

**Ryerson University**  
Department of English

Fall 2010

Professor Karen Mulhallen  
Office: Jorgenson Hall 1005  
Office Hours: Thursdays: 12:30-1:30 pm by appointment; Fridays: 11:30 am- 12:30 pm.  
Other days by appointment, but never on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, when I am working off-campus.

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PLEASE NOTE: I will be reading email and answering voice mail only when I am in my Ryerson office.

**ENG 101: LAUGHTER AND TEARS,**  
**COMEDY AND TRAGEDY**

LOWER-LEVEL LIBERAL STUDIES.

ENG 101, section 1: Thursdays 10-12, ENG LG04; Fridays 10-11, TRS 2119216.

ENG 101, section 2: Mondays 9-11, RCC 201; Fridays, 1-2 pm, EPH 142

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What do we mean when we call an event, or a life-story, or a series of events a tragedy? Is tragedy a quality that connects to character, or to our sense of the nature of life, or to an error in judgement? Are stories which are tragic, tragic in various media? Can a film be called a tragedy in the way a play might be understood to be one? Can a painting, or a cartoon, or a piece of music, depict a tragedy?

What makes a work comic? What is comedy? Can comedy and tragedy occur at the same time, or in the same set of circumstances?

In this introductory course, we will be asking ourselves about the extremes of character, of plot, of situation. In works for the theatre, in literary criticism, in poems and in prose fiction, we will work toward an understanding of tragedy and comedy, and come to appreciate the power of narrative to provoke laughter and tears.

Initially, we will examine early western European narratives, with the bawdy Greek comedy of Aristophanes's Lysistrata, and the desperate and tragic life of King Oedipus, as depicted in Sophocles's great theatrical work. A study of Aristotle's Poetics will help us to establish a base for analysing these and more recent works.

New roles and meanings for comedy and tragedy will unfold as we explore the ironies of Alice Munro's Who Do You Think You Are, the tragedy of individualism in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and the tragic and comic panorama of E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime.

Students who wish to pursue independent research might examine psychology and race in Shakespeare's Othello, or explore woman's search for freedom in a male world in Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler.

Students are encouraged to view the various film versions of the required texts, and to consider the achievement of different effects through the different means of production and the different forms.

During the semester we will read together a selection of short lyric and narrative poems in order to view, in miniature, the techniques and effects of the comic and tragic modes.

While independent of ENG 101: LAUGHTER AND TEARS, ENG 201: THE HERO'S JOURNEY: MYTH AND ARCHETYPE is a continuation of the groundwork laid in ENG 101, and examines two other basic components of narrative, those of myth and archetype.

In both courses, ENG 101 and ENG 201, early forms are placed next to more contemporary forms in order to show new roles and meanings reflective of social change.

#### Course Teaching Method:

Lecture-Discussion

#### Blackboard

I will use Blackboard to post your assignment grades and occasionally to send you all a memo. However, I do not use Blackboard to post lecture notes as such.

#### **Please Note:**

**No assignments will be accepted via email or via facsimile transmission.** There is an Essay Box in the English Department on the tenth floor of Jorgenson Hall where all assignments may be placed, clearly marked with my name. Please do not shove assignments under my office door, as they might be stolen. Assignments placed in my department mail box are also vulnerable to theft. The best policy is to hand the

assignment to me directly. Also, please be sure you keep a copy of the final draft of each assignment and keep all your graded assignments when they are returned, until you have received your final grade for the term. Assignments do go missing; and miscalculations of grades can be made. Errors do occur. It is always best to keep copies of your work in every course, until the term is completed, and grades have been posted and checked by you for accuracy.

### **Required Readings**

Aristotle, Horace, Longinus in Classical Literary Criticism  
Aristophanes. "Lysistrata" in Lysistrata and Other Plays  
Sophocles. "King Oedipus" in The Theban Plays  
Mary Shelley. Frankenstein  
Alice Munro. Who Do You Think You Are?  
E.L. Doctorow. Ragtime

### **Optional Texts**

De Roche, Joseph. ed. The Heath Introduction to Poetry  
Ibsen. Hedda Gabler  
Shakespeare. Othello

Please note that all books required for the course have been ordered into the Ryerson bookstore. They are also available at used book stores and in libraries. For the works in translation, it is generally easier, although not required, to use the same editions as I do. I will be using Penquin editions for the the first three required texts.

