

SGBH 101: Art and Fiction

Fall 2020

MWF 12:15-1:25, Online

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Office: Virtual office hours, by appointment only

Course Description

This “gateway” to the Shimer Humanities sequence occupies the territory shared by visual art and storytelling. Students cross cultural and historical boundaries to look at the basic human impulses toward representation and self-expression in two distinct artistic modes. Students exercise both modes in critical reflections as well as in expressive work designed to highlight the functions of figurative language and imagistic language, as well as distinctively visual modes of storytelling in genres that include painting, graphic novels, and film.

Course Objectives

Course-Specific Goals

- Practice basic techniques in visual and literary arts, such as creating a perspective grid, doing experiments with color theory, and composing a short story or other piece of fiction
- Join in-class discussions spontaneously with evident attention to both classmates and course materials

Gen Ed Area: Arts

- Demonstrate comprehension of contexts, theories, principles, and production processes in an arts discipline
- Evaluate works of art using methods common to the arts

Gen Ed Area: Global Understanding

- Explain local, national and global identities and commitments with increasing awareness of their environment
- Explain how various cultures contribute to the development of a multicultural world
- Describe the implications of global interdependence including its effects

Course Readings

Joshua Taylor, *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*, 2nd edition. University of Chicago Press, 1981. ISBN: 9780226791548

Josef Albers, *The Interaction of Color*, 50th Anniversary edition. Yale University Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780300179354

Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville. Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780199537372

Wu Ch'êng-ên, *Monkey: Folk Novel of China*, trans. Arthur Waley. Evergreen, 1994. ISBN: 9780802130860

Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson. Norton, 2018. ISBN: 9780393356250

Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad*. Canongate, 2006. ISBN: 9781841957982

Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2007. ISBN: 9780375714832

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Harper Perennial, 2006. ISBN: 9780061120060

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*. Vintage, 2004. ISBN: 9781400033423

The following text is optional; students may choose instead to use a Bible of their choice (other than the King James Version):

Jonathan Alter, trans., *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*. Norton, 1997. ISBN: 9780393316704

Other texts and materials will be distributed via Blackboard and are marked on the schedule as follows: (**)

Assignments and Grading

Courses in the Shimer Great Books Program are heavily discussion-based and student-driven. Accordingly, class participation counts for a much higher proportion of student grades than in most courses: 50%. In addition, students will write three essays and a short story, which altogether will account for 50% of their grade.

Class participation presupposes careful and thorough preparation and serious intellectual involvement in class discussion. Students should come to class not only having read the text through, but having underlined, taken notes, and scanned over the marked text at least one additional time after the initial reading. On the basis of such preparation, students should be prepared for an intensive discussion focused on the texts or artworks assigned for that day.

You must also come prepared to class, and that means having the course text in front of you, along with annotations or notes. Hard copies are strongly preferred, especially for assigned books available from the college bookstore, but if electronic copies are used, you should plan to mark them and/or take notes as you read.

My expectation for class participation is that every member of class will be able to contribute with remarks and citations that are on-topic and reflect solid preparation for class. A student who meets that baseline will receive a grade in the **B range** for their participation portion. Students whose contribution is notably lacking—for instance, those who speak very little, who give no evidence of having done the reading carefully, who consistently change the topic in a disruptive way, or whose primary contributions are jokes or personal anecdotes—will receive a participation grade in the **C or D range**. Students who distinguish themselves through some particular service—such as consistently contributing new topics that shape the discussion, serving as a resource for navigating the text, or making a special effort to draw in quieter classmates—will qualify themselves for a participation grade in the **A range**.

Given the limitations of the online format, the professor reserves the right, in dialogue with students, to vary the format of class with the goal of building up the group's rapport or comfort level with the software interface. If such experiments deviate significantly from the norm of open-ended group discussion, the expectations will be specified ahead of time, in consultation with students. In addition, some class sessions are already designated as "independent activities" on the schedule below; assignment sheets will be provided in advance.

The baseline condition for class participation is of course attendance at our meetings. Absences not only affect the individual student, but the entire group, and the same is true of habitual lateness. Lateness will count against a student's participation for that session, and in extreme cases will be treated as the equivalent of an absence. During a normal semester, absences would result in a series of increasing grade penalties, and absences equaling more than 20% of class

sessions would be grounds for failing the course. Given the realities of the pandemic, I am loosening that policy to the extent that all excess absences can be made up and there is no automatic trigger of failure.

There is no need to make up your first two absences. (If students miss fewer than three classes, however, then in cases where a student is at the threshold between two grades, the professor will go with the higher one.) After that point, students must carry out a make-up activity per absence in order to get the participation points corresponding to that session. Absences will normally require watching a recording of the class session in question and either (1) writing a one-page, single-spaced response addressing at least two specific lines of conversation from the class or (2) scheduling a meeting of at least ten minutes with the professor to discuss the reading in light of the recorded session. If multiple students miss the same class, I encourage them to schedule a group make-up discussion with the professor in order to better approximate the experience they missed. If the format of the class missed differs significantly from an open discussion, please check with the professor on how best to make up that session.

