

ENG 185 G: DISABILITY IN LITERATURE

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Hours: Wednesdays 1.30-3.30; Thursdays 3.30-4.30 and by appt.

TEXTS:

Plays:

The Cripple of Inishmaan, Martin McDonagh (at the Bookstore)

Translations, Brian Friel (at the Bookstore)

Novel:

Ironweed, William Kennedy (at the Bookstore)

Poetry:

Selected Poetry by Pat Mora, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, etc. (e-reserves on Blackboard)

Short Stories:

“The Yellow Wallpaper”, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (at the Bookstore)

“The Metamorphosis”, Franz Kafka (at the Bookstore)

Young Goodman Brown & Other Stories, Nathaniel Hawthorne (at the Bookstore)

“The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (e-reserves on Blackboard)

“The Gold Bug”, Edgar Allan Poe (e-reserves on Blackboard)

“Everyday Use”, Alice Walker (e-reserves on Blackboard)

“Good Country People”, Flannery O’Connor (e-reserves on Blackboard)

“Ward 9” (e-reserves on Blackboard)

IMPORTANT!—Students are expected to bring a copy of each day’s assigned text to class, having read it, thought about it, and prepared comments and/or questions about it in advance. Failure to bring the text to class will result in a class absence. Also, I recommend that you purchase all the required texts at the start of the term, as the Bookstore returns any unsold copies well before the term’s end (and without warning).

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

From Shakespeare’s portrayal of the villainous Richard III to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s insight into the underpinnings of postpartum depression, literature is ripe with characters and issues that expose the ways in which society marginalizes—and even isolates—individuals with disabilities. By establishing markers of difference in fictional characters (i.e., Manus and Sarah in Friel’s *Translations*, Billy in McDonagh’s *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, and Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis”), writers ask their audience to question the social, cultural, psychological, and physical impact of stereotypes in their own environment.

This course is designed to explore literary texts and films from across the globe that address disabilities of various kinds (physical, mental, social). Some of the questions we shall consider include: how has the definition of “disability” shifted in recent years? What, then, is “normal”? Is the very term “disability” problematic? How does disability further impact other social constructs such as race, gender and socio-economic status? In order to investigate these issues, we shall begin the course with the lexicon of disability. The subsequent sections of the syllabus will include poetry, plays, short stories, novels, and film, and be approached from the following

perspectives: patient perspective; family perspective; disability due to trauma (including war/political strife); and resiliency and self-efficacy.

COURSE GOALS:

- To become familiar with the ways in which disability has historically been portrayed in literature.
- To gain an understanding of pervasive stereotypes in our culture and the impact this has had on disabled individuals.
- To assess how cultural alienation is achieved (with a special focus on race and ethnicity).
- To develop and enhance writing and presentation skills through Blackboard posts, papers, essays, and presentations.
- To understand how your perception of disability has been shaped by experiences, attitudes, and cultures.

CORE CURRICULUM GOALS:

This course addresses the following Goals of the Core Curriculum at Misericordia University:

- Write clear and effective expository and argumentative prose that adheres to the conventions of standard written English.
- Use modern technology effectively to support learning.
- Read for comprehension at an acceptable level.
- Read critically with attention to secondary and multiple meanings.
- Use data in the construction of an argument.
- Identify the religious, cultural, political and economic characteristics of different societies.
- Identify political, social, economic, and cultural trends and historical processes that have shaped the Western heritage.

These core goals are assessed through essay assignments in which students must analyze texts and select evidence from those texts to argue for a particular reading. The essays demand both critical reading and writing skills.

SERVICE LEARNING GOALS in ENG 185:

- 1) Support the incorporation of community service opportunities into university courses.
- 2) Provide service-learning experiences supportive of the University's mission that connect students with their communities.
- 3) Develop strong community partnerships between the University and within the Community that will enable further development of the potential within the larger community in which the University is located.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

I am not a lecturer; however, I will provide you with necessary background information on texts, authors, and the cultures we cover. During class, we will spend our time dissecting the major issues embedded in our readings and developing our own critical notions based on our readings. Yes, you *will* have your own, individual critical notions about what we read—and *all* of you have valuable things to say! Sometimes, we might work in small groups, provided that the task at hand is discussed fully.

I cannot stress enough that I am always happy to meet with you; if my office hours are at inconvenient times for you, we can schedule alternate times. Do not hesitate to stop by—whether you have questions about the readings, your writing, or my extensive knowledge of football, fashion, and 80s music (just kidding). ☺

When doing the readings, don't be afraid to write in the margins...this will help you relate to the text, raise questions about it, and make brilliant comments during our class discussions. Keep an open mind, and always respect what your classmates have to say.

