

Oakland University
College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
ENG 1700 (CRN 43352) Modern Literature (4)
Fall 2018

Instructor: Robert Anderson (544-D O'Dowd) **Email:** r2anders@oakland.edu
Class: T/Th, 8-9:47 174 SF **Office Hrs:** T/H 10-11; M 9-10; by appt.

Course (Catalog) Description:

English 111: Modern Literature

A general introduction to modern literature, which can include works written from the early twentieth century to the present, with some attention to literary form and to the way in which literature is a reflection of culture.

This class satisfies the General Education requirements in the Literature category.

“The study of literature enables the student to move beyond individual experience by participating in the intellectual, emotional and spiritual experiences of others. The study of the ways literary works fuse form and content cultivates sensitivity to language and enhances awareness of our humanity.” -- Academic Policies and Procedures, *Oakland University Undergraduate Catalog* (57).

Course Prerequisites: None

General Education Learning Outcomes:

1. Development of knowledge of literary form
2. Development of understanding of ways in which literature is a reflection of culture

Cross-Cutting Capacities:

1. Critical Thinking

Course Objectives:

1. Development of close reading skills
2. Development of knowledge of historical context and its relation to theme
3. Development of knowledge of literary form, which can include elements such as style, genre, and point of view

English 111, Modern Literature, is a general education course designed to present an overview of the themes and stylistic developments particular to world literature in the twentieth century and beyond. Our particular focus will be on relatively recent award-winning fiction. We will read novels written by Nobel Prize winning novelists, and books which won the Pulitzer Prize, the Man-Booker Prize, and the National Book Critics Circle Prize. Part of our work this semester will be to talk about what, if anything, awards mean. This will naturally lead us into exploring the place of fiction in our culture today.

Our primary focus, however, will be on the way these novels explore the limits and possibilities of form. How do writers experiment with the conventions of story-telling? How do these experiments shape our reading experience? At the same time, we will explore how fiction seeks to interpret social, political, moral, and religious maladies. Because fiction deals with relations between people and, frequently, relations between people from different religious, class, ethnic, racial and national groups, it can be a powerful means of exploring and criticizing societies. Because fiction is written by people who are themselves parts of these groups and

societies, it is often infected with some of the same maladies they seek to analyze. These maladies (slavery, racism, ethnocentrism, intolerance, authoritarianism, selfishness) are products of history and culture. This is to say that examining fiction as interpreters of maladies will help us understand the ways literature is a reflection of culture. Our job will be to pay close attention to the novels and short stories we read to see what they have to say about us, and, more importantly, how they say these things.

A word of caution some of these books are disturbing. Some contain descriptions of sexual violence. If this is a problem for you, please contact me.

Attending to *how* literature “says” what it has to say requires that we learn about literary form, which includes genre (novel, short story) as well as devices and tools (plot, point of view, setting, perspective, voice, diction) that are at work within the novels and stories. Understanding literary form will help us see how literature works, which is crucial to becoming an active, critical reader. Your first challenge will be to move beyond summarizing and paraphrasing what happens in a work of fiction and into analyzing how it works. When we summarize a novel or a short story, much gets left out—namely, the literature. We will spend time regularly talking about these formal elements of fiction, examining how they work for the writers who use them.

Attending to how literature works brings us back to its language. This is what we call close reading, which is the heart of literary study. Language is everything in literature. Every claim about a novel (or a poem or a short story) must be supported by the language of the work to be of any use. I will ask you to back up your claims by pointing to the language of the text and supporting them with analysis. This daily practice will be crucial preparation for your exams.

Course Procedures and Expectations of Students:

Each student is expected to read the assigned texts carefully and to come to class prepared to discuss them. If all you have to bring to class are questions and confusion, you will be helping the class, especially if you can be clear about the sources of those questions. In order for the class to be a success, each student must contribute. Because the contribution of each student is so important for the class, a portion of your grade will be based on your contribution to class discussions. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, this is a good time to stretch yourself. If you lack confidence about your ability to analyze literature, then this is a great opportunity to boost your grade. I am eager to meet with you in my office to talk about strategies to increase your understanding. If you are struggling, come see us early. We want to make this class a good experience for you—more importantly, we would like to help you find pleasure in reading great literature.

