Introduction to Critical Reading and Writing

The goal of this course is to sharpen and broaden your analytical, interpretative and critical skills by exposing you to a variety of stories, and to a variety of ways of describing, interpreting, discussing and writing about them. We will be doing a lot of close reading, and there will be a reading and short assignment for each class. While the stories we will be discussing are generally not long, you will be doing a lot of thinking, talking and writing about them.

Texts:

R. S. Gwynn (ed) *Fiction: A Pocket Anthology* (7th edn, Prentice Hall)

Maria Tatar (ed) *Classic Fairy Tales* (Norton Critical Edition)


Syllabus

Aug. 21. Introduction


Notes: Repetitions within and between stories; oppositions.

Concepts: Story and Narrative; Defamiliarization, Demythologizing.


Notes: Repetitions and binary oppositions

Concepts: Story and Narrative; Selection; ordering


2 Paragraphs: Functions of Repetitions; of binary opposition/s

Concepts: focalization; episodic structure; ordering

Sept. 4. Gwynn, “The Minister’s Black Veil” 47-63

Notes: Repetition and differences in representations of the veil

Concepts: Centering/decentering; presence/absence

Sept 6 Gwynn, “The Red Convertible” 373-82
Paragraph: Repetition and differences in representation of the car
Concepts: Centering/Decentering; Presence/Absence
Notes: Repetitions of symbols; binary oppositions, citations
Concepts: Repetition and Citation, Structure and Defamiliarization.
Sept 13 Gwynn, “The Story of an Hour” 83-6; “Happy Endings” 309-12
Paragraph: Analyze the ending of “The Story of an Hour”: what does it add/change?
Endings: poetic justice, open, closed, surprise, ambiguous, and other
Sept 18. NO CLASS
Sept 20 FIRST PAPER DUE
Sept. 25 Gwynn, “Roman Fever” 102-14; “Girl” 350-1
Notes: Characterization through speech: who and how?
Concepts: Representation, Demythologizing
Sept 27. Gwynn, “The White Heron” 66-75
Paragraph: Why this title? How does it characterize a character and/or the story?
Concepts: Direct and Indirect Characterization; doppelganger
Oct 2. Gwynn, “The Bear who Came over the Mountain” 252-77
Paragraph: Why this title?
Concepts: Focalization, Reliable/Unreliable Narration; Direct and Indirect Characterization
Notes: Reliable/Unreliable Narrator; Direct and Indirect Characterization
Concepts: Demythologizing, presence/absence
Notes: Citation, Characterization, Demythologizing
Oct 11 Gwynn, “A Rose for Emily” 152-60; “Mother Savage” 76-83
Notes: Centering/Decentering; Presence/Absence
Concepts: Frame Story; Embedded story; addressees and readers.

Notes: Treatment of time

Concepts: foreshadowing, flashback, dramatic irony

Oct. 18  Gwynn, “A Memory” 178-183 (“Roman Fever”)

Paragraph: Treatment of time

Oct 23  SECOND PAPER DUE

Oct 25  Discussion of papers: Read “Shiloh” or “Cathedral” (whichever you haven’t written on)


“Traditional Approaches,” sections IIA; III A, B1 and4; IV A, IV B1 and 4.

Notes: Construction of the arguments; what is present/absent? Weighted Words? What does/doesn’t get explained about the poem and the story?


Notes: Construction of the argument: what is present/absent, assumed/implied? Weighted Words? What does/doesn’t get explained about the poem and story?


Notes: Construction of the argument: what is assumed/implied, present/absent? Weighted Words? What does/doesn’t get explained about the poem and story?

Nov 8  Guerin, Feminism and Gender Studies” I, II, III, IV, V A and D.

Paragraph: Construction of the arguments: assumptions, implications etc.

Nov 13  Guerin, “ “Materialisms” I, II, III, IV, V, VI A and D

Paragraph: Construction of the arguments etc.

Nov 27  Guerin, “Cultural Studies” I, II, III, IV B & D

Paragraph: Construction of the arguments etc.

Nov 29  THIRD PAPER

Dec. 4.  Guerin: Limitations p. 70, 122, 197, 222, 251, 299, 354

Dec 6. Wrap up
Assignments and Grades

1. **40%** of your grade will be a joint participation/notes grade. Brief notes or a paragraph (a page max) need to be written and typed up for each class; we will use these in class, and I will take them up from time to time.

2. **60% of the grade: 3 Papers** – You may rewrite the first two, if it is clear that you took the assignment seriously the first time.

Your essay should be **four pages double-spaced, typed and stapled -- hard copy not emailed.** Don’t forget your name. Write out or otherwise indicate clearly which question you are answering.

