ENL 258: Literary Studies - Master Syllabus

(University Studies Cluster 3A)

**Course Overview**

Content

A course for English majors designed to increase understanding of literary terms, forms, conventions and traditions, as well as help improve student writing, research and oral presentation skills by analyzing works from the three major literary genres: poetry, drama, and prose fiction (both short stories and the novel).

Course work

Will vary somewhat from section to section, but usually includes an anthology of representative works by poets, dramatists and writers of prose fiction from various time periods and diverse ethnic backgrounds, including novels by canonical authors like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, etc. and plays by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, etc. Course work includes regular quizzes and essays on assigned readings and excursions to live theatrical performances.

**All four outcomes of University Studies Cluster 3A: Literature are addressed by this course.**

**A.** Description

In analyzing methods of generating comedy, particular attention is paid to developing a critical vocabulary for understanding sources of verbal humor such as literalized metaphors, innuendo, word-play, exaggeration or understatement, as well as visual humor through sight gags, farce, and the like. Corresponding analytical vocabulary for satire includes terms like irony, sarcasm, vituperation, invective, hyperbole and parody.

**B**. Learning Outcomes

1. To identify characteristic features of literary genres, periods and movements

2. To define literary terms and concepts

3. To apply formalist strategies for ‘close reading’ in literary analysis

4. To conduct research using traditional and electronic sources, implementing MLA

guidelines

5. To produce highly competent writing that conforms to established stylistic

conventions

6. To develop verbal presentation skills both through informal class discussion and

formal oral reports—individual and group

Cluster 3A. Literature Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)--Students will be able to:

1. Articulate how literature both reflects and helps shape culture, society and

history.

2. Explain how a text's literary form, style and content express its meanings and

using appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary

texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to

their experiences.

**C**. Sample Texts

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times*

DiYanni, Robert, *Literature: Approaches to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 2nd Edition

Flaubert, Gustav, *Madame Bovary*

Hardy, Thomas, *Tess of the D’Durbervilles, Jude the Obscure, Mayor of Casterbridge*

Ibsen, Henrik, *A Doll House*

Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible*

Shakespeare, William, *The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, Richard III*

**D.** Example Single Assignment-From Artifact to Art (highlighting language related to University Studies SL#1, Articulate how literature both reflects and helps shape culture, society and history).

Abbreviated description of assignment:

Write a 1,000 word review of *The Merchant of* *Venice*, focusing on how effective

you believe the play’s staging, set, props, costumes and performances were in

conveying what you consider Shakespeare's central ideas. In other words, your

review must be based on an interpretation of the text.

**E.** Example Multiple-part Assignment--Group Performance (highlighting language

related to University Studies SLOs @# 2,3, and 4)

1. Abbreviated description of assignment**:**

Working in groups of 5-6 students, discuss features of the assign poem that reveal

the speaker’s tone:

Group I: “War is Kind”

Group II: “Naming of Parts”

Group III: "The Man He Killed,"

Group IV: “Dulce et Decorum Est”

2. Related University Studies learning outcomes

The group presentation project concerns Outcomes # 2,3, and 4 (See "Artifacts"

below for indication of how its components *address these learning outcomes*

*individually*):

2. Explain how a text's literary form, style and content express its meaning using

appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary

texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach

to their experiences.

3. Artifact generated by the assignment that can be sued to measure student

learning:

Essays: 20% each\*:

Write a 1,500 word (6-page) essay comparing and contrasting the moral

and psychological issues with which John Proctor and Hamlet dealt--not

simply how they dealt with those issues, but the actual issues themselves.

Because both works are highly philosophical and psychological, you are welcome to apply principles you have learned in Philosophy or Psychology courses--so long as you cite your sources. No matter what, be sure to support your assertions with selective textual evidence, annotated according to conventions illustrated in the student paper on pp. 117-119, as well as the "Manuscript Format" hand-out.

