

Literary Theme Courses Spring 2013

English II

Learning Outcomes:

On completion of a theme course the student should be able to

- give an account of the content of the literary and critical texts studied in the course;
- define the basic literary genres and describe some literary works from each genre;
- identify and describe a number of literary works from different periods in the history of literature in English;
- demonstrate a critical understanding of basic concepts and methods of literary criticism;
- analyse literary texts applying such concepts and methods, orally and in writing;
- formulate an independent interpretation of a literary text;
- justify their own interpretations in a scholarly essay and in discussions.

Theme course 1: The Art of Crime

Joakim Wrethed

Course Description:

The somewhat odd murderer in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* describes a part of his unforgivable deed in the following way:

It's not easy to wield a hammer in a motor car. When I struck her the first time I expected to feel the sharp, clean smack of steel on bone, but it was more like hitting clay, or hard putty. The word *fontanel* sprang into my mind. I thought one good bash would do it, but, as the autopsy would show, she had a remarkably strong skull – even in that, you see, she was unlucky. (p. 113)

As is clear even in this short excerpt, even the horrible act of murder may have aesthetic qualities. The aim of this theme course is to examine the complicated relation between art and crime. There will be a historical dimension mirrored in the narratives selected, but there will also be a part of the course that focuses on crime in fiction as a philosophical issue and a mass culture phenomenon. We will read classics as well as less well known detective and crime fiction and we will also watch some episodes of TV-series of the CSI-type. Together we will explore different aspects of the phenomenon and hopefully our joint efforts will enable us to discern patterns that lead us in various exciting directions. Your own creativity as readers and your ideas about art and crime will constitute the core of the course.

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Required Reading

Reading will include a selection of 1800-2000 pages from the following list.

Fiction

Auster, Paul. *The New York Trilogy*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.
Banville, John. *The Book of Evidence*. London: Picador, 2010.
Black, Benjamin. *Christine Falls*. London: Picador, 2007.
Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep and Other Stories*. London: Penguin, 2000.
Christie, Agatha. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. London: Harper/Collins, 2002.
Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The Sign of Four*. London: Penguin, 2005.
Cornwell, Patricia. *Postmortem*. London: Sphere, 2007.
Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* [Norton Critical Edition]. New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2004.
Paretsky, Sara. *Hardball: Everyone Plays Dirty*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010.
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth* [Arden Shakespeare second series]. London: Methuen, 2003.

Films and TV-series

CSI Miami, 2002 (season 1, part 1). The first episode and another one of your own choice.
Sherlock (A New Sleuth for the 21st Century), 2010 (Series 1). Directed by Paul McGuigan.
Bound, 1996. Directed by the Wachowski brothers.
American Psycho, 2000. Directed by Mary Harron.
Psycho, 1960. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

Theoretical works

Scaggs, John. *Crime Fiction*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005. [excerpts]

Theme course 2: Epiphanies

Marina Ludwigs

In this course, we will read mostly canonical texts organized around moments of epiphany. In literature, the term *epiphany*, which refers to a “sudden spiritual manifestation,” is inherited from James Joyce. The original Christian epiphany refers to various manifestations of the divinity of Jesus. We will use this term to refer to the moments of revelation and decision on the part of characters. Something is irrevocably changed once a moment like this is experienced: when you have an epiphany, you “just know.” A typical example from one of the novels we will be reading, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, is a moving passage describing the protagonist's arresting realization of his literary vocation. Epiphanies are often not only key turning points for fictional characters that capture something very central to human experience but also poignant moments for readers that shape their understanding of the text's meaning. In addition to considering

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these moments' structural importance in individual texts, we will also theorize them as coping strategies that endeavor to “heal” the gap of representation by reorganizing and transforming chains of random events and occurrences into explanatory narratives. Ultimately, it is the operation of such explanatory narratives in bolstering identities and justifying decisions that foregrounds the meaning of free will and choice.

In addition to literary works, we will also read a selection of short excerpts from theoretical texts in order to get a better understanding of narrative meaning, plot as temporal structure, and epiphanies' function as important narrative nodes.

Required Reading

Reading will include a selection of 1800-2000 pages from the following list.

Fiction

Shakespeare, William: *The Winter's Tale*

Eliot, George: *Daniel Deronda*

James, Henry: *The Portrait of a Lady*

Joyce, James: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Woolf, Virginia: *To the Lighthouse*

Duras, Marguerite: *The Lover*

Film:

Rohmer, Eric: *The Winter Tale*

Theoretical texts (excerpts from some of the following):

Bal, Mieke: *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*

Brooks, Peter: *Reading for the Plot*

Curd, Martin, Cover J.A.: *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*

Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time*

Kermode, Frank: *The Sense of an Ending*

J. Hillis Miller: *What is a Kiss? Isabel's Moments of Decision*

Moretti, Frank: *The Way of the World*

Ricoeur, Paul: *Time and Narrative*

Theme course 3: Love and its Discontents

Adnan Mahmutovic

Course description

As Jeffrey Eugenides says in the foreword to a love-story collection, “Love stories depend on disappointment, on unequal births and feuding families, on matrimonial boredom and at least one cold heart. Love stories, nearly without exception, give love a

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bad name.” In this course on love and its discontents, we will take Eugenides at his word, and team around an analytical task of dissecting love stories.

Some of the questions raised in and by the course will be: Can love be analyzed like a thing, like an object, like a subject? *How* is love? What on earth *is* love? And most importantly, *where* in the world is love? We will borrow guidelines from different theoreticians on love, and base each seminar on one strong type of love and spin off from there to complicate and problematize the suggested type. We will tackle aspects such as romantic love and altruism, ecstatic love and solidarity love, and many more. Is love like a fax machine, useless if you are the only one that has it?

Required Reading

Reading will include a selection of 1800-2000 pages from the following list.

Novels and short stories

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead*

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Magendie, Kathryn. *Tender Graces*

Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*

The Bible “Genesis 39”, and *The Qur'an* chapter “Joseph” (handout)

Films

Othello (any version).

Wright, Sussana. *Jane Eyre* (BBC version). 2006.

Coppola, Francis Ford. *The Godfather*. 1972.

Theoretical Works (optional, for your theoretical development)

Barthes, Roland (2002). *Lover's Discourse: fragments*. Transl. Richard Howard. London: Vintage.

Evans, Mary (2003). *Love: An Unromantic Discussion*. Cambridge, Polity.

Cowburn, John (2003). *Love*. Marquette University Press.

Blanchot, Maurice. “The Community of Lovers” (handout).