

## **The Sacred and Profane in American Literature**

UNIV 190

Fall 2010

(Section 45 meeting: TR 1:00-2:15 in 129 Snell Hall)

(Section 46 meeting: TR 2:30-3:45 in 129 Snell Hall)

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Phone: 268-3992  
Office Hours: TR 3:45-6:15

### **Course Description**

The Clarkson Seminar is designed to make you a better thinker, reader, writer, and communicator. The theme around which this particular Clarkson Seminar is structured is the interplay between the sacred and the profane in American literature. We will read closely and critically texts that exhibit varying degrees of religious or secular overlay, from narratives suffused with religious symbolism and motifs to the spiritual void expressed by Modernism. American literature and culture have their roots in the sacred, but contemporary fiction and society are predominantly secular. In this course we will explore the sacred and the profane through literary texts associated with one or the other, or both, of these domains. Though at times we might describe these two spheres as what Stephen Jay Gould dubbed (speaking of religion and science) non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA), the pattern in literature and society is frequently one of great overlap between the sacred and the profane. Though we will begin our readings in the nineteenth century—when literary allusions to scripture far outpaced those to other texts, and when the most read book in America was The Bible—we will focus primarily on twentieth-century American literature.

### **Course Objectives (Expected Course Outcomes)**

In this course you will:

Meet the expected course outcomes of the Clarkson Seminar, including an awareness of intended audience, purpose, and context; support your written arguments with evidence and documentation; rigorously revise earlier drafts; critically evaluate information and texts; demonstrate incisive analysis of texts and ideas; clearly communicate those ideas in writing and through oral presentations; and improve your interpretative, imaginative, and problem-solving skills by using writing as a tool for thinking.

You will also:

Gain familiarity with key texts and themes in American Literature.

Challenge monolithic expectations about what constitutes the religious and the secular in American Literature and society.

Read texts closely.

Consider the multiple levels of context in which words and texts are meaningful.

Improve critical thinking and writing skills.

In this course you will also refine your writing and communication skills. Strive to:

- Read all writing closely, including as the toughest reader of your own work.
- Develop a clear, precise, and well-defined thesis statement.
- Develop and support your thesis with evidence and persuasive reasoning.
- Subordinate additional ideas and commentary to your main argument.
- Structure your paragraphs optimally with clear and smooth transitions.
- Appreciate the nuances of diction.
- Mind the mechanics and grammar of formal written English.
- Revise as re-vision—writing as a process of discovery and critical thinking.
- Refine your oral presentation (researching, preparation, and delivery) skills.

### Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Leading Class Discussion	10%
Paper 1	10%
Paper 2	15%
Paper 3	15%
Paper 4 (Final Paper)	30%
Class participation, pop quizzes, and attendance	20%

### Required Texts

Gardner, Janet E. *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2009. ISBN: 9780312474997.

Strunk, William and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. ISBN: 020530902X.

Bausch, Richard and R.V. Cassill, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction, (Shorter Seventh Edition, Paperback)*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. ISBN-13: 9780393926125.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. (Norton Critical Editions). Eds. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996 [1845]. ISBN: 978-0393969665.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006 [1926]. ISBN: 978-0743297332.

Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Talents*. New York: Warner, 2007 [1998]. ISBN: 978-0446675789.

### Recommended Texts

Lunsford, Andrea A., Paul Kei Matsuda, and Christine M. Tardy. *The Everyday Writer*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. ISBN: 9780312594572 (plastic comb).

### A Note on Text Editions

You must purchase all Required Texts for the course. Unfortunately, I cannot allow anyone to use (exclusively) an online version of any course text as this would leave you with no hard copy of the text with which to follow along in class. For the same reason do try to purchase the particular edition of each text that I have indicated above—the alternate page numbering alone of another edition can impair your ability to follow along and fully participate in class

discussion. That said, if you have an alternate edition of the text, bringing it as a supplement to the edition that we are using in the class is a great idea and can greatly enrich our discussion of the text.

