

English 303 (Spring 2016)
Dr. Justin M. Pfefferle
pfefferj@newpaltz.edu
@ProfPfefferle (#IntroBritLit)

Tuesday and Friday, 9:30-10:45
Office: J710
Office Hours: Wed, 12:00-4:00

English 303: Introduction to British Literature: The Canon and its Discontents

Course Description:

This course will introduce students to a representative survey of British literature from the 17th-century to the present. Over the course of the term, we will study a variety of canonical British texts, including poetry, theatre, short fiction, literary non-fiction, and the novel. As well as discussing the formal and aesthetic properties of the works we examine, we will spend time situating these texts in their respective cultural, historical, social, and political contexts. Of necessity, this work will entail a sustained conversation about what the concept of “the canonical” entails. Students who take this class should expect to finish the term with a rich sense of the British literary tradition. They should also look forward to acquiring an improved ability to develop and defend argumentative positions about literary works.

Learning Outcomes:

Think historically about a variety of literary forms from different periods and cultural contexts.

Write with increasing precision and clarity of mind about the relationship between aesthetics and thematic content in literary works.

Develop reading and research skills that may be put to use to craft original, historically informed, persuasive argumentative essays.

Acquire a thorough understanding and appreciation of the development of canonical literatures in Britain, as well as a sophisticated sense of the aesthetic, social, cultural, and political implications of thinking in terms of the canonical in the first place.

Required Texts:

Fleming, Ian. *Casino Royale*
Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*
Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*
Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Method of Evaluation:

In-Class Participation: 15%

Active, engaged, collaborative participation is crucial to the experience of a humanities education. Be prepared to contribute and help build a vigorous, stimulating intellectual community.

Online Engagement: 15%

In lieu of using Blackboard for online discussions and questions, this course will be using Twitter. As well as posting at least two critical questions per week, you'll be expected to maintain dialogue with one another (and with me! @ProfPfefferle)

Short Essay (3-4 pages, 1000-1200 words): 25%

The short essay will take the form of a close textual analysis of a short passage in a particular literary work. It will give students an opportunity to work toward crafting an idea that may be developed in the final essay, and must be written in formal, polished, analytical prose. It will be evaluated on the basis of the originality of thought, clarity and precision of language, and sophistication of analysis.

Due: Friday 12 February 2016

Essay Proposal (1-2 pages, 300-500 words): 15%

Three weeks prior to the final essay due date, students must submit a short essay proposal in the form of an abstract. The objective of the proposal will be to solicit feedback that will help you develop your ideas into a persuasive, argumentative paper. The proposal should introduce a question, or set of questions, as well as a tentative thesis statement that will serve as a foundation from which to organize the final essay.

Due: Friday 1 April 2016

Research Essay (5-6 pages, 1200-1500 words): 30%

The final essay will require that students complement close textual analysis with an assessment of the relevant social, historical, theoretical, and philosophical concepts at stake in the text(s) and period under discussion. You'll situate your reading of a particular literary work (or works) within the context of the critical conversations that we will have had over the course of the term.

Due: Friday 6 May 2016

NB: The two essays and research proposal **must** be submitted in hard copy, in class on their respective due dates.

Class Schedule:

Week One: "English" and the British Literary Canon

Harold Bloom, Selection from *The Western Canon*: "An Elegy for the Canon"

Terry Eagleton, Selection from *Literary Theory: An Introduction*: "The Rise of English"

Week Two: Shakespeare, the Canonical Figure *Par Excellence*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Week Three: English Literature, the British Empire, and the Culture of Curiosity

Shakespeare, *The Tempest* continued

Week Four: Romantics and Radicals

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Week Five: Romantic Feminism

Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women"

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Due: Short Essay (Friday, 12 February)

Week Six: Narrative Agency; or, Can Texts Have Lives of their Own?

Shelley, *Frankenstein* continued

Week Seven: Victorian Values and their Discontents

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Week Eight: Modernist Politics, Modernist Aesthetics

James Joyce, "The Dead"

Week Nine: The Modernist Novel

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Week Ten: The Modernist Novel, cont.

Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* continued

Week Eleven: Englishness and the Documentary Turn

John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary"

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

Film Screening: Alberto Cavalcanti, *Coal Face*; Harry Watt and Basil Wright, *Night Mail*

Week Twelve: British Literature, Irish Identity, and the Second World War

Elizabeth Bowen, Stories from *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*: "Introduction," "The Inherited Clock," "The Demon Lover," "Ivy Grippled the Steps" (1945)

--. Selections from *The Mulberry Tree*: "London, 1940"

Due: Research Essay Proposal (Friday, 1 April)

Week Thirteen: The Novel for a Cold War Environment

Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale*

Week Fourteen: Angry Young Men

Alan Sillitoe, "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner"

Philip Larkin, "This Be the Verse" and "Church Going"

Week Fifteen: The Empire Writes Back

Salman Rushdie, "Step Across this Line"

Zadie Smith, "The Waiter's Wife"

Due: Research Essay (Friday, 6 May)

Attendance:

Attendance is mandatory. Unless you have cleared it with me, failure to attend more than three classes will result in your being asked to withdraw from the course.

Late Work:

Due dates are non-negotiable. Although I will accept late work, I will dock a half-letter grade per day late. Thus, a paper that is one day late that would have received an A will receive an A-. Two days late: B+. And so on.

College ADA Policy:

Students with documented physical, learning, psychological and other disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations. If you need classroom or testing accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (Student Union Building, Room 205, 257-3020). The DRC will provide forms verifying the need for accommodation. As soon as the instructor receives the form, you will be provided with the appropriate accommodations. Students are encouraged to request accommodations as close to the beginning of the semester as possible.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work. Cheating, forgery, and plagiarism are serious offenses, and students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary action.

If a student has any question about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, it is that student's responsibility to clarify the matter by conferring with the instructor and to seek out other resources available on the campus. The link regarding plagiarism on the Sojourner Truth Library's website is an excellent beginning:

<http://lib.newpaltz.edu/assistance/plag.html>

Technology Policy:

A 2011 study at the University of Michigan found that 75% of students reported "using a laptop during class increased the amount of time they spent on non-course work." 35% of students reported having spent "more than ten minutes per class using social media sites and email.

Although I am uploading readings to the web, I expect you to print them out and have them with you—ideally with voluminous marginal notes!—in class every day. Without exception, laptops, tablets, and cell phones must be stowed away in bags.