Course Description:
“To Tell the Truth”: The Unreliable Narrator

ENGL 2000 is a required course with a focus on close reading—of print texts (fiction, poetry, non-fiction) and film (feature and documentary)—and critical writing. It is a required course for all undergraduates and is the first required course for an English major. Students will do in-class writing and at-home reader responses as a way of developing their own questions about a text. There are a total of 3-4 papers, 2-4 pages in length.

Topics covered:
- Generating a thesis based on one’s own initial questions about a text.
- Reinforcing the necessity of defining terms.
- Developing a paper based on textual evidence and an explanation of the class member’s understanding of the evidence.
- Reviewing rhetorical forms including comparison/contrast.
- Reinforcing how to incorporate secondary sources in a paper.
- Contextualizing the readings with pertinent theory and terminology on the unreliable narrator drawn from scholars such as Wayne Booth and James Phelan.
- Considering the use of strategies we will have developed to discern unreliable narration in realms beyond the literary.

This section of ENGL 2000 focuses is on the unreliable narrator in prose, poetry and film. Below is the course description as it will appear on the syllabus.

Daily, in our lives--in advertisements and in the media, in public life, political life, and private life, personally and socially--we make judgments about the reliability of a speaker. We readily accept that in a courtroom, a speaker—prosecutor or defense attorney—may be victorious, regardless of the “facts.” Outside the courtroom, the importance of “facts” is increasingly under scrutiny. “Facts” will of course exist within a narrative, but what is accepted as reliable is inseparable from the power of the “narrative” itself, reflected these days in any speaker’s desire to “control the narrative,” so it will triumph over those of his or her adversaries. We eventually make a decision about a narrator’s reliability, but we can’t always explain which “facts” matter or how we came to our conclusion because we mostly act intuitively and quickly. The goal of this course is to closely and self-consciously “read” both print and cinematic texts critically, becoming aware of the attributes that either
increase or decrease our trust in a narrator—in addition to “facts,” we will look at a
narrator’s word choice, tone, demeanor, internal consistency of the narrative, issues
of self-interest—on the part of narrator or listener, research outside of the text, or
even assessments of a narrator’s morality, intelligence, or sanity. Such scrutiny
allows us, as “readers” to become more self-conscious and deliberate as we assess
the components we rely on as we assess reliability, including what we bring to the
text.

In summary, the related goals of this course are, first, to do “close readings” of
various texts, and second to be able to recapitulate clearly—in writing our
understanding of these texts AND the evidence from the text we bring to bear on our
assessment of reliability.

Calendar: The class meets on T, W, and T, 6-9, beginning May 26 and ending June 25. A day-by-day calendar of readings and assignments will be distributed prior to
the beginning of the class.

Class Texts: Texts will be drawn from the list below.

FILM
“Capturing the Friedmans” (documentary)
“Primal Fear” (feature)

NOVEL:
Mark Haddon, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

MEMOIR
Lauren Slater, Lying, Penguin (paperback)

SHORT STORY
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (link on Blackboard)
Katherine Mansfield, “Bliss” (link on Blackboard)
Edgar Allen Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (link on Blackboard)
Eudora Welty, “Why I Live at the P.O.” (link on Blackboard)

POETRY
Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess” (link on Blackboard)
William Carlos Williams, “This is Just to Say...” (link on Blackboard)

Course Requirements:

Grades:
Preparation for daily class, determined by
a) Your Reader Response Blogs (10%) (see below) and occasional homeworks.

b) your Class Participation (10%) I value good thoughtful questions, good thoughtful responses, and your interactions with one another

**Paper #1:** Paragraphs (20%)
**Paper #2:** 3 page paper (20%)
**Paper #3:** 3-5 page paper (20%)
**Paper #4:** 3-5 page paper (20%)

There is no midterm exam or final exam.

**Conferences:** Everyone should see me twice during the semester to discuss a paper you’re working on or a paper that’s been returned.

**Absences:** You’re permitted two absences without penalty. If you’re absent, you’re responsible for finding out what you missed, and being fully prepared for the following class. Even if you’re absent, you must upload to Blackboard any assignments due that day, Reader Responses and homework to the Blog Section, or papers to Blackboard when they are due.