### **Film**

*Da Vinci Code*

### **Books on Course Reserve**

I have placed the following texts on two-hour reserve at the Clarkson University Library. You will find the first group of titles on this course reserve list helpful for improving your writing and critical thinking skills.

#### Writing Books:

*Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* by Joseph Williams. 1981.

*Writing to Learn* by William Zinsser. 1988.

*Writing with Power* by Peter Elbow. 1981.

#### Other Books:

*The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry* by Perry Miller. 1982.

*The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* by Cleanth Brooks. 1963.

*The Oxford Companion to American Literature* by James D. Hart. 1983.

#### Films on Reserve:

N/A at this time.

### **Course Website**

A course website is available through Moodle (<http://moodle.clarkson.edu/>). You will need to go to the course website in order to access Electronic Course Reserve readings. If this course does not appear under My Courses at the bottom of the Moodle homepage, then use the Course Finder submenu under the Courses tab in the top left-hand corner of the page to find the course.

### **Electronic Course Reserves**

Over the course of the semester I may place new materials on electronic course reserve through the course website on Moodle. (Once logged into the course website on Moodle, click on the “Electronic Course Reserves” folder, where you will find the e-readings in PDF format.) Whenever an electronic reserve reading—indicated by the abbreviation (E)—appears on the Course Schedule of readings, print it out and bring it with you so that you can follow along in class when we discuss the reading.

### **Paper Formatting**

All assignments handed in are to be in 12 point font, double-spaced, and paginated. As should go without saying, use normal margins. In the upper left-hand corner should appear, single-spaced, your name, the course number (e.g., UNIV 190 or LIT 220), and the date—each

having its own line. Each paper should have a title. Center the title so that it will stand out better.

Buy a stapler. (Very inexpensive staplers can be purchased for less than the price of a vending-machine soda.) Any paper that you hand in should be stapled together in the upper left hand corner. Unstapled sheets get lost, and this may cause me to assume that you have only written half a paper.

Use MLA style citation. See Gardner's *Writing about Literature*, especially pages 121-42, for an explanation of MLA citation with examples. For additional information, click on the MLA citation link from the following Writing Center webpage: (<http://www.clarkson.edu/writingcenter/citations.html>). All papers must have a Works Cited, even if citing only the primary text (such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*) that you are writing about.

Use as your guide the model MLA-formatted student paper on page 138-42 of Gardner's *Writing about Literature* or in the "MLA Documentation" section of Lunsford's *The Everyday Writer*. These model papers clearly demonstrate everything from the upper left-hand corner layout to what the Works Cited should look like. They also demonstrate such principles as organization of the paper and the method and style of writing literary criticism.

**Assignments must be handed in *in class* on the day that they are due.** Late assignments lose one letter grade for each day that they are late. Keep copies of all your work.

Expect papers to be shared with other class members for peer editing, group projects, and class discussion. Student papers might also be shown to other instructors, writing advisors, and the like. I will ask your permission first if using your work as a model paper to show students in other courses.

A word about content: your paper should offer your own unique ideas, insights, and arguments. Don't just repeat what we discussed in class. You can start with a topic that we discussed in class but your thesis must be your own. It should present the reader with *your* argument. This is one of the key differences between class discussion (or even different types of writing, such as reading responses or pre-discussion notes) and the writing of a formal paper. Good class discussions are those in which everyone engages with what their fellow classmates have said in class. In a formal paper, the way to engage with the larger scholarly and other conversations about the text is through citation. In class discussion our ideas often merge together. In a formal paper, particularly of literary criticism, written sources are usually privileged over oral ones and you need to cite those who have influenced your own thinking.