Research Essay: The overall purpose of this assignment is to investigate the multiple

sources of inspiration for Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney’s so-called “bog poems”—historical, political, biographical, geological, etc—in helping analyze Heaney’s imaginative use of these materials. Not counting the poems themselves, your essay should draw upon at least 5 sources of information, no more than 2 of which should be professional criticism about the poems. In other words, your other sources should include works like *The Bog People*, by P.V. Glob, biographies of Heaney, etc. Once again, direct quotation should be very selective and annotated according to conventions illustrated in *LIT*, pp. 1522-38 (the bibliography will count as 10% of your essay's grade).

\*See sample research essay below.

Evaluative criteria:

Essays significantly shorter or longer than 1,500 words (6 typewritten pages) or padded with unanalyzed quotations will be penalized proportionately.

Ignoring instructions outlined on the format sheet entitled, "Manuscript Format" will result in a full letter-grade penalty. Remember to include a title that encapsulates your thesis.

A full letter-grade will be deducted for recurring errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., or generally careless appearance.

Unless your essay has a thesis and concrete supporting evidence the highest grade

it will receive is C-.

Simply re-telling the "plot," stringing together various quotations, or listing various

"objects of ridicule" will likewise earn no higher than a C-.

You may use class notes and 'outside sources'—so long as you document the latter.

Organize your essay in any fashion you wish, but make sure it does have some recognizable principle of organization.

**F**. Examinations

Departmental exit exam assessing ability to analyze extracts from a poem, short story

and play in response to multiple-choice questions.

**G**. Supplementary Course Overview:

This foundation course for English and Liberal Arts majors is designed to enhance understanding of literary terms, forms, conventions and traditions, as well as help improve writing, research and oral presentation skills by analyzing works from the three major literary genres: poetry, drama, and prose fiction (both short stories and novels). Our overall objectives will be

• to identify characteristic features of literary genres, periods and

movements

• to define literary terms and concepts

• to apply formalist strategies for ‘close reading’ in literary analysis

• to conduct research using traditional and electronic sources,

implementing MLA guidelines

• to produce highly competent writing that conforms to established stylistic

conventions\*

• to develop verbal presentation skills through informal class discussion and

formal oral reports—both individual and group

\*The Reincarnation of Ancient Oppression into Modern Conflict: The Imaginative

Inspirations of Seamus Heaney

Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote a series of poems, known collectively as “The Bog Poems,” which concerned the eruption of Ireland’s “Troubles.” While ostensibly describing in vivid detail the discoveries of several ancient corpses recovered from the bogs of Denmark, Heaney employs the poems as a vehicle to convey his sense of ambivalence regarding the situation in Ireland; he does so by reflecting upon numerous historical and political influences, as well as experiences from his own life and the contextual details of the bog discoveries and weaving them all together into an elaborate metaphor displaying the parallels between the plight of the “Bog People” and the tumultuous social upheaval witnessed during the “Troubles.” As each successive poem unfolds, the feeling of aguish is delivered with significant force; Heaney tries to maintain an air of desperate hope, but his realization of the cyclic quality of human nature causes him to question the probability of future resolution. His ambivalence primarily stems from his own artistic integrity: he is unwilling to compromise his art by expanding it to the realm of propaganda. As a result, he maintains a position of relative neutrality, lamenting through his “Bog Poems” the escalation and continuation of the conflict without supporting the cause of either faction, regardless of his inherent sympathy for one side in particular.

