 *The Sand Box/ Inside Iraq.*

6 *The Sand Box.*
Last Day of Class/Paper