In your formal papers you will want to cite and interpret primarily passages from the literary text that you are writing about, and secondarily from sources such as academic journals in the field. Thus, the most compelling—not to mention most original—papers tend to explore topics and themes beyond those covered in class. That said, bear in mind that in this class you will always be writing about a particular literary text, and this will impose some natural boundaries on the both the scope of the paper and your choice of paper topic.

As experienced writers, you already know that the secret to writing success is to start early. If you wait until the night before a paper is due before committing anything to paper, it will invariably not be a very good paper. Also know that you do not have to wait until we finish discussing a text in class before you can start writing about it. Rather than relying on class lecture for your ideas, read the text on your own and start writing about it early. You can then use class discussion of the text as a tool to refine your thinking about what you have already written in drafts of your paper.

### **TurnItIn.com**

Clarkson University requires that papers (final drafts only, unless otherwise specified) written for this course also be submitted in digital form to TurnItIn.com, which is an online service that checks for plagiarism. Your paper must be uploaded to TurnItIn.com *before* handing in your hard copy to me. (That is, you must upload the paper before the assignment is due in class.)

You will need to create a student account on the TurnItIn.com website. Instructions for doing so can be found on their website. You will need the following information to create your profile:

(Section 45) Course ID: 3433646

Password: yawp

(Section 46) Course ID: 3401576

Password: yawp

### **Oral Presentations**

On the second day of class you will sign up for a date on which to give your oral presentation. Your presentation topic will be on whatever reading is assigned for that day in the course reading schedule. The presentation should last 10-15 minutes, ultimately leading into class discussion. Your presentation should present the class with historical, biographical, and other contextual information that will inform our reading of the text. Your preparation for the oral presentation will thus require some outside research. A computer will be available in class for your use during presentations. Some presenters opt to use a PowerPoint slide show as a visual aid during their presentation. This allows the presenter to show the class helpful historical documents, images, and the like. Some presenters also use the classroom computer for projecting an outline of their presentation for the entire class to see. But if you prefer to memorize your presentation or to conduct it from prepared handwritten notes, feel free to do that instead. You will also engage directly with the primary text, with the larger aim of leading us into a class discussion of the text. One way to do this is through offering some discussion questions that we can engage with as a class. Additional information on oral presentations will be provided in class.

### **A Note on Evaluation**

It is sometimes assumed that merely fulfilling the requirements for the course, or a particular assignment, merits a default grade of A. This is not the case. Simply fulfilling the minimum requirements for a paper or the course is likely to get you an average grade, which would be in the C range. Higher grades are based on the exceptional quality of your work. I also reward the development of your thought and writing whenever this is apparent. Papers that offer particularly unique, compelling, or insightful arguments are almost certain to earn higher grades than most, as are papers that evince an exceptional degree of research and thought.

Do NOT think of a grade of B or C (or whatever) as having been derived by the “deducting” of points from what “began”—by virtue of merely having been handed in—as an A. The “point deduction” model may apply to a multiple choice test in, say, an introductory physics course, but it is not how writing is evaluated in most humanities courses. You might find the

following breakdown helpful in orienting your expectations about what letter grades represent on all assignments in this course:

A—excellent overall

B—good with some excellent aspects

C—adequate

D—mostly adequate with some unacceptable aspects

F—unacceptable overall

Letter grades, other than the final grade for the course, break down to the following numerical ranges: A(94-100), A-(90-93), B+(87-89), B(84-86), B-(80-83), C+(77-79), C(74-76), C-(70-73), D+(67-69), D(64-66), D-(60-63), F(<60). For purposes of estimating your current grade in the course, plug in the lowest value for each grade range. For example, if you received grades of C+, B, B- on assignments that have been graded to date, then plug in the values of 77, 84, and 80 to calculate their weighted average (see above to determine the percentage of your final grade that each assignment counts for), and thus a number that you can plug back into the grade ranges above to arrive at a letter grade that serves as a good estimate of your current grade in the course. Note that even without crunching the numbers, it's pretty clear that the grade set given in this example would put you in the B/C+ range for a final grade, and that the final determination of your grade would depend a great deal upon your yet-to-be-determined participation grade and on how well you do on the final paper.