Summaries must be completed and emailed to the professor **within one week** of the absence being made up, by class time. In-person meetings must be scheduled **within two weeks** of the absence being made up. In emergency circumstances (such as extended illness), these deadlines may be extended. Grades of incomplete (“I”) are also possible in such cases.

Students requiring additional accommodations are urged to discuss this matter with the professor as early as possible in the semester and to devise a formal written plan in consultation with the relevant institutional offices. In line with the Shimer School’s policies on attendance, accommodations will be made with the aim of allowing a student to attend at least 80% of class sessions synchronously and without placing undue burdens on either the accommodated student or the faculty member.

Written work will take the form of two short essays, one short story, and one longer essay. More detailed descriptions of each assignment and potential topics will be provided closer to their respective due dates.

The first short paper will *compare two artworks*, on the level of both representational content (if any) and formal qualities. The second short paper will *compare a narrative text to an artwork* based on or inspired by that story and must include some reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of each storytelling medium (text or visual art). Both papers must be 2-4 *full* pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins, and the student must provide digital copies of the artworks under discussion to the professor. Each of these papers will count as 12.5% of the student’s final grade.

The *short story* will select a story read in class from the Bible, Ovid, Kafka, or O’Connor and adapt or respond to it in some way. This story must be at least 2-3 pages in length, but may be longer if the student is feeling inspired. Students will have the opportunity to review these stories in consultation with their peers before submitting a final draft. The short story will count as 5% of the student’s final grade and will be graded pass/fail on the basis of a good-faith effort to fulfill the assignment.

The longer essay will analyze one or two of the literary works discussed in class, with an influence on explicit literary borrowings (if applicable) or treatment of similar themes in differing contexts. Students will have the opportunity for peer review prior to submitting a final draft. This paper must be 5-7 *full* pages in length, double-spaced with standard margins, and will count as 20% of the student's final grade.

All written assignments must be turned in on Blackboard by the due date listed on the course schedule below; in case of technical difficulties with Blackboard, you may submit the paper via email for the sake of meeting the deadline, but the paper must be posted on Blackboard as soon as possible in order to receive comments and a grade. Students submit ***all written work*** in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) format; in case of technical difficulties submitting in the required format, you may use another format for the sake of meeting the deadline, but must resubmit in the required in order to receive comments and a grade. **Unless otherwise stated, the deadline is always the beginning of class time on the date in question.** Papers turned in within 24 hours of the deadline will receive a 5% grade penalty on the assignment; papers turned in within a week of the deadline will receive a 10% grade penalty, with an additional 10% penalty for each additional week (or portion of a week) the paper is late.

Students may rewrite all essays, provided that a draft of some form is submitted by the stated deadline. Rewrites of short essays are due within *two weeks* of the time the professor posts grades and comments on Blackboard (which will be established via the Announcements feature). The final essay may be rewritten if an early draft is turned in by the deadline listed below. In emergency scenarios such as protracted illness, all submission and rewrite deadlines may be extended; as noted above, a grade of incomplete may also be possible depending on the exact circumstances.

Grading Criteria for Essays

A: The paper demonstrates excellent competence in all areas: imaginative choice of material; excellent thesis clearly stated and supported with persuasive evidence and reasoning; well-organized ideas that unify the paper; good transitions between ideas and between paragraphs; clear and logical development of discussion; the paper is virtually free of errors in usage, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

B: The paper demonstrates above-average competence in all areas: appropriate choice of material; good thesis clearly stated and supported with good evidence and reasons; overall unity but some disjointed paragraphs and vague transitions; ideas sometimes out of sequence, and discussion occasionally hard to follow; clear and readable language that may at times be too general, vague, or inappropriate. It is comparatively free of errors in the use of English.

C: The paper demonstrates average competence in all areas: predictable, overly general, trite or obvious thesis supported with some irrelevant material; basic organization showing that the paper follows a logical plan; some paragraphs may be disunified or misplaced, containing abrupt shifts in ideas; wander off topic at times, becoming difficult to follow; sentences sometimes awkwardly constructed with wordy, imprecise, or trite language; mechanical errors that are distracting.

D: The paper demonstrates below-average competence in all areas: vague or carelessly thought-out thesis supported with inappropriate material; lack of overall unity, poor organization and

development of ideas with some illogical transitions and weak conclusions; confusing sentences or passages whose meaning is unclear; poorly chosen language with numerous mechanical errors.

