

Literature Institute
Study Guide

LIT 516 Twentieth Century Literature

Instructions for the Study Guide: Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay. Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the “Readings” file.

Instructions for Essays: Please write a 1,250 – 1,500 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

Instructions for Final Essay: Please write a 5,000 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- O1. Identify and describe major Twentieth-century works of literature and their authors.
- O2. Explain the emergence of movements such as modernism, surrealism, postmodernism, and globalism, and discuss examples in literature.
- O3. Analyze the underlying ideas in modernism, and the belief that art and literature could either a) play a role in the shaping of societies; or b) show how all literature is ultimately ineffectual in shaping society.
- O4. Describe the opening of literature to sectors of society that were previously blocked or barred from having a voice, and provide examples.
- O5. Identify contradictory, conflicting ideas about human nature as expressed in Twentieth-century literature.
- O6. Discuss how technology, political change, globalism, and total war shaped works of literature in the Twentieth Century.

UNIT	WEEKS	TOPICS
I	1-3	Modernism Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) Heart of Darkness
	Overview	Colonialism and the Myth or Mystery of Africa
	Introduction	Does Conrad’s text, which vaults us into the 20 th century, carry a universal meaning? If so, what is it? If not, is the story about the particular historical situation, Colonialism, and the evils (or passions) associated with it? What is Conrad’s attitude toward that historical situation, which was so all powerful during the later 19 th and first half of the 20 th century? Was Conrad an admirer of Marlowe, who narrates the story? What about Kurtz? Was Conrad appalled by him?
	Question	Q1. These difficult questions cluster about the tale before us, and are not easily put to rest. Why? Is it that one’s response to these questions depends on one’s own ideology? Chinua Achebe, cited in our Bedford textbook, views Conrad as an outright imperialist. But the editors of the Bedford volume appear to view Conrad as a stark opponent of Colonialism. So here is another question. How is it possible for a literary work to provoke

such contrary evaluations? Widen your response to that enquiry. Have many of the texts we have read been inherently ambiguous? Does literature strive to be clear, or does it gladly put up with ambiguity? Many questions. Note the brilliance of Conrad's easy narration, the sinister quality of the heart of darkness itself, and the unique English of this novelist of Polish birth, who first learned English in his teens.

Question Theme: Evil	<p>Q2. Discuss the theme of evil in human beings in the case of Kurtz. How was Kurtz transformed from an idealistic person to an evil person? Does Conrad believe that all human beings have a primitive "dark" side of their personality to carry out evil acts if unconstrained by the civilization? How does Marlow's story about human evil affect the listeners?</p> <p>James Joyce (1882-1941) The Dead</p>
Overview	Gaiety and Weltschmerz in Upper Class Dublin
Introduction	'The Dead' relies less than Conrad's story on historical context. Joyce takes us to a traditional middle class Christmas Party in Dublin, and lets us see it/evaluate it through the eyes of Gabriel, a member of the society but a person somewhat superior and detached. We feel the festivity—as well as the overfamiliar, cliché-quality of the group gathering--and we see what that gathering means to the participants. Throughout, we feel the tinge of sadness which marks the event. (How is that touch introduced into the story? What about the tale, as it unfolds, conveys the mood of human loss and pretence?) The post-party situation is where the 'sadness' sets in fully. Gabriel wishes to make love to his wife, but finds she is thinking of a young man, now dead, who once loved her. Meanwhile the snows falls outside.
Question	<p>Q1. The memory of the dead crowd the room, and seem to fill it as does the white stillness of the snow outside. How does Joyce use descriptions of landscape and interior décor, to enforce his story's mood of sadness? Does Joyce want to make a point, or just to establish an atmosphere? Does Joyce go for universal qualities of the human situation? Does he reach them? Is sadness, as distinct from tragedy, a condition of human sensibility, and can it pervade an entire tale?</p>
Question Theme: Memory	<p>Q2. Discuss the theme of memory and past in relation to Gretta's past memory of a friend who died. How does it relate to mortality in relation to Gabriel's statement "His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead?" It isn't only the lover who is dead, but the whole society. Discuss the various symbols of death and futility, social as well as personal, in the story. Show the ways in which they anticipate Gabriel's final vision.</p> <p>Thomas Mann Death in Venice</p>
Overview	Aging and Eros at the European Beach
Introduction	Modernism is a loose term for a difficult to categorize group of early 20 th century texts. In the roughest sense these are texts—and works of painting and music—that turned away from both the Enlightenment confidence in 'reason,' and from the realistic/naturalist confidence in depicting life 'as it is.' But so far this point is entirely negative. What <i>is</i> Modernism? The three texts before us so far are all in their ways 'realistic,' but at the same time they all about art and the mind. Does that view of the matter make sense to you? 'Death in Venice' in particular fits the 'art and the mind' definition. An aged intellectual falls for a beautiful young boy whom he sees passing repeatedly on the beach outside a hotel in Venice.
Question	<p>Q1. For the observer, who is reviewing his life, and its stages, the provocation of the apparition seems to force a review of the observer's entire life, much of which has been devoted to a celebration of beauty. Do</p>

