Benedict; English 279 Fall 2020; T/Th. 3:55-5:35

Lockdown and Escape Stories

# What does it feel like to be shuttered up for days or months or years? How do characters find a mental release from monotany and fear? This course explores literary representations of the experience of confinement--be it on an island, in a cellar, in tomb, room, cabin or castle--and the ways in which individuals escape, whether successfully or not. The course will also enable students to explain, analyze and judge literary texts, and to express their own responses in polished and persuasive prose. As well as literary analyses of the texts (and some songs), students may chose to write memoirs, narratives, poems or songs about their experiences of COVID-19 “sheltering at home.” The class will include class discussion and reading aloud via Zoom, collaborative and break-out exercizes with other students, and lectures and videos posted on Moodle.

Texts:

**1. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"**

**2. Joseph Conrad, “The Secret Sharer”**

**3. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”**

**4. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”**

**5. John Fowles, *The Collector***

**6. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Speckled Band”**

**7. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**8. Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*.**

**9. Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia***

**10. Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.**

**Assignments:**

**IF ZOOM COLLAPSES, PLEASE COMPLETE IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS POSTED ON MOODLE.**

**Please send all your assignments to me via email.**

Students are required to complete all the day’s reading with notes by the start of class, and to participate in class discussions on Zoom audio and video. Classes may be recorded to help students unable to attend class.

CLASS PROTOCOL: ARRANGE A NON-DISTRACTING AND HAPPY WORK SPACE FROM WHICH TO ATTEND CLASS by removing enticements to distraction like phones, pamphlets, food etc.

1) You will receive a Zoom invitation before each class; please be sure to accept the link in time for the start of class.

2) Please turn ON your camera and audio.

3) Please choose “Gallery View” so we can all see each other in discussion. For this reason, big screens work best, so please try to use a computer rather than a ‘phone. During video clips, we will all watch my screen and then have pauses and discussion before returning to the clip.

4) Please do not check your email or phone during class any more than you would were we in a classroom (it is distracting and discourteous); we will have breaks during class that will allow you time to do this).

1. Specific written assignments and paragraph-long responses to the day’s reading (in red on the syllabus) that students will read aloud to the class when discussion begins. These will not be individually graded, but instead will be folded into your overall participation grade: 4/10.

2. In addition, students should bring notes and thoughts about the questions on the syllabus to discuss in class. Suggested topics will be provided in class and by questions on the syllabus below: they could include analyses of passages, issues that the text raises or problems in presents, and/or related observations from other texts or events.

**3. TWO collaborative Zoom presentations of roughly 20 minutes to the class, exploring a text’s themes, characters, narrative voice or symbols. Topics will be determined by email or in the previous class. Students should work in groups of two or, if they prefer, three, and may elect to do more for extra credit. These will be folded into your overall participation grade.**

4. THREE 3-5 page literary analyses of a text from the class. These could analyze the narrator, any character, symbols or themes in the text. Specific suggestions are included on this syllabus and will be provided in class; please email them to me in a rich-text format so that I can make comments on them. Each is worth 2/10.

**Recommended further reading in the literature of lockdown and escape:**

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre;* Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow*; *The Diary of Anne Frank;* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.*

# **FURTHER COURSE INFORMATION:**

**CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** Barring exceptions, break-out sessions etc. students are expected to be present **on audio and on video for the entire class session**: except for reading aloud sessions and a few other exercises, no muting, please, and never blank out of video. Please remember that video class sessions may be recorded for students unable to attend. Also, we will not spend the entire time staring frontally at Zoom!

**LATE POLICY**: Class assignments, reading journals, and/or revisions will **NEVER** be accepted late, nor made up: you must furnish a deans note to be excused from an essay. **There are no exceptions.** Essays are due via email by the beginning of the class and will be docked 1/3 of a grade for every day they are late, starting with the due date. Thus, if you submit/email an essay rating a B after class has begun, it is already 1 day late and will receive a B-. However, if you submit it by 6:00 p.m. that same day, it will still receive a B-; the following day, it will receive a C+ and so on. **PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS LATE TO FINISH AN ESSAY** since it is already late, and your entrance disrupts class. Instead, email it to me later that same day, after class. **Note: graded essays cannot be returned until all have been submitted**, so your late essay prevents everyone else from getting back their own papers.