Since Clarkson University conflates minus grades with whole letter grades on transcripts, *Final Grades for the course* break down by the same method of conflation: A(90-100), B+(87-89), B(80-86), C+(77-79), C(70-76), D+(67-69), D(60-66), F(<60). These are clear cut-offs, and no rounding up will be used when calculating final grades.

### **Class Participation**

This is a reading, writing, and discussion course, not a lecture course. Come to class prepared to talk about the text. Read the text closely, engaging in mock dialogue with the text as you read. Asking questions of the text as you go through it will bring you to class with many questions, observations, and arguments about the reading to share with the community of literary critics, readers, and writers that the class will provide.

Note that the model of class discussion that we are striving for is one in which you engage not only with the readings, but also with each other's ideas. Keep in mind that mere volubility is no substitute for apt, substantive, and well thought out comments. In fact, since there is seldom enough time to do justice to each text or topic, brevity is often as important as clarity and precision whenever speaking to the rest of the class. That said, most students speak too little rather than too much. What we will strive for in this course is vibrant and robust class discussion in which everyone is fully engaged and participating.

I may occasionally require that you write 150-200 word pre-discussion notes to hand in before class. Or I may ask you to bring to class one or two discussion questions about the reading. In-class writing might also be assigned. And sometimes you may be asked to prepare a presentation, either individually or in small groups, for a subsequent class.

Pop quizzes may be given at any time. As long as you have read the text the quiz will be easy. Any detailed questions that I might ask will be readily answerable if you have read the text carefully. If, on the other hand, you are relying on Spark Notes, a website summary, the film version of the book, or someone else telling you the plot—instead of reading the text for yourself—you will expect to find the questions well beyond your grasp.

As a discussion course, attendance is critical. The first two absences will not be counted against you but all subsequent absences will negatively impact your grade in the course. The **two free absences should** easily cover medical, family, or other emergencies in most cases, so there is no need to present the instructor with a medical note for absences. In the event of an extended absence due to illness, a family emergency, or the like, you should notify the Registrar's Office, which will in turn notify all of your professors about your situation. *Missing a total (cumulative, not just consecutive) of **three weeks** or more of class constitutes a failing grade in the course.* All students are responsible for announcements made in class as well as material covered in class. So if an absence is unavoidable, make arrangements with another student to find out what you missed in class.

Tardiness and leaving class early are disruptive to your fellow students. Realize that either may be counted as a full absence, particularly if the problem becomes excessive over the course of the semester. If you absolutely cannot complete the class without leaving for a drink of water, to use the restroom, or whatever, I only ask one thing of you: don't re-enter the classroom. Instead, in consideration of your fellow students, quietly collect all of your things and take them with you when you leave. This will likely be counted as an absence.

As a discussion class, open laptops are not allowed. Cell phones should be silenced and put away before class and may be confiscated for the duration of the class if used (including for texting) during class.

### **Office Hours and Email**

I'd much rather see you and get to know you in person than as an email. As such, I encourage you to take full advantage of my office hours, whether for simple queries or more substantive questions and discussion. Email is a poor substitute for live interactions, which are both more fun and more productive. (And of the two, only office hours are appropriate for discussing paper ideas and thesis statements.) Feel free to drop by without an appointment anytime during scheduled office hours.

### **Documentation and Academic Integrity**

Obvious cases of academic misconduct such as plagiarism, cheating, or collusion constitute violations of the Clarkson Code of Ethics and will be referred to the Academic Integrity Committee (<http://www.clarkson.edu/studentaffairs/regulations/iv.html>), or other appropriate venue.

