

# INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE

## Somewhere on the Outside: The Alienated Self and Other

ENGL:1200; SEMESTER

MEETING TIMES, ROOM ASSIGNMENT

The University of Iowa, Department of English

Instructor:

Office Hours:

Email:

Department Chair:

Department Main Office: 308 EPB

Course Supervisor:

### COURSE TEXTS

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Penguin, 978-0-141-43947-1)

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (Delta, 978-0-385-33458-7)

Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred* (Beacon, 978-0-807-08369-7)

Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (New Directions, 978-0-8112-1404-9)

Course texts available at the Hawk Shop. All other course readings available on ICON and **should be printed out**, annotated, and brought to class. In addition to these materials, students should have a **notebook dedicated to this course**, which will be collected periodically throughout the semester.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *alien* appeared in English writing as early as 1350, when it was used as a verb meaning “To make averse, hostile, or unsympathetic to someone or something.” The term has since taken on a more general meaning to signify something foreign, and surely when we think of the term today, we think of its many common uses, from ongoing debates about immigration to ecological diversity to the belief that life exists outside of our own solar system. But the original connotation of the term—referring to something hostile, strange, and unfamiliar—remains, and alienation is often a process rooted in fear and apprehension.

This course highlights texts in which protagonists experience some form of alienation. Alienation can be felt in various ways and be considered via many interpretative lenses; we'll think about alienation from both inside and outside perspectives, consider what determines meaningful membership in a community, and challenge assumptions about the alienated. We begin with *Frankenstein*, one of the quintessential texts to capture the outsider experience. The other major course texts—James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*—will allow us to consider how feelings of liminality and exclusion can derive from markers such as sexuality, class, and race. As we discuss these texts and other short readings, we will necessarily consider the historical and political moment that produced them, and make connections between past and present.

By allowing you to use and refine your skills of close reading, speaking, and writing to respond thoughtfully and sensitively to literary texts, you will be able to see yourselves as critical and unique readers, recognizing the influence of individual differences (such as gender, ethnicity, geography) and experiences on interpretation. Writing assignments will ask you to engage both critically and creatively with the course materials and regular class participation will allow you to share your own interpretations of the texts and support and/or challenge readings offered by your peers. In addition to this interpretive work, we'll take time to simply appreciate the important lessons these stories have to share, including the dangers of social exclusion, the trauma of self-alienation, and even the joy that can come from living life on the outside.

## WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS

For each semester hour credit in this course, students should expect to spend two hours per week preparing for class sessions. This is a three credit hour course, so your average out-of-class preparation per week is six hours. This will fluctuate throughout the semester; some weeks will be a bit lighter and others more intense.

## GRADING

Final grades will be determined on the University's A-F grade scale, with A as the highest possible grade. Course grades depend mainly on a series of major and informal writing assignments. The rest of your grade depends on engaged and respectful participation, misc. assignments recorded in your class notebook, and a midterm and final exam.

### Final Grade Percentages:

15%	Essay #1
20%	Essay #2
15%	Engaged and respectful daily participation
15%	Midterm Exam
15%	Final Exam and Portfolio
15%	Notebooks
5%	Close Reading Assignment

### Accessing Grades:

Grades for major assignments will be posted on ICON under "Grades" approximately two weeks after the due date. Your participation grades will be posted once at midterm and once at the end of the semester. Informal assignments will be mostly recorded in your class notebook, which will be collected at least twice during the semester. Your notebook grade will be posted once at the midterm and once at the end of the semester. **Note that a missed assignment is marked as a zero, so it's important to complete all homework assignments and attend every class to avoid bringing down your grade.**

My detailed grading policy is as follows:

*A grade of C:* You can earn a C by attending class regularly and punctually, completing with competence all of the work assigned and participating regularly in class activities. This requires 1) adequately meeting all criteria for assignments, and 2) completing reading assignments on time and being prepared to share your opinions on the texts in class and during discussions.

*A grade of B:* You can earn a B by fulfilling all of the C requirements while demonstrating a significantly higher level of effort and competence on all work assigned for the class. To earn a B you must show an interest in energetically, creatively, and critically engaging with the material and assignments. B work typically reflects independent thinking. The B student is self-reflexive and often asks questions such as “How can I make my work better? How can I revise this? How can I make my work unique and interesting? How can I help the class have productive and energetic discussions?”

*A grade of A:* To receive an A in the course, you must surpass the requirements for B work as well as demonstrate high-level critical thinking and original analysis. A students interrogate all sides of issues enthusiastically in order to clarify their own opinions. A students don't skip class, fail to honor deadlines for any reason, or show up unprepared to discuss the reading. A students will, instead, be willing to make intellectual discoveries and demonstrate an effort to inquire further into commonly understood issues.

*A grade of D:* You can earn a D by not fulfilling your responsibilities outlined under “Grade of C” criteria, and/or failing to show respect for or interest in your fellow students’ presentations of ideas. A D student is a student who has many excuses but few completed assignments. For example, D students often fail to turn in reading responses or other informal work. D students are generally disinterested students who refuse to take an active role in making the class energetic and productive.

## LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Late work will be **docked one full letter grade** for every day late, beginning as soon as the original due date has passed (e.g. a paper that earns a B will receive a C if it is one day late, a D if it is two days late, etc.). Late essays submitted over four or more days after the due date will receive an automatic F. If the due date for one of these essays is nearing and you do not feel capable of turning in a completed assignment, please set up a meeting with me to discuss potential solutions. If you miss class, you are still responsible for submitting work on time via ICON or email. This policy extends to class notebooks: if you are in class on the day class notebooks are collected, you must turn yours in to me; if you are absent, you will be docked for each day the notebook is late, or you may leave it in my mailbox in EPB 310 on the day I collect without penalty.