F: The F paper usually indicates failure to state and develop a main idea. It may also contain serious errors in logic, grammar, spelling, punctuation, documentation, and sentence structure.

Note on Institutional Policies

Please note that the college-wide policy on plagiarism holds for this class and that student assignments may be run through plagiarism-detection software at the professor's discretion. Plagiarism is a very serious academic and ethical offence that can lead to failure of the assignment or course—or, after multiple instances, expulsion from college. Please consult the Student Handbook for more details of the plagiarism policy. All other institutional policies apply equally, including those related to accommodations for students with learning disabilities or differences and Title IX protections. More details on those policies are available in the Student Handbook, and students are encouraged to approach the professor with any questions or concerns they may have.

Class Schedule and Readings

This calendar provides the schedule for assignments and readings for our time together this semester. Students should be aware that the schedule may change. All students will be alerted as soon as possible via email and Blackboard announcement. Failure to check email regularly is no excuse for missing these updates.

Monday	August 24	Class introduction and syllabus Artwork: Impressionists and Cézanne (in class) Rilke, selection from <i>Letters on Cézanne</i> (virtual handout)
Wednesday	August 26	Taylor, <i>Learning to Look</i> , chs. 1 and 2
Friday	August 28	Alberti, selection from <i>On Painting</i> (**) Artwork: Renaissance perspective 1 (**)
Monday	August 31	Independent activity: Perspective Artwork: Renaissance perspective 2 (**)
Wednesday	September 2	Albers, <i>Interaction of Color</i> , pp. 1-74
Friday	September 4	Albers, <i>Interaction of Color</i> , pp. 77 to end In-class activity: Color Experiments
Monday	September 7	Langer, "Creation" (**)
Wednesday	September 9	Genesis, chapters 1-11; artwork (**)
Friday	September 11	Genesis, chapters 12-22; artwork (**)
Monday	September 14	Genesis, chapters 23-35; artwork (**)
Wednesday	September 16	Genesis, chapters 37-50; artwork (**)
Friday	September 18	Qur'an selections (**)
Monday	September 21	Paper on artworks due Sunday, September 20 by noon Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , Book 1; related artwork (**)
Wednesday	September 23	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , sections from Books 2, 3 and 5: Callisto (36-40), Jupiter and Europa (49-50), Diana and Actaeon (55-58), Narcissus and Echo (61-66), The Rape of Persephone (109-116); related artwork (**)

Friday	September 25	Kafka, "A Report to an Academy"; O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (**)
Monday	September 28	Short story draft due by class time—post to discussion board for peer review
Wednesday	September 30	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 1-4
Friday	October 2	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 5-8
Monday	October 5	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 9-12
Wednesday	October 7	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 13-16
Friday	October 9	Short story final draft due by noon NO CLASS—Fall Break
Monday	October 12	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 17-20
Wednesday	October 14	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> , Books 21-24
Friday	October 16	Atwood, <i>The Penelopiad</i> (whole book)
Monday	October 19	Comparative art/fiction paper due Sunday, October 18 by noon; deadline for mid-semester conference Auerbach, "Odysseus's Scar" (**)
Wednesday	October 21	Satrapi, <i>The Complete Persepolis</i> , Intro through pg. 153
Friday	October 23	Satrapi, <i>The Complete Persepolis</i> , pp. 155-341
Monday	October 26	Wu Ch'êng-ên, <i>Monkey</i> , Intro, Preface, chs. 1-5 (pp. 1-62)
Wednesday	October 28	Wu Ch'êng-ên, <i>Monkey</i> , chs. 6-12 (pp. 63-118)
Friday	October 30	Wu Ch'êng-ên, <i>Monkey</i> , chs. 13-19 (pp. 119-180)
Monday	November 2	Wu Ch'êng-ên, <i>Monkey</i> , chs. 20-24 (pp. 181-246)
Wednesday	November 4	Wu Ch'êng-ên, <i>Monkey</i> , chs. 25-30 (pp. 247-305)
Friday	November 6	Hurston, <i>Their Eyes...</i> , chs. 1-5 (pp. 1-50)
Monday	November 9	Hurston, <i>Their Eyes...</i> , chs. 6-13 (pp. 51-128)
Wednesday	November 11	Hurston, <i>Their Eyes...</i> , chs. 14-20 (pp. 129-193)
Friday	November 13	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , Foreword, chs. 1-2 (pp. xi-55)
Monday	November 16	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , chs. 3-5 (pp. 56-151)
Wednesday	November 18	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , chs. 6-9 (pp. 152-216)
Friday	November 20	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , chs. 10-11 (pp. 219-285)
Monday	November 23	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , chs. 12-15 (pp. 286-337)
Wednesday	November 25	Draft of literary paper due by noon (if rewriting) NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break
Friday	November 27	NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break
Friday	December 4	ALL WRITTEN WORK DUE BY NOON