

English-007H-1: First-Year Honors Seminar in Literature
SYLLABUS

Fall 2018

Class: 6:30–9:45 pm Thursday; Reynolds 109

Office Hours: 3:15-5:00 pm MWF or by appointment

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Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature.

—*Hamlet*, 3.2.17-22

When Hamlet instructs the Players “to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature,” he is articulating a mimetic theory of art. That is, he asserts that art exists to imitate human interactions in a recognizable reflection of real life. The work of the literary or dramatic creator—the poet, the playwright, or, more recently, the novelist or film director—is to imitate the created order brought into being by the divine Creator. Anytime we read imaginative literature—whether poetry, fiction, or drama—we encounter an imagined world that exists to reflect the world imagined into being by God.

In literature, we see the rich variety of human characters, presented in all of their complexity and contradictions. Through it, we witness the breathtaking human capacity for both virtue and depravity, oftentimes within a single individual. From it, we take away images of ourselves, reflected portraits that alternately comfort and challenge, admonish and affirm. Literature affords us the gift of a glimpse into what it means to be human.

This First-Year Honors Seminar in Literature aims to explore the ways our field of vision can be expanded by looking through the windows on the world, the ways of knowing, that literature offers. As an honors seminar, we will be dealing with a more ambitious reading list than would normally be found in an introductory class. The seminar will also introduce you to a wide array of critical approaches to literature, including New Criticism, New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Reader-Response criticism, and Cultural Hermeneutics. You will become familiar with and be given the opportunity to “try on” the major concerns of multiple approaches in order to equip you with a variety of critical tools with which to ask challenging questions of the works we study.

But if literature is “an imitation of an action,” as Aristotle described it, drama is “the imitation of an action in the form of an action.” In poetry we can hear about a poet having to choose when “two roads diverged in a yellow wood,” or in fiction we can read about a protagonist having to choose whether to keep drawing when his father denounces art as childish. But in the theatre we actually see an actor who must respond when another actor tells him to revenge his father’s murder at the hands of his uncle who is also his stepfather and king. The actor playing Hamlet may seem more sad or more angry, more distraught or more vengeful. None of these ways of playing Hamlet are “wrong.” But decisions about *how* to play the character are a necessary part of bringing any performance of *Hamlet* to the stage. And until *Hamlet* receives theatrical performance it is not being experienced in the way intended by the playwright, a word which means maker or builder rather than just author.

The poet writes a poem or a novelist writes a novel and you “close the loop” when you sit in your room reading that imaginative literature. And this course fulfills the GE requirement for “Reading

Imaginative Literature” (more about that later). You can also sit in your room and read a play, which is another form of imaginative literature. But foundational to this course is the recognition that a play script—like a novel—may be published as a book but the two works are fundamentally different. A script is just a blueprint that does not become fully realized until it is enfolded in a stage performance. Vital to this aspect of the course is recognition of the fundamental corporeality of drama. While you can “close the loop” on a poem or novel by reading it in your room, closing the loop on a play involves seeing it in a theatre where actors and a director along with lighting, set, sound, and costume designers are all involved in working artistically. And this course also fulfills the GE requirement for “Working Artistically” because you will not only engage in exploring the critical principles which guide theatre artists, and participate in interpreting their work as you expand your perceptual faculties, but you will also play a role in creating theatre by planning, preparing, and performing in a scene.

As a means to the ends outlined above, the course seeks to equip you with the ability to read works of literature—and to respond to dramatic literature in live performance—more perceptively, more discerningly, more intensely. Mostly, that endeavor will be pursued through discussion rather than lecture.

CLASS DISCUSSIONS: In a discussion class we are all engaged in teaching and learning from one another. You are responsible to participate in this process by contributing your perceptions to our classroom discussion and by considering seriously the remarks of other students. We need to hear about each other’s experience of reading the text. You’re an expert on that—in fact, you’re the only expert on what captivated you, what stumped you, what bored you. Be willing to listen to others; but be willing to speak about your own reading experience. You are responsible for synthesizing the best of what we all have to say in coming to an informed critical position of your own. Your own contribution to the class will not be measured quantitatively. What matters is that you raise questions about the literature and make intelligent, creative responses to the questions of others.

