

ENG 110 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF FICTION
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

“But man -- let me offer you a definition -- is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories. He has to keep on making them up. As long as there's a story, it's all right. Even in his last moments, it's said, in the split second of a fatal fall -- or when he's about to drown -- he sees, passing rapidly before him, the story of his whole life .”

Graham Swift. *Waterland*. London: Picador, 1983, 53.

Stories or, rather, *story-telling* is, then, what this course is all about. Its aim is to focus on the different ways we tell stories or, indeed, the ways different stories *tell us* (for stories create and re-create us as much as we do). In this course the emphasis falls on fiction, that is, on *stories written in prose*. Different forms of fiction will be studied (the fairy tale, the allegory, the 19th century domestic story, the modern and postmodern short story, the novel) with the intention not only to point out their differences (in other words, the features that distinguish them as separate *genres*), but also with the hope of showing where all these forms merge: i.e. their function as *narratives*. As a result, our early discussions will familiarize you with the main narrative elements as structuralist theory has defined them (e.g. *histoire* and *discours*, focalization, characterization, temporality, causality, etc.). Later discussions will trace the changes these elements have undergone in specific historical periods and in the context of different literary traditions (i.e. Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, Postmodernism). Finally, we will explore some urgent theoretical questions raised in most contemporary approaches to narrative: i.e. Does a narrative aim at representing life? Does its author determine the adventure of meaning taking place in it? Is reading something that "happens" to a narrative leaving it unaltered? How do a reader's personal history and social position influence the reading process? In what sense is a narrative always engaged in a dialogue with other narratives -- irrespective of whether it acknowledges its relation to them or not?

Apart from imparting to you the theoretical and practical knowledge indispensable in any of your future contacts with fiction, the course hopes, ultimately, to open you up (or, perhaps, call you back) to the magic of story-telling, this incomprehensible feeling of desire and expectation triggered off by the familiar, “innocent” phrase: “Once upon a time....”

REQUIRED TEXTS (on short loan)

H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Tales of New York* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 2000).

The following books are *very* helpful both in the context of this course and in the context of your studies in the area of Literature in general:

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Jeremy Hawthorn, *Studying the Novel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

All other primary texts are included in your course packet.

USEFUL SECONDARY MATERIAL (on short loan)

Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Mieke Bal, *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1985).

Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978).

Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983).

Lilian R. Furst, ed. *Realism* (London: Longman, 1992).

Donald Pizer, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

Vassiliki Kolokotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou, eds. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004).

Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984).

GRADING

The final grade for this course will be based on:

- a *midterm exam* – 30%
- a *final exam* – 50%

My aim in these exams is to evaluate a) your knowledge and understanding of both the theoretical material and the literary texts studied; b) your ability to bring together (compare/contrast) different literary texts from a particular theoretical perspective; c) evidence of critical ability and/or originality in your engagement with literary texts. Please note that academic honesty is absolutely required: ***plagiarism is unacceptable*** in any form and will automatically lead to your failure in the course.

The remaining 20% of your final grade will be based on:

- short creative assignments or in-class presentations on one of the literary texts discussed;
- the completion of assigned reading *before* each meeting;
- *active* participation in class-discussions;
- *regular* attendance.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge & Understanding (Theory Component)

- Appreciate how narratives work, learn to recognize the key narrative elements;
- Formulate an understanding of how the literary genre of fiction has developed from the early, orally-transmitted stories that abound in pre-modern civilizations (e.g. the fable, the fairy-tale) to the modern and postmodern fictional forms we are currently familiar with;
- Develop an ability to discuss the different literary traditions that have affected the production of a variety of fictional forms as well as our understanding of the relation between reality and fiction;
- Explore central theoretical questions that facilitate the process of reading and interpreting a wide range of fictional texts.

Key Skills (Practical Component)

- Analyse the basic narrative elements and the changes these have undergone in selected works of fiction;
- Apply the required skills in scholarly research and citation to compose concise and valid interpretations of particular thematic or stylistic aspects of a short story or a novel;
- Develop the ability to discuss historically and comparatively two or more fictional texts.

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

Week 1: Introduction to the course.

Storytelling - Power - Desire

H. Porter Abbott, "Narrative and Life," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1-12.

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, "Narrative," in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall, 1999): 54-62.

Week 2: Prologue and Conclusion from *A Thousand and One Nights*.

H. Porter Abbott, "Narrative and Life" (cont.)
Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, "Narrative" (cont.)

Narrative – Representation – Mediation - Construction

H. Porter Abbott, "Defining Narrative" in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 13-24.

Week 3: H. Porter Abbott, "The Rhetoric of Narrative" in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 40-54.

Julian Barnes, "Shipwreck - II," in *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* (London: Picador, 1989): 125-139.

Week 4: H. Porter Abbott, "Narration," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002): 67-77.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter," *The Art of the Short Story*, edited by Wendy Martin (Boston & NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006): 178-198.

Week 5: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," *The Art of the Short Story*, edited by Wendy Martin (Boston & NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006): 432-444.

Review of theoretical material.

Week 6: *Midterm Exam*

Reality and Realism: How Does Life Turn into a Plot?

A Window onto the World

Ian Watt, "Realism and the Novel Form" from *The Rise of the Novel in The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000*, Dorothy J. Hale, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 462-480.

Week 7: Ian Watt, "Realism and the Novel Form" (cont.)

"Balzac Addresses the Reader About Truth" and "Duranty on the Principles of Realism," in *Realism*, Lilian R. Furst, ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1992): 30-32.

Richard Lehan, "The European Background," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*, Donald Pizer, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995: 47-49, 65-66.

Introducing Naturalism and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (A Story of New York)

Week 8: ***The Paradox of the In-dividual: Freedom and determinism***

Bennett & Royle, "Character," in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*: (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall, 1999): 63-70.

Charles Darwin, from *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, edited by Vassiliki Kolokotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 10-12.

Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (cont.)

Week 9: ***Causality - Epistemophilia - Closure***

H. Porter Abbott, "Closure" and "Interpreting Narrative," in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 55-66, 83-95.

Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (cont.)

Week 10: **Life Escapes**

Beyond the “tyranny of the plot”

Virginia Woolf, “Modern Fiction,” in *20th Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London & New York: Longman, 1972): 85-91.

Virginia Woolf, “The Mark on the Wall,” in *The Arnold Anthology of British and Irish Literature in English*, edited by Robert Clark and Thomas Healy (London: Arnold, 1997): 1331-1336.

Week 11: Virginia Woolf, “The Mark on the Wall,” (cont.)

Henri Bergson, from *Creative Evolution*, in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, edited by Vassiliki Kolokotroni, Jane Goldman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 68-71.

The “dark places of psychology”

H. Porter Abbott, “Narration” and “Interpreting Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 77-78, 95-97.

Katherine Mansfield, “Miss Brill” in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, fifth edition, X. J. Kennedy (New York: Harper Collins, 1991): 31-35.

Week 12: James Joyce, “Araby,” in *The Art of the Short Story*, edited by Wendy Martin (Boston & NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006): 600-605.

Tillie Olsen, “I Stand Here Ironing,” in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, fifth edition, X. J. Kennedy (New York: Harper Collins, 1991): 448-454.

Week 13: **Re-Plotting Life**

Patricia Waugh, “The Analysis of frames: metafiction and framebreaking,” in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984): 28-34.

Margaret Atwood, “Happy Endings,” *The Art of the Short Story*,

edited by Wendy Martin (Boston & NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006): 929-931.