### **Assignments and Evaluation:**

The assignments will total a minimum of 2000 words. Two assignments will be written outside of class, and two assignments will be written in class. Assignments are due as the instructor sets out, and, except in unusual circumstances, late assignments, when accepted, will receive no commentary, but simply a credit. Please speak to me in advance if you are having trouble meeting assignment dates. There will be no final examination in this course.

Proficiency in English and writing skills are required, and will form part of the evaluation of all assignments. There is a Ryerson University Writing Centre where help with assignments is available free of charge for all students and students are encouraged to make use of this resource.

The two in-class assignments will be short tests, one on comedy and one on literary criticism. One of the out-of-class assignments will be a Research Paper, part of whose purpose will be to teach the student basic research methods and formatting. The second out-of-class assignment will be on poetry, and each student will be asked present a brief personal response to one or more of the poems on the course list. All assignments will be discussed in class before they are due. Any variations you wish to make from the course assignments need to be discussed with me in advance of the due date.

### **Poetry Reading List**

(Please note: This list is provisional. We may not discuss all of these poems, and other poems may be added either at the instructor's discretion or at students' requests.

In class I will be using The Heath Introduction to Poetry, edited by Joseph de La Roche. There are many editions of this anthology and little variation among them. Editions are widely available in used bookstores and in the Ryerson library. It is suggested that students either purchase a poetry anthology, or assemble one for themselves, in order to have all the poems together to bring to class. Most of the poems are available at the various internet poetry sites. In class we might move from one poem to another as is appropriate to our discussions, so it is best to have them all available on days when we are discussing the poems.

Anon., Sumer Is Icumen In  
Ezra Pound, Ancient Music

Anon., Get Up And Bar The Door  
Anon., Lord Randal  
Anon., Bonny Barbara Allan

Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven

Lewis Carroll, Jabberwocky  
T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock  
William Butler Yeats, Easter 1916

Ezra Pound, The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter  
Randall Jarrell, The Death of The Ball Turret Gunner

e.e. cummings, may I feel said he  
e.e.cummings, my sweet old etcetera  
e.e.cummings, I sing of Olaf glad and big

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, The pennycandystore beyond the El  
Edward Field, The Bride of Frankenstein  
Allen Ginsberg, A Supermarket in California

Elizabeth Bishop, One Art  
Anne Sexton, Cinderella  
Sylvia Plath, Daddy

### **Course Outline**

**The classes run from 7 September until 3 December, 2010**

**Week One: Introduction to the Course, Poetry**

**Week Two: Aristotle, The Poetics**

**Week Three: Greek Theatre and Aristophanes, Lysistrata**

**Week Four: Aristophanes. Lysistrata; Review of Aristotle on Comedy and Tragedy**

**Week Five: Test on Comedy; Sophocles, Oedipus the King**

**Week Six: Oedipus the King; Longinus on the Sublime**

**Week Seven Mary Shelley, Frankenstein**

**Week Eight: Mary Shelley, Frankenstein; : Test on Literary Criticism; Discussion of Research Paper**

**Week Nine: Alice Munro, Who Do You Think You Are?**

**Week Ten: Alice Munro, Who Do You Think You Are?; Poetry Assignment Due**

**Week Eleven: E.L. Doctorow, Ragtime**

**Week Twelve: E.L. Doctorow, Ragtime; Research Paper Due**

**Week Thirteen: Office Hours and Pick up Of All Outstanding Assignments**

**Please Note: Short poems will be introduced at random into the above outline.**

**Please bring to classes your gatherings of poems as well as the primary text listed for each week's classes.**

### **Research Paper**

DUE Week of 22 November 2010  
anytime before 2pm on November 25

## INSTRUCTIONS

Your Research Paper must be presented in formal essay style including a title-page, a bibliography, and end-notes ( or internal documentation). MLA, APA or Chicago-Turabian are all acceptable formats, but other formats may be used as long as you are consistent in your formatting.

The essay will be graded for formatting, clarity, organization, and grammar, as well as research and independence of thought. Students wishing to receive outstanding grades must go well beyond classroom discussions.

The paper need not be long. A suggested length is 1200-1500 words, although you might choose, if you feel it is needed, to submit a longer paper.