you see some emotive connection between Aschenbach, in this story, Gabriel in 'The Dead,' and even Marlowe in 'Heart of Darkness'? Are not all of these figures observers, consciousnesses surveying passing—possibly sad or even deadly—pageants of worldliness? Does this kind of literary construction seem to you of our time? Or is it outdated? Do you relate to the world-perspective of the three Modernist stories we have read so far?

Question Theme: Beauty	Q2. In <i>Death in Venice</i> , Aschenbach has fallen in love with what he can't have. His quest for beauty seems at first to be a pursuit of wisdom and dignity, but it reveals itself to be something more elusive. How does he justify his pursuit? How does it feel to have a desire for something just beyond one's reach? Is this, in fact, the modern condition? Why does the quest result in nihilistic resignation, rather than transcendence?
	T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)
Overview	Culture and Social Breakdown
Introduction	Do you see the connection between these two poems? Are they both about the impotences of our time, the fear of self-assertion, the failure of nerve when it comes to belief? (Do you agree with that account of the two works?) What lies at the root of the impotence of 'The Waste Land,' which was created in the early 1920's? Is it a question of the circumstances of the time: the disillusionment following the first World War, with its until then unparalleled brutalities? Or of the breakdown of religious faith? Or the loss of a sense of social community, as the Age of Big Business arrives to commodify human relations? Eliot was clearly sensitive to all these weak points, in the culture of his moment, and wrote in 'The Waste Land' a devastating critique which to everyone's surprise caught the attention of world readership.
Question	Q1. Have we read other texts which penetrate deeply into the weakness of their own time? (I bet you can answer this question, with examples from Petronius to Dostoyevsky, with a major waystop at <i>The Inferno</i> .) Do you think it is part of literature's role to serve as a watchdog over cultural values? Did the great ancient epic writers, Homer and Virgil, stand guard over the values of their times?
Question Experience: Alienation	Q2. Discuss the structure of the poem as it reveals Prufrock's isolation, paralysis, and indecisiveness. What images help to establish the mood? Discuss the structure of the poem as it reveals Prufrock's isolation, paralysis, and indecisiveness. What images help to establish the mood?
Essay	E1: Modern literature probes the meaning of human progress and the nature of the self and self-concept in the face of overwhelming and fragmenting forces. Please discuss the ways in which the works in this unit explore the human condition and compare and contrast their ways of depicting life and the self.

II 4-6 Surrealism

Franz Kafka (1883-1924)
"Metamorphosis"

Overview	The Helplessness of the Human in the Grips of a Meaningless Existence
Introduction	Kafka jacks up Eliot's criticism, in <i>The Waste Land</i> , to a new level. Eliot savaged the cultural ambience of European society in the early 20 th century; Kafka went for the contemporary sickness of mankind itself. When Gregor Samsa wakes, to find his physical form changed into that of a beetle, he realizes in himself the absurd vulnerability of the entire human condition. We call this kind of literary art surrealism because it keeps the real but transforms it into something beyond itself. (You may soon, with Marquez' 'Old Man' story, begin to wonder what the difference is between Surrealism and Postmodernism in literature.)

