

ENGL1036 Meaning and Metaphor

Final Exam

Due Friday, May 17th by 5 pm; please submit your essay by email; remember to include your name, a title, and page numbers

Thank you!

Choose one of the following and write *one* essay of 5 to 7 pages (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 posed under a topic in a short essay. Please adapt these topics as you find a focus for your essay. Be sure to formulate a thesis that presents an argument. Please define the 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. You can refer to the guidelines on formulating a thesis that we discussed in class:

<https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/PDF/ThesisDefinitionStrategyFEB2024.pdf>

A. Choose a specific object or thing that acts as a symbol in a text that we have read this semester (for example: “hand” or “window” or any thing that you notice to be a powerful symbol). Consider how this symbol might appear at different points in the text to generate an allegory (or competing allegories). Why does the author use of the specific object/thing in their narrative—in other words, how would you evaluate the effectiveness or implications (intended or unintended) of the author’s use of this symbol?

B. Read the essay "What is a Nation?" by Ernest Renan

https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/PDF/engl55_kj_renan_nation.pdf

To what degree do you think that Walt Whitman’s poem “When Lilac Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” confirms or refutes Renan’s definition of a nation? As you interpret Whitman’s poem and Renan’s essay together, it will help to focus on and analyze a key metaphor (or symbol) and/or specific qualities of their writing styles.

C. In what significant 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 and a social context that generates a competing allegory.

D. Choose a concept by Freud (“the uncanny”; “the fetish”; “mourning” / “melancholy” / “mania”) and use it to interpret a text that we have read this semester (from Bunyan, Rowlandson, Franklin, or Douglass, to Alcott, Whitman, Dickinson or *The Wizard of Oz*). 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 to understanding the text.

- E. Consider “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” as a poem that is reinterpreted in its performance. What is the significance of this place? And (or) what does the “rainbow” mean in the lyrics of the song and as performed in the film (or elsewhere)?
- F: In our discussion of *Little Women*, we considered a “freeze frame” from the film as a way of focusing our discussion on female authorship. In your essay, adopt a similar method of freezing a frame from *Little Women* or *Wizard of Oz* to anchor an interpretation of the film.

Some points that you might consider about the method of “freeze frame” interpretation:

-Your selection of a specific scene is an act of interpretation—be sure to tell your read why you have selected that image

-In creating a “freeze frame,” you are disrupting the narrative flow of the film and changing how your audience will experience the film. What are the implications of doing so? You might alert your reader both to the insight that you create by freezing the frame (focusing interpretative attention) and also to the potential distortion that results to the film as a whole as you lift the “freeze frame” out of narrative context.

-In regard to the “freeze frame” image, interpret it as a symbol or set of symbols

-Finally, you might match the “freeze frame” to the literary text in the novel; this comparison of the image and the novel’s text might yield powerful points of difference that feature in your argument or are even the focal point of your thesis.

- G: What is Route 66?

Check out the course website for a link to the image of the road sign “66.” Or click here: <https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/Route66.html>

This webpage begins by reminds us of literary definitions of “metaphor” with which we began the course when considering “Plato’s Cave” (Week 1).

The webpage on “Route 66” then clusters cultural productions—including maps, a poem, music lyrics to the song “Route 66,” different versions of the song, and promotion posters. (Please note: Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” is not an explicit reference to Route 66; it appears simply because *the road* is a central metaphor of his poem.)

In facing this cluster of cultural production about Route 66, your challenge is to *select one or two* of the texts and propose how “Route 66” serves as a symbol and/or extended metaphor in an allegory. Remember that there can be more than one allegorical layer at play in the same text—so be sure to explain to your reader how ambiguity and/or contradiction feature in your interpretation. In working on this topic, please feel free to define “Route 66” as you see fit in making your argument—you need not consider it as a song or as route on a map; you could also consider how artists have lifted the reference to “Route 66” and re-contextualized it to create a new allegory through their performance.

Additional possibility: is “Route 66” an *icon*? Please consider how and why it might fit such a definition – or how one of these artists are complicating the potential *iconicity* by adapting the meaning of this sign through performance.

Additional possibility: Draw on “Route 66” to consider how Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) considers the role of language and speech in the creation of meaning.

Link through Presentation 12, or:

<https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/PDF/SaussureFerdinandGENERAL1972.pdf>

- H. Consider Emily Dickinson’s poem “There’s a certain Slant of light” (#258 / 320): https://english.hku.hk/staff/kjohnson/PDF/ENGL58_KJ_Dickinson.pdf

Why do you think that Dickinson capitalizes some words but not others? Feel free to develop your essay into a focused consideration of Dickinson’s poem as it relates to what you think a specific capitalized word means.

In considering the implications her selective capitalization, you are welcome to develop a focused comparison with another text that we have read this semester, such as poems by: Anne Bradstreet (Week 5), Sherman Alexie (Week 5), or Walt Whitman (Week 13).

- I. Select and consider a key difference between the book and the film adaptation for either: *Little Women* or *The Wizard of Oz*. If you focus on a scene from the film by taking a screen shot (“freeze frame”), check out topic F (above). Please note, it would be a good idea to cite passages from the novel *and* the film to present a direct reference of comparison.
- J. Formulate your own thesis in regard to the works that we have read this semester. If you choose this option, please send me an email to let me know what you have in mind.