

English 20764: Uneasy Environments: Literature from Australasia and the American South

Instructor: Dr. Nicole Winsor

Email: nwinsor@nd.edu

Time and Location: MW 3.30-4.45, De Bartolo Hall 223

Office Hours: Wednesday 5.00-6.00pm (or by appointment)

Course Description and Objectives

Occasionally, when we read a novel or short story, or watch a film or play, we are struck by the way that both natural and urban environments can suddenly seem to become characters of their own: they sneer, snarl, and haunt, hanging over characters like a threat, unsettling them (and us). This course will explore twentieth century literature and film from the American south, Australia and New Zealand, which depict environments in such a way as to generate these uneasy feelings. This course will explore the multiple ways that literary and filmic representations of eerie, harsh, and macabre spaces help us to interrogate aspects of life at the edges of society.

Students will analyze depictions of environments (natural, urban, social, and cultural) in twentieth century prose writing and film from the American south, Australia, and New Zealand for the purpose of understanding that the relationships which people have with various landscapes play an important role in how they imagine themselves and the societies and cultures to which they belong. Depictions of urban and rural spaces in literature—particularly those which leave readers feeling “uneasy”—can help us imagine and understand the complexities of identity, society, and culture in any given historical climate across the globe.

Statement of Core Learning Goals

In our discussions and writing assignments we will define, comprehend, and apply devices, techniques, and concepts of literary and film analysis in order to help us understand these texts in light of their historical contexts, intellectual ideas, literary and cinematic forms, and aesthetics. This course will meet the learning goals for the core curriculum Fine Arts and Literature Way of Knowing as well as the Writing Way of Knowing in the following ways:

- By defining and understanding how devices, techniques, and concepts relevant to literature and film function, you will learn how to carry out close analyses of the structural components of twentieth century texts. You will put your understanding of how creative devices function to create meaning into practice by writing a (revisable) Creative Landscape piece.
- By understanding what these American and Australasian texts can offer in terms of how writers comprehend and critique the world around them, you will come to appreciate the social, cultural, political and aesthetic factors which have shaped creative processes in Australasia and the American South in the twentieth century; you will also be able to identify and evaluate the kinds of aesthetic, cultural, social, and political decisions that writers and film practitioners must make in order to produce an aesthetic and/or argumentative experience that makes an impact on the world.
- By appreciating and understanding these factors and decisions with the assistance of secondary historical and cultural readings, you will be able to situate American and works within their relevant historical contexts.

- By reading, discussing, responding, and analyzing the rhetorical moves that literary scholars use to make arguments in these secondary sources, you will learn how to produce complex and well-supported arguments that reflect the conventions and audience expectations of the discipline
- By situating these works within their relevant historical contexts, you will learn how to generate and apply your own critical comparative frameworks; by applying these comparative frameworks in your own writing, you will learn how to compare, contrast, and evaluate the way that these texts represent similar and/or different social, cultural, and political concerns
- By completing reading responses, short creative writing and close analysis essays, and a research essay you will understand the expectations of explorative, creative, analytic, and argumentative forms of writing and use this knowledge to write effective English Literature essays
- By attending a library research workshop you will learn how to effectively conduct research, frame your arguments within an appropriate scholarly conversation, and cite that research using discipline appropriate reference styles (Chicago or MLA)
- By meeting with me one-on-one twice during the semester (once before the landscape piece is due and once before submitting your final essay proposal/bibliography) and by receiving written and oral feedback from both myself (during meetings and in assignment feedback form) and from your peers (during workshops and presentations of your final essays) you will learn strategies for organizing, revising, and proofreading your writing so that your writing is grammatically and syntactically coherent and so that you can articulate substantive research questions in both oral and written forms using practices of reasoned, evidence-based, intellectually open-minded communication.