TEXTS: We will use the following texts. You need to have your own book to underline and make marginal comments. You need to have the edition indicated so we may all refer quickly to the same page during class discussion. Please obtain your books well in advance of the date of our class discussion.

| Author | Title | Publisher | ISBN |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Shakespeare | <i>Hamlet</i> , ed. Bate & Rasmussen | Modern Library | 978-0812969092 |
| Shakespeare | <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> ed. Bate & Rasmussen | Modern Library | 978-0812969122 |
| Seamus Heaney | <i>Selected Poems 1966-1987</i> | Farrar, Straus & Giroux | 978-0374535605 |
| Eavan Boland | <i>New Collected Poems</i> | Norton | 978-0393337303 |
| William Faulkner | <i>Go Down, Moses</i> | Vintage | 978-0679732174 |
| Arthur Miller | <i>The Crucible</i> | Penguin Classics | 978-0142437339 |
| Tom Stoppard | <i>Arcadia</i> | Farrar, Straus & Giroux | 978-0571169344 |
| Chaim Potok | <i>My Name is Asher Lev</i> | Anchor | 978-1400031047 |
| Erich Auerbach | <i>Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature</i> or | Princeton UP new expanded edition | 978-0691160221 |
| MLA | <i>MLA Handbook</i> , 8 th edition | 50th anniversary edition MLA | 978-0691113364 978-1603292627 |

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|-------------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Steven Lynn | <i>Texts and Contexts: Writing about Literature with Critical Theory</i> | Pearson Longman | |
| | or | 5th edition 4th edition | 978-0321449078 978-0321209429 |

PHYSICAL ATTENDANCE POLICY: When you are healthy, your attendance is expected. Each unexcused absence after the first will be recorded as a zero for class participation for that week. Grounds for an excused absence are illness or a family emergency. If you get sick, stay in bed and rest. Illness is grounds for excused absence from class, for delay of papers, for rescheduling of exams. However, exams will not be rescheduled nor excuses for late papers granted for such reasons as travel plans, ski trips, or extracurricular activities. According to college policy, a student may be dropped from a class with a grade of F if “the number of unexcused absences equals or exceeds twice the number of times the class meets per week.” Our class meets once a week. Do the math.

MENTAL ATTENDANCE POLICY: You need to be present mentally as well as physically. If you bring a laptop to class it should only be used for taking notes or checking information pertinent to the class discussion. If you use your laptop or phone to check your email, browse the web, play games, update your Facebook status, text or tweet friends, or work on stuff for other classes, your mental absence will be counted as an absence.

NON-ATTENDANCE POLICY: If you have flu-like symptoms—fever, cough, body chills or aches, congestion, diarrhea, or vomiting—you need to stay in your room and notify the Health Center. Inform me of your situation by email or voice mail if you are able. But you are not to come to class, nor to go to any stage production, nor to show up in person to report your illness, until you have been free of all of the above symptoms for at least 24 hours.

QUIZZES: You may expect unannounced quizzes. Active class participation reduces the need for quizzes. But quizzes can provide a helpful indication of what concepts need further clarification. Although quizzes may not be made up, I’ll drop one quiz grade for every five quizzes that are given.

POLICY ON CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES: Please do not bring food to class or chew gum during class. Water and other liquids are fine as long as you can ingest such fluids quietly (i.e. without slurping, snapping bottle lids, crunching ice, or turning a plastic water bottle into a noise maker). Please do not wear baseball caps in class—in discussion it helps to be able to see each other’s eyes.

PROMPTNESS: Please be on time. Being on time means that you’re present and in a cap-free, gum-free state. Being late to class three times will be treated as an absence.

COURTESY: I require courtesy in the classroom. Save your private conversations for outside of class and make your remarks that apply to the class discussion public for the entire class to enjoy.

PAPERS: You will write three play reviews of 800–1,100 words (2½–3½ pages) each, three analytical papers of 1,200–2,100 words (4-7 pages) each. The number of words is the operative guideline; the parenthetical reference to pages is an informal guide since font sizes can vary considerably. You are to review one out of the first two plays we see, one out of the second pair of plays, and one out of the final three performances. However, each play review is due at the next class session after seeing a performance. See the course calendar for a schedule of these assignments.

SCENES: You and from one to four of your classmates will memorize, rehearse, and perform for the rest of the class a scene from one of the plays we study.

POINTERS: You will receive three pages of “Pointers” designed to help you with matters of format, style, punctuation, incorporation of quotations, in-text citations, and MLA documentation style. I expect to read your writing attentively. Before I do so, I expect you to read my writing attentively. You will be given

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opportunities to ask about anything you find puzzling in the Pointers. The first paper will offer an opportunity for you to practice applying the Pointers without being penalized for confusion about applying them. After the first essay, you may expect a reduction of one-third of a letter grade for every three instances of violations of the Pointers, so you need to pay close attention to them.

FORMAT FOR PAPERS: All written work is to be submitted both electronically (as an email attachment) and in hard copy. Please submit all work as a Word file in .docx format or as a Pages file. Yes, if you use some other word-processing program that means you will need to do a “save-as” since GoogleDocs or .pdf format is not acceptable. The electronic copy of your paper should be named using the following convention: your surname—an indication of the assignment—a short title. So if your name is Elinore Ford and you’re writing your first review on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, your filename might be: Ford-R1-Midsummer.docx.