Question	Q1. Have you read any previous radical critique of the human condition? Would <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> or <i>The Underground Man</i> be such a critique? Would those works cut as deeply as Kafka does into our sense of wholeness as human beings? Would Saint Augustine have been able to understand Kafka's perception of the human condition? Do you see our human condition as adequately represented in 'Metamorphosis'?
Question Experience: Alienation	Q2. Surrealism employs the subconscious and the non-rational to cause readers to view subjects in a new way. By using exaggeration and distortion it represents reality, and even makes it grotesque in order to get at the heart of human nature and institutions. Kafka's work illustrates the Surrealist movement in literature. Describe the elements of surrealism in "Metamorphosis." Discuss the theme of isolation and alienation in the case of Gregor Samsa and compare it to the bureaucratic isolation in the modern world. How does the family react? What does the sister do after he dies? As his world becomes smaller, their becomes larger. Show how the family space and Gregor's space change and shift.
Essay	E2. Surrealism employs the subconscious and the non-rational to cause readers to view subjects in a new way. By using exaggeration and distortion it represents reality, and even makes it grotesque in order to get at the heart of human nature and institutions. Kafka's work illustrates the Surrealist movement in literature. Describe the elements of surrealism in "Metamorphosis." Discuss the theme of isolation and alienation in the case of Gregor Samsa and compare it to the bureaucratic isolation in the modern world. How does the family react? What does the sister do after he dies? As his world becomes smaller, their becomes larger. Show how the family space and Gregor's space change and shift.

III 7-9 Existentialism

Existentialism
Sartre (1905-1980)
The Flies

Overview	The Pride of the Individual Making his/her own Life
Introduction	Do you recall the issues that were central to Aeschylus' play, <i>The Eumenides</i> ? You will recall that an entire cycle of mythic tales was involved: the immediate sources were in the tales of the Trojan War. Agamemnon returned to Mycenae, after the war, bringing his concubine, Cassandra, along with him. Upon return, this hero found his wife involved with a lover, Aegisthus, and found himself killed by his vengeful son, Orestes. In the final play of the <i>Oresteia</i> , which we did not read, Orestes was exonerated, and a new reign of non-revenge justice was instituted by the Gods. Sartre builds into this legend the tale of an Orestes who kills Agamemnon, does so out of vengeance in a free act, then is left to bear proudly the consequences of his act. No final exoneration of Orestes is needed or offered. We are looking at secular vengeance freely undertaken by Orestes, in an act of independent decision. We are looking at an embodiment of the ethical principle of independent choice, which Sartre developed at length as a philosophy of existentialism.
Question	Q1. What is the nature of philosophical thought, when it is expressed in literature? How does literature deal with philosophical ideas? What other writers have we read who seem to create philosophical ideas directly into their work? Is that effort often successful? Is it successful here?
Question Theme: Freedom	Q2. Compare and contrast Orestes' and Electra's motives for their actions. Are they successful? Show the process by which their positions become reversed. Explore the implications and consequences of their actions. Albert Camus (1913-1960) The Guest
Overview	Isolation and Moral Decision in the Sahara

Introduction	Like Sartre, Camus was drawn to the philosophy of Existentialism, with its stress on freedom and intellectual choice in a godless universe in which 'man is on his own.' In the present story the schoolmaster finds his desert solitude broken into. The Arab, dragged on a rope, represents a legal challenge the schoolmaster does not wish to accept. The schoolmaster backs out of the alleged responsibility to transport the Arab to prison. It is also a tenet of Existentialism, however, that one's voluntary, and self-defining act entails consequences one has to live with. In the end, the schoolmaster has to live with a world in which his action toward the Arab has won him unexpected enemies. Like Orestes, the schoolmaster must live his choices.
Question	Q1. In case it is not apparent on the surface of the story before you, Camus (like Sartre in 'The Flies,' is writing in the context of compelling war time events in which the action of individual choice is called upon for passionate partisan purposes—in the present case, for meaningful behavior in the midst of the War of Algerian Liberation from France. How important is it, to understanding a story like 'The Guest,' to know the philosophical background to it? Do great works of literature like <i>The Iliad</i> or <i>The Inferno</i> have a 'philosophical background'? At the opposite extreme, is there a "philosophical background" behind a lyric poem?
Question Theme: Freedom	Q2. Discuss the theme of freedom of decision and action in the case of Daru and the prisoner. Is Daru any freer than the prisoner? What is the point of making him a teacher? Of putting him in an isolated setting? What are the moments of irony and absurdity?
Essay	E3: Existentialism involves the freedom of choice and taking responsibility for the consequences of one's acts. How do these works illustrate the concepts of existentialism, and deal with the problem of living with the consequences of one's freely-made choices? How do they deal with living in the modern world?

