

Introduction to the Study of Literature

<http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/english-101-2017>

Moacir P. de Sá Pereira

blah@blah.com

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MW 15:30–16:45

Office hours: 244 Greene, 506, T 15:00–16:30

1 Course description

Designed for English majors and minors, this course examines three intertwined questions: What is literature? Why do we read it? and How do we read it? As we will see, any attempt to answer these three questions will take us through various historical, spatial, political, and cultural fields. More precisely, the course will follow a path of engaging with primarily American, English-language aesthetic objects (poems, plays, novels, short stories, essays—while also incorporating films and other, “newer” technologies of aesthetic production) alongside a wider scholarly apparatus that has tried to codify, restrict, (de)politicize, champion, demystify, appropriate, critique, quantify, or simply complicate those objects. In so doing, we will see how the study of literature has several histories, geographies, and politics in its relationship with various cultures.

2 Goals of the course

- to introduce you to
 - the history of literature as an object of study;
 - tools and resources provided by the university for literary study;
- to develop skills in
 - reading literary texts carefully and analytically;
 - summarizing and presenting analytical texts in class;
 - writing short analytical essays about literary texts;
 - revising writing;
 - writing analyses that are cogent and syncretic, making use of the various methods on hand; and
- to develop, refine, and present scholarship that exists, spatially and temporally, beyond the boundaries of the course.

3 Books

- Coovadia, Imraan. *Green-Eyed Thieves* (2011)
- Johnson, James Wheldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1927)

- Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1440)
- Morraga, Cherrié. *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983)
- Patel, Shailja. *Migritude* (2010)
- Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (2004)
- Roy, Arundhati. *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014)
- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest* (c. 1611) (Arden edition)

4 Course requirements & policies

4.1 Assessment

Plenary sessions

English 101 features four plenary sessions led by four faculty members in the English department. With these sessions, the faculty will give you the opportunity to be exposed both to the diverse set of