Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the critical study of literature, and is intended for English majors, intended majors, and non-majors alike. We will cover a range of literary forms and genres, from the novel, short story and other prose genres to poetry and drama. Our discussions will often explore the parameters of conventional distinctions of literature, examining the relation of imaginative fiction to other forms such as political writing, memoir, the essay, and satire.

Our readings offer a wide-ranging sample of texts across historical periods, literary styles, national canons, and minority literary traditions. In situating texts in their historical and cultural contexts, we will do so in order to identify overarching -- perhaps even universal -- themes that unite these texts. One reason that literature retains value is because it speaks to us across boundaries and despite differences, and it is through literature that we can imaginatively learn about the lives and experiences of others, as well as appreciate our place along a historical spectrum that continues to be written.

In this spirit (so to speak), one of our recurring themes will be that of the ghost story. As with our first text, James’s The Turn of the Screw, it is a genre that makes us aware of the elusive search for meaning, the pursuit of forms – like the representations found in literature – that are not exactly real. But ghost stories often serve as a way of grappling with the unresolved residues of the past, an issue we will continue to explore with Morrison’s novel Beloved and Shakespeare’s play Hamlet. More generally, we will also see many writers responding to the ghosts of their literary predecessors, a dynamic especially relevant for women and minority writers as they search for rooms of their own within ongoing literary traditions.

Required Course Texts and Materials:

James, Henry, The Turn of the Screw, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism, ed. Peter Beidler (Bedford) ISBN: 9780312597061
Morrison, Toni, Beloved (Plume) ISBN: 9781400033416
Shakespeare, William, Hamlet (Bantam) ISBN: 9780553212921
Wilde, Oscar, The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays (Oxford) ISBN: 9780199535972

Course packet available at Clark Graphics, 2915 N Oakland (“CP” in schedule) [electronic copy available on Canvas]
Mid-term paper (5-7 pp) – 25%
Final paper (5-7 pp) – 25%
Reading quizzes (7 in all) – 33.3%
Participation and attendance – 16.7%