

## Department of English &amp; Writing Studies

**Studies in Narrative Theory**  
**English 2220F (001)**  
Fall 2016

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabek, Lenape, Huron-Wendat, and Attawandaron peoples. Acknowledge and respect.

**Instructor:** Donna Palmateer Pennee, PhD  
**Office and Office Hours:** AHB 2G19A, tba  
after consultation with the class  
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**(e-mail is the preferred mode)**

**Graduate Teaching Assistant:** Morgan Leone  
**Office Hour and Contact:** tba

**Location:** Talbot College 340  
**Date/Time:** Tuesday 6:30pm-9:30pm

**Antirequisite(s):** – check [Academic Calendar](#).

**Prerequisite(s):** At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or both English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department. – check [Academic Calendar](#).

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course will change how you read. Really! You will learn new ways of attending to and processing the information encoded into stories; you will learn how stories have been having effects on you; and you will discover knowledge about how stories mean—knowledge that you may not know you have because you haven't spent time theorizing how we read or write.

*Narratives require close study because stories structure the meanings by which a culture lives. Our culture depends upon numerous types of narrative: novels, short stories, films, television shows, myths, anecdotes, songs, music videos, comics, paintings, advertisements, essays, biographies, and news accounts. All tell a story. [. . .] [T]he events making up a story are only available to us through a telling. (Cohan and Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* [Routledge, 1988] 1)*

This course provides an introduction to the study of narrative theory, primarily through a semiotic (Saussurian) approach to understanding language and a semiotic and narratological approach to understanding narrative and narrativity.

Instead of paraphrasing *what* stories mean, we will focus on learning and applying vocabulary and concepts for understanding and analyzing *how* narratives produce meaning and other effects. As we build our repertoire for identifying semiotic and narratological features of fiction and understanding how they work, we will return anew to the more typical expectation of analysis of what stories mean. We want to reach a point where we are competent in analyzing and articulating not only what we think our readings mean, but also addressing the larger question of how “stories structure the meanings by which a culture lives.”

The theories and methods studied in this course will provide you with a deepened appreciation for the complexity of narrative as a formal and social structure, through studying how language and narratives encode and structure not only our understanding of what we read but also how linguistic and narrative conventions establish the very possibilities and limits that shape our understanding of narrative as a form. The course also studies theory and method applicable to analysis beyond literary forms of signification and narrative: we will consider narratives in visual and aural forms from time to time. Successful students really do finish this course with a whole new way of reading stories (in book, film, and other cultural forms).

*Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* is core to the course: it requires a willingness to engage in abstract, conceptual thinking about every-day interpretive practices. Reading this textbook requires time, which is one of the reasons why there are so few books required for this course. Be prepared for re-reading both this theory textbook and the short stories and novel assigned. Re-reading is imperative for developing and refining your understanding of and facility with the narrative theory studied in this course. *Engagements with Narrative* is a much more accessible introduction to narrative theory, which also broadens the range of types of narrative theory that have recently emerged and not accounted for in our other theory text.

As much as possible, teaching and learning will occur by facilitated discovery, application, and practice in class, with mini-lectures for concepts and examples followed by discussion and other forms of in-class work. In the main, we will *learn by doing* in this course, and methods of assessment will correspond to the means by which teaching and learning occur during class time. The weight and length of assignments start small: as we build knowledge of narrative theory over the term, and hone our analytical reading and writing skills through hands-on work in the classroom, writing essays out of class and getting feedback on out-of-class work, the weight and length of assignments will increase.

The structure of the course and individual classes will provide as much opportunity as possible for:

- reading closely to discover, identify, and explain the components of semiotics, textuality, and narrativity at work in selected short stories and one novel
- applying semiotic and narrative theory in detailed analyses in in-class work and discussion
- demonstrating your knowledge and comprehension of, and ability to apply, semiotic and narratological terms in class and in out-of-class work
- applying and synthesizing components of semiotics and narrative theory in short out-of-class essays and / or for those students who wish it, in one short in-class oral presentation instead of one short out-of-class essay (possibility of an oral presentation will depend on number of students in the class: tbd after consultation with class)
- evaluating your own and others' work using guidelines provided (this activity does not determine your grades; rather, it is designed to help everyone improve their writing and self-editing skills through the defamiliarizing practice of studying others' writing on the same topics)

Following on these methods for building your knowledge of and facility with concepts of how narratives work, you will have the opportunity in the final examination

- to demonstrate and synthesize your course learning on a work of literature not studied in class or analyzed in out-of-class work (or perhaps on a work of literature only partially studied in class)

Because the learning activities for this course both provide and require time for reading *and re-reading* the assigned materials, you will be given advanced notice of the work of literature to be analyzed during the final examination; that is, you will have the opportunity to study this work of literature prior to writing an analytical essay about its narrative features in the final examination time slot (scheduled by the Registrar's office). Other components of the final examination will be determined and announced during the course.

