

THE ENGLISH GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Editors: Dr. Alexander Howe, Faculty Advisor
Charles C. Ferguson, EGSA President

Welcome to the

English Department

UNIVERSITY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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UNIVERSITY OF
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EGSA MISSION:

The English Graduate Student Association was founded on May 2, 2005. Designed as a scholarly and social organization, the EGSA acts as the campus voice of its members.

The mission of the EGSA is to promote the scholarship of literature and rhetoric at the University. To these ends, each semester the Association will endeavor to bring guest speakers from other universities, sponsor colloquia with department faculty, and hold workshops discussing students' ongoing research projects.

EGSA Founding Members: Darlene Allen, Michael Benjamin, Sam Doku, Charles Ferguson, Nona Grant, Donna Gurley, Dr. Wynn Yarbrough (Faculty Advisor), Dr. Alexander Howe (Faculty Advisor), and Sharon Nuskey.



Message from the EGSA President



Charles C. Ferguson

Fellow Students

Welcome fellow graduate students to another semester of opportunity for self-realization and fulfillment through academic study.

The promised successes of this semester come hard upon the daily struggle to adequately meet the demands of a professional and academic life. To help ensure your successful completion of this semester, the Graduate Student Association is at your disposal to help achieve your goals by providing you with an out-of-class venue where you can discuss your ideas and concerns with peers. The graduate newsletter too is at your disposal, providing a literary venue for your creative appetites while showcasing your works to fellow students and professors alike.

This semester, I encourage each of you to fully use these forums as vehicles of academic exchange and growth thereby fulfilling your personal and academic goals.

Sincerely,

EGSA President



Message from the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research



Beverly Karplus Hartline, Ph.D.
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Dear Graduate Students

Please allow me to add my welcome to you as you enter graduate study at the University of the District of Columbia in English Composition and Rhetoric. In addition, congratulations for taking this major educational step and joining with other like-minded creative professionals in choosing to enroll in this program.

I feel a bit awkward writing this “bulk” welcome, because we want everything we do at UDC to reinforce our belief and our commitment to you, that you are important to us as an individual. While you will take graduate courses along with other students, of course, you are here to gain

knowledge, skills, experiences, and networks that will help you achieve your personal and professional dreams and aspirations. Be sure to take full advantage of the flexibility in the program and the resources available on campus and in the rich environment of our nation's capital to tailor your graduate experience to meet your needs. As gifted writers and speakers you appreciate more than many others that content, context, formulation, and delivery all matter.

Please give us feedback—early and often. Help us to help you make your graduate career in all respects inspirational, rewarding, and fun. Best wishes for success. I look forward to getting to know you in the months ahead.

The Oak Tree at Court House Park

A Short Story by Christine H. Kroll

The oak tree was planted at the turn of the century when Fresno's downtown consisted of ornate brick or wooden buildings, both Edwardian and Victorian, frilly and reminiscent of the pomp and glory of recent miners whose pockets, now filled with gold and silver coins, clashed, and blended to the tune of troubadours' songs of fortune, newfound romance, and happy fate. It was Brett Harte's Wild West, tamed eventually by bankers and farmers, who claimed and planted, among thousands of trees, or in this case left to spare, a native sapling to grow among others, in the future designated Park.

This tree, if it had eyes, saw much, much more than ever it could tell. It saw children of all sizes, shapes, and colors play year after year at chasing the squirrels amidst the shade proffered by large cedars and oaks located close by. It had served as a surveyor's witness tree during the razing of that venerable Capitol-like structure, the old Courthouse, and the erection of the new modern structure, enclosed with its outer concrete facade of grid work. One time, the Park was the scene of a cold-blooded lynching; years later, it was refurbished and replanted with cypresses, hollies, and other hardy perennials. Now because of its anterior location downtown, it wore a faded air, providing noontime accommodation for office workers, bus commuters, and welfare recipients, serving its primary function during the day, unsafe to visit after sunset.

Joaquin had recently found work at Fresno's Courthouse Park as a popsicle vendor. The Mexican who owned the vending carts was a self-made man, an entrepreneur who spent whole nights making the fruit popsicles, packaging them, ensuring there was an adequate supply of them for distribution, and performing all manners of odds and ends. He would never have pulled this operation off were it not for his equally devoted wife, who slaved beside him all hours of the night, demanding practically nothing, but who during the day oversaw the purchasing of a variety of locally grown fruit which could be crushed, blended, and mixed into the variety of fruit juices, then thickened with pectin and frozen into molds.