Course Texts (subject to change):

Flannery O'Connor, short stories – “The Heart of the Park” (1949), “The River” (1953), & “You Can’t Be Any Poorer Than Dead” (1955)

William Faulkner, novel – *As I Lay Dying* (1930)

Zora Neale Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Henry Lawson, short story – “The Drover’s Wife” (1892)

Barbara Baynton, short story – “The Chosen Vessel” (1902)

Daisy Bates, ethnographic memoir – *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1938; selection of chapters)

Joan Lindsay, novel – *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967)

Jocelyn Moorhouse, film – *The Dressmaker* (2015)

Katherine Mansfield, short stories – “The Woman at the Store” (1912) & “Millie” (1913), selections from the Urewera Notebook.

Jane Campion, film – *The Piano* (1993)

James K. Baxter – selection of poems, TBD

Michael Morrissey, short story – “Jack Kerouac Sat Down by the Wanganui River and Wept.”

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation 10%:

Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your degree of attendance, class preparation, completion of all exercises, and active participation in large and small group discussions. You must also meet the stipulations regarding participation and attendance detailed under **Classroom Policies** below.

Reading Response papers 20%:

You are expected to write six 1-2 page response papers on individual texts, each worth 2% of your grade. At the end of the American and Australian sections when we discuss how to compare these texts, both groups will submit a 2-4 page response on two or more texts we have read in that section (each worth 4% of your grade). The class will be divided into two reading response groups and you are required to hand in a hard copy of your reading response on the day allocated for your group (see Course Schedule below).

Creative Landscape Piece 10%:

In order to apply what you've learned about literary devices, techniques, and concepts through close reading, you will be required to write a short (2-3 page) piece of creative writing to be submitted in week four (see schedule below). For this assignment you will use a selection of devices, techniques, and concepts to describe a landscape from your hometown which reflects that town's social and cultural environment. You can revise and resubmit this piece after receiving feedback from me as many times as you want up until November 12th (I will give you a provisional grade each time you submit).

Mid-Term Exam 25 %:

This exam will consist of three sections:

1. **Identifications:** you will be given 8 short passages from the texts we have read so far. You will pick 5 of these and identify the text from which that passage comes as well as the author (each ID worth 1% for a total of 5%).
2. **Close Reading:** you will write a short unstructured essay based on a close reading of 1 of 2 passages provided by me. In addition to identifying formal techniques and discussing the relationship between these techniques and the narrative content of the passage, you will be required to discuss the significance of the passage and its form in relation to the text as a whole (10%).
3. **Short Essay:** You will be provided with 3-4 essay questions prompting you to consider the broader social, cultural, and/or historical landscapes (i.e. religious, racial, gendered) that the environments depicted in the texts we have read so far reflect and/or challenge (10%). You must refer to 2 or more texts.

Final Paper 35% (Proposal/Bibliography, 5%; Presentation 5%; Final Essay 25%)

You will be provided with 3-4 topic questions and you will pick one question to answer, writing an 10-12 page comparative essay that draws together three or more texts of your choosing from this course. You must include at least one text from each country. You should complete outside research, but the main emphasis should be on paying close attention to the texts themselves and to developing an analytical essay that compares and contrasts literary depictions of landscapes and the cultural, social, and/or historical environments that they reflect and/or challenge across the three countries. You will be required to submit a short proposal of your argument with a bibliography which you will workshop in class (see schedule below).

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Participation and Attendance

Respect for Diversity: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a

resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

The topics that we're covering in this class are often difficult, not just intellectually but emotionally. While I expect there to be rigorous discussion and even disagreement in the course of our class discussions, I ask that you engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Aim to disagree without becoming disagreeable. In this class we will not shy away from the uncomfortable. In exchange, I will work to ensure a classroom environment that supports you taking these intellectual and emotional risks.

While in this classroom, you are expected to treat your fellow students with respect at all times. Failure to do so will significantly lower your in-class work grade.

Note that this is not a lecture course and your participation will be evaluated based on your degree of engagement with the class. By "engagement" I mean the effort you put into listening, processing, and responding to others in a conscientious and constructive way.

Each student is allotted **two free absences** for sickness, emergencies, etc. More than two missed classes will result in your final grade being lowered by a third (e.g., from a B- to a C+) for each absence beyond those two. **Five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.** If extenuating circumstances require you to miss more than two class periods, please speak with me.