*More detailed information (weekly schedule, etc.) about this course will be available via the on-line (OWL) course site at the beginning of the F16 term.*

### Course Materials

The following textbooks contain the required reading for this course:

Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1987.

Janine Utell, *Engagements with Narrative*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Julia Gaunce et al., eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Short Fiction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Peterborough: Broadview, 2012. (different editions have different contents: please purchase the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Wayson Choy, *The Jade Peony*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995 (multiple reprints available under more recent dates).

Other (limited) readings will be available under copyright via the OWL course site.

(Used and new copies of *The Broadview Anthology* and *The Jade Peony* will be available in Western's Bookstore; Used and new copies of *Telling Stories* may be available in Western's Bookstore; *Engagements with Narrative* will be available only as a new book.)

### Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

**60%** 3 short essays (from 500 to 1500 words) of increasing weights due in Weeks 4, 7, and 11 during the term

**40%** Final examination to be written in the time slot scheduled by the Registrar

### **Objectives:**

The readings, teaching, in-class activities, and methods of assessment (assignments) for this course have been designed with the following intentions and learning objectives (in bold print) in mind:

- To facilitate students' knowledge and comprehension of selected concepts and terminology appropriate to the study of narrative, narration, and narrativity
  - Forms of assessment of knowledge and comprehension would ask you, for example, to identify, define, and differentiate terms and concepts, and to demonstrate recognition and understanding of these terms and concepts at work in sample readings

- To provide opportunities for analysis, and for application and synthesis of students' knowledge and comprehension of the course materials
  - For example, forms of assessment are designed to determine if you can select and use the appropriate terminology and concepts to illustrate and explain *how* the components of a given passage of writing function to create meaning and/or other effects; and what that meaning and/or other effects are
- To enable students to bring all of these learning objectives together in the evaluation of students' own and others' work on narrative, narrativity, and narrative theory (in draft written form and in oral presentations, should oral presentations be possible: tbd)
  - For example, can you differentiate between and rank others' analyses of given passages or whole literary works that employ the terminology and concepts used in the course? And can you provide an explanation for the ranking and provide informed feedback for improvement?

By the end of this course you will have had ample opportunity to work toward meeting these learning objectives and to hone your writing skills.

Your part in meeting these learning objectives will be to bring the following to your own learning:

- a willingness to make and take the time to *read more than once* the literature and theory studied in this course (the reading list is limited to accommodate this necessity): re-reading is imperative for the complexity of analysis required; and
- an ethic of preparedness, attentiveness, engagement, discipline, rigor, and commitment to what is studied and taught, all the while recognizing that writing, reading, and other skills vary from individual to individual, and may vary within a single individual's own work over time.

Needless to say, regular attendance can also facilitate success, though attendance alone may not suffice without the other items listed above as part of *your* role in meeting the course learning objectives. Absences from class may hinder your progress in meeting the learning objectives (as well as prevent you from being able to write the final examination).

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Appreciate the value of repeated re-readings of fiction and theory;
- Appreciate and attend to the linguistic and formal properties of narrative with a heightened awareness of relationships between form and function;
- Appreciate the complexity of narrative as a form of communication and knowledge in society;
- Write concisely for short analytical essays;
- Provide constructive feedback to peers;
- Know, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate a range of terms and concepts specific to semiotic and narratological theory.

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the Office of the Registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/info%20for%20students.html#grade>.

Late penalties: 10% per day (or part thereof) of the value of the late assignment (e.g., a paper worth 15% will be penalized at the rate of 1.5 marks for each day or part thereof late).

### Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at [http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf).

### **Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC):**

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

### Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

### **Plagiarism Checking:**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

### Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

**Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western:** <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.