A few words about plagiarism and documentation might be instructive. Though there are gray areas as to when one should cite and when a paraphrase is adequate, we all recognize blatant plagiarism when we see it. As for the gray areas, cite your sources. That is the simplest advice I can give you, and the hallmark of scholarly work. We all stand on the shoulders of giants; we all benefit from the ideas of others. Many of our best ideas are common knowledge, societally and globally shared. It is hard to imagine an idea that does not owe something to someone else's brilliant thoughts too. A class like this is partly about finding your own voice. When you write down the great ideas that others have undoubtedly thought before you, you should do so in your unique voice. If your great idea (or your agreement with some great idea, or the realization that somebody else has stolen your idea before you even thought of it) was inspired by a passage in a book you just read two days ago you will have to be more mindful of your wording. Your thinking and writing should be your own: make sure it hasn't been supplanted by the thought and phrasing of the book's author. **When in doubt, cite.** If your

paraphrase is not clearly in your own words and voice—perhaps because the kernel of truth you wish to glean gets lost as you deviate from the original wording—then cite your source.

Documentation is particularly important when using online sources. Academic journals accessed online need to be cited. Ideas taken from other online sources also need to be cited, particularly given the wide-ranging reliability of online sources. Papers that rely excessively on superficial web searches (such as simply paraphrasing websites that come up on a Google Search) are likely to receive a very low grade. Papers that engage in such shoddy scholarship without citing their sources are even more at risk.

### **Writing Center and Writing Resources**

The Writing Center is an academic support service available to all Clarkson University students, and an indispensable resource whenever writing papers for this course. In addition to a library of helpful writing books, the Writing Center (located in Snell 139) offers one-on-one assistance with writing revision. Check their website

(<http://www.clarkson.edu/writingcenter/index.html>) for hours, policies, and contact information.

I also encourage you to take advantage of the extensive writing resources available through the Writing Center website. Here is one good starting point:

(<http://www.clarkson.edu/writingcenter/Punctuation,%20Grammar,%20Style%20Aids.html>).

Another indispensable resource is the Clarkson University Library. At the library you will find more than a few print resources, while the library website serves as a portal to literary resources available online. To explore some of these (JSTOR, for example, offers many full-text articles on literary topics), click on Find Articles from the library's homepage (<http://www.clarkson.edu/library/>).

### **Special Accommodations**

If you have a documented disability requiring academic adjustments or accommodations please bring me your documentation and speak with me during the first two weeks of class.

### **Course Schedule**

The date that an item appears on the syllabus is the date that it is **due in class**. *Email submissions are not accepted without the prior approval of the instructor*, which will only be granted in extenuating circumstances. Readings are sometimes referred to by their title, and sometimes just by author name. “(E)” designates readings on electronic course reserve. “(N)” designates The Norton Anthology.

Lengthier readings will be spread out over several days but informed class discussion requires familiarity with the entire text from the first day that it appears on the syllabus. The syllabus sometimes indicates when we will be focusing class discussion on a particular section of text. I may periodically announce in class a chapter or section to pay particular attention to for the next class. As you have probably already discovered in your college careers, staying ahead of the readings is much more productive and less stressful than falling behind on them.

#### **Week 1 COURSE INTRODUCTION: WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE**

8/24 Course Introduction: Why writing, literature, and this course matter—to you.

(Ungraded) Clarkson **Writing Assessment** (handed out in class).

“Student Questionnaire” (E).

8/26 Gardner (chapters 1-2) ; “HSS Policy on Plagiarism” (E). **Quiz on Syllabus**



Week 2 PURITAN ALLEGORY AND THE PERSONIFICATION OF EVIL

8/31 “Young Goodman Brown” (N 325-34); Gardner (chapters 3-4).

**Paper 1 due** (2pp book review of *Three Cups of Tea*).

9/2 “Young Goodman Brown” (cont.); “Peer Editor Workshop” (E).

**Thesis Paragraph due** (Bring **2 copies** to class. Literary criticism of “Young Goodman Brown”—topic of your choice.).

