



Instructor: **Benjamin Torbert**, Associate Professor of English, University of Missouri-Saint Louis  
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**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** This course will acquaint students with as much operatic repertory as is feasible in a semester, presented thematically, rather than strictly chronologically in the fashion of a “coverage” survey, as *American Literature After 1865*, say, is often taught. The principle objective is to expose students to the art form broadly and to foster enjoyment of it.

Students will engage with the works presented and produce a seminar paper demanding close reading and analysis. The instructor will historically contextualize major movements in opera, and the works presented, but these considerations will not, primarily, structure the course. While we will discuss vocal categorization/*fach*, a bit of music theory, &c, the course does not address vocal production or the niceties of performance practice, for which you already have great resources at UMSL.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** As in all classes at UMSL, students must adhere to University policies about cheating and plagiarism—see [http://umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student\\_planner/policies/conductcode.htm](http://umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/conductcode.htm)

**CIVILITY:** UMSL lists university policies about our shared responsibilities as teachers and as students for creating a positive environment for learning. Our classroom must be an intellectually safe space. Please be judicious about using your cell phones during class. We also need you to display respect for your fellow students. See [http://www.umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student\\_planner/policies/positive.htm](http://www.umsl.edu/studentlife/dsa/student_planner/policies/positive.htm).

**ACCESS/DISABILITY:** Students who have special needs must meet with the campus access office in MSC 144. If you require special accommodations, please meet with me to discuss accessibility of disability needs.

**EARLY ALERT:** UMSL uses an early alert system to notify students who are struggling academically.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** In addition to class participation, the grade will be based on (a) weekly, short (~400 word) reading responses, for which I’ll give you a short battery of prompts, (b) a shorter (~1000-1250 word) midterm paper in response to one live performance at Winter Opera St Louis (due 14 March), (c) a 200-word abstract setting up the final paper (due 11 April), and (d) a seminar paper (~10-12 pages) on a relevant topic of your choosing (due TBA during finals week). **\*\*The weekly responses are due at Noon on Tuesdays.\*\***

**READING & VIEWING ASSIGNMENTS:** Reading assignments are listed on the syllabus. The reading/viewing assignment should be completed by the day on which the assignment appears on the syllabus. In other words, have it read or seen before the class period in which we are discussing it. As most of the opera you will see/hear will be on video, I’m running this like a film course, which is to say, the viewing assignment is primary, and the reading assignments will be lighter than they would in, say, a course on literature. For each opera I will supply the libretto, with English translation if necessary, but most of the opera we will consume will be on video and thus subtitled.

Additional, short articles will be assigned throughout the semester; these will be three- and four page scholarly-but-popular articles from *Opera News*, mostly.

Winter Opera Saint Louis holds “student nights,” on which \$10 (!) gets you some pizza and a ticket. They are performing Bizet’s *The Pearlfishers* on 26 January and Donizetti’s *The Elixir of Love* on 9 March. I’ll have a sign-up sheet, with, ideally, about half of you attending one performance and one attending the other. We’ll meet at the venue approximately 30 minutes prior to curtain, to present student IDs to the box office. Your midterms paper will be a response to the performance you see then.

TEXTS TO PURCHASE:

The “textbook” for the course will be that, for these four months, you must subscribe to Metropolitan Opera On Demand (<http://www.metopera.org/Season/On-Demand/>), which costs \$15/month. This will allow you to stream nearly all the works we cover. I will circulate some other operas via the Faculty Resource Center. I’ve also put in a book order for four books. In chronological order,

Lee, M. Owen. *The Operagoer’s Guide: One Hundred Stories and Commentaries*. (2001) ISBN 9781574670653

Lee, M Owen. *First Intermissions*. (2004) ISBN 9780879109707

Berger, William. *Puccini Without Excuses*. (2005) ISBN 9781400077786

Rutherford, Susan. *Verdi, Opera, Women*. (2013) ISBN 9781107043824

I will distribute other readings in a fair-use fashion on Canvas. If there’s something additional to read that isn’t listed on this syllabus, I’ll make sure you have it six days in advance, and that it’s short. I may revise the schedule due to the needs of guest speakers, but you’ll always know, at a given time, what’s going on next week.

W 1/17	Introductions	<i>La bohème</i> , (Puccini), “Che gelida manina”...end act I <i>La bohème</i> act III <i>The Rabbit of Seville</i> (Chuck Jones) <i>What’s Opera, Doc</i>
W 1/24	Dramatic Momentum I	<i>Rigoletto</i> (Verdi) essay by William Berger
W 1/31	Dramatic Momentum II	<i>Tosca</i> (Puccini) Essay by Father Lee
W 2/7	Community	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i> (Puccini) Essay by William Berger Guest Talk, William Berger, Metropolitan Opera
W 2/14	Operatic Shaxperimentation I	<i>Roméo et Juliette</i> (Gounod)
W 2/21	Operatic Shaxperimentation II	<i>Macbeth</i> (Verdi), acts III & IV <i>Otello</i> (Verdi), acts III & IV Guest talk, Dr Kurt Schreyer (possibly previous week)
W 2/28	Fractured Fairy Tales	<i>L’amour de loin</i> (Saariaho) <i>Rusalka</i> (Dvorak)
W 3/7	Greek Tragedy	<i>Idomeneo</i> (Mozart), acts II & III <i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i> , acts III & IV
W 3/14	Women’s Agency I	<i>Norma</i> (Bellini), act II <i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i> (Poulenc) act III Excerpts from Clement, <i>Opera, or the Undoing of Women</i>

W 3/21	Women's Agency II	<i>Fidelio</i> (Beethoven), act II <i>Rodelinda</i> (Handel), substantial excerpts TBA readings from Rutherford, <i>Verdi, Opera, Women</i>
W 4/4	Losing your Family	<i>Die Walküre</i> (Wagner) Essay by M Owen Lee
W 4/11	The Individual & Society	<i>Peter Grimes</i> (Britten)
W 4/18	African American Opera	<i>Champion</i> (Blanchard), excerpts <i>Treemonisha</i> (Joplin) Act I <i>X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X</i> (Davis), audio Discussion of performers of color in opera
W 4/25	Social Justice	<i>Satyagraha</i> (Glass)
W 5/2	Comedy is Hard	<i>Les contes d'Hoffmann</i> (Offenbach), prelude/act I <i>Der Rosenkavalier</i> (R Strauss), act III Guest talk, Dr Stella Markou, UMSL Director of Vocal Studies