POLICIES:

- 1) **Attendance & Class Participation** -- Your presence in class is **mandatory**. Active class participation is strongly encouraged. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting and will affect your participation grade. No student may miss more than 3 classes. Each subsequent class missed will lower the student's final grade by one notch (B becomes C). Special situations such as prolonged illness or family crisis must be confirmed by a note from the dean or doctor. If you know that you will be absent from class, please notify me in advance. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course.
- 2) No make-up work will be given. Students are responsible for whatever may happen in class during their absence.
- 3) Late assignments **will not** be tolerated. For each day an assignment is late, your grade for that particular assignment will drop one whole letter. However, you must complete **all** assignments in order to receive a passing grade for this course.
- 4) All cell phones **must** be turned off before class begins. Also, all cell phones and technological devices (iPods, MP3s, and so forth) must not appear on your desk or near your person. Texting is **STRICTLY** prohibited and if you do not comply with this policy, it will result in your being marked absent for the day.
- 5) All papers (including rough drafts) must be typed and submitted via hard copy. I do not accept emailed papers or assignments. SAVE your work on a flash drive/CD.
- 6) **Plagiarism**, the deliberate misrepresentation of the words and/or ideas of others as one's own, is a serious academic offense and will not be treated lightly. Students are encouraged, and in some cases required, to conduct research of various sorts. Proper techniques for incorporating the results into papers and for documenting those results will be an important part of the coursework. To state it simply, **the penalty for plagiarism will be failure of the assignment in question and the Dean will be notified. If the offense is repeated, you will fail the course.** As students, we shall strive to ensure the academic integrity of our work. Do your own work!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- 1) **Service Learning Project & Presentation** (20%) – It's your turn to think outside of the box. You will each join a group (of no more than 5 students) and choose an original project related to a community agency that assists individuals with disabilities. Here are some ideas: one group may decide to visit the Lupus Foundation of America, participate in the Lupus Walk, and begin a chronic illness support group on campus; another may work with severely emotionally disturbed children at the Graham Academy and stage a reading or performance for them; artistically-inclined members of the class may want to work with a foundation that showcases disabled artists; another group might like to do something for Hospice Community Care; and keep in mind that there are a number of homeless shelters (i.e. VISION! and Ruth's Place) that are always looking for volunteers. You will decide your groups and the focus of your energies by Tuesday, September 20. The specific time of your project will depend on the agency you choose to work with.

At the end of the semester, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation (strictly timed) in class to share the intricacies of their projects and/or "perform" them. You must NOT use PowerPoint during the presentation, and you want to think about how to engage your class members. Each group member must also individually submit a 750 word reflection paper on the presentation topic that outlines the genesis of your creative work and what you gained from the experience. Have fun and remember—be creative!

- 2) **Exams:** The **Mid-Term** (20%) will cover the texts/issues we discuss during the first part of the semester and will include short answer and essay questions. This will be given in class on **Thursday, October 6.**

Students will take their **Final Exam** (20%) at a time specifically designated by the Registrar's Office during exam week. **Each student MUST be present at the allotted time—no make-ups will be given.** This will cover materials from after fall break to the end of the semester.

- 3) **Paper:** (20%) There are so many interesting aspects to explore with regard to our course topic that I decided to give you two options! Select one of the following and please keep in mind that I can meet with you about your papers at any time. **Due: November 15 at the start of class.**

Film Paper—Think about all of the themes we've discussed throughout the semester (markers of difference, assimilation, marginalization, the rhetoric of disability, and so forth). For your final paper, you will consider the representation of disability in one of the following films: *My Left Foot*, *28 Days Later*, *Ironweed*, *The King's Speech*, *Mask*, *Frida*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *The English Patient*, *Wolfman*, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, etc. In doing so, you need to thoughtfully incorporate at least one of the texts we've investigated this semester. You will combine original textual analysis with the primary sources you engage in your paper. Paper must be at least 5 pages in length.

Metamorphosis Paper—Imagine you had a disability of some sort, that you could undergo a metamorphosis. What changes would you undertake? Would these changes be voluntary or forced? Would your 'alteration' be a change in body or in mind? Use evidence from the texts as well as from our in-class discussions to explicate the analytical, philosophical, and psychological consequences of this metamorphosis. Paper must be at least 5 pages in length.

4) Assignments, Cultural Events & Pop Quizzes (20%) – This category may seem like a hodgepodge, but it's not. Everything you do for this course—from in-class writing assignments, to outside observations—counts. Oh, and to make sure you are doing the reading, I may give a number of unannounced quizzes. My quizzes are difficult to fail if you've done the reading, and difficult to pass if you have not.