Born into a Roman Catholic family in County Derry, Northern Ireland, Heaney found himself to be part of a minority in the historically Protestant region. The feeling of oppression inherent to being part of a minority became radically amplified with the outbreak of the so-called “Troubles” in the late 1960s. Living in Belfast at the time, Heaney witnessed firsthand the violent struggle between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Protestant Loyalists and British troops (Frangsmyr). In his poem “Casualty,” Heaney chronicles the death of his friend in the IRA bombing of a pub, questioning who, if anyone (or everyone), is at fault. This incident led Heaney to comprehend the utter absurdity of the conflict, noting that it is essentially a war of attrition, the ultimate victor affecting the higher death toll on his enemy. It also relates to Heaney’s creative use of the bog discoveries as a metaphor for the conflict in Ireland; the Iron-Age corpses discovered in Denmark had been victims of ritual sacrifice, just as the Irish Catholics were ultimately sacrificing their own in an effort to vanquish their opponents (Glob 22-23, 43-45). In “Punishment,” Heaney expresses an understanding—and even agreement—with the retaliatory violence perpetrated by the IRA, stating that although he would protest against such atrocities, he can also “understand the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge” (43-44). His use of the word “tribal” is indicative of two things: he is demonstrating his feeling a sense of unity with the Catholic faction of Northern Ireland, but he is also hinting that there is something very primal and savage about what they are doing. This latter sentiment ultimately conveys a message that the participants of this modern conflict are no different than the members of an ancient pagan society who engaged in ritualistic human sacrifice, establishing the idea that the course of human nature is cyclical.

Also in “Punishment,” Heaney describes himself as “the artful voyeur,” suggesting that, despite his sympathies, he is not an active participant in this conflict, but rather a by-stander taking in the violence around him as fuel for creative production (32). As an artist, it is important to Heaney that he remains detached from the politics of the situation and maintains his poetic integrity. Blake Morrison notes that Heaney is uncomfortable in the role of public spokesman that has been thrust upon him and that he questions “the extent to which poetry…can influence the course of history” (poetryfoundation.org). Heaney most often addresses the “Troubles” in a very broad sense, lamenting their occurrence, rather than criticizing one particular side. The metaphorical message he delivers through his “Bog Poems” similarly often refrains from critique and aims more for coming to an understanding, while maintaining a somewhat tenuous grasp of hope for the future. In her essay “Belonging as Mastery,” Magdalena Kay posits that in Heaney’s poems—particularly “The Tollund Man”—there is conveyed a sense of “fear that the land may swallow or pervert one’s selfhood” (79). This may be indicative of Heaney’s reluctance to tackle the subject of the Anglo-Irish conflict overtly in his poetry: he is afraid that he will get lost in the fervor of political extremism and his creative integrity will become compromised. Kay further quotes the final two lines of “The Tollund Man”—“I will feel lost,/ Unhappy and at home” (43-44)—as a means of demonstrating that Heaney is unhappy with his homeland, but it is “clearest when viewed from a distance and not at close range” (Kay 79); this assertion also suggests a necessity to remain aloof from the center of the conflict, that if he were to approach it up close, his poetry would suffer as a result.

Seamus Heaney found a great source of inspiration in P.V. Glob’s *The Bog People*, an account of the unearthing of several ancient bodies discovered in the bogs of Denmark. Each of the corpses had been the victim of ritual sacrifice, made as an offering to an Earth goddess to ensure fertility of body and soil (Glob 115). Heaney made a connection between the bodies in the bog and the Anglo-Irish/Protestant-Catholic conflict going on in Ireland: they each involved the sacrifice of a society’s own people for the purpose of attaining some higher ideal, fruitful harvests for the pagans and independence and freedom from oppression for the Irish Catholics. Quite disturbingly, the tenor and vehicle of Heaney’s morbid metaphor are historically situated nearly two thousand years apart, yet the violent, self-destructive behavior in which they each engage has continued without deviation. In some of Heaney’s earlier poems, particularly “Digging,” he refers to the peat bogs his forefathers worked on and cut for fuel. This presents an interesting parallel between the geological makeup of the Jutland bogs and those of Heaney’s native Ireland. Prior to making the connection between the “Bog People” and the Irish, Heaney first appreciated these findings for the presence of the Danish bogs themselves, somehow feeling a personal connection due to their similarities to those of Ireland. In a 1979 interview with James Randall, Heaney expressed that “the bog was a genuine obsession. It was an illiterate pleasure that I took in the landscape” (Randall). His intensely vivid descriptions of the bogs and those bodies as they are recovered from them are evidence of this pre-established fascination with the bog. Brian McHale, in his essay “Archaeologies of Knowledge,” asserts that Heaney’s “Bog Poems” are, in fact, a direct response to Glob’s *The Bog People*, and that Heaney, through the structure and language of his poems, is creating “archaeological depth and stratification,” as well as “depth in various ways at other levels of textual organization” (243). McHale cites as an example of this depth the narrow, elongated, vertical shape of Heaney’s “Bog Poems” (243). A further example of depth may be in the figurative language of the poems; Heaney’s construction of this metaphor for the Irish “Troubles” is a rather in-depth—and imaginative—re-working of the discovery of several ancient bodies in the bogs of the Jutland peninsula.