**GRADING:** A=excellent: insightful, original, ambitious, rhetorically elegant and persuasive, well argued, developed and proven, flawless in grammar, punctuation, spelling and usage. B=very good: thoughtful and engaging, technically flawless but a little under-developed or flawed in argumentation, organization etc. C=a fair effort, but marred by errors in the categories cited above. D=inadequate in any one or several of the above categories. F=failure. **You are STRONGLY encouraged to contact the Writing Center for help on your essays**.

**REVISIONS**: **ONLY** essays that 1) are submitted on time, and 2) receive a failing grade (D+ or lower) are eligible for revision. Students must meet with the Professor to determine whether revision is appropriate, and if so must submit it *with the original essay* by the final day of class.

**OFFICE HOURS**: **By appointment only**. Please email me to set up an appointment, via Zoom, email or telephone.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**: students requiring special accommodations should provide the Professor with a letter or email copied to Ms. Lori Clapis (Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu).

**GENDER PRONOUN PREFERENCE**: Please inform the Professor of your preferred gender pronoun; mine is she/her.

**SYLLABUS (subject to change as circumstances dictate):**

**Week One: Tues. Sept 8: Introduction; discussion of lockdown, class requirements, procedures and expectations. Also, e.e.cummings, “since feeling is first,” Jusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It,” and John Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which we will discuss in class.**

**Thurs. Sept 10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”**

**Response Prompts: what does the house suggest or symbolize? Why does Gilman make the wallpaper yellow? Why does Gilman make John a physician? What kinds of confinement appear? Does the narrator escape at the end? Please \*1) choose a symbol from the story EXCEPT THE WALLPAPER ITSELF, and be prepared to explain it to the class.**

**Week Two: Tues. Sept 15: John Fowles, *The Collector*, Part I. Please \*1) read the brief Introduction on Moodle, and \*2) choose a significant passage and be prepared to read it and explain it to the class.**

**Response Prompts: What, if anything, is wrong with Clegg? Why does Fowles make him a “collector” and what is the significance of what he collects? What does Miranda represent to him? Does Miranda use the right ways to escape? What is the significance of G.P. (why is he in the book at all)? Why don’t Clegg and Miranda agree on which are her best paintings? Is Clegg confined in any way?**

**Thurs. Sept 17: *The Collector*, Part II. Please \*1) choose a significant passage and be prepared to read it and explain it to the class and contrast/compare it with a similar passage by Clegg.**

**Response Prompts: What do we learn about Miranda—her problems, desires, experiences, weaknesses? Do you like her? Why/not? Does she make any mistakes? Does she change?**

**Week Three: Tues. 22: finish *The Collector*; also Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Break-out sessions to prepare a defense of Clegg or of Roderick Usher (if you can!) to present to the class.**

**Response Prompts: What does Clegg feel at the end about Miranda? Has he changed? Does Miranda escape? Does Clegg? What is the significance of the initial description of scenery in “The Fall of the House of Usher”? What is the significance of the building itself? What ails Roderick Usher? Do you trust the narrator? Why/not?**

**Thurs. Sept 24: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart;” also Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Speckled Band.”**

**Response Prompts: who seems confined and by what in either story? In what ways are the two stories similar? How does the point of view affect the narrative? How does each story represent passion, madness and dispassionateness? Is Holmes a “hero” and why and how or not?**

**Week Four: Tues. Sept 29: Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*, Part I. \*1) please read the brief Introduction on Moodle, and \*2) prepare a contrast/comparison to share with the class of your own shutdown/lockdown experiences and that of Leggatt. Break-out sessions on your essays. \*3) Also come prepared to explain your essay topic, thesis and evidence to the class: break-out sessions on writing.**

**Response Prompts: What characterizes the narrator? How does he feel, act and think? Is he reliable, paranoid, insane, sensitive, a good captain? Is he awake or dreaming? How does he feel about Leggatt and why? Is the narrator confined in any way? what significant details of description or symbols do you see, and why are they important to the story? How does lockdown affect Leggatt? Did he commit murder or was it an accident? What is the narrator’s relationship with his ship?**