Get ready to be cultured! Have you ever been to an art gallery? Do you know about the Misericordia Players? Are you aware that MU will host a number of multicultural events on our campus? Have you ever been to a lecture or musical concert? Well, now is your chance. Each student must attend 3 cultural events on campus. A complete list of these (mostly free!) events will be posted on the Blackboard component to our class. A one page, single-spaced paper will also be submitted after you attend the event...you choose the focus, just be sure that it's meatier than a summary of the event.

GRADING SCALE:

93-100 = A 90-92 = A- 87-89 = B+ 83-86 = B 80-82 = B- 77-79 = C+
73-76 = C 70-72 = C- 65-69 = D 64 and below = F

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

In this highly-sensationalized, uber-technological era, it's easy to forget about the proper use of language. However, as university students you **MUST** practice email etiquette. When you send an email to faculty, staff, and fellow classmates, "Yo, tzup? Wot r we doin in class 2day?" does not cut it. Begin your email with a greeting, and follow with a message that includes complete

sentences. Do not, under any circumstances, email as if you were sending a txt. It is impolite, unacademic, and disrespectful. Always sign the email, too.

FERPA—As per the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA), all email correspondence between the professor and students must be addressed to the student's institutional email address (@misericordia.edu) in order to maintain students' privacy. Students accessing their email through a separate account (gmail, Yahoo!, etc.) should have their school email forwarded to ensure the receipt of any course-related announcements, assignments, etc.

FORMATTING CRITERIA:

- All assignments must follow MLA format for documentation.
- All assignments must be typed.
- All assignments must be “ragged right” *not* “full” or “right” justified.
- All assignments must be double-spaced.
- All assignments must be in “Times New Roman” font.
- All assignments must be in 12 pt. font size.
- All assignments must have one-inch margins on all sides.
- All assignments (in addition to your own name, of course) must include on the first page my name, the name of the class, and the date the paper is turned in, preferably in that order.
- All assignments of more than one page must be stapled in the upper left-hand corner.

RULES AND REGULATIONS:

- No extensions will be granted on papers! Nada. Niente.
- You **MUST** check your Misericordia email account daily as I will occasionally post updated information and/or reminders to the class.
- I never, ever accept papers or drafts via email.
- **No internet sources are permitted unless cleared by Yours Truly!**
- I reserve the right to alter the syllabus and course schedule when necessary.

WRITING CENTER:

If you would like additional help with your writing, please visit the Writing Center (Alumnae Hall 29). They are not a proofreading service, but they will help you with developing ideas and crafting your masterpieces. Contact them at 674.6191 or writing@misericordia.edu

COURSE SCHEDULE

8/30	Welcome! Introduction to the course; the lexicon of disability
9/1	Which issues of disability (do you think) impact you the most?
Southern Gothic confronts physical deformities	
9/6	Alice Walker, “Everyday Use”
9/8	Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People”
9/13	Group #1-Information Literacy (meet in the library, 2 nd floor); Group #2 – Mapping MU (post findings on Blackboard)
9/15	Group #2-Information Literacy (meet in the library, 2 nd floor); Group #1 – Mapping MU (post findings on Blackboard)

Mystery writers expose markers of difference

- 9/20 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Gold Bug”
9/22 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Man with the Twisted Lip”

Women and mental illness

- 9/27 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”
9/29 Gilman, cont’d; Selected poems – Anne Sexton
10/4 Selected poems by Sylvia Plath, Yosano Akiko, etc.
10/6 Mid-Term Exam

It’s a mad, mad world

- 10/11 Will Self, “Ward 9”
10/13 No class; Fall Recess—Enjoy!

Family perspectives and self-image

- 10/18 Franz Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”
10/20 Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Birthmark”
10/25 Hawthorne, “Rappacini’s Daughter”
10/27 William Kennedy, *Ironweed*
11/1 *Ironweed*
11/3 *Ironweed*
11/8 Guest Lecture by Dr. Brenda Hage; Readings on Blackboard

Fragmented Identities in a fractured nation

- 11/10 Brian Friel’s *Translations*, Act One
11/15 **Paper Due;** *Translations*, Act Two
11/17 *Translations*, Act Three Martin McDonagh, “The Cripple of Inishmaan”
11/22 Follow Thursday Class Schedule; Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*
McDonagh, cont’d
11/24 No class; Happy Thanksgiving!
11/29 McDonagh, cont’d

Diagnosis

- 12/1 Pat Mora, “Diagnosis”, “Waiting Room: Orthopedic Surgery”, & “Spared (temporarily)”;
excerpt from Paula Vogel’s *Baltimore Waltz*
12/6 Service Learning Presentations
12/8 Last Day of Class; Re-defining/re-framing disability; Literary Jeopardy

12/13-17 **Final as scheduled by the Registrar...**Good luck on final exams!