"Can you speak English?" the owner had asked Joaquin when he was interviewing for the job, mainly to test his resolve.

Certainly there was plenty of opportunity for Joaquin's resolve to be tested. There was the heat, balmy from early morning watering, but sweltering by afternoon. There were the children or adults whose desire, it seemed, was to demonize him. Those adults threw him withering looks that seemed to say, what respectable grown up man would be handling a homemade pushcart selling popsicles and ice-cream? It seemed the more humiliating to those who didn't understand that the carts featured flavors named in both English and Spanish written by Joaquin. Teenagers looked both wistful and greedy as they inquired whether the watermelon popsicle could be sold for twenty-five cents only, then turned and giggled over speculation about which street corner he could be found sleeping at night.

Of course he wasn't the only grown Hispanic man who worked a vending cart. There were several, whose carts were exactly like his, spread out around Mariposa Mall and Courthouse Park. They fanned out, pushing or bicycling their vendor's carts, bumping along the colored concrete pavement and its pebbled courses, so reminiscent of a sandy boardwalk. Joaquin, a recent émigré, could hardly guess that the Mariposa Mall he saw, with its collection of run-down buildings, once

hailed glory to Fresno's fanciest shops, uptown department stores, and richest banks. Instead, he saw a humble, struggling collection of new, cheap dime stores rife with Chinese- or Mexican-made goods; dollar eateries frequently visited by the low-income people; and law and government offices claimed many buildings also--all grateful for the inexpensive retail space and its accessibility to provide service for the low-income--the modern terminology for those poor folks.

But as Joaquin learned the hard way, poor folks were rarely as uninteresting as the term might connote. There were degrees and shapes to poverty, types of degradation, millions of different stories, and, always there were happy faces, and the happy ones always overshadowed the bitter ones, those unhappy former shadows of themselves.

At the Mall, the pace always seemed leisurely. Perhaps this had to do with how broad the pedestrian street was, or how tall the trees were that grew alongside. Perhaps it had to do with how various low fountains formed into gently shaped brooks, and pools graced with twining metal sculptures, seemed to capture the imagination and fascination of small children; it teased them and made them run as if they were entranced by the Pied Piper, so that their shrieks and laughter rose and echoed against the glass storefronts of art-deco style buildings, voiding anxieties and resting on the brown marbled faces of elderly men, whose job it seemed, was to sit as men had for decades, resting on shady bench alcoves, artfully placed along the Mall, forming protective enclaves.

Joaquin was only semi-conscious of this for he had continually to watch his cart, to smile at passersby, looking for a resting place and vantage point for himself and the merchandise. One of these places was underneath the Tower Clock near the Free Speech platform. This tower was a fascinating center piece for all the fanciful pools and cast metal sculptures decorating the mall; for it was designed in the shape of a metal tree cast within tall columnar supports, its inwards spiraling upwards in an unpronounced yet captivating fashion. This was a favorite resting place for Joaquin because here he could watch out for people; they noticed him, but he would blend into the ambience of the restful mall with its walkscape, whether busy or not.

A strapping black man hopped onto the low-lying, eggshell white and oval-shaped concrete platform. He was the Dancing-Baptist. Whether on the street or espied at a bus-stop along Tulare between downtown and Southeast Fresno, he was never seen at a standstill; instead he would be stomping his feet, clapping his hands, raising and shaking them at the sky, proclaiming "Hallelujah" in a jovial and boisterous voice that boomed emptily towards cars whizzing by, while he faced innocent pedestrians who stared wondrously at him in passing. Because he always wore a backpack, he might even be mistaken for a college student, were it not for the unseeing eyes he wore as he energetically chanted.

On alternate days during lunchtime he preached fiery sermons, never pausing to address the crowd directly or asking for contributions, but pacing back and forth on the overhung, smooth, eggshell white precast concrete dais, and in his bouncing like walk, projecting his face and body upwards and forwards, as if in spiritual levitation over his crowd of anxious listeners.

"And God said, 'Repent! Become like my Son, the Lord Jesus. For only True Believers of Jesus, those baptized in the name of God, with holy fire, can enter the Kingdom of Heaven! There are those who want you to follow the way of the White Man to the top of the World. But those at the Top, they don't care about their brothers who are truly in need. They don't feel the need to study the Bible because they think they got everything already!'"