## ABSENCES

Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. That said, I understand that occasionally, everyone needs to miss class. Therefore, I will allow each student three unexcused absences without penalty to their participation grade. You do not need to provide any excuse for these absences, though if you know ahead of time you will be missing class, an email is always appreciated.

Absences cause you to miss out on instruction, learning time, and thinking opportunities. Consequently, any absence will negatively affect your grade; **after three absences, each one will reduce your class participation grade by 1/3 of a letter grade**. You also cannot earn points for reading notes, participation, or in-class activities on days when you are absent. Being late to class or leaving class early will also negatively impact your daily participation grade. If you need to leave class early for an exam for another course, you must provide official

documentation that shows me the exam time. Please make an effort to be in class on time, ready to participate as soon as class begins. You will earn a zero on any reading quiz given on a day in which you are either absent to class or arrive after the quiz has already been administered.

At times when Iowa City Schools have been dismissed or delayed due to weather, students will not be penalized if they decide it is not safe for them to travel to class. Instructors will use their discretion about whether to hold class or to offer some online or replacement activity, and as usual students will be responsible for making up missed work or arranging to take missed exams or quizzes.

## TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

**I expect that you will turn off/silence and put away all of your electronic devices (cell phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) before class begins. This includes laptops and e-readers unless otherwise specified.** Inappropriate use of electronics during class time will negatively affect your participation grade. If, for any reason, you have a particular need for iPads, cell phones, or laptops during class time, please come talk to me during office hours. There will be class periods, activities, and peer review sessions for which I allow and often encourage technology use. I will notify you of these moments as necessary.

## CALENDAR OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

This is a tentative calendar and is **subject to change**. Updates will be posted to ICON and/or shared in class. Students are responsible for tracking course activities, readings, and assignments as the semester progresses.

**A NOTE OF CAUTION:** Many of the texts we are reading depict or discuss violence. Every person in our class brings years of lived experiences with them into the classroom, and all class discussions should be respectful of this fact. If you are at all concerned about reading certain texts, please don't hesitate to discuss your concerns with me. Taking care of yourself is crucial for academic success. I have listed confidential resources beneath the university's "Sexual Harassment" policy.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1:

DATE: Introductions to course, readings, and each other

DATE: The Skills of Close Reading

Sherwood Anderson, "Hands"; Eula Biss, "Time and Distance Overcome" (ICON)

### Week 2:

DATE: *Frankenstein*: An Arctic Voyage; and, Victor's Education  
Letters I-IV; Vol. 1: Chapters I-IV (pp. 15-57); **Assign Essay #1**

### Week 3:

DATE: *Frankenstein*: Creating a Monster  
Vol. 1: Chapters V-VIII; Vol. 2: Chapters I-II (pp. 58-104)

DATE: *Frankenstein*: The Monster's Tale  
Vol. 2: Chapters III-IX (pp. 105-151)

**Week 4:**

DATE: *Frankenstein*: Return to the Arctic  
Vol. 3: Chapters I-VII (pp. 155-225)

**Week 5:**

DATE: Queer Poetics  
Selected poetry from Danez Smith, Pat Parker, Frank O'Hara, etc. (ICON)  
Essay #1 Workshop [Bring draft of Essay #1 to class]

DATE: *Giovanni's Room*: the presence of a new barman  
Part 1: Chapters 1-2 (pp. 3-43)

**Week 6:**

DATE: *Giovanni's Room*: the longer and lesser and more perpetual murder  
Part 1: Chapter 3; Part 2: Chapters 1-3 (pp. 44-118)

DATE: *Giovanni's Room*: a terrific scandal  
Part 2: Chapters 4-5 (pp. 119-169)

**Week 7:**

DATE: **Midterm Exam**

DATE: The Alienated Masses: Social Class in America  
George Saunders, "Sea Oak" (ICON)

**Week 8:**

DATE: *The Glass Menagerie*: Memory  
Production Notes; Scenes 1-2 (pps. xix-18); **Assign Essay #2**

DATE: *The Glass Menagerie*: Movies  
Scenes 3-5 (pps. 19-49)

**Week 9:**

DATE: *The Glass Menagerie*: Dinner  
Scenes 6-8 (pps. 50-97)

DATE: "the subway heaped in modern myth": Race in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Metropolis  
Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (ICON)

**Week 10:**

DATE: The Feminine Mystique  
Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (ICON)

DATE: The Monstrous-Feminine  
Angela Carter, "The Werewolf"; Carmen Maria Machado, "Real Women Have Bodies"

**Week 11:**

DATE: Essay #2 Workshops/Meetings

DATE: (Neo-)Slave Narratives

Excerpts from Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (ICON)

**Week 12:**

DATE: *Kindred*

Prologue; The River; The Fire (pp. 9-51)

DATE: *Kindred*

The Fall (pp. 52-107)

**Week 13:**

DATE: *Kindred*

The Fight I (pp. 108-154)

DATE: *Kindred*

The Fight II (pp. 154-188)

**Week 14:**

DATE: *Kindred*

The Storm (pp. 189-239)

DATE: *Kindred*

The Rope; Epilogue (pp. 240-264)

**Week 15:**

DATE: The Postplantation Today

*Thirteenth* (documentary); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (excerpts)

DATE: Final Exam Review

**Final Exam: DATE, TIME, LOCATION**