IV 10-12 Postmodernism

Jorge Luis Borges
The Garden of Forking Paths

Overview	The Unreality of Time and the Layers of Historical Meaning
Introduction	We have struggled with a definition of Modernism—to characterize various major works from the early 20 th century—and now we are dealing with the effort to do so for Postmodernism, a century later. Does this story by Borges give any hints toward the meaning of this still newish term? You will notice that the narrative line is intentionally broken, that the perspective of the narrator is constantly being diffracted by new textual information, that the very firmness of time as a foundation for narrative structure is shaky. (Am I correct that all these features display in Borges' tale?) Is it that literature is calling itself into question as an art project, even while it is being created? Would that perspective apply at all to the pieces of Mann, Conrad, or Joyce, that we considered earlier? (If you want to say <i>no</i> , could you explain yourself?)
Question	Q1. What, finally, could be the reason for the unmistakable flight from straightforward narrative, that we find in Postmodernism? Is there some meaningful reason for the questioning of the narrative? Would it be extreme to say that we live in an age when many of the dominant accounts of reality are under question?
Question Reality	Q2. Describe how Borges creates a puzzle within a puzzle, first with the attempt to break codes used in war, and then, the use of an ancient riddle. How do riddles of the past, false information, subterfuge, and spying affect one's sense of reality in "The Garden of the Forking Paths"? Explore interweaving of realism and fiction, the power of story-telling over so-called reality.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez
A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

Overview	Magic and its Demise in the World we Live In
Introduction	We turn, here, to a kind of fiction which has frequently been called 'magic realism.' Ordinary reality, like that of the filthy, stinking, parasite- covered Old Man, appears under circumstances that only the magic in things could create. (A bevy of novels, many of them South American, sprang up in the wake of this fresh perspective, which is clearly a kind, but a different kind, of Postmodernism.) What do you take to be the meaning of the present story? Is the Old Man's disappearance a sign that magic has itself disappeared from the world? Or is that not the way meaning operates—symbolically—in a work like this?
Question	Q1. Have we, by the way, read anything like this story before? What about the work of Cervantes or Swift, to return to older authors? Were they whimsical in their themes, or did they parody reality, like Moliere, in order to make specific, and rather moralistic comments on reality? What about the work of Kafka, of which you read in example, and which comes very pertinently to mind. Does 'Metamorphosis' inhabit the same kind of world as Marquez's story? Or is Kafka's tale less fanciful and magical than Marquez's, and more clearly commenting on everyday life?
Question Theme: Magical Realism	Q2. Explain how the people in "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" illustrate the conflicting feelings in the modern world between the secular and the sacred.

Milan Kundera
The Hitchhiking Game

Overview	The Exhaustion of the Erotic
Introduction	The game of sexual roles and ultimately power politics plays out in this seemingly innocent tale. Male and female push their own roles to certain limits in the conflictual/erotic game the two play, but in the end the drama results in mutual discomfort. The erotic level of the relationship is handled in a fashion that ultimately pleases no one. In the end the two partners wish to be free of the unfortunate game they have been playing, and to return to 'being themselves.' Why is this tale 'postmodern'? (Could it have been written by Mann, Conrad, or Joyce?)
Question	Q1. What is the new perspective here? Is the tale actually the embodiment of the point the tale is making? Is the point of the tale that society and its games turn emptily on themselves, and the telling of the tale itself is an example of the point the tale is making? If that makes sense—it may not—would you say that this postmodern tale is different from the kinds of stories we have been reading earlier in the class—from Petronius through "The Story of an Hour"? Is a new form of self-consciousness at play in the present story?
Question Theme: Men and Women	Q2. Discuss the effect of role playing on a person. Describe the progression of the role-playing and the effect.