Here, the learned young man flipped open his Bible, the one he previously waved in the air, and quoted passages, citing texts that dealt with mankind's general hardships and its hunger for redemption. The Dancing-Baptist was practiced and nimble, articulating in voice and tone, gestures and movement; even if his vision for salvation vaguely paralleled the thoughts of Malcolm X, his call for the unification of sinners resembling the call for unification among black brotherhood.

Contrary to popular belief, his noon-time crowd was sparse, a motley collection of elderly Hispanic men, perhaps, a few women with children in custody most likely waiting for social services offices to reopen, a few strangers who milled about hands in pockets, and scarcely anyone else. Office workers did not apparently wish to augment their free noon hour with the enlightenment offered from a self-instructed proselytizer, albeit one who appeared contemptible. They would rather be served a scrumptious lunch and be waited upon; forget the crowd of mendicants who needed their mercies; indulge in the fact that they were the favorers; even if only because they themselves were supported by the largest majority of all.

However there was Joaquin, only fifty feet away, vigilant and attentive, if only he could understand all that was said in English.

A small Mexican boy, accompanied by his mother, approached him.

"I would like some tamales today," he said.

His mother, although embarrassed, asked in fluent Spanish where there might be some hot snacks.

There were hot-snack vendors who sold nachos, popcorn, hotdogs, tacos, enchiladas, and even tamales on Mariposa Mall. It was really a matter of which vendor sold what where. The vendors along Mariposa Mall seemed as if they occupied a permanent place. The vendor who sold fresh fruit juices and fruit salads was always at Fresno and Fulton below the Guarantee Savings Bank, itself long abandoned, although the building's regal exterior stood symbolically as historic stock and the slanted "G" block remained a curiously signed emblem that protruded upwards from the top of the roof's precipice, supported on a pole and visible above the surroundings for blocks; perfect for postcards of downtown Fresno.

There were two vendors selling hotdogs, tacos, and enchiladas, one between Inyo and Fulton, another near Mariposa and Fulton. However Joaquin directed them towards Tuolumne and Fulton where the vendor sold Polish hotdogs, and tamales.

There seemed more for Joaquin to see and do at the mall, but Joaquin had to stay busy, not stare at the office workers on their break; the farm workers with days off and extra dollars to spend; the juveniles attending court hearings; or foreigners gathering in a line outside the Immigration and Naturalization Office. He could not figure out these strangers' lives or motives, when he knew full well that if he were to wheel his way back to Courthouse Park, there was brisk business to be had during the afternoons near the bus stations, where passengers awaiting the city buses desired snacks.

And Joaquin knew exactly under which shady oak tree he could park his cart under.



Christine Kroll (aka Wong) is a graduate student in the English Composition and Rhetoric program at UDC. She can be found volunteering at The Writing Center (TWC).

ON SYMBOLS AND THINGS

By **Melvin Hawkins**

I have long been intrigued how a singular object can have such myriad symbolic connotations for so many separate individuals. As for my own personal experiences, a tree also has great symbolic significance to me as well, to be more specific, an oak tree.

In the front yard of my parent's house, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, stands a majestic oak tree. The tree must be nearly a century old by now, and as the seasons and years have rolled by, along with the seemingly endless cycles of acorns and autumn leaves, it has become almost like a member of the family. I have many memories of various incidents that took place underneath that oak tree, but one in particular stands out in my mind.

One early summer mid-morning my grandmother, younger sister, and I sat out on the front porch after a brief but intense thunderstorm. Raindrops were dripping from the leaves of the tree, the birds had resumed their morning songs, and a breeze had briefly displaced the rampant Southern humidity. All was serene in the world. Then suddenly, a tiny ebony figure tumbled out of the branches of the oak tree and onto the ground. It was a black baby squirrel.

The creature seemed a bit dazed and confused, but it did not appear to be seriously injured. We assumed that its mother was hiding somewhere up in the oak tree, amidst the foliage.

Suddenly, concern clouded my grandmother's face. "Dear Lord," she said. "I sure hope those two little terrors of yours aren't around, because if they find that baby squirrel they are going

to kill the poor thing." The "two terrors" my grandmother referred to were my beloved but vexing pet cats.

