

Proposal - Revised

EG 40 Special Topics

Fall 2001 - Spring 2002

The Story of Genre

The origin, evolution and status of literary genre.

Respectfully submitted

By Gerry O'Connor

Overview

The aim of this on-line course is to study the origin, evolution and current status of the respective types of literary genre: poetry, novel, drama, short story. Our goal is not to study literature but more to explore the reasons for its existence in the current genres. We will explore the political, social, religious and economic influence/pressures that shape the types of literature. I hope to expose students to the reasons why our first printed symbols/letters/words dealt with keeping track of farm produce and how writing evolved into literary works of art and how we evolved from an oral culture to a text culture.

We'll be examining such issues as the following: the cultural, political, economic and technological conditions that fostered the emergence and success of each new literary genre; changes in narrative and verse form; gender and the subjects of and audience for fiction.

Why did poets start writing poetry and playwrights start writing drama? Why did authors start writing in the short story format or novelists begin the novel form? Why did people read these types of writing? What purpose did these new literary constructs serve? How have they evolved? What role do they serve in today's society? Will genre continue to be an influential form in the 21st century?

The emergence of new media such as film and television has put into question the traditional categories, and challenged the assumptions on which earlier genre theory was based. This course will also chart these new developments.

Rationale

In EG13 we traditionally study the four types of fiction: the poem, the play, the novel and the short story. EG 13 is primarily content-based. We often don't have time to discuss or

explore the reasons for the existence of the different types of literature. This course attempts to study the history and origin of each of the genres and explore their evolution.

Course Objectives

- ◆ To acquire an understanding of the reason for and meaning of literary genres
- ◆ To develop the ability to build knowledge from a wide variety of sources
- ◆ To gain an understanding of the varied and multifaceted implications of the history, origin and evolution of assorted genres
- ◆ To develop evaluative and critical thinking skills
- ◆ To develop technical skills necessary to work in a new medium
- ◆ To develop the skills necessary to become an independent and lifelong learner
- ◆ To build a unique perspective that sees literary developments first in isolation and ultimately in totality

Sample Questions

This course will attempt to help students understand the origin and implications of the different types of genres.

- ◆ Why did individuals begin to tell stories, write poetry, love the epic, write novels, read the short story? What purpose did they serve?
- ◆ What impact did they have on the listener?
- ◆ How were stories told?
- ◆ When and why did we shift from listening to reading?
- ◆ What impact do technologies, i.e. print, transportation, film, and television, have on genre origin, evolution and history?
- ◆ Will the short story, as we know it, survive. Will hypertext, enabling alternate story lines, modify the fixed print novel format?

Informational Architect

Because the computer easily accommodates interdisciplinary approaches to academic study, we can use it to develop and to extend our ability to think critically and to make connections between discrete bodies of information. Students will have to begin to think of themselves as intellectual nomads; they will become informational architects. The electronic facility to make connections speeds up the processes of skilled reading, creative thinking/tinkering and knowledge-building. The instantaneousness of links also permits and encourages sophisticated forms of analysis.

The point is not to befuddle students but to dispel complacency by creating cognitive dissonance. Students who experience a gap in their knowledge will seek to fill it.

Creating a gap in student learning is a basic strategy underlying inquiry learning and problem-based learning.

As so much research material is now available electronically on the web, much of student research will be conducted by visiting academic web sites provided by me. Additionally, I will provide a working bibliography of more traditional research material. Thus students will be researching in both electronic and traditional media.

Ultimate Goal

I hope to make the on-line experience intellectually immersive and allow students to synthesize the scattered symbolism of the experience into a visual alphabet and multimedia experience. And even if they grow tired of the adventure, the temptation of the quest is enough to win the war against their impatience.

Methods

I will supply a rough outline (study guides) of potential areas of exploration for each genre. For an example of the kind of outline to be provided, you may want to visit the following web page in my EG20 course titled, *The Story of Writing*:

<http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/oconnog/story/illumman.html>

Using both the web and the more traditional printed sources, students will be expected to explore/discover the reasons for and the historical evolution of the different types of genre. Their acquired knowledge will be developed into a minimum of 6-8 extended essays. These essays will be posted to their webfolio on the college server as individual web pages and subjected to a collaborative review by their peers. I will then evaluate/critique their work and provide suggestions for improvement. Students will then be able to modify and revise accordingly.

Additionally, students will participate weekly in threaded discussions (I will provide questions. For the types of questions I have provided in my EG20 The Story of Writing course please see the following web page: <http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/oconnog/story/questions.html>) on matters related to their research. Hopefully this Socratic questioning begins with inquiry, leads to perplexity, and ends in enlightenment. In on-line discussion, writing is very much dialogical. There is an audience of peers whose role is not to evaluate writing for a grade but to explore and develop ideas together. It provides students with an arena to further their understanding. Collectively, the webfolio and threaded discussion provide a real purpose and a real audience for student writing.

Webfolio

This is the ultimate product of the course and the arena for students to demonstrate their mastery of the material. Student will assume that they are writing a book (for lack of a better term) with multiple chapters (the total number is still to be determined). The goal is to infuse that book with the knowledge the student has acquired while exploring and researching both in traditional form (print media) and on the web. Since we are using the web as our publishing medium, the student will have infinite access to the revision and the restructuring process. Thus, the book (Webfolio) is never final until the last day of class. It is a project in process throughout the semester. The goal is to make sure the book (Webfolio) reflects what they have learned about genre, writing, technology, web page design, research, collaboration, process and the connections they have made.

The structure, sequence and content of the individual chapters are determined by the students and should reflect a point of view uniquely theirs.

Weekly Content - Sample Chapters

- ◆ Orality
 - ◆ story telling
- ◆ Epic poems
- ◆ Drama
 - ◆ comedy
 - ◆ tragedy
- ◆ The novel
 - ◆ political
 - ◆ social
 - ◆ detective
 - ◆ science fiction
- ◆ The short story
- ◆ Poetry - verse
- ◆ The Comic Book
- ◆ Television
- ◆ Film
- ◆ Hypertext fiction

Preliminary Bibliography

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Eisenstein, Elizabeth. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. New York:

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Press, 1992.

Required Access, Texts and Other Resources

- ◆ Access to a computer, modem (28.8 is a suggested minimum) and to the Internet through the student's own Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- ◆ Windows 98 / 2000 for the PC and OS 8.0 for the Mac are considered a minimum for desktop operating systems.
- ◆ It is also recommended that the student use one of two browsers: Internet Explorer 5.0 or Netscape Communicator/Navigator 4.7 or better. They are available free for download from Microsoft and Netscape.
- ◆ For web page design, either raw HTML coding or a WYSIWYG program, i.e., Microsoft's FrontPage 1.0, Adobe Pagemill 3.0, Adobe GoLive 5.0 or Dreamweaver 3.0. These range in price from \$49 to \$150 (best prices are usually available on-line) and are available for both Mac and PC. Netscape Communicator 4.0 or better and Internet Explorer 5.0, free to download, also have a minimum web page design programs.
- ◆ An active Suffolk e-mail account before the first day of class.
- ◆ Access to **The Non-Designer's Web Book** (2nd edition) by Williams and Tollett, an excellent resource for those of us who have little or no web design experience. It gives great suggestions and puts it all in perspective, thereby taking the mystery out of the design and uploading process. It's available at our bookstore or at Amazon. It retails for about \$32.00.