

ENGL1036 Meaning and Metaphor -- Fall Semester 2019

Final Exam

Due Wednesday 10 May by 5 pm; please email me your essay as MicrosoftWord or PDF file.

Choose one of the following and write *one* essay of 5 to 7 pages for a total of 1600-2000 words. The following are broad-based topics that are meant to get you thinking. It would be impossible to answer all the questions that they ask in a short space. You are encouraged to narrow your interpretation in any way that you see fit. Be sure to formulate a thesis that presents an argument, defining a key term or terms that is central to your analysis and interpretation of a text (or texts). Be sure to tell your reader the significance of your interpretation.

- A. Choose a specific object or thing that acts as a symbol in two texts that we have read this semester (for example: "hand" or "window" or anything that you notice creates a meaningful point of connection between two texts). Use the object to compare the two texts—pointing out similar and different meaning that the thing/object conveys. You might also consider the different ways that the object/thing creates meaning in the text or consider how the difference in meaning relate to specific themes or social contexts. (Does the symbol fit into an allegory? Does the object/thing work as a primary metaphor with other layers of potential reference?) Why does the authors use of the specific object/thing in their narrative?**
- B. In the *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin writes about his secret society of the "junto." Ann Petry's *The Street* includes a character actually named Junto. Why is this? To answer why Petry does this, you will need to define Franklin's concept. To what extent is Petry's borrowing of Franklin's term effective to the overall message she conveys in her novel.**
- C. Consider the "Abolitionist Alphabet" (1847) in relation to the *New England Primer*. (See link from Week 7.) How does the "Abolitionist Alphabet" imply a different conception of literacy? Or, how does the "Abolitionist Alphabet" imply a different understanding of childhood? In pursuing your comparison, it might help to focus on a specific letter—or, to draw your reader's attention to specific elements of the two primer's style of presenting the alphabet—or, to compare the terms by which the Primers introduce the alphabet to readers.**
- D. Read the essay "What is a Nation" by Ernest Renan**
https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/PDF/engl55_kj_renan_nation.pdf

Do you think that Walt Whitman's poem "When Lilac Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" confirms or refutes Renan's contention that "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle" (19)? Be sure to define what you think Renan means by "a soul" as you interpret Whitman's poem. And as you interpret Whitman's poem, remember that it might help to focus your analysis on a key metaphor (or symbol) and/or a characteristic of Whitman's writing style.

- E. In what important way(s) does *The Wizard of Oz* (novel or film) revise an aspect of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*? In answering this question, it will be important to focus on a scene, object/thing (as symbol or metaphor), or literary feature of narrative. It will also be important to consider the revision in regard to a principle of religious faith or a social context.
- D. Choose a concept by Freud ("the uncanny"; "the fetish"; "mourning" / "melancholy" / "mania") and use it as a way of interpreting a text that we have read this semester (from Bunyan, to Alcott, to Whitman, *The Wizard of Oz*, or Ann Petry). Be sure to offer a provisional definition of the Freudian concept and to tell your reader why it makes sense to use the concept in regard to the text that you choose. Also, it would be a good idea to tell your reader both what insight the term lends in regard to an interpretation of the text—and what the limits of the term are in regard to understanding the text.
- E. Use any of the essays that are listed as Presentations to consider a literary text that we have read this semester. As in the previous question (see above), be sure to offer a definition of the concept that you want to apply to the literary text and explain why you have decided to apply the ideas of the Presentation essay to the text—what insight does the essay generate and what are its limits—(that is: what questions does it raise and leave unanswered; what does the essay fail to account for)?
- F. Consider the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" as performed in *The Wizard of Oz* or elsewhere as a poem that is reinterpreted in its performance. What is the significance of this this place? And (or) what does the "rainbow" mean in the lyrics of the song and as performed in the film (or elsewhere)?
- G. In Ann Petry's *The Street*, Lutie visits a nightclub and looks in the "big mirror in the back of the bar" (145). Consider what she sees in the mirror. What might her observations mean in regard to an interpretation of the novel? (Be sure to define "mirror" as it relates to the scene and to the broader implications of Petry's novel as a representation of society.)
- H. The first paragraph of Chapter Three of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of a Life of an American Slave* (1845) describes a garden with its perimeter marked by tar. Interpret this passage carefully by considering it as an allegory. Remember, to formulate a strong thesis that defines its key terms as you consider the meaning and implication of this passage.