Kool-Aid was a magnificent gray tabby and Kitty-Poo was a slender, primarily black cat, with a splotch of white on her chest and another tuft of white at the tip of her tail; and both had an unfortunate yet deserving reputation for mayhem. They were a pair of ferocious female felines who were the predatory bane of their fellow creatures in our neighborhood. Countless small mammals, amphibians, arthropods, reptiles and birds met their doom at the paws of Kool-Aid and Kitty-Poo. I literally lost count of the captured animals, some still alive and squeaking, that they would bring back to me as "gifts." Any creature smaller than them that came within reach of their claws and teeth were fair game. Sometimes, however, an animal their size or even bigger was not always enough of a deterrent to keep them at bay.

One time, a huge cottontail rabbit crept out of the woods and made the fatal mistake of venturing into our vegetable garden. Kool-Aid and Kitty-Poo promptly stalked it like a pair of lionesses after a zebra on the African savannah. After setting the trap, Kitty-Poo rushed in and ambushed the cottontail in the center of the garden, amidst a row of cabbages. The cottontail shot out of the garden like a cannon, with Kitty-Poo holding on onto its back for dear life—where it ran right into the waiting jaws of Kool-Aid. The two cats then proceeded to maul the rabbit viciously. My mother ran outside, screaming bloody murder, which spurred me into action. I rushed to the rabbit's aid and chased the cats away, but it was too late. The big cottontail went into shock thereafter and died of its injuries.

So if a giant rabbit succumbed to the predation of my cats, what chance did a tiny infant squirrel have?

As if on cue, a black and white figure suddenly appeared on the scene. It was Kitty-Poo. Without hesitation, she made a beeline towards the oak tree and charged the baby squirrel before I could react. Then an amazing thing happened.

Instead of trying to escape, the baby squirrel rose on up its hind legs and waved its tiny front paws in the air as if attempting to spar with the attacking cat. This bizarre and unexpected response stopped Kitty-Poo dead in her tracks. She seemed genuinely dumbfounded and confused. She sat down directly in front of the squirrel and peered downwards at her little foe, as if trying to figure it out. What was this? Small animals were supposed to flee in terror at her presence, not stand up to her. What manner of creature was this?

Then an even more amazing thing happened. Within moments of their initial confrontation and ensuing stare down, my cat and the baby squirrel were playing with each other, taking turns chasing each other around the base of the oak tree.

A few minutes later, I was able to coax Kitty-Poo into the backyard with a fresh can of tuna fish. My grandmother reported that soon afterwards, a grey squirrel, presumably the mother, cautiously but quickly scampered down the tree, where it grabbed the baby squirrel by the scruff of its neck, and raced back up with it to the safety of the nest.

"It was a miracle," said my grandmother, a deeply devout Methodist. Divine intervention or not, it was truly one of most extraordinary life scenes I had ever witnessed.

Thank goodness that my other cat, Kool-Aid, was not present that day. She was older, bigger, and bolder than Kitty-Poo, and a much more of an accomplished killer.

So in short, the family oak tree has great symbolic value to me personally to this day. On one level it conjures up an image of a cherished childhood memory, but going even farther than that, the oak tree to me is a symbol that the laws of nature do not always follow a harsh code of conduct, and sometimes it will throw you an unforeseen curveball, where the unexpected and totally surprising happens.

As for my older sister, however, I fear that very same oak tree invokes a somewhat more unsettling memory and resulting image than mine.

It was the Christmas holidays and my sister was home after her first semester as a college freshman at Hampton University. She was out the front yard, in the cold night air of December, talking to her longtime high school beau underneath the oak tree. Even though they went to different colleges after graduating from high school (The boyfriend attended Howard University), they had decided to continue their romance. However, from the very onset of their conversation it became abundantly clear that all was not well between them. (Yes, I was eavesdropping, listening with the window slightly cracked and the lights out in my bedroom. What else are mischievous little brothers supposed to do?) Bitter accusations and recriminations flew back and forth between them before my sister finally stunned her boyfriend with a startling confession: She was no longer in love with him and had met another guy from New Jersey while attending Hampton (A man who would indeed become her future husband and the father of her children). Soon after, the now ex-boyfriend angrily stormed off to his car and drove away, leaving my disconsolate sister sobbing beneath the oak tree.