Students will not be penalized for University-approved excused absences (see <http://studenthandbook.nd.edu/academic/absence/> for a detailed description of approved absences).

Late Work Penalties and Exam Makeups

Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day that it is late.

Reading Responses **must** be handed in to the instructor in class on the day in which they are due. No late reading responses will be accepted.

If you are absent on the day of the midterm and have a legitimate reason (ie. illness or an emergency), you must contact me within 48 hours to schedule a day and time to make up the exam. **If you do not contact me within 48 hours, you will receive a score of 0.**

Assignment Grading Standards

A = 93-100	A- = 90-92.9	B+ = 87-89.9	B = 83-86.9	B- = 80-82.9
C+ = 77-79.9	C = 73-76.9	C- = 70-72.9	D = 60-69.9	F = below 60

The grading standards for this class follow the university-wide grading standards and are as follows:

“A-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds all expectations for the assignment. Paper is outstanding in form and content, well organized, and easy to understand. The central thesis is cogent and insightful and engages with course materials in complex and rigorous ways. The evidence chosen in support of the thesis is convincing, and the authorial voice is engaged and lively. There are no, or very few, errors of spelling, grammar, or typing.

“B-level” work: Clearly meets or exceeds nearly all expectations of the assignment. Thesis is strong and clear, and there is good evidence presented to support it. The argument exhibits thoughtful engagement with class material and demonstrates critical thinking about the course’s central questions. Polished, although may contain a few minor sentence-level errors.

“C-level” work: Clearly meets all basic expectations of the assignment. The paper contains a central thesis and attempts to support that thesis with appropriate evidence. The central argument is maintained and attempts are made to engage with course materials, though at times the essay’s focus may drift. May contain a few patterns of sentence-level errors, but not severe enough to interfere with communication.

**Note: many students are surprised to receive a “C--level” grade when they have “done everything listed on the assignment sheet.” Simply meeting the minimum requirements constitutes a basic “passing” grade; to get a “B” or an “A,” you must exceed those minimum requirements through more sophisticated execution.

“D-level” work: Work is below “average,” meaning it does not clearly meet basic expectations of the assignment. The central idea of the paper may not be clear, or the evidence may not be convincing or seem appropriate. The paper may fail to address the course’s core theme, or may suffer from serious disorganization. May contain patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

“F-level” work: Work does not meet minimum expectations for the assignment. Shows little to no central argument. May demonstrate inadequate command of the subject matter, and information may not be presented in a clear and appropriate way for readers. Perspective may be unoriginal, difficult to follow, or not truly argumentative. Connection between ideas may be very rough and difficult for readers to follow. May contain numerous patterns of sentence-level error that are severe enough to interfere with communication.

Policies and Resources

Academic Honesty: Upon entering Notre Dame, you were required to study the online edition of the *Academic Code of Honor*, to pass a quiz on it, and to sign a pledge to abide by it. The full code is available at: <http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code/>. Please pay particular section IV-B, particularly the first sentence:

The pledge to uphold the *Academic Code of Honor* includes an understanding that a student’s submitted work, graded or ungraded –

examinations, draft copies, papers, homework assignments, extra credit work, etc. – must be his or her own.

Please review the University's Honor Code and talk to me about any questions you have throughout the semester. Most instances of plagiarism are not done from malice but from ignorance of the law. If you are *ever* uncertain throughout the semester about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, or if you think you may have inadvertently plagiarised, then *please talk to me ASAP!*

Disability Services: If you have a disability and will need accommodations for this course, please register with Disability Services (www.nd.edu/~osd/). After you have discussed your accommodation needs with the Coordinator of Disability Services, please speak with me to make whatever arrangements may be necessary.

The University Writing Center: The Writing Center is dedicated to helping students become better writers. **It is not mandatory for you to attend an appointment for this course, however it is strongly advised.** When you visit the Writing Center, the tutors working there will help you by listening to your questions attentively, reading your papers carefully, and talking with you intelligently about your ideas. Writing Center tutors work with writers during all stages of the writing process—from understanding an assignment, to developing a thesis, to organizing the paper, to revising the first draft, to editing the final product. The tutors do not write or edit your papers for you. Rather, they help you develop effective rhetorical strategies for your written work. To learn more about the Writing Center and make an appointment online, visit: <http://writingcenter.nd.edu>.