**Thurs. Oct. 1: finish *The Secret Sharer*; Response Prompts: what does the hat symbolize or represent? What is the significance of judgement in the story? Why (symbolically) do both the narrator and Leggatt wear sleeping-suits? Does the narrator do the right thing in hiding and protecting him? Is he right to risk the ship by shaving the shore? Does the journey have a symbolic meaning? What does the narrator “understand” about Leggatt and his situation? Does the narrator come to understand anything else by the end? Does Leggatt truly escape? Also \*First essays due. Please write 3-5 pages on any one of these suggested topics (or invent your own but please clear it first me):**

**\* How do “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *The Collector* depict women in confinement?**

**\* What part does gender play in these stories of confinement?**

**\*Does either woman “escape”, and if so in what way? Do their escapes resemble and/or differ from each other?**

**\* In what ways is Roderick Usher and/or Clegg confined? How do their confinements resemble/differ from each other?**

**Week Five: Tues. Oct 6: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Acts I and II; \*1) choose a minor character and prepare an analysis of him with appropriate quotations to present to the class (we will also have break-out discussions to refine these analyses in pairs).**

**Response Prompts: what is the significance of the first scene? The storm? The Island? How would you characterize Prospero—does he have virtues, flaws, unique traits? Has his confinement on the Island affected him? Is he, or had he been, confined in any other ways? What characteristics define Miranda, and how does she resemble or differ from the other characters? Do you consider Caliban a monster, a slave, a villain or a victim? How is he like or different from Ariel? Break-out sessions on individual characters.**

**Thurs. Oct 8: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Acts II and IV; also \*1) choose a specific speech to analyze and present to the class: you may choose one you don’t entirely understand and include questions, if you like, and you may work in pairs if you prefer.**

**Response Prompts: what is the significance of the chess scene? What is the function of the masque (the supernatural celebration)? What do the illusions Ariel presents to the various characters symbolize? What is the significance of the magical glittering clothes Trinculo and Stephano find? How does Caliban’s character emerge or change in these two Acts?**

**.**

**Week Six: Tues. Oct. 13: *The Tempest*, Act V; also read Daniel Defoe, *The Journal of the Plague Year* to the paragraph after the italicized Psalm, beginning “With this Resolution” (about the first 15 pages). Also read \*1) the brief Introduction on Moodle; also \*2) Barbara M. Benedict, “Memories and Memorials: Genres of Fact in Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year*,” posted on Moodle, and \*3) prepare a page-long summary of this essay to read to class.**

**Response Prompts: Do you think Prospero will be a good ruler when he returns to Milan? Has he learned anything on the Island? What will happen to Caliban? What is the function of the Epilogue? How would you characterize the narrator of the *Journal*, H. F.? is he reliable, good, foolish, odd? does anything strike you as unusual about the way this novel is written?**

**Thurs. Oct. 15: Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*: first third to the paragraph beginning, “But the Prudence of my Lord Mayor.” Also \*1) please select a specific incident or passage to analyze and present to the class, and \*2) please jot down the ways in which the book expresses your own reactions to the coronavirus to share with the class.**

**Response Prompts: are you finding the *Journal* realistic? Plausible? What techniques does Defoe use to make it seem like a true record of remembered experiences? Have you encountered or heard of any parallel experiences to those H.F. records? How does the response of the people in London to the plague compare to our reaction to the coronavirus epidemic?**

**Week Seven: Tues. Oct. 20: Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*: second third to the paragraph beginning, “It may be proper to ask here, how long it may be supposed.” Also \*1) please select a specific incident or passage to analyze and present to the class, explaining also why you chose it.**

**Response Prompts: does H.F. learn anything about himself, human nature, or the epidemiology of the plague by the book’s end? Did he make any mistakes in the course of the novel? How does Defoe depict the effects of confinement, the plague and the recovery? Also \*1) please bring your tentative thesis statement for the next essay and be prepared to discuss it.**

**Thurs. Oct. 22: finish *Journal of the Plague Year*. Also \*1) Please bring your completed first paragraph from your essay to discuss with the class.**

