

MOUNT SAINT MARY COLLEGE  
Newburgh, NY 12550  
Spring 2022

Forms of Literature (ENG 1020), Dr. Peter Witkowski, [peter.witkowski@msmc.edu](mailto:peter.witkowski@msmc.edu)

Office Hours: I can meet students who wish to have a face-to-face conversation using either Skype ([peter.witkowski](mailto:peter.witkowski)) or Zoom (PMI: 870-585-9840). We can arrange this at a time convenient for both. To access my calendar, go to <https://calendly.com/peter-witkowski>

## COURSE OUTCOMES

ENG-1020 is defined in the college catalog as “a study of the literary forms of fiction, drama, and poetry with attention to characterization, plot development and structure, use of figurative language, and understanding of literary techniques.” My approach to teaching it emphasizes two objectives above all others: first, reading literature more critically than you might normally be inclined to do and, then, writing about it as a natural extension of the reading process, a method of working through ideas. Each assignment is designed with these particular objectives in mind.

Among the specific skills you can expect to practice, the following are the most essential:

- \* putting the works we read in context, culturally as well as historically
- \* distinguishing the elements that matter to a reading from those that do not
- \* developing a critical vocabulary with which to articulate what you know
- \* conveying your ideas logically, coherently, and succinctly
- \* using sources responsibly

## REQUIRED TEXTS

I will provide links to all readings via eCLASS.

## EVALUATION

**TWO SHORT ESSAYS (30 PTS):** The most important work of the course will be the essays you will turn in during weeks two, three, and (or) four. Week two will be devoted to poetry, week three to fiction, and week four to drama. Assignments are divided into three categories (analysis, research, and imitation), with rubrics to match. You must write two essays. If you write a third, I will count your best two grades.

**DISCUSSION FORUMS (25 PTS):** During each week of the course, I'll initiate a discussion forum relating to the poems, stories, and/or plays assigned for that week. Some will be small group discussion (groups TBD) that will require you to engage with what your peers have posted on the topic. Others will be general fora.

**QUIZZES (10 PTS):** There will also be three 10-question quizzes per week to establish objective facts about the poems, stories, or plays and to identify any possible confusion you may be experiencing. Quizzes will be multiple-choice and true-false, or possibly very short answer. I will permit two attempts,

which will be timed. The higher grade will be the grade that counts.

**EXAM (20 PTS):** The exam will include objective questions (either new or repeated), as well as short quotations for identification. However, the primary emphasis will be on essay questions that will ask you to reflect on one or more of the texts you have read during the course. I will provide at least one poetry, fiction, and drama option, and you will answer a question about two of the three genres.

**FINAL PROJECT (15 PTS):** You will each select a poem, short story, or dramatic scene from our schedule of readings to examine from a variety of angles and in so doing create a succinct record of the text and your particular response to it. I will provide models of the one-page, detail-rich documents I have in mind. I will also facilitate the assignment of texts, to prevent needless overlap and to ensure you are assigned a poem, story, or play that you have some interest in working on.

In general, the Division of Arts and Letters adheres to the following grading scale:

POINTS	GRADE EQUIVALENT	QUALITY POINTS	MEANING
100-95	A	4.0	SUPERIOR
94-90	A-	3.67	OUTSTANDING
89-87	B+	3.33	EXCELLENT
86-83	B	3.0	VERY GOOD
82-80	B-	2.67	GOOD
79-77	C+	2.33	ABOVE AVERAGE
76-73	C	2.0	AVERAGE
72-70	C-	1.67	BELOW AVERAGE
69-65	D+	1.33	POOR
64-60	D	1.0	PASSING
59-0	F	0.0	FAILING

#### OTHER IMPORTANT MATTERS

#### COMMITMENT TO THE COURSE:

In order to do well in this course, you will need to participate in the weekly activities and complete the assigned readings, adhering to the established schedule. A prolonged period of inactivity or inattentiveness will put you at a disadvantage, since you will be unable to participate belatedly in graded work such as Discussion Forums or reading quizzes, both of which do inevitably have deadlines. If circumstances require you to be offline for any period, and especially if this is something you can try to mitigate in advance—meaning that it isn't an emergency—I urge you to communicate your circumstances to me by email. Direct, honest communication with me is always your best option.

**LATE PAPERS:** You will submit your work to me via Turnitin. Those who miss the deadlines will need to reach out to me by email. Whether I accept the work or not will then depend on the circumstances. Keep in mind that the quality of the excuse is less important than when the request is made. I'm also unlikely to tolerate habitual lateness, particularly since our deadlines are so tight.