I don't plan to teach you what these novels mean so that you can repeat it on exams and quizzes. The goal of this class is to give you the opportunity to develop skills for reading and analyzing literature. I can't give you those skills by lecturing to you. You develop those skills by practicing them in class, in quizzes and on exams. Practicing them in class comes without risk and will help your efforts on the quizzes and exams where there is risk.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING (All grades are on a 4-point scale.)

Quizzes (20%): There will be a quiz almost every day in class. The quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. Once the quizzes are collected, no more quizzes will be accepted and those not turned in will get a “0.” There will be a couple of opportunities to do things that will allow you to make up for missed quizzes, but there will be no make-up quizzes. If you miss class, you miss the quiz. Depending on how many quizzes we have, I will drop a quiz or two. Each quiz

will ask you a factual question (who did or said what to whom) and ask you to analyze that the factual part (how does the factual element produce meaning in the work).

Exams (30% each): There will be two exams. Although **this may change** (if it does, I will let you know well in advance), each exam will have three parts: 1) definition of literary terms; 2) identification and analysis of passages; 3) essay question. The exams are designed partly to test your knowledge of the material we are studying, but mostly to give you the opportunity to show how much you know and how skilled you are in analyzing literature. My experience shows me that a large portion of your grade on the exam will be based on how well you answer questions. Because of this, I will post a practice exam (and answers) on Moodle the week before the exam. After the first exam, I will distribute examples of successful exams.

Participation (20%): To get a “4” for this portion of your grade, you will need to be a regular, frequent and substantial contributor to class discussions. If you come to class every day and sit quietly and listen, you can expect to get a “2” for this portion. If you come to class and are a distraction (to yourself or others), you won’t be getting a “2.” Try taking notes. You can use note paper or even mark in the margins of your book—that is what the pros do. If you miss more than four days, you will find it difficult to pass the class.

Grade Determination:

Quizzes: 20

Exam 1: 30

Exam 2: 30

Participation: 20

Classroom Rules: Don’t fiddle with your phone during class. I assure you I can see it. If you are expecting an emergency call, leave your phone on your desk and disregard it. Otherwise, put your phone away and engage yourself in the class. Be respectful to the members of our classroom community.

A Note on Academic Conduct: You are expected to do your own work. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing in any way will be referred to the University’s Academic Conduct Committee. Students found guilty may be suspended or expelled, but will fail the class. Don’t do it. If you do, it will make both of us miserable—but I will get over it more quickly.

OU’s academic conduct policy: <http://catalog.oakland.edu/content.php?catoid=3&navoid=150>

Students with Disabilities:

All students with disabilities that require accommodations should let me know and contact the Office of Disability and Support Services (121 North Foundation Hall, (248) 370-3266) during the first week of classes. For more information, visit <http://www.oakland.edu/dss>.

Required Texts: Use the editions listed below.

Jose Saramago, *Blindness*. HBC. 9780156007757

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*. HBC. 9780156027328

Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Houghton-Mifflin. 9780395927205

Jennifer Egan, *Visit from the Goon Squad*. Penguin Random House. 978-0307477477

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. Penguin Random House. 9781400033416

Ishiguro, Kazuo. Penguin Random House. *Never Let Me Go*. 9781400078776

Class Schedule

6 H

11 T José Saramago, *Blindnes*, 1-93.

13 H Saramago, *Blindness*, 94-159.

18 T Saramago, *Blindness*, 160-269.

20 H Saramago, *Blindness*, 270-326.

25 T Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*, ch. 1-36 (1-93)

27 H Martel, *Life of Pi*, ch 37-54 (94-159)

2 T Martel, *Life of Pi*, ch. 55-90 (159-255)

4 H Martel, *Life of Pi*, ch. 91-100 (255-326)

9 T Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* ("A Temporary Matter," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine," *Interpreter of Maladies*," "A Real Durwan," "Sexy")

11 H Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* ("Mrs. Sen's," "This Blessed House," "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar," "The Third and Final Continent")

16 T EXAM 1

18 H Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1-51)

23 T Morrison, *Beloved* (52-100)

25 H Morrison, *Beloved* (101-56)

30 T Morrison, *Beloved* (167-235)

1 H Morrison, *Beloved* (236-70)

NOV

6 T Morrison, *Beloved* (271-324)

8 H Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (1-89)

13 T Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (90-196)

15 H Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (197-288)

20 T Exam 2

22 H THANKSGIVING

27 T Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, ch. 1-5 (1-91)

29 H Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, ch. 6-8 (92-165)

DEC

4 T Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, ch. 9-11 (166-233)

6 H Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, ch. 12 to end (233-339)