RUNNING HEADS: Have your word-processing program *automatically* add a running head to the second and subsequent pages consisting of your surname and the page number. So Ellie’s review should have a running head consisting of “Ford–2” at the top of the second page. Do not type “Ford–2” into the body of your paper; it’s a running head. Some on-line applications that purport to do word processing cannot manage running heads. Avoid those apps.

LATE PAPERS: Late papers not excused for illness will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each academic day they are late. Thus a “B+” paper handed in one day late would receive a “B,” etc. Work not submitted will receive a zero. A zero is to an “F” as 0% is to 50%.

PLAY REVIEWS: In writing a review, tell us what was most distinctive about the production you have seen. If you have seen prior productions of the play, or have read the text previously, or have an insight related to our class discussion, by all means feel free to use those perceptions in your review. But be sure that you tell us not only how a play might be performed but how it **was** performed in the version you witnessed. Some sample reviews will be available. As with all of the written work in this course, play reviews will be evaluated for style and clarity as well as for content. Offer a clear statement of what you see as central to the production as a whole, then support that clear, central statement with insightful arguments and reasons to accept that understanding. Each play review is due at the first class session after we’ve seen the performance (see the course calendar for details). See the appendix for more detailed guidelines.

DOCUMENTATION: For written work submitted in this course you are required to provide a “List of Works Consulted.” That list must identify any source you have read on your subject—including Sparknotes, genius.com, plot summaries, character lists, other online sources, published books or articles, or other students’ papers—whether or not you have used material from that source. Your list needs to provide full bibliographic information in MLA-formatted parenthetical documentation. Consult your copy of the *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition for detailed information about how to document material in MLA format. For additional examples, see the Purdue Online Writing Lab <<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>>. In addition, you need to provide parenthetical documentation (including specific page numbers) for any direct quotations or paraphrased ideas from any source.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Plagiarism consists in taking the words or the ideas of someone else and presenting them as if they were your own. Copying someone else’s paper is an obvious form of plagiarism. But finding ideas in a book or article and paraphrasing them in your own words as if the ideas were your own is an equally serious form of plagiarism. Any piece of work guilty of plagiarism will receive a zero and result in the semester grade being lowered one letter grade. A second offense will result in failure for the course. Please

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familiarize yourself with the Westmont College Plagiarism Policy, which explains different levels of plagiarism and the disciplinary consequences for each. See: <http://www.westmont.edu/~academics/pages/provost/curriculum/plagiarism/>

PERFORMANCES: An individual can read in solitude a novel or poem that was written by another individual in solitude. But drama, the most communal of the arts, requires a company of actors and a body of people for an audience. We will go to the theatre together and share the experience of seeing at least seven performances. Your participation in this aspect of the course is expected, but you need not feel that you have to attend each production if you have conflicts some nights. As an educational expense, a fee of \$200 for drama field trips will be collected along with tuition. The field trips fee covers your theatre tickets, the cost of transportation, and group booking costs for productions we attend as a group.

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BASIS OF EVALUATION: Your grade will be determined by your written work and your participation in class discussion. Your grade for class participation gauges your conscientiousness in reading the material, the depth of your understanding of the literature, and your ability to articulate your ideas in comments and significant questions. The weighting of these factors is as follows: each review—one grade; each essay—two grades; scene performance—two grades; quizzes—one grade; exam—one grade; class participation—two grades. Translated into percentages that weighting is approximately as follows: each review 6.7%, each essay 13.3%, scene performance 13.3%, quizzes 6.7%, exam 6.7%, class participation 13.3%.

CONNECTING WITH PROFESSORS: You are encouraged to take advantage of the “Take a Professor to Lunch” program as an opportunity to get to know each of your professors over a shared meal. Feel free to check with me about an available day for a lunch conversation.

GENERAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW: This course fulfills the goals of Reading Imaginative Literature and Working Artistically (in the Common Inquiries section of General Education) and serves as a writing-intensive course (in the Common Skills portion of General Education). Within the English major it fulfills the requirement of an Introduction to the Major course.