As this is a Research Paper, a minimum of three secondary sources in addition to the primary source must be included on your bibliography. Please note that web sites may be included on the bibliography, but they must include the address and hit-date. Web sites, however, do not count for the required minimum of three secondary sources.

## TOPICS

1.

Using a few of the following technical terms, write an essay describing a production of Sophocles's King Oedipus, or Aristophanes's Lysistrata, or the musical version of Doctorow's Ragtime.

In your discussion be sure to include both praxis and ethos, that is the physical aspects and the ethical dimension of the production.

Terms: orchystra; non-illusionistic; illusionistic; deus ex machina; chorus; protagonist; mythos( plot); imagery; stasimon; episode; skene hut; exode; buskins; metamorphosis; thymele; prologue; old comedy; new comedy; tragedy.

2.

Discuss the ways in which images of sight and blindness, light and darkness contribute to the evolving action in King Oedipus.

3.

Is Doctorow's Ragtime a tragedy or a comedy?

In creating your response be sure you discuss the author's intention.

4.

In what does the tragedy of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein consist?

5.

Choosing an aspect of the work of Aristotle on tragedy or on comedy, as found in the Poetics, or of Longinus on the sublime, show what one of these critics reveals about **one**

work on our course. You may elect to consider a work of poetry, or of fiction, or of drama for your discussion.

(Poetry should be selected from the list of poems for the course.)

6.

Comedy often tackles serious theme. Discuss this assertion with reference to either Aristophanes's Lysistrata, or Alice Munro's Who Do Yo think You Are? , or Doctorow's Ragtime.

7. What is the difference between reading a work, and seeing a work?

With reference to **one** work on the course compare two media. Stay close to your text. Be specific. Avoid vague generalizations.

8. Choosing **one** book on the course, discuss its attitudes to women.

9. Create your own topic, using one of the works on the course.

\*\*\*\***NB**: Topic number 9 must be discussed with me and cleared in advance of submission. I will give you a written permission note to attach to the essay when you submit it.

#### NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ESSAY WRITING

Analyze; do not just narrate. Remember that your goal is to prove your points, not to retell the stories of the works which you are discussing.

Make sure that your essay has a strong thesis. (I am happy to check your thesis for you before you begin writing your paper if you wish.)

You may, of course, quote from the works, but, if you do, be sure that the quotations are genuinely relevant. You should also keep quotations short and integrate them into your prose correctly. A few short and well-chosen quotations can make a very valuable contribution to the effectiveness of your paper. It is important however that you use quotations only to support points and your own explanation of these points. You must not use them as substitutes for your own arguments.

You must acknowledge the information and ideas that you borrow from critics—and remember that “critic” includes the anonymous contributors to such publications as Monarchs Notes and the various Internet sites—through in-text citation and inclusion in your Works Cited list, even if you do not use a single one of the source author or authors' exact words.

If you have questions about your essay, please come and see me. If you are having difficulty with organizing your materials or if you feel you need feedback on the first draft of your essay, you should take advantage of the free services offered by The Writing Centre which is located just inside the library on the second floor of the south end of the Learning Resources Building.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY**

All assignments are due as set out in your course outline. I do not ordinarily accept late assignments, although there are exceptions to this general rule. In many cases, when I accept a late assignment, the assignment will receive a simple credit rather than a grade and might be returned without written comments. If you are having trouble making the assignment due date, please come and talk to me before the assignment is due. Please do not ask for an extension on the date the assignment is due!

## **COURSE EVALUATION SUMMARY**

**Assignment Number One: Comedy: 25%**  
**Assignment Number Two: Literary Criticism: 25%**  
**Assignment Number Three: Short Poems: 20%**  

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**Assignment Number Four: Research Paper: 30%**

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**TOTAL = 100%**

## **FACULTY COURSE SURVEY**

**The Faculty Course Survey will be conducted in November. The date will be announced in class in advance of the survey. Your evaluation is important but will be anonymous.**

### **English Department Policies:**

All assignments are due as the Instructor specifies. Please consult the individual instructor course outlines for regulations regarding due dates, and other course regulations.

Modifications to course outlines will be discussed in class prior to implementation and a written statement of revision will be provided to students.

English Department Policies are available in the English Department.

Examinations are written during the examination period; students are advised to consult the Ryerson calendar to determine the exact dates of the examination periods before finalizing holiday and employment plans.