So whereas the family oak tree in our front yard means one thing to me, it is a good bet the image that my older sister associates with the oak tree is a decidedly darker one, just as a tree means two different things to a Buddhist and an adherent of one the Judeo-Christian faiths. To my sister, the oak tree is probably a symbol of hopeless teenage naïveté about romantic relationships and, perhaps, a sense of youthful heartbreak and loss as well.

Every single day our simian brains are constantly bombarded by competing mental images. The exact same thing happens when we encounter our fictional counterparts in the world of literature. The most interesting point I thought Lecture 10 made about imagery is when it examined the symbolic relationships particular objects have with different individuals. This is why I made my own tree analogy about me and my sister's symbolic relationship to an oak tree, just as Lecture 10 illustrated the religious symbolic value of a tree. In the fictional world, there are endless symbols and countless permutations of how they are perceived by various readers. What do the white and yellow flowers symbolize to a Mongolian teenager in Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums"? What kind of image appears in the head of an elderly Hindu who is reading Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants"? An even more interesting and tantalizing thought is what those symbols mean to the authors themselves, if anything at all? Questions like these makes imagery in literature endlessly fascinating to me.

Melvin Hawkins is a graduate student in the English Composition and Rhetoric program at UDC.

This piece was written in response to Dr. Ernest Hamilton's lecture on imagery in literature.



Dorothy Phaire
Professor of English
English Department
University of the District of Columbia

Blind Delusion

By
Dorothy Phaire

Reviewed by

Charles C. Ferguson

In her latest book Blind Delusions, Professor Dorothy Phaire again uses the District of Columbia and its surrounding suburbs as the setting for this wonderfully crafted story of intrigue, murder, betrayal, love, and friendship.

Readers of Professor Phaire's last book Murder and the Masquerade would immediately recognize some of the characters in this latest installment from the Dorothy Phaire Mystery/Romantic Series. Readers would also realize that the two books are not dependent upon each other and the second book, Blind Delusion, expands the lives of the characters. Dr. Renee Hayes, the successful, but dissatisfied, and unfulfilled psychologist who in her attempt to help others must deal with her own personal inner turmoil in order to find satisfaction. Renee, the main character, searches for fulfillment through her friendship with her secretary, Brenda, and the younger Detective Degas "Deek" Hamilton. As the friendship between Renee and Brenda develops, so too does the turmoil in their lives. Both women are led down paths of loss, pain, renewal, and rebirth. Both women explore religion and faith as a source of strength.

For Renee, the need to help is one that propels her to always examine her life, particularly, her life with husband Bill who in his own search has become even more distant. Bill, like Detectives Hamilton and Melvin Bradford, Jerome Johnson and the other men who populate the novel, explores friendship and relationship from the male perspective. These men through their relationships are held up to the light of examination as the psychological motivations that drive them are explored. They demonstrated the best in male bonding and the worst in male rivalry as they engage in corruption, murder, love, and law enforcement.

Blind Delusion is a non-stop, action packed novel which captivates from beginning to end. The relationships which develop among the women of the book are easily counter balanced by those developed by the men. This tale of DC intrigue is a wonderful read for faculty and students alike and would make a wonderful fireside companion providing entertainment and unseen twists from start to finish.

No, it isn't

Death isn't what it is made out to be.
It isn't a journey
To that "undiscovered country
From whose bourne
No traveler returns."
No, it isn't.

Some wish for a one-way trip to the Pearly Gates of Heaven.
Some dread banishment to the blazing fires of Hell.
But when the time comes
We just up and die,
And get buried under six feet of dirt.
Bones picked clean by the maggots and such,
The rest left to rot in the dampness of the earth.

No, death isn't what it is made out to be.
It is when your eyes are shut and there is nothing to see.
It is when your ears are closed and there is nothing to hear.
It is when your senses are turned off and there is nothing to feel.
It is when your mind shuts down, never to turn on--ever.

It is when all your sensations are wrapped into your emotions,
It is when all your emotions are wrapped into your thoughts,
It is when all your thoughts are wrapped into your speech,
It is when all your speech is wrapped up and tucked away
Deep into the silence of the damp earth forever.

No it isn't what it is made out to be,
Death is when the world goes on forever,
And you just, simply, cease to be.
Yes, the world goes on as ever,
But you simply cease to be.

Anonymous.

WHAT IS LITERATURE?

Dr. Ernest Hamilton
Professor of English
English Department
University of the District of Columbia

What is literature? Well, to the students of literature, it is what is found between the two covers of the anthology of literature they were required to purchase. To the teachers of literature it is what they have taught for years on end from those free anthologies of literature that they received as desk copies.