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)
Krapps' Last Tape

Overview	The Bleakness of Life's Wisdom
Introduction	If Kundera's story is in some sense about itself, then even more so is <i>Krapp's Last Tape</i> . (By the way, need we remind ourselves that, since our entry into Realism and Naturalism, and perhaps since our entry into

Chaucer and Boccaccio, we have been dealing with real life u close, not just with Trojan Wars, mythological systems, and Battles among Knights. Perhaps Petronius put us on the wrong path?) An old—and very unheroic—man reviews two earlier stages of his life, while listening to tape recordings made at those earlier stages. There is much he admires in the earlier versions of himself—more virility, a stronger creative power—but at the same time he finds much to criticize in the presumptuousness and ego of his earlier birthday recordings. He also finds him self locked into the accounts he has made of himself in the past and into the comments he is making about himself now.

Question Q1. For Krapp there is no way out of the cycle his recordings of his life enclose him in. Does this story seem to you to bear on the essential dilemma of the human condition, which is frozen into itself? Does the 'technological' component of the story, the tape recordings, intensify the pathos of the human situation here? How are you affected by the narrator's ultimate ambivalence toward his past—now finding it admirable, now pathetic?

Question Theme: Absurdity Q2. What means does Beckett use to indicate that life is absurd and at the same time to create a meaningful structure in the play?

Essay E4: For postmodernists, reality is a construct, teleology is suspect, and the self / identity is multiple. Myth and magic are within the realm of possibility and envisioning, time is not linear, and the nature of perception is distorted and fragmentary. What elements of postmodernism can you see in the works discussed in this chapter?

V 13-15 **Globalism**

R. K. Narayan

Overview Comedy and Pathos on the Global Level

Introduction With the present section we come onto global issues. Do you think we have dealt with global issues before in this class? Did Homer and Virgil deal with global issues? Did the mediaeval travelers we read deal with such issues? How about the author of *The Song of Roland*? Do global issues come before us in a distinctively new form, in Narayan's story? Do the elements of comedy and farce, as well as social and verbal incomprehension, mix to form a unique blend in this story? Finally, what is your experience of global issues through this class?

Question Q1. You might pause and assess what is actually happening among/between us, you and I. Technology has made it possible for us to be together in widely different places. We are in fact meeting on the internet, an electronic gathering for all of us in this class. Are we being brought together, as the businessman and the villager were brought together in Narayan's story? Are there misunderstandings among us, other than those language imposes on all of us? Do we have the whole world of literature at our fingertips, in ways no students had, in earlier ages? Are we becoming a global family? And finally, the kicker, are we a happier human community, over the globe, than our ancestors were?

Question Theme: Multiculturalism Q2. Describe the encounter of Muni and the American Businessman. Discuss miscommunication that takes place whenever people of different backgrounds, cultures, education, and languages. Show how the confusion, sometimes comic, grows and is compounded.

Chinua Achebe
Things Fall Apart

Overview The Depredations of Colonialism and Self Inflicted Cultural Conflict

Introduction Globalism is dramatized here. Writing in a language promoted for him by

Colonialism, the English Colonialism of Nigeria, Achebe returns with that English in a subtle critique both of the colonizer and of the African tradition itself. What could better illustrate the capacity of literature to testify—to give a uniquely nuanced picture of the mind at the cross roads of different cultures? What do you think Achebe's own attitude is, finally, to the breaking up of the old world through Colonialism? Is he emphatically opposed to the Colonial heritage? It was Achebe, after all, who in a renowned speech condemned the Conrad of 'Heart of Darkness' as a bloody Colonialist. Was Achebe correct in his view of the Conrad whose story we read? Finally, what about the importance of literature itself, in opening out the global perspective?

Question Q1. As you look back on the many texts we have read, in this sequence of courses of Literature, do you feel that literature has often served the cause of human liberation, of helping people to come to terms with their traditions and their future possibilities? Is literature typically respectful of the growing process in human culture? If so, would that be a consequence of the very fact of the creative act, which is from the outset an act of assertive sharing?