**Response Prompts: does H.F. learn anything about himself, human nature, or the epidemiology of the plague by the book’s end? Did he make any mistakes in the course of the novel? How does Defoe depict the effects of confinement, the plague and the recovery? Also \* Second essays due. Please write 3-5 pages on any one of these suggested topics (or invent your own but please clear it first with the Professor):**

**\*Write your own memoir of your lockdown experiences with reference to specific passages or incidents in Defoe’s *Journal*: what will you always remember? What wise choices and/or mistakes did you make? What did you miss? What did you feel and did your feelings change as the months passed? Did you hear any apocryphal tales of stricken or escaping people? Did you learn newly to value or discard certain preconceptions, ideas, beliefs, people, things? Did you feel as H.F. does in the end?**

**\* Discuss the role of religion and superstition in Defoe’s *Journal*. What does H.F. believe? What kinds of belief appear in the novel? How does religion or superstition affect the people—does it help or harm them or both? What is Defoe saying about God, religion, belief, if anything?**

**\* Write an analysis of the themes of rulership and liberty in *The Tempest*. What is the line between freedom and chaos? What makes a good ruler? What causes usurpation? What is Shakespeare saying about the role of hierarchy in society?**

**\* Write an analysis of the relationship between the narrator and Leggatt in *The Secret Sharer*. How are they similar, different, both? Does either escape his confinement at the end—how/not?**

**\* Write an essay on the depiction of confinement in any one, two or three texts from the class that you have read so far but NOT written on your first essay. What different kinds of confinement are there? Are some worse than others? Are any of them liberating in any way?**

**Week Eight: Tues. Oct 27: Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, chapters 1-26, and also the lecture posted on Moodle. Please \*1) read the brief Introduction on Moodle; and \*2) choose one chapter to analyze and present to the class, explaining what it means and why you chose it, and \*3) write a paragraph on what confinement means in the story.**

**Response Prompts: Is this book an allegory, and if so, of what? What does the happy valley represent? Why is Rasselas discontented there, and why does it take him so long to escape? Why is the story set in a fictionalized East? Do you find Imlac a reliable guide? What are his characteristics? What is the role or function of a poet in society? What gender differences do you see in the book?**

**Thurs. Oct. 29: finish *Rasselas.* Please \*1) write a paragraph explaining the significance of the pyramids to present to the class.**

**Response Prompts: what does “The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded” tell us about the story, life, human nature? Does Nekayah escape and from what? Does Imlac or Rasselas or Pekuah? What is really confining people?**

**Week Nine: Tues. Nov. 3: Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, chapters 1-5. Please \*1) identify three important objects and explain their symbolic significance. Break-out sessions to analyze a minor character to present to the class: what is his/her vices, strengths, characteristics, nature?**

**Response Prompts: what is the significance of the setting? why does Merricat hide things? What is the significance of the names in the story? Why do the villagers hate the Blackwoods? What characterizes the villagers? What themes do you find in the story? Why does Merricat resist Constance’s desire to go outside?**

**Thurs. Nov. 5: finish *We Have Always Lived in the Castle.***

**Response Prompts: why do Merricat and Constance laugh at the end? Why do the villagers leave them food? Are they confined at the end or do they escape?**

**Week Ten: Tues. Nov. 10: poems and songs TBA.**

**Final essays due. Please write 3-5 pages on any one of these suggested topics (or invent your own but please clear it first with the Professor):**

**\* Compare/contrast confinement in *Rasselas* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle.* Who is confined, by what, is it the same kind of confinement, different or both, and in what ways? Does anyone in the two stories escape? What are the two authors saying about human nature, desire and fate?**

**\* What role does gender play in *Rasselas* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*? Are the gender roles conventional or significant or not, and how? Does gender have anything to do with confinement?**

***\** Write a thorough analysis of any pair of central characters from *Rasselas* or *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*: what characterizes them, how are they alike or different, why are they significant to the story? How do they express the author’s ideas?**

**\* Write an essay on the theme of escape using any two or three texts from the class that you have NOT previously written about in earlier essays. What kinds of escape are there? Are there problems with escaping? Is escape the same as release?**

**Thurs. Nov. 12: final day of class. General celebration.**