Then, of course, there is literature that is *not* literature and literature that *is* literature.

See what I mean?

Not at all, you say. This just doesn't make any sense.

Well, you are right. It doesn't make any sense, that is, if you are not privy to either the general meaning of literature or the particular meaning of it. Literature in its general sense means any piece of writing done on *any* subject under heaven—such as, for instance, when your dentist, as she waves her drill over your half-open mouth, tells you: Open wide! Not to worry, I have read a lot of literature on this.



Painfully, you discover that she wasn't really talking about any poem or play she had read.

On the other hand, what literature in its particular sense means, I am afraid, is only known to those students and teachers whom we mentioned earlier.

I don't mean to suggest that these students and teachers—the people privy to the particular meaning of literature—are members of some kind of a secret society. They seem to go about their business like all other people do. You will find them in libraries, quietly pouring over stacks of books and journals supposedly related to what they call literature, or walking in a garden reciting some poem or a monologue, or drawing dense diagrams on the blackboard to illustrate what they call the plot, characters, points of crises and climaxes, etc., found in their literature anthologies. When a few of them do get together, you don't see them talking about what literature is. You see them discussing poems, plays, novels, and short stories, but you never hear them talk about “literature”—as if it were some kind of a secret code word; and so everybody seems to exchange

glances as if to say, “we know what we know.” Those who are there should know what it means; or they should not have been there in the first place.

But, as you found out, though quite painfully, that your dentist seemed to be sure what she was talking about when she said that she had read a lot of literature—albeit on tooth drilling.

Of course, the dentist’s claim that it was *literature* she had read doesn’t give us any hint as to in what *form* that literature on tooth drilling was. It could be in the form of a poem, beginning, for instance, with lines like, “When at first you apply the drill/ Expect to hear some cries shrill,” and so on. Or it could just as easily be in the form of a play, with characters such as Mr. Gum and Dr. Drill, and with all the points of crises and resolutions a play is entitled to. Again, it could be in the form of a short story or a novel, or simply an essay or an academic article.

So, you see, your visit to the dentist was helpful after all.

No?

Oh, it was very painful and you lost a tooth, too.

Yes, but look at the bright side. You now know, thanks to the dentist, that the *form* of a piece of writing does not determine whether it is literature in the particular sense or not. The fact that a piece of writing is in the form of a poem or a play or a short story or a novel does *not* make it literature.

Just as we saw in the case of the dentist’s use of the term literature, a politician may sing his own praises in a poem or a play in order to *persuade* his voters. In that case the politician’s poem or play would have to be considered, at best, a poetic piece of political advertising or propaganda, but certainly not literature.

Similarly, an English language teacher may decide to write the punctuation rules in the poetic form in an attempt at a more efficient instruction. Clearly, one cannot consider a poetic piece that intends to *instruct* as literature.

Or suppose a travel agency in order to *inform* its clients about the location of its places of attraction and how to get to them puts the information in a narrative form, say, as a short story depicting a family’s travels to those attractive places. We may safely exclude such writing from the category of literature.

Again, suppose you are going on a long journey and decide to take a book that contains humorous essays, anecdotes, jokes, and other amusing material with you to *entertain* yourself on the way. However, entertaining as the book may be, you cannot seriously consider it literature.

So, rule number one: any piece of writing which, implicitly or explicitly, purports to persuade, to instruct, to inform, or to entertain may not be considered literature.

And that also leads us to rule number two: a piece of writing may not be considered literature simply because it employs forms, such as poetry, drama, novel, or short story. .

And while we are at it, we may add a third: any piece of writing that employs literary devices, such as figurative language--simile, metaphor, personification, irony, and oxymoron, hyperbole etc., etc., in order to persuade, to instruct, to inform, or to entertain, explicitly or implicitly, may

also not be considered literature. That is to say, that a piece of writing may exhibit literary qualities without being a literary work.

And now to avoid any further confusion, in this lecture at least, about what is not literature and what is literature, we shall designate the writings belonging to literature in the general sense with a small “l,” *literature*; and we shall identify the literature in the particular sense with a capital “L,” *Literature*--except, of course, when the term literature in a general sense comes at the beginning of a sentence: “Literature related to medicine may be found...”