LITERATURE AS A MODE OF INQUIRY: Reading imaginative literature invites us to consider how literature can inform our lives and deepen our faith. Moving across space (to other places and other cultures) and time (to historical periods other than our own), we will seek to discern what is essentially human from what is particular to the place and time we inhabit. Within this mode of inquiry we will explore different literary genres with the goals of helping you to

- ❖ respect the benefits of paying close attention
- ❖ notice the interplay of form, style and content
- ❖ demonstrate an understanding of language beyond its literal level
- ❖ encounter the other with empathy, compassion and love
- ❖ articulate and wrestle with the ethical questions implicit in a text
- ❖ examine the assumptions we bring to our reading
- ❖ deepen your understanding of what it means to read as people of faith
- ❖ increase regard for the significance of story for people of the book

GOING BEYOND G.E. EXPECTATIONS FOR READING IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE: In this honors seminar, you will read and study approximately twice as much material as would be covered in courses that fulfill the basic requirements for Reading Imaginative Literature. You will study literary texts from American, British, and Irish cultural traditions, ranging from the Elizabethan to contemporary eras and including writers who are Jewish, Irish Catholic, and American Protestant; male and female; novelists, poets, and playwrights. In addition to a reading list drawn from a wide array of traditions, you also will be exposed to the tools that critical theory can provide for the analysis of literary texts. You will be introduced to New

Criticism, reader-response criticism, New Historicist modes of analysis, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist critical approaches, and cultural hermeneutics. You will be expected to become sufficiently adept at those modes of analysis to be able to apply at least two such modes in original literary analysis of your own. You will also be exposed to literary terminology that will increase your capacity for attentive reading.

WORKING ARTISTICALLY AS A MODE OF INQUIRY: As a class we will attend five or more live theatre productions which we will discuss in class. In writing performance reviews on at least three of those productions you will have ample opportunity to hone your interpretive skills in assessing live performance. In class we will not only discuss criteria for interpreting live performance and reflect on the principles that undergird live performance, we will also get on our feet to take part in readers' theatre explorations of how intonation, facial expression, or body movement can alter the effect created by live performance. Through such exercises you will participate directly in the processes of enactment that characterize the art of the theatre. Your engagement in this aspect of the course will culminate in your participation with one to four of your classmates in performing a scene from one of the plays we study.

SCENE PERFORMANCE: If your performance group of two to five students perform a scene from a Shakespeare play, each actor should have 25-35 full-length lines. If you want to stage a longer scene and learn more lines, feel free. If you perform a non-Shakespearean scene, it should be of at least 10 minutes' duration with each actor having at least 200-300 words to speak. Again, if you want to go longer, feel free. All actors are to have their lines memorized and each scene is to be rehearsed at least four times for an hour each. In presenting your scene to the rest of the class, you may either perform in the classroom or you may choose some other location on campus. However, any place you choose must not pose a risk of injury to performers or to college property nor a risk of disrupting some other class. Members of your group should be appropriately costumed and provided with props if called for by the scene. By preparing and performing this scene you will be making theatre by participating in the very processes of enactment that characterize the art of the theatre.

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WRITING FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS: Fulfilling a writing-intensive requirement (in the Common Skills portion of G.E.), this course seeks to contribute to your development as a writer. As indicated in the section on Papers above, you will write seven papers totaling 20½ –32½ pages. You will receive detailed written instruction regarding grammar, punctuation, ways of incorporating quotations into your prose, and accepted bibliographic style. In addition, part of our class time will be devoted to writing instruction as we workshop your essays to sharpen your prose style. Writing in a variety of modes throughout your college career will, we hope, equip you to:

- ❖ express yourself clearly, cogently, and grammatically
- ❖ develop the ability to distinguish information from opinion
- ❖ marshal evidence in support of points you wish to make
- ❖ disagree with others without expressing disrespect
- ❖ agree with others without plagiarizing their views
- ❖ structure your presentation of ideas in ways that prove persuasive
- ❖ use words skillfully, craft sentences forcefully, and develop paragraphs robustly

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES (CLOs): As the above lists indicate, the goals for this course are many and various. But for assessment purposes we specify measurable things you will all be able to do by the end of the course. The expected learning outcomes for this course will be assessed through the papers you write and the scene you perform. You will be able to:

1. **Demonstrate an understanding of language beyond its literal level** (an outcome as a GE Reading Imaginative Literature course)

In your analytical essays you will show how a particular image pattern evolves over the course of a work to convey figurative meaning that deepens our understanding of characters or thematic conflicts within the work.

2. **Demonstrate the capacity to respond with empathy and compassion to human experience represented in literature** (an outcome as a GE Reading Imaginative Literature course)

In offering a reader-response analysis, you will have an opportunity to explain how a character, situation, or relationship in the literature we have read particularly resonates with your own experience. Although you may not be male, or Jewish, or female, or African American, or married, or of Asian descent, or a sixteenth-century subject of a monarch, you will show how you can enter into the experience of someone who is quite unlike you in some ways—and how the human experience represented in literature can help you to reframe your own experience.