Week 3 WRITING SEQUENCE

9/7 “Young Goodman Brown” (cont.); Gardner (chapter 5).

**Draft of Paper 2 due.** (4pp. Bring **2 copies** for in-class peer-editing workshop.)

9/9 “Young Goodman Brown” (cont.); Gardner (chapter 7).

**Peer Editing comments due** (bring **2 copies**.)

In-class Oral Conferences with Peer Reviewers.

Class Presentation and Discussion (Option to present on Gardner reading)

Week 4 RELIGION AND SLAVERY

9/14 *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* 1-38; (E): “Self-Evaluation Sheet,” “Instructor’s Symbols,” “Symbols for Common Errors” (Baker), “Paper Checklist” (Baker, inside cover), “Academic Standards for Papers.”

9/16 *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* 39-80; Rhetorical Terms (E).

Class Presentation and Discussion

Week 5

9/21 *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*

**Paper 2 due** (4pp).

9/23 *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*; Gardner (chapter 8)

Class Presentation and Discussion (Option to present on Gardner reading)

Week 6 FREE WILL (AND DETERMINISM)

9/28 FALL RECESS: No Class

9/30 “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (N 529-55)

Start thinking about Paper 3 and make Writing Center appointments.

Class Presentation and Discussion

Week 7 THEOLOGICAL NATURALISM

10/5 “The Open Boat” (N 189-206)

\*(Finish Paper 3 draft and get to Writing Center if you haven’t done so already.)

10/7 “The Open Boat”

Class Presentation and Discussion

Week 8 MODERNISM: THE TRANSVALUATION OF THE SACRED & PROFANE

10/12 *Sun Also Rises* 1-71; “Ten Keys to a Clear and Graceful Style” (E).

10/14 *Sun Also Rises* 72-156; “Midterm Check-up” (E).

Class Presentation and Discussion

## Week 9

10/19 *Sun Also Rises* 157-228.

**Paper 3 due.** (4pp. Literary criticism of “Bartleby” or “The Open Boat.”) **Staple Writing Center Session Summary** printout to the last page.

10/21 *Sun Also Rises* 229-251

Class Presentation and Discussion

## Week 10 SHORT STORY UNIT: THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

10/26 “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (N 616-27)

10/28 “Conversion of the Jews” (N 682-92)

Class Presentation and Discussion

## Week 11

11/2 “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (N 454-58)

11/4 “Cathedral” (N 75-85)

Class Presentation and Discussion

## Week 12 GOD IS CHANGE: FUTURISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

11/9 *Parable of the Talents* 1-91

**Thesis Paragraph due** (Bring **2 copies** to class. Literary criticism of *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, *Sun Also Rises*, or *Parable of the Talents*—topic of your choice.).

11/11 *Parable of the Talents* 92-182

Class Presentation and Discussion

## Week 13

11/16 *Parable of the Talents* 183-275

**Draft of Paper 4 due.** (6pp. Bring **2 copies** for in-class peer-editing workshop.)

11/18 *Parable of the Talents* 276-348; 349-408

**Peer Editing comments due** (bring **2 copies**.)

In-class Oral Conferences with Peer Reviewers.

## Week 14

11/23 *Parable of the Talents* 349-408

11/25 THANKSGIVING BREAK. No Class.

## Week 15 FILM UNIT: THEOLOGY AND REBELLION

11/30 Film: *Da Vinci Code*

12/2 Film: *Da Vinci Code*; Last Day of Class.

Final Exam Date (**check exam schedule**):

**Final Paper (Paper 4) Due** (6pp. Literary criticism, topic of your choice, on any one of the following texts: *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, *Sun Also Rises*, or *Parable of the Talents*. The Final Paper is due on the day—and at the beginning of the scheduled hour—of the final exam. The Final Paper can be thought of as a “take home final exam.” Check the Registrar’s schedule for final exam date, time, and location.)