### Writing Requirements

**BLOGS and HOMEWORK**

**BLOGS:** 10 Reader Response You will have roughly a dozen opportunities to respond to a work we will discuss in class by posting a Reader Response in the BLOG section on Blackboard. Do any 10 (though note that the majority of opportunities occur early in the semester with the short stories). As you do each Reader Response, number it. If your first Reader Response is on Browning, you will give it the heading, “e.g. “#1 Browning.” The next one will be #2, etc. These reader responses do not need to be polished, just your initial ideas and questions about a piece we’ll be discussing. Reader Responses must be posted by the time we discuss the work in class.

A few prompts that may trigger some thoughts: In regard to narrators we encounter, what leaps out at you, or puzzles you or interests you? You might want to read the first paragraph (or scene) especially closely because it’s the author’s first opportunity to focus your attention, often offering hints about where the story may be going. The author might be offering you information about an unreliable narrator without the narrator fully understanding what s/he is revealing. Are there particular words or motifs or metaphors that appear and reappear? If so, what do they suggest to you about the narrator’s reliability? If there are epigraphs, what might their relation to the text be?

**HOMEWORK:** Assigned intermittently….should be posted and numbered in BLOG section.
Additional information on academic policy

- **You may use your computer or laptop to take notes and/or to access materials necessary for class discussion. Please do not check your Instagram “likes,” etc. during class time. Smiling at your screen is a dead giveaway.**

- **Attendance:** You are permitted 2 absences. After that your grade will be adversely affected.

- **If you miss class, you’re responsible for finding out what you missed.** If any materials were distributed or posted on Blackboard, or any additional assignments were given, you will need to make sure you find out so that you come to class the following week **fully prepared.** Make sure you have the phone numbers/emails of 3 people in class. After you find out the assignment given when you were absent, the week you missed, if it is unclear to you, I will be happy to clarify it for you via email, or during my office hours (see above) in person or by phone, or by phone appointment.

- **Grades** I will grade your papers numerically, taking into account a) the **clarity** and **quality** of your thesis (both)  
  b) your ability to substantiate it with **specific examples** and **clarifying discussion** (both)  
  c) the correctness of your **writing** and **organization** (both)

Here is the qualitative meaning the university assigns to each grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter / Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 95-100</td>
<td>excellent; honors-level work, outstanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>A- 90-94</td>
<td>still excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+ 87-89</td>
<td>very good; high level of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>B  83-86</td>
<td>good; solid &amp; above average level of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>B- 80-82</td>
<td>good; still above average</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+ 77-79</td>
<td>competent; average level of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>C  73-76</td>
<td>adequate: acceptable level of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>C- 70-72</td>
<td>weak minimally acceptable</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+ 67-69</td>
<td>passing, but unsatisfactory; below average performance</td>
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<td>D  63-66</td>
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<td>D- 60-62</td>
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<td>F- below 60</td>
<td>failing. inferior performance</td>
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Please let me know your preferred name and pronoun.

Counseling Services: If you are troubled by depression, or stress, you can receive support from The Counseling Center, located in the building at 140 W 62 Street, G02. To set up an appointment, call (212) 636-6225 or stop by the office. If your concern is urgent, and you would like the process expedited, please see your class dean or me.

Academic Integrity
If you plagiarize—meaning use someone’s words without giving them credit—your paper will fail. A second plagiarism will result in your failing the course. You are expected to be familiar with and to adhere to Fordham University’s standards of academic integrity (see http://www.fordham.edu/academics/handbooks__publicati/undergraduate_academ/)
index.asp).

**From the Office of Disability Services:**
Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill - O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282).

The Office of Disability Services (ODS), headed up by Carolyn Mooney (mooney@fordham.edu), works with students, faculty, and staff to ensure appropriate services for students with disabilities. Fordham University will make reasonable accommodations, and provide auxiliary aides and services to assist otherwise qualified students who self-identify as having a disability in achieving equal access to its programs, services, and facilities.

It is essential that students who ask for accommodations have registered with the Office of Disability Services. Until a student self-identifies as having a disability and presents an academic accommodation letter written by ODS on ODS letterhead, faculty should not provide any academic accommodations to that student.

ODS staff abides by specific confidentiality standards when working with students with disabilities, but they can and do answer many kinds of questions that faculty have regarding accommodations and ways to work with students with disabilities without breaching confidentiality. They look forward to your call.