Question Theme: Clash of Cultures Q2. What establishes Okonkwo as a hero in his culture? Do we see him as a hero? What is the process which leads to his tragic end?

Leopold Sedar Senghor
Negritude
Black Woman; Prayer to the Mask

Overview The Beauty and Power of Black African Culture

Introduction Chinua Achebe helps us to see the richness of the Black African cultural tradition, which is forced from within itself to grow, and from outside itself—through Colonialism—to absorb new forms of understanding and self-awareness. Leopold Senghor, who was to occupy important academic, creative, and finally administrative posts—as President of Senegal for twenty years—represents self-aware Black African culture at its most globally sophisticated. The movement of Negritude, of which Senghor was a founder, was a paradoxical expression of globalism. It brought the Black African out onto the world scene, promoted global understanding of this cultural zone, yet did so by emphasizing what was most distinctive and different about Black African culture. What do you think of the kind of poetry Senghor devotes to the virtually mythical 'Black Woman'? Or the 'Prayer to the Masks'?

Question Q1. Is Senghor getting caught up in a 'Romantic' view of Black African tradition? Is he mythologizing his own tradition? What, finally, is the role of his Black African tradition in the chorus of traditions that make up world literature? To what do you attribute the fact that Black African culture has produced relatively little classical literature before our time?

Theme Question: Negritude Q1. Senghor belonged to the francophone movement known as "la negritude," that was started in the 1920s and 30s, that aimed to incorporate the aesthetics of African tribal art in European high culture. Describe some of the contributions of authors writing as a part of this movement.

Theme Question Q2. When does Senghor's imagery evoke a sense of Africa as a metaphor and an ideal? What are some of the ideas and values embodied in the metaphor that Senghor creates?

Derek Walcott
Poems

Overview You Can't Go Home Again

Introduction We have read lyric poetry from Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and now, to

conclude, from a subtle craftsman who, though surely of global interest, is also a miniaturist of language. 'The Light of the World' is a good instance. Thematically put, the poem simply concerns the issue of 'you can't go home again.' Pure and simple. When you consider the details of texture, though, you see how finely poetry can depict a 'universal experience.' Think only of the pack of cigarettes the fellow passenger returned to Walcott at the end. The man had nothing, the people of the village had little, but they were not going to take advantage of this former islander, Walcott, who was by now a 'transient' himself, cut off from his roots.

Question Q1. Fine lyric poetry has to read with the care with which it was written. Which may, perhaps, be a fitting place to conclude these notes. Literary art is art. It embodies the main themes of the human experience, but it does so cunningly, pasting honey on the lip of instruction. How does Walcott keep you caught up in his sense of regret

Question Theme: Postcolonialism Q2. Discuss Walcott's resistance to European culture and the degree to which his work draws upon it.

Question Theme: Heritage Q3. Discuss the themes of African heritage and colonialism as they appear in Walcott's work. If you'd like you may read additional poems from Walcott at poets.org: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/220>

Essay E5: In the last part of the twentieth century, because of technological improvements, world culture became global and multi-cultural. Please discuss the ways in which these writers explore the clash between different cultures and traditions in the modern world.

VI

16

Review, Annotated Bibliography, Research Paper

Final Essay Question

Please choose one question from the selections below for your final essay.

FE1. What do you see in common among the works of the four Modernists we read? Have they similar themes or points of view? Is there conception of narration similar? Is the narrator voice similar in the works of these four writers? How does the Modernist perspective contrast with the Postmodernist?

FE2. Do you see some unifying thread among the Globalist writers we have read? Have they some points of view in common, in what we read? Is Globalism a literary movement, in the sense that Modernism claims to be, or is it something different from a literary movement? What would you call Globalism if it is not a literary movement?

FE3. Discuss the ways in which 20th century writers portray the collapse of standards of value and the ways in which they seek to compensate for or mitigate the effects of this collapse.

FE4 Explore the ways in which Modernism expressed the psychological and material conditions of people in the 20th century. Find examples in your readings and describe / discuss their forms, characterization, and generic innovation help bring about a new way of representing the world.