REVISING: I consider revision to be an important part of the writing process and will return your work to you with comments and suggestions intended to point you in the right direction if you choose to resubmit. There are four categories of improvement: "surface-level," "getting there," "substantial," and "exceptional," with points corresponding to each. Due to the timing of the course, only essays submitted on the first two due dates may be revised. The final project is likewise one-draft-only. However, I will gladly give you casual feedback about that assignment if you get an early start with it and share your work-in-progress.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: I will not tolerate academic dishonesty. Certain essay options require using sources, while others do not. If you choose to use sources, you must use them responsibly. You will also register with turnitin.com and upload your essays as directed. Our class ID # is 25217667 and the enrollment password (all caps) is LITERATURE. Suffice it to say that there are consequences for attempting to earn credit for someone else's work. A college-wide policy authorizing instructors to set penalties for academic dishonesty has been in effect since January 5, 2009. Instructors are to notify the Registrar, who then keeps a record of all cases. Students reported to the Registrar for a second time who have accumulated fewer than thirty credits will have their cases referred to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Students who have accumulated more than thirty credits will automatically fail the course, this regardless of the penalty the instructor had decided on. Students who are caught engaging in dishonest behavior a third time will be dismissed from the college.

DISABILITY SERVICES: It is the policy of Mount Saint Mary College to accommodate students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state laws. If you, as a student with a disability, have difficulty accessing any part of the course materials or activities for this class, please let me immediately. Accommodations for test-taking should be arranged in advance. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Disability Services Office as soon as possible so that appropriate accommodations can be determined. Please call the office at 845-569-3638, or email them at [disabilityservices@msmc.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@msmc.edu), or access further information at [http://msmc.edu/Student\\_Services/Students\\_with\\_Disabilities](http://msmc.edu/Student_Services/Students_with_Disabilities). If you have met with the disability services office and have been given an accommodation letter, please speak with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss the logistics and implementation of your accommodations.

Here are twelve essay options for the course. Only two essays are required, but I will collect them on three dates, as noted. Those who wish to turn in something on each of the submission dates may do so; I will then drop the lowest of the three grades. Only essays submitted on the first two dates may be revised, given the timing of the course.

- 1) Paying careful attention to language and, in particular, to the connotations of words, allusions, figurative language, rhythm, sound, and so forth, explicate (analyze closely) a poem of your choice. Focus on the text and on the type of speaker the lines suggest, leaving aside anything you may happen to know about the poet or poem itself. Do say something about form, i.e. about how the poem is put together. For a model explication, see the student essay I've posted on Dickinson's "There's a certain Slant of light." For a convenient online anthology of suitable poems, see [www.loc.gov/poetry/180/](http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/). Rubric: Analysis

- 2) Paying careful attention to language and, in particular, to the connotations of words, allusions, figurative language, rhythm, sound, and so forth, explicate (analyze closely) a poem of your choice. Focus on the text and on the type of speaker the lines suggest, leaving aside anything you may happen to know about the poet or poem itself. Do say something about form, i.e. about how the poem is put together. For a model explication, see the student essay I've posted on Dickinson's "There's a certain Slant of light." For a convenient online anthology of suitable poems, see [www.loc.gov/poetry/180/](http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/). Rubric: Analysis
- 3) Compare and contrast the Dudley Fitts & Robert Fitzgerald translation of a short sequence of monologue or dialogue from *Oedipus Rex* with the corresponding passage I've made available to you in Week Two from the translation by Ian Johnston. I don't have a specific model to share with you, but you should aim for the detail of the Emily Dickinson explication also posted among the First Essay Resources. The story being told is the same; explain how the subtle points differ in the competing translations. Rubric: Analysis
- 4) First, choose a poem from among those assigned in Week Two and read the interview that accompanied its publication at <http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com>. Then, give me: (1) a bibliographic entry for the interview in MLA or APA style; (2) a page or so summarizing – not paraphrasing – the interview; and (3) another page or so subjectively assessing the interview and, by extension, the poem. If you don't get much from the question and answer, consider saying what questions you would have asked the poet, and why. Rubric: Research
- 5) Watch the 29-minute adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits" directed by Booker T. Mattison and starring Chad Coleman and T'Keyah Crystal Keymáh posted in Week One. Next, read the interview with Mattison I've also posted. Finally, give me (1) a bibliographic entry for the interview and film, in MLA or APA style; (2) a complete, accurate, and objective summary of the Question-and-Answer; and (3) a page or two more of subjective assessment, in which you give your own candid thoughts about the interview and/or film. Rubric: Research
- 6) Write me a poem, but not just any poem. Let it be a counterfeit, borrowing the logic or even the syntax of a poem we have read. (I will provide at least one sample.) Or consider a fixed form poem developed from the 6-word memoir you composed as an ice breaker – or really any six words. I'll share models for the backward shrinking sestina and the ovillejo. Follow up with a page or two of analysis. This is not – or not only – an exercise in creativity. I'd like to hear about your process and about what you think of the work you produce. Rubric: Imitation
- 7) Select a brief passage (< one page) from one of the three stories assigned during Week Three and explicate its meaning. As with the corresponding assignment from the first row above, this means paying careful attention to language. Do not simply summarize the passage you've selected. Put it in context to indicate when it appears, and explain why it demands our close attention. If you'd like, connect it to something specific, such as character, setting, or point of view. Be sure to quote directly. If you are not sure which passage to use, I will gladly make a suggestion or two. For a quick online example of how to explicate short fiction, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkoEib59VjA>. Rubric: Analysis
- 8) Read one of the author interviews corresponding to a story from Week Three posted among the Second Essay Resources. Then, give me (1) a bibliographic entry for the interview, in MLA or APA style; (2) a complete, accurate, and objective summary of the questions and answers; and (3) a page or two more of subjective assessment, in which you give your candid impression of the

interview. If you don't get much from the question and answer, consider what questions you would have asked, and why. Rubric: Research