In other words, literature with a small “l” means a piece of writing in any field of knowledge; thus, biblical literature, medical literature, literature on classical music, literature on the history of art, etc., and, of course, as your dentist mentioned, literature on tooth drilling.

What we are after, however, is Literature with a capital L, the nature of which we seek to explore. For, as we have said earlier, any piece of writing that seeks to persuade, to instruct, to inform, or to entertain may not be considered Literature. It may be called literature, but it cannot be called Literature.

So, then, what *is* Literature? At this point, perhaps, it would be best to go back to where we started from, as it would not be very polite to disturb all those teachers and students solemnly pouring over those stacks of books and journals in the silent halls of the library by asking this question. At the very beginning we had said that a Literary work is “a holistic expression of a writer's feelings and impressions about some aspect of the human experience, whether that experience consists of the way human beings relate to each other, or the way they relate to nature, or the way they relate to themselves. Literature, in other words, is about human beings living and experiencing life in all its variety and complexity.”

Notice that we did *not* say that Literature is about the life experiences of human beings of a certain age or gender or ethnicity or profession or social or economic class or religious or political or philosophical orientation at a certain point in time. Instead, we said that a literary work is a piece of writing about human beings, that is, about *all* human beings. When we talk about all human beings, we think about what is common to all human beings. When we think about what is common to all human beings, we think about what is universal and perennial in all human beings. And when we think about what is universal and perennial in all human beings, we say, ah, thus is humankind; thus, it is ever!

Yes, Literature expresses what is universal and what is perennial in humankind. This is the way all human beings are, and will always be; these are the dilemmas all human beings face, and will always face. This is the way they will always be and such are the dilemmas they will always face, that is, as long as human beings are human beings.

Thus rule number four: the subject matter of Literature is all that is universal and perennial in humankind. Historians write about the past; social critics write about the present; visionaries write about the future; fiction writers write about what is enduring in and common to all humankind.

Thus when we see a piece of writing such as a short story, novel, play, or a poem, containing literary devices, such as figurative language--simile, metaphor, personification, irony, and oxymoron, hyperbole etc., etc.-- employed to express what is enduring and universal in humankind, we can be sure we have a genuine piece of Literature in our hands.

Yes, that piece of writing in our hands may begin with a particular person of a particular gender, having to deal with a particular problem at a particular time and place. But by the time we have finished reading that piece of writing we are not thinking of that particular problem that particular person had to deal with at the particular time and place; instead, we find ourselves thinking about all humankind. Having come to the end of our reading, we say, ah, *thus* it is with us all; it is *ever thus!*

Like the people of that particular village in “The Lottery,” human beings everywhere and for all times must deal with the fact of death; like Leo Finkle of “The Magic Barrel,” human beings have perennially and universally sought to understand the world and come to terms with it. Similarly, we realize that “A & P” is not a journalistic account of how a particular young boy named Sammy became infatuated by a particular girl named “Queenie” in a particular A & P grocery store; it is the representation of perennial and universal youthful infatuation--among other things. “Everyday Use” is not an entry in a particular mother’s autobiography about how she managed to keep her undeserving daughter from taking the family quilt; rather, it expresses the universal and perennial “generation gap.” And so is the case with “The Mask of the Red Death,” “The Blue Hotel,” “Young Goodman Brown,” “The Other Side of the Hedge,” “The Chrysanthemums,” and countless other short stories, novels, plays, and poems. In each instance, the particular persons, objects, and events depicted are not important in themselves but in the way they symbolize what is enduring and universal in the process of human existence.

And there we are. Unlike literature, Literature artfully employs the particular to express the universal and the time bound to point to the perennial. And in so doing it enables us to become more profoundly aware of what is perennial and universal in humankind. And that, indeed, is the key to knowing the difference between literature and Literature.

And now, perhaps, we don’t need to capitalize literature to know what literature is literature and what literature is not literature. After all, that dentist knew what she was talking about when she said that she had read “a lot of literature.” But, if you are still in doubt, you may pay another visit to that dentist, even though--if you remember--you did lose a tooth on your last visit!





EGSA OFFICERS:

Officers Elected for 2009-2010

President—Charles C. Ferguson

Faculty Advisors

Dr. Alexander Howe
Dr. Wynn Yarbrough

Students interested in serving as EGSA officers should contact either Dr. Howe (ahowe@udc.edu) or Charles C. Ferguson (charlesnova@aol.com). All are welcome to participate.



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