Your first paragraph should tell your reader what your argument is and how you are going to develop and substantiate it in the rest of the essay. Your last paragraph should sum up the major parts of your argument and remind the reader where s/he has been. You may find when you get to your conclusion, that you did not, in fact, argue what you thought you were going to argue, or that the evidence/your thinking took a different turn from what you initially expected. Going back to ensure that your introduction and the connections all the way through lead to the conclusion you claim and that you have made your point/s convincingly, is what word processors and second drafts are for.

**Sept 20 -- Paper #1.** Choose ONE of the following:

1) Imagine two different endings for one of the Gwynn stories we have read, and describe a) what interpretation/s the present ending invites; b) how your endings would change the possible interpretation/s of the narrative.

2) Analyze “Sweat” (Gwynn 140) working with repetitions, binary oppositions, narrative vs story, selection, ordering, demythologizing and presence/absence as relevant.

3) Margaret Atwood writes: “The only authentic ending is the one provided here: John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die.” (Gwynn, 312) Discuss with specific reference to at least two stories we have read. Think it through first, for instance: do you trust that word “authentic?” If true, is this more true of life or of stories, true of both or of neither? if this is true, and all stories don’t end with death, how do different narratives meet the challenge of ending the story (and what kind of challenge are they meeting)? If it is not true, what does it say about different kinds of ending, and how is that borne out in specific stories?

**Oct 23 – Paper #2.** Choose ONE of the following:

1) While elucidating the story, describe the methods of characterization and narrative technique/s in “Shiloh” (Gwynn 313), highlighting distinctions between what is stated and what is implied, what is present and what is absent. Use concepts such as narrative, selection, ordering, repetitions, binary oppositions, demythologizing etc as necessary.

2) While elucidating the story, describe the treatment of time in “Cathedral” (Gwynn 278) and explain why you think each temporal move is being made. Use concepts such as direct and indirect characterization, narrative/story, selection, ordering, repetitions etc. as necessary.

**Nov 29 – Paper #3** Choose ONE of the following:

1) Analyze EITHER “Sex and Violence” (Tatar, 364-73) OR Bettelheim (Tatar 269-79) OR “Yours, Mine or Ours”(Tatar 353-64) showing how the argument is constructed, what school/s of criticism it belongs to, and use one or more of the tales we have read to evaluate its effectiveness in elucidating or demythologizing the story/ies.
2) Analyze one of the stories we have read using two of the approaches described in Guerin, and say what you are having to leave out.

3) Take two of the stories we have read, explain which approach/es you think would add most to our understanding of each *particular* story and why. This essay HAS to be specific: about the story, you need to show what the approach brings out/fails to bring out in those particular stories.

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**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesday and Thursday, 10:15-11:45, Gittinger 103 and by appt.

**Email:** etbannet @ou.edu

*Come and see me, and/or email me, when you have questions or concerns*

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**Academic Misconduct:** You should be aware that academic misconduct entails severe penalties and incurs the resentment of honest students. Definition: a) Academic misconduct includes cheating (using unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise), plagiarism, falsification of records, unauthorized possession of examinations, intimidation, and any and all other actions that may improperly effect the evaluation of a student's academic performance or achievement; b) assisting others in any such acts or attempts to engage in such acts” (Student Code Book, p. 21).

The most common form of academic misconduct is plagiarism. It is your responsibility as a student to familiarize yourself with the rules of academic citation. A full account of how and when to reference sources is available on Blackboard for this course in the "Film Writing Guide." I would suggest downloading it and following it carefully as you prepare assignments. Briefly, plagiarism is using words, thoughts, ideas, writings, or artistic works of someone else and passing them off as your own without complete citation in footnotes, endnotes, or internal citations. In our Internet era, it is all too easy to copy text off of the Web. It is also, however, easy for instructors to catch this, so don’t do it! Each student in this class should familiarize himself/herself with the University’s policies and procedures involving academic misconduct, grievances, sexual and ethnic harassment, and discrimination based on physical handicap. No behaviors in violation of these policies will be tolerated.

**Students with Disabilities** - If you have any physical, visual, auditory, or learning disability that may impede your ability to understand course material or meet performance requirements, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can explore possible alternative arrangements to meet your needs. **OU Writing Center:** offers free help with your pre-writing, organizing, documenting of sources
or revising of other aspects of an assignment. You can make an appointment for a free 45 minute conference by calling 325 2926. But don't wait for the last minute before the paper is due to call. The Writing Center is located in Physical Sciences Center, Room 209, and is open 9-8 MTW and 9-5 ThF.