3. **Demonstrate effective interpretive processes in analyzing live theatrical performance** (an outcome as a GE Working Artistically course)

In your three play reviews you will explain how the interpretive choices of directors and actors affect the emphases and meaning of live theatrical performance. Rather than just offering plot summary or character sketches, you will analyze what individual actors do to convey the mannerisms, mindset, and emotions of their character. Further, you will interpret the significance of how the actors interact with each other on stage to create the dynamics of a given situation. You might, for example, be able to explain how the performance of one actor affects how we see the significance of behavior by a different actor. You may also show how the choices made by costume designers, set designers, and sound or lighting designers contribute to our understanding of characters. For new plays, you will also assess the work of the playwright in crafting a theatrical script that does justice to whatever conflict he or she chooses to dramatize.

4. **Demonstrate emerging levels of skill in the creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performance** (an outcome as a GE Working Artistically course)

In exercises when we get on our feet to enact scenes in class and to a much greater degree in the scene you memorize and perform, you will demonstrate an understanding of how intonation, facial expression, and physical movement contribute to the effectiveness of theatrical performance. At the most rudimentary level, you will show that you recognize theatre exists to be seen and heard by ensuring your actions are visible to your audience and your lines are enunciated clearly enough for your audience to hear, process, and understand the words you speak. Beyond that, you will “suit the action to the word, the word to the action,” as Hamlet says, so that you “hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature.” That is, you will be seeking to reflect in your performance the personality of the character you are embodying.

5. **Demonstrate the capacity to communicate in written form for a variety for purposes and audiences** (an outcome as a GE writing-intensive course)

In your play reviews, you will be engaging in a journalistic form of writing consisting of brief paragraphs and beginning with a compelling “hook” that conveys the most significant feature of the production you are reviewing. With an intended audience of, say, *Horizon* readers, you will be writing for fellow students in a mode in which contractions, somewhat casual diction, and pop culture references are all fair game.

By contrast, in your analytical essays you will be writing more formally with an introductory paragraph spelling out an original thesis and using effective argumentative transitions as you progressively build a case using topic sentences at the start of well-developed paragraphs and culminating in a conclusion which goes beyond a mere restatement or summary of what has

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preceded. In such formal writing, you will avoid contractions and pop culture references as you write for a more scholarly audience.

6. **Incorporate all quotations into your own prose grammatically**, either by embedding brief quotations into your own sentence or by crafting an introductory sentence that identifies the speaker and context of the passage. This learning outcome contributes to
 - ❖ the GE expectation regarding your capacity to communicate in written form, and also to
 - ❖ a Program Learning Outcome of the English Department that students will “engage various audiences in writing with sensitivity to rhetorical situations and scholarly standards.”
7. **Employ MLA citation and formatting style for incorporating sources into written work.** This learning outcome, which you will demonstrate in all of your written work including play reviews, contributes to
 - ❖ the GE expectation regarding your capacity to communicate in written form, and also to
 - ❖ a Program Learning Outcome of the English Department that students will “engage various audiences in writing with sensitivity to rhetorical situations and scholarly standards.”
8. **Practice close analysis of literary texts from diverse historical and cultural traditions.** Your reading, our class discussion, and your written work will expose you to diverse historical and cultural traditions. Your adeptness at close analysis will be assessed through all of the reviews and essays you write, which will hone your skills in this area. This CLO contributes to the English Department’s Program Learning Outcome that students will
 - ❖ Read literary texts carefully, analyzing both the contexts and the techniques (e.g., literary devices and genre characteristics) that shape their meaning.
9. **Write an essay that engages Christian faith.** Essay #3 and the final exam will provide opportunities for you to address issues of Christian faith and will be the means for assessing this learning outcome. This CLO contributes to the English Department’s Program Learning Outcome that students will:
 - ❖ Demonstrate critical discernment in their examination of literary texts in ways that expand their affections and sympathies, by assessing their own cultural and theological assumptions.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Students who have been diagnosed with a disability are encouraged to contact the Disability Services office as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the Office of Disability Services. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your equal access to this course. Please contact Sheri Noble, director of disability services (310A Voskuyl Library, 565-6186, snoble@westmont.edu) or visit the website for more information: <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability/>.

LIBRARY ASSISTANCE: Westmont librarians are available to help you. You can go to the Research Help Desk in the library for help with research for your assignments. You can also set up an appointment with the librarian who serves your academic department. To identify a specific librarian and to find subject-specific resources, consult the library’s research guides at libguides.westmont.edu.

