

Principles of Literary Study

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Office hours: Mondays 2:00–3:00 or by appointment

January 21, 2021. Introduction.

Sign-in: <https://forms.gle/3JKj2gQgFeP6jHmA6>

introductions

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- ▶ mute if not speaking
- ▶ use physical hand or Zoom hand or say “stack” in chat
- ▶ please, no side conversations in chat
- ▶ please remain visible the whole time
(will always have a break 12:40–12:45)

course goals

- ▶ read some excellent poems, stories, and novels
- ▶ learn how to discuss literary texts as scholars
 - ▶ how to ask relevant scholarly questions
 - ▶ how to analyze the evidence of texts
 - ▶ how to make arguments in writing
- ▶ make you smarter, stronger, faster
 - ▶ (no promises on the last two)

what do we do in literary studies?

- ▶ Literary studies is the historical human science of the textual dimensions of culture.
- ▶ Literary studies makes arguments about the *significance* of cultural texts.

principle I: form

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- ▶ How texts are *composed* out of words or other signs matters.
 - ▶ Which words have been chosen? What other ones were available?
 - ▶ How have the words been arranged? What other arrangements were possible?
 - ▶ What meanings does this choice and organization of language produce?

principle 2: production

- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *production* matter.
 - ▶ Who made it?
 - ▶ Where and when?
 - ▶ With what aims?
 - ▶ Under what constraints?

principle 3: use

- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *circulation and use* matter.
 - ▶ Who has made it available (then or now or in between)?
 - ▶ Who has read or otherwise used it?
 - ▶ What uses has it been put to?

principle 4: relation

- ▶ The text's *relationships to other texts* matter.
 - ▶ What categories (*genres*) might readers place it in?
 - ▶ What available categories do readers *not* place it in?
 - ▶ How does the text relate to precursors?
 - ▶ How does the text relate to successors?

poetry poems

- ▶ How texts are composed matters.

Emily Dickinson (USA, 1830–1886)

“Tell all the truth but tell it slant” (1872)

Discussion

Does this poem follow its own advice?

intermission

- ▶ class resumes in 5 minutes

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

tell all the truth
 but - tell it slant -
 Success in Circuit
 Lies
 Too } Bright for our
 } good

infirm delight
 the truths superb
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 the Children ease
 with explanation kind
 the truth must
 dazzle gradually
 Or great ^{moderate} man
 blind -

relationship status: it's complicated

- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *production* matter.
- ▶ The circumstances of the text's *circulation and use* matter.

Anne Bradstreet (ca. 1612–1672)

The Author to Her Book (pub. 1678)

like, don't RT

Marianne Moore (1887–1972)

Poetry (1967)

POETRY

I, too, dislike it.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in

it, after all, a place for the genuine.

form again

Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979)

One Art (1976)

using the *OED*

- ▶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (2011), s.v. “literature”

for next time

- ▶ Read the [selections for Monday](#). Please print out for special attention:
 - ▶ Donne, “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”
 - ▶ Ezra Pound, “In a station of the metro”
 - ▶ Rae Armantrout, “Will”
- ▶ [Exercise](#): look up a word and write 50-100 words. Due on Sakai on 1/25 by 2 p.m.

poetry handouts, a user's guide

- ▶ poetry selections for Jan. and Feb. are all on Sakai by date assigned
- ▶ (or just download the [all-in-one](#))
- ▶ print at least poems listed in bold on the syllabus. Mark up!
- ▶ blue phrases in the PDF are hyperlinks to sources

next: words

- ▶ Read the [selections for Monday](#). Please print out for special attention:
 - ▶ Donne, “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”
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