Schedule

Week 1

Aug 22nd: Introduction and Collaborative Class Exercise: “How to Read Comparatively and Ethically: A Classroom Policy”

Week 2

Aug. 27th: O’Connor – “The Heart of the Park,” “The River,” & “You Can’t be any Poorer than Dead”

Aug. 29th: O’Connor – “The Heart of the Park,” “The River,” & “You Can’t be any Poorer than Dead” continued.

Reading Response due for both Group 1 and 2 (1-2 pages; 2%)

One-on-one meeting with me to discuss Creative landscape piece

Week 3:

Sept. 3rd: Faulkner – *As I Lay Dying*, pages 3-31; and “Cultural Context,” McCullers “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature” and Fred Hobson, “Benighted South,” pages 203-213 of your *As I Lay Dying* Norton Critical Edition

Reading Response from Group 1 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Sept. 5th: Faulkner – *As I Lay Dying*, pages 32-81

Reading Response from Group 2 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Week 4:

Sept. 10th: Faulkner – *As I Lay Dying*, pages 82-119

Creative Landscape Piece Due.

Sept 12th: Faulkner – *As I Lay Dying*, pages 120 – end

Week 5:

Sept. 17th: Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pages 1-50; & “How it Feels to be Colored Me”

Reading Response from Group 1 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Sept. 19th: Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pages 51-80

Reading Response from Group 2 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Week 6:

Sept. 24th: Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pages 81-153

Sept. 26th: Hurston – *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, pages 154-193

Week 7:

Oct 1st: Oklopčič – “Sensual Women of Yoknapatawpha County”; and Brumm – “The World is a Madhouse.”

Reading Response from BOTH GROUPS Due (3-4 pages comparing 2 or more readings from the American Section; 4%)

Oct. 3rd: Midterm Exam Preparation

Week 8

Oct. 8th: **MIDTERM EXAM**

Section II: Australia

Oct. 10th: Webby – “Colonial Writers and Readers”; Goldsworthy – “Fiction from 1900 to 1970”; Mee – “Introduction”; and Bates – “Prologue” from *The Passing of the Aborigines*

Reading Response from Group 2 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

FALL BREAK – Oct 13th - 21st

Week 9:

Oct. 22nd: Lawson – “The Drover’s Wife”; Baynton – “The Chosen Vessel”
Reading Response from Group 1 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Oct 24th: Library Research Workshop
Draft of Proposal and Bibliography Due

Week 10:

Oct 29: Lindsay - *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, pages 1-59.
Reading Response from Group 1 Due

Oct 31: Lindsay – *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, pages 61-100.
Reading Response from Group 2 Due

Week 11:

Nov. 5th: Lindsay – *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, pages 101-147
Final Proposal and Bibliography Due

Nov 7th: Lindsay – *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, pages 149-204

Week 12:

Nov. 12th: Moorhouse – *The Dressmaker*
Reading Response FROM BOTH GROUPS Due (3-4 pages on 2 or more Australian texts; 4%)

Section III: New Zealand

Nov. 14th: Mansfield – “The Woman at the Store” & “Millie”
Reading Response from Group 2 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

Week 13:

Nov. 19th: Campion – *The Piano*
Reading Response from Group 1 Due (1-2 pages; 2%)

THANKS GIVING BREAK: Wed November 21st – Sun 25th

Week 14:

Nov. 26th: James K. Baxter – Selected Poems; Michael Morrissey – “Jack Kerouac Sat Down by the Wanganui River and Wept.”
Draft of Final Essay Due

Nov. 28th: Final Paper Presentations

Week 15:

Dec. 3rd: Final Paper Short Presentations

Dec 6th: Final Paper Short Presentations & Conclusion

Final Revised Essay Due Monday December 10th by 6pm