WRITERS’ CORNER, the campus writing center, is an academic support service that is free for all students. Peer tutors, who offer help with your writing, are available for one-on-one tutorials in Voskuyl Library 215. Open hours are 4-11 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 6-11 p.m. on Sunday. Drop-ins are welcome (first come, first served). For more information on policies and services, visit the Writers’ Corner website: <http://www.westmont.edu/academics/departments/english/writers-corner.html>

APPENDIX: WRITING PROMPTS FOR WRITTEN WORK

Play Review Assignment Guidelines

The writing of play reviews requires a journalistic style of prose, which means leaping into your subject, writing brief paragraphs, and communicating your main observations and opinions clearly within the first few sentences. In writing a review you should respond to the actual production you see, and not enter into a discussion of matters related solely to the text of the play. If you have seen the play before, or read it before, or have an insight related to our class discussion, feel free to use those perceptions in your review. But be sure that you focus primarily not only how a play *might* be performed but how it *is* performed in the production you witness.

As you reflect on the performance, remember that doing theatre is about making choices. Some choices work well, some don't. One choice may appeal to you, and strike another person as bizarre. However, in theatre, it is rare that an actor, director, or designer will make a choice that is not motivated by some idea. Before you dismiss a choice as foolish, try to figure out why the theatre artist made that choice in the first place.

- ❖ Your subject for a play review is the play as performed, not the plot. If I want to know the plot of a play, I can read the text. What I can't know from the text is how the actors are interpreting that text, what the set designer is doing to create an environment for those actors, or how the costume designer saw the physical attributes of each character. More importantly, I can't know your insights into these interpretive choices.
- ❖ Your audience wants to know right away what stands out about this production as a whole. Because this is a journalistic style of writing, using several sentences to introduce your topic isn't really a good idea. You should just plunge in, giving your audience a snapshot of the distinctives of the production from the very earliest sentences of your review. Your audience will want to know some specific details, whether they are of actor choices, design choices, or directorial choices, so notice what you notice in the production. Your audience will also want to know what the overall effect of the production was, so reflect analytically on how all the individual choices coalesce to create a unified and meaningful whole.
- ❖ Your purpose in writing a play review is to give your audience both a vision of the production as a whole and an analysis of some critical details that are revelatory of that whole. You should strive to be simultaneously descriptive and analytical. Avoid simply saying, "It was good; I liked it." Instead, tell *how* it was done, and why it matters. The best reviews will be ones where every paragraph does a great deal of work, simultaneously delineating production choices, analyzing those choices, and revealing how those choices contribute to making up the larger whole. Questions to bear in mind while writing reviews include:

- What is the director's concept in producing the play as he or she does?
- What works, or doesn't work, in this production?
- What key moments from this production really stand out?
- How is the actor bringing meaning to the language she is speaking?
- How do acting choices complicate, support, or undercut the words being spoken?

- How does setting, costume, or lighting enrich or expand the world of the play?
- Why are the artists making the choices they are?
- Why are these choices effective or not?
- Why is this play being produced in this manner?

Stylistic requirements

- ❖ the name of the play, the playwright, and the group producing the play must all appear early in the review; do not, however, simply dedicate one sentence to the pedestrian reporting of this information—incorporate it into the flow of engaging sentences instead
- ❖ actors must be discussed by name, not by character name: you may not say, “the guy playing Hamlet”; you must say, “Ethan Hawke” (or Mel Gibson, or Stephen Dillane, or Kenneth Branagh, or Kevin Kline, etc); this means, of course, that you must obtain a program
- ❖ the title of your review must not be the title of the play you just saw, or anything as uninspired as “a review of the title of the play I just saw”
- ❖ your review must deal with the production, not with a narrative of your journey to the production, your exhilaration as you found your seat, your dismay when you realized you were sitting behind Yao Ming in a big hat, etc
- ❖ your review should make sparing use of the first person, eschewing it entirely if possible
- ❖ paragraphs should be relatively brief, as suits a journalistic style, but ought to flow nicely from one to the next, as suits good writing in general
- ❖ your review should be 800-1,100 words long—that’s roughly 2½–3½ pages

Your objectives for your play review are to:

- ❖ present and evaluate the choices made by the theatre artists in production, using vivid language to describe key moments and relating those moments to the overall objectives of the production and its relative success
- ❖ describe the leaf in order to show us the forest (in other words, find the particular that is revelatory of the general)
- ❖ make it clear what your overall view of the production is, whether your thesis is explicit or implied, as it often is in review writing
- ❖ discuss the play as performed, not the plot
- ❖ move from what to how to why in your examination of the production
- ❖ offer specific and meaningful evidence to support your claims
- ❖ analyze and comment on this evidence fully and originally
- ❖ write in a journalistic style, opening with your most important observations, and making every sentence count
- ❖ plunge into your subject in your opening paragraph, and offer some meaningful synthesis of your evaluation of the production in your closing paragraph