- 9) Write me a story, but not just any story. Let it relate in some essential way to one of the stories we've read and discussed – or more than one. If you'd like, write a sequel, prequel, or "lost" scene from any of the stories. Or retell a portion of the existing story from someone else's point-of-view – Slemmons's, for example, or Perry's, Bernadette's or William's, or the lump under the bedspread's in "Ba Baboon." Tell your own true or fictional story of "Modern Families." I'm thinking out loud here. If you have some other idea, run it by me. As with the corresponding poetry option just above, please follow up with a page or two of explanation. Rubric: Imitation
- 10) Compare and contrast the three short video clips showing the first stages of Ophelia's madness that I've posted in Week Four, together with the text of the scene in question. Apart from the shared storyline, what (if anything) do the three versions share in common? How do they differ? Which is the most successful in your view – and why? Rubric: Analysis
- 11) Watch Franco Zeffirelli's Hamlet, which can be purchased cheaply on YouTube, and read the two reviews of the film I've posted in Week Four. Give me (1) a bibliographic entry in MLA or APA style for each review; (2) a couple of pages comparing and contrasting the reviews; and (3) a couple more pages of subjective assessment. In this last part, while it's ok to agree with one or both of the reviewers, please avoid repeating what they said needlessly. Rubric: Research
- 12) Write me a play, but not just any play. For models, I'm thinking of the "Shouts and Murmurs" column in The New Yorker. I've posted a sample titled "Donald Trump Performs Shakespeare's Soliloquies." The first is from Hamlet and ought to sound at least vaguely familiar. You wouldn't have to channel the POTUS; in fact, it might be better if you didn't. But can you take a speech and rewrite it for a larger-than-life performer? I'll look for additional mini-dramas that aren't necessarily Shakespeare related. As with the poetry and fiction options above, please follow up with a page or two of explanation. Rubric: Imitation

## Course Schedule

### Week 1:

The assigned readings for this week provide a sampling of the three genres the course will cover: four poems, one short story, and an excerpt from a play. I've copied the specific texts into the Resource Book (Print). In the Resource Book (AudioVisual), you'll find a link to a 29-minute film adaptation of Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits" that I've invited you to write about in an essay option and also a 10-minute clip from the start of a 1984 production of Oedipus, starring Michael Pennington in the title role. It's not the same translation as the one we're reading, but it should still be possible to follow along, if interested. Before attempting the Oedipus quiz, you should certainly review my timeline of the play.

### Week 2:

"There's a certain Slant of light" (Emily Dickinson) "American Cheese" (Jim Daniels) "Dandelion" (Julie Lechevsky) "Love Poem with Toast" (Miller Williams)

### Week 3:

What have poets said poetry is? “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off,” Emily Dickinson once wrote, “I know that is poetry.” According to Dylan Thomas, poetry is “what, in a poem, makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, [and] makes your toenails twinkle.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it more simply: “the best words in their best order.” For this second week, I’ve selected nine poems featured at the blog “How a Poem Happens,” along with interviews the authors gave. I’ve grouped the poems not quite randomly into three clusters: poems about language, poems that tell a story with some dialogue, and poems about truth and fiction.

#### Week 4:

“Happiness and Happenstance Share the Same Root” (Mari L’Esperance), “Trans” (Idra Novey), and “Adjectives of Order” (Alexandra Teague) “I’m Starting to Speak the Language” (Nicole Cooley), “To the Young Man Who Cried Out . . . When I Backed into his Car” (Lynne Knight), and “Minor Miracle” (Marilyn Nelson) “Lesser Evils” (Joel Brouwer), “Believe It or Not” (Jean Monahan), and “Day Players in the Makeup Trailer” (Hayden Saunier)

#### Week 5:

If Poetry 180 and How a Poem Happens are my current go-to sources for readable poems, my source for short fiction is The New Yorker. Among other things, I like to read the stories alongside the short author interviews published online. Here are three stories published in the magazine within the last few years. The interviews are posted among the documents connected to the second essay due date. Even if you are not completing that essay, you might still have a look. However, the three quizzes are about the stories only.

“Demeter” (Maile Meloy) “First Husband” (Antonya Nelson) “Ba Baboon” (Thomas Pierce)

#### Week 6:

Drama is defined as “a composition in prose or verse, adapted to be acted upon a stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action, and is represented with accompanying gesture, costume, and scenery, as in real life” (OED). What such a definition leaves out is drama’s collaborative element, unique to the genre, where it’s the extraordinary work of directors and actors and costume or set designers, make-up artists and lighting experts, etc. that brings words on a page to life.

#### Week 7:

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (William Shakespeare)

#### Week 8:

This last, partial week of the course will be given over to the final exam and to (optional) extra credit work