The animosity between the Irish and the British, along with their Irish-Protestant Loyalists, stems back several centuries, most notably with the defeat of James II and his Irish supporters by William of Orange in 1690 (guardian.co.uk). As a child growing up in Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney would have been subject to the humiliating display of the “Orangemen” commemorating the British victory at the Battle of the Boyne every July with celebratory marches throughout the region. Throughout the years the tension between these factions has remained, periodically surfacing and resulting in bloodshed. The primary motivation of the Irish Catholics for continuing this struggle is **survival** independent of oppressive rule. This motivation, coupled with the protracted duration of the feud, draws a comparison with the bog discoveries. The ancient pagans of Denmark offered human sacrifices to a fertility goddess in an attempt to ensure prosperous crops, along with their **survival**; the Irish engage is civil war to escape the ever-looming hand of oppression and ensure their own future prosperity. In “Bogland” Heaney writes “We have no prairies/ To slice a big sun at evening,” ostensibly alluding to the landscape of Ireland around the bogs (1-2); however, one may conclude that the sun may serve as a reference to the British Empire—upon which it never sets—and the inability “to slice” it alluding to the continued oppression of Ireland. Additionally, the Anglo-Irish feud itself has been going on for so long that one may consider it to be ancient, just like the society that offered its citizens in exchange for plentiful harvests; the historical implications here being that nothing ever changes, history is repetition ad infinitum and progress with regard to the human race is an illusion. If this is the case, and progress is moot because humanity equates to stagnation, then life is nothing more than death with a pulse.

Going in line with this notion, Heaney gives the corpse in “The Bog Queen” a sense of consciousness, essentially creating a dead creature which possesses properties of the living. The contradiction is further elaborated with the appearance of fruit growing on the corpse; the line “Bruised berries under my nails” is indicative of life emerging out of death (Bog Queen 22). This is suggestive of Heaney’s own hope for the future; he maintains an outlook that **eventually** the cycle of oppression, humiliation and self-sacrifice will be broken. Another contradiction may be found in “The Grauballe Man,” where Heaney writes, “but now he lies…/ hung in the scales/ with beauty and atrocity” (37, 42-43). The ironic juxtaposition of “beauty and atrocity” represents Heaney’s suggestion for co-existence between two warring factions; such an existence seems an impossibility, but the existent contradiction of beauty and atrocity in the world serves to establish that there may be no—or at least few—absolutes in this world. However, his choice of the “Bog People” to function as the vehicle for his metaphor demonstrates that this petition for peace is an act of futility and that history will continue to repeat itself. Heaney further hints at the futility of attempting to steer the course of history off of its current path in “Strange Fruit” when he writes, “Diodorus Siculus confessed/ His gradual ease with the likes of this” (9-10). Here he refers to the ancient Greek historian’s accounts of atrocities in the world of antiquity as a means of conveying the idea that this—violence, hatred and human indifference in the face of evil—is simply the way things are, and have always been.

The nature of the conflict surfacing in Northern Ireland during the “Troubles” of the 1960s and 1970s was so heinous and brutal that it is quite understandable that a witness to such an ordeal may look somewhere else for some type of answer, explanation or solution. In the case of Seamus Heaney, his search for answers came up short—essentially telling him that these things just happen—but his quest was not fruitless, as he was empowered with the inspiration that helped produce some of his most powerful poetry. Ever-hesitant to use his poetry as a political platform, Heaney avoided taking an overt stance and instead turned the discovery of ancient sacrificial victims in a bog into a desperate plea to the Irish people to work their hardest to divert the course of history—and human nature—from its path of destruction.

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