

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: ENGL 366: Epiphany & Empathy in the Contemporary Novel
Credits: 3 Credits
Instructor: Filippo Belacchi



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Epiphany in 20th century literature

He finally found a certain thread, a hidden spirit, a chess idea for his as yet hardly planned 'novel', to which he had glancingly referred yesterday in the letter to his mother. It was of this that he spoke now, spoke in such a way as if it were really the best and most normal expression of his happiness – which was also expressed in a more accessible edition by such things as the velvetiness of the air, three emerald lime leaves that had got into the lamplight, the icy cold beer, the lunar volcanoes of mashed potato, vague voices, footfalls, the stars among the ruins of clouds.

-Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*.

This passage describes what in literature is known as an epiphany--an exquisite moment when the mind intersects with the world to create a spontaneous and almost miraculous apprehension of reality. An epiphany is a rare but defining experience in which our idea of the real matches external reality, a sudden but tender kiss of recognition. In this course we will study fiction that focuses epiphany--its sources, its processes, its consequences, and its significance. The purpose of this course therefore is to investigate and to explain the stylistic function of these moments of "empathy" between the mind and reality, and to single out what exactly causes the epiphanies in the several novels and short stories under consideration. Ultimately, through our examination of the literature of epiphany we will explore the role this flash of understanding plays in our lives.

We will read three novels, including *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert Pirsig and *White Noise*, by Don DeLillo, as well as several short stories and novels excerpts which centre around pivotal epiphanies in the lives of their characters. There will be two formal papers, regular informal journal writings, a mid-term and final exam.

REQUIREMENTS

Completion of assigned readings, two formal papers, unannounced quizzes, one formal presentation to the class, various informal writings, regular participation, and regular attendance.

ATTENDANCE

Attend class. Absences will lower your grade. You are responsible for all material presented in classes which you miss. Recurrent tardiness will lower your grade and count as absence after the first two times.

PARTICIPATION

Your grade for class participation will be averaged in once. The same grades will be assigned for not contributing to group work, for doing other work in class, for disrupting class, and so on.

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Read the entire assignment for the first scheduled class covering the work. I may give unannounced quizzes regularly throughout the semester, and I may ask you to write at home or in class on various readings. You should read actively, take notes, and formulate questions and observations about the readings.

PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the dates on which they appear in the syllabus. I will not accept late papers. You must cite the sources for all paraphrases, quotations, and other borrowings by page number and edition. Use the MLA Works Cited Page documentation style (see Little Brown Handbook).

GRADES

To arrive at a final grade, grades for Paper #1, Paper #2, your presentation, the average of informal writings, the average of your quizzes, and class participation will be awarded grades of equal value.

PLAGIARISM

Deliberate representation of someone else's work as your own will earn you an F for the course. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to buying a paper and turning it in with your name on it, copying from other students' work, and copying from sources in the library without identifying the sources and without using appropriate documentation. Other forms of cheating will also earn you an F for the course.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a learning or other disability that requires special accommodation, you must notify me on the first day of class.

JANUARY

- Introduction
- The concept of Epiphany
- The Epiphany in Modern Literature
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
- *White Noise*
- *White Noise*
- *White Noise*
- *White Noise*

FEBRUARY

- Martin Amis, *The Information*
- *The Information*
- *The Information*
- *The Information*
- *The Information*
- *The Information*
- *The Information*
- **Formal Paper #1 Due**

MARCH

- Raymond Carver, *Cathedral*
- John Cheever, *The Swimmer*
- Katherine Mansfield, *Dinner Party*
- Joyce Carol Oates, *where are you going where have you been*
- **Mid-Term Exam**
- Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

APRIL

- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
- *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*
- **Final Exam**