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Writing Prompt for Essay # 1: Poetry Explication Assignment Guidelines

In writing a poetry explication your goal is to unfold what is implied in the poem. There is no need to strain after obscure “hidden” meanings or to invent some mystical interpretation (if the poem focuses closely on a red wheelbarrow, that wheelbarrow probably *doesn't* represent an invading alien army intent on world domination). Simply present in an orderly, discursive fashion what seems to be poetically present in the text. However, remember that many, many riches may be present in a text, and a paper that suggests that a poem has no more meaning than your average tweet is probably missing the point. Bear in mind that an explication not only tells what a poem or story means but analyzes *how* it means what it means. A poem is made up of words and images and may well employ meter, rhythm, or rhyme. Make sure you address how form follows (or deviates from) content.

While working on a poem it can be helpful to write it out slowly in your own hand. Make all the sense you can of it before turning (if at all) to secondary sources. Let your first secondary source be the dictionary (but avoid sentences which begin “the dictionary says” or “the dictionary describes”). If you turn to critical essays (and you are not expected to do so), don't let them overwhelm your explication. Your finished essay should be very much your own. And it should be a coherent essay, not a series of footnotes. It is not sufficient to write a critical essay that merely agrees with other sources. You must advance an original critical argument of your own which differs in significant ways with critical arguments advanced by any essays you have read.

- ❖ Your subject will be the meaning and structure of a poem of your own choosing by Eavan Boland, one that is either not assigned for class or that we have not fully discussed in class. This means you will need to do a measure of outside reading to discover a poem that speaks to you powerfully and whose meaning you wish to delve into more deeply.
- ❖ Consider carefully what information your audience will need to understand the poem. Are there words whose meaning may be obscure? Is there significance to the particular form, meter, rhyme scheme, or style that could help your audience appreciate the poem's intent better? Is there any background information about the poet, the genre of the poem, its date, or its historical context that might help make sense of the poem?
- ❖ Your purpose is to move through the poem in an orderly fashion, explicating its meaning, without allowing the essay to decay into a series of random notes on successive lines. Explain obscurities. Follow up on allusions to other texts or historical events. Mark puns, ironies, paradoxes, and intentional ambiguities, and consider why they are present in the poem. Above all, look for patterns of contrast or repetition of terms and images. And also attend to ways in which sound echoes sense: ways in which rhythm, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, consonance, and meter highlight key thoughts. After working through the entire poem, gather your reading into a synthesis that goes beyond a mere summary of what has come before. Make sure we can see the forest, not just the trees. As you work on your explication, consider the following questions:
 - What is the meaning of the poem?
 - What is the point-of-view of the poem?
 - Who is the speaker and how do we come to know that speaker?
 - What is the structure of the poem and how does that contribute to its meaning?
 - What images does the poet use?
 - Do the images change in the course of the poem—if so, how?
 - How does rhythm, meter, or rhyme contribute to the meaning of the poem?

- ❖ We have now studied the critical approaches of New Criticism and feminist criticism. In the course of your explication, apply either a New Critical or a feminist reading to the poem of your choosing. The kind of reading you are applying should be made explicit both in the title and in the body of your essay.
- ❖ Besides labeling what you are doing in your title and introduction, your essay should also apply the terminology of the critical approach that you are pursuing. If your explication offers a feminist reading of a poem, it might be helpful, for example, to know what sorts of *exclusions*, *suppressions*, or *exploitations* are perpetuated or countered by the poem you are considering. What are the *performative* aspects of *gender* in the poem—how is “male-ness” or “female-ness” created by what one does, rather than by what one is, in the poem? How are *stereotypes*—of gender, of class, of race, of sexual orientation, or of nationality—reinforced or undercut? How is the representation of such categories *constructed* in the poem? If Virginia Woolf argues that “*we think back through our mothers if we are women*” (qtd. by Lynn, 5th ed., p. 235), how is such thinking embodied—or excluded—in the poem you are considering? Does the poem reinforce or subvert a *binary* perception of women “as either Mary or Eve, the angelic mother or the evil seductress” (Lynn, 5th ed., p. 236).
- ❖ if you are offering a New Critical analysis of any poem, you might engage in a part-to-whole analysis showing how some detail, no matter how small, contributes to an essential complexity (or tension, irony, paradox, opposition, ambiguity) in the work and how that detail pertains to the way the complexities of the work are resolved into some kind of unity. You would need to answer these questions (quoted from Lynn, 6th ed., p. 45):
 1. What complexities (or tensions, ironies, paradoxes, oppositions, ambiguities) can you find in the work?
 2. What idea unifies the work, resolving these ambiguities?
 3. What details or images support this resolution (that is, connect the parts to the whole)?

Your objectives for this essay are to:

- ❖ explicate a poem of your choosing, showing how the poem means what it means
- ❖ develop a focused and significant thesis
- ❖ move from *what* to *how* to *why* in your examination of the poem
- ❖ offer specific and meaningful evidence to support your claims
- ❖ analyze and comment on this evidence fully and originally
- ❖ craft vivid and substantive opening and closing paragraphs
- ❖ construct a coherent and logical progression of ideas, building one idea upon the last

Your poetry explication should consist of 1,200-2,100 words (approximately 4–7 pages).

Writing Prompt for Essay # 2

The Assignment: We've now studied *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Arcadia*, *The Crucible*, *My Name Is Asher Lev*, the poetry of Seamus Heaney, the poetry of Eavan Boland, and "Was." And we've studied the critical approaches of New Criticism, New Historicism or postcolonial studies, feminist criticism, psychological and psychoanalytic criticism, and reader-response criticism. For your second essay, please write an original New Critical, or a New Historicist, or a feminist, or a psychological, or a reader-response analysis of some aspect of one of the above works. Do not use the same critical approach you used on your first essay. You need to be offering an analysis of your own, arguing for a thesis that is original with you.

Writing Process: Steven Lynn provides detailed suggestions regarding how to go through the steps necessary to develop an essay of each sort. So, for example, if you are offering a New Critical analysis of any play you might engage in a part-to-whole analysis showing how some detail, no matter how small, contributes to an essential complexity (or tension, irony, paradox, opposition, ambiguity) in the work and how that detail pertains to the way the complexities of the work are resolved into some kind of unity. If you are offering a New Historicist reading of a work, you might engage in research regarding the social or historic context of the times in which the work was written—including such disparate matters as labor practices, economic movements, social unrest, social equality or inequality of women (in *some* ways, though not all, women in Shakespeare's day had greater freedoms than Victorian women or American women of the 1950s), conditions of the working class, issues of religious freedom, imperialist practices. For Potok, you might look up information regarding the cultural and religious practices of the Ladover Hasidim, anti-Semitism in 1950s Brooklyn, educational and career opportunities for Hasidic women, or Soviet-era persecution of Jews. For Arthur Miller, you might research the legal rights of women as opposed to men in 17th-century Salem (when *The Crucible* is set) or the tactics used in the McCarthy era (when *The Crucible* was written) to get people suspected of Communist sympathies to name the names of other sympathizers. What you do *not* need to do (and probably *should* not do) is to look up New Historicist, New Critical, or Reader-Response readings of the novel, play, or poem you're writing about. You need an argument of your own, and any argument you find in some critical essay is not your own.

Documentation: You are required to provide a List of Works Consulted. So you've got to document anything you read about the subject, whether you think you rely on it or not. And you've got to go beyond anything you read to offer an original critical thesis of your own.

Safety Net: In the sections labeled "Practicing New Criticism" and "Practicing Reader-Response Criticism," Lynn gives poems or prose passages which he does not analyze and provides a series of questions about each one. If you get stymied in responding to the prompt in the first paragraph on this page, the safety net would be for you to writing an analysis of one of these poems using Lynn's questions as a starting point. To use terminology from figure skating or gymnastics, the "level of difficulty" of this alternative is not as great as an original analysis of some aspect of one of the four plays we have read. So the highest possible grade for a safety net essay is an A- rather than an A or A+. But the safety net exists if you find it needful.

Vocabulary: Whichever critical approach you use, demonstrate that you understand the concepts and are able to apply the vocabulary of the approach.

Length: Your essay should consist of 1,200-2,100 words (approximately 4–7 pages).

Appendix 2: Scene Preparation Work

Ten Questions

To ask and answer for yourself (as your character) every time you attempt to create a role.

1. Who am I? Answer both in the general sense, and in the sense of “Who am I now rather than in any other circumstances?”
2. Where am I? Country, region, city, neighborhood, house, room, part of room. (Why?)
3. What time is it? Year, month, week, day, hour, minute. (Why?)
4. What surrounds me physically? Include everything seen and unseen. Determine the importance of several things.
5. What are the given circumstances? Everything relevant that makes my situation specific. Consider social class, economic status, marital status, family situation, and any special circumstances of life.
6. What are my relationships? With self, with others in the play, with objects?
7. What do I want? In the play, scene, moment. In my life? This year? Today? This minute? What’s the positive outcome?
8. What’s in my way? External and internal obstacles.
9. What do I do to get what I want? In the play (my “life”); in the scene (at this moment).
10. What could I lose in this scene? Consider the array of things being risked in the scene.

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