

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

NEIL HARTLEN

Fall 1997 305 South College

MWF 10:10-11:00 Office hours: W 1:30-3:30

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INTERNATIONAL SHORT STORY

This class is an introduction to the close reading and textual analysis of short fiction. As a Comparative Literature class, it aims to examine stories written in languages other than English (read in translation) as well as to consider the heterogeneity of English-language short story production. Stories can open up different worlds to the reader, and we will work to develop strategies of reading that are sensitive to cultural differences. In addition, we will work toward an understanding of the short story as a specific literary genre, with strengths and limitations shared between various story writers.

Since the reading load is not as heavy as for other courses, you will be expected to do careful and thorough readings of the assigned stories before coming to class. When you've read them once, read them again! You will be required to demonstrate your analytical skills in class discussion as well as in numerous papers, details of which are provided below.

Texts:

The Story and its Writer. Anne Charters, ed. (Available at Atticus/Albion Books, Amherst)

Numerous handouts, given out in class. (C)

Requirements:

- **Daily Attendance.** You are allowed only three (3) unexcused absences. Every absence thereafter drops the final term grade by one-half of a letter grade.
- Loudmouthed participation
- Reading aloud
- **Daily Question/Comment paragraph:** This is due every Monday and Wednesday morning, will be collected, and will form part of your participation grade. It should consist of several sentences of questions, thoughts, ruminations, speculations or arguments which you are to bring up in class. You will occasionally be called upon to read your paragraph aloud. You should jot it down while you are reading; it is to be treated as class preparation, not as formal writing.
- **Three 2-3 page "responses",** typed, to be written on the stories of your choice. Potential topics will be provided; you may also choose a topic of your own. They should be more organized than your paragraphs, and must address a particular argument or question (i.e. they must have a thesis). Use evidence from the story (citing where necessary). They are not plot summaries; they are brief expository essays. They will be graded.
- **One final paper, 8 pp./2000 words,** on the subject of your choice (once again, suggestions will be provided.) This will go through two revisions. The first draft will be subjected to "peer review", the second draft will be corrected by the instructor, the third will be graded.

Grade:

30% Preparation and Participation (includes question/comment paragraphs)

30% 3 Responses

40% Final paper (including drafts)

***Additional writing guidelines will follow.

Week One. Formal and Thematic Introduction to the "International Short Story"

- 9/3 "The Snow Child", Angela Carter (C) . Short and...sweet?
- 9/5 "A Travel Piece", Margaret Atwood (C). How do we relate to different cultures?
The flawed model of the travel writer.

Weeks Two-Four. Short Story: Origins and Materials

- 9/8 "The Necklace" and "The Writer's Goal", Guy de Maupassant. A straightforward tale...with a twist.
- 9/10 "The Purloined Letter" (C), Edgar Allan Poe. The question at the heart of the story.
- 9/12 Discussion
- 9/15 "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Importance of the Single Effect in the Prose Tale", Edgar Allan Poe. With what eloquence does a madman speak?
- 9/17 "The Overcoat", Nikolai Gogol. The narrator is sane...but shifty.
- 9/19 Disc.
- 9/22 "The Lady with the Pet Dog" and "Technique in Writing the Short Story", Anton Chekhov. The objects that speak reality.
- 9/24 The Problems of/in Translation. (In-class exercise.)
- 9/26 Disc. **First response due.**

Weeks Five to Nine: Inside and Across Nations: Writing and Difference

Week Five: Writing and Sexual Difference

- 9/29 "Desirée's Baby", Kate Chopin. At the crossroads of gender and race.
- 10/1 "The Yellow Wallpaper", Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Who is making the narrator sick?
"The Hidden Woman" (C), Colette. What does a woman want?
- 10/3 Disc.

Weeks Six to Eight: Colonial differences

- 10/6 "Heart of Darkness", Joseph Conrad, Session One. Europe's bad dream...
- 10/8 "Heart of Darkness", Session Two.

- 10/10 Disc.
- 10/13 No class, Columbus Day.
- 10/15 "A Meeting in the Dark" (C), Ngugi wa Thiong. The legacy of colonialism.
- 10/17 No class, instructor away.
- 10/20 "Dead Men's Path" (C), Chinua Achebe. The irony of colonialism. **Second response due.**
- 10/22 "In the Shadow of War", Ben Okri. Civil war through a child's eyes...
- 10/24 Disc.

Week Nine: Internal colonies and minor literatures.

- 10/27 "The Metamorphosis", Franz Kafka, Session One. Deterritorialization I: the tragedy and comedy of the absurd.
- 10/29 "The Metamorphosis", cont'd. "The Guest", Albert Camus. Deterritorialization II: The grim reality of the absurd.
- 10/31 Disc.

Weeks Ten-Thirteen: Literary Representation: A Meta-narrative of Short Story Development

- 11/3 "A Simple Heart", Gustave Flaubert. Naturalism and attention to detail
- 11/5 "The Boarding House" (C), James Joyce. Modernism and economy of style.
- 11/7 Disc.
- 11/10 "Diary of a Madman" (C), Lu Xun. The cannibalism of tradition. **Third response due.**
- 11/12 "The Thief" (C), Tanizaki Junichiro. The evolution of a species...
- 11/14 "The Postmaster" (C), Rabindrath Tagore. The cost of modernism and urbanization.
- 11/17 "The House on the Esplanade" (C), Anne Hébert. The hint of the supernatural.
- 11/19 "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings", Gabriel García Márquez. The supernatural brought down to earth; the wonder of magic realism.
- 11/21 Disc.
- 11/24 **Peer-evaluation day: first draft of final paper due.**

11/26 "The Garden of Forking Paths", Jorge Luis Borges. Postmodernism, and the labyrinth of time, space, and meaning.

11/28 No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Weeks 14-15: Doing what we can with what we've got; heterogeneity at home

12/1 "All at One Point" (C), Italo Calvino. The languages of art and science implode.
Revised draft of final paper due.

12/3 "Simon's Luck" (C), Alice Munro. Time as a multi-faceted jewel.

12/5 "Girl", Jamaica Kinkaid and "Roselily", Alice Walker. Two experimental narratives.
Revised drafts returned with comments.

12/8 "The Management of Grief", Bharati Mukherjee. Mourning in a divided community.

12/10 "Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies" (C), Salman Rushdie. At home at the crossroads.

12/12 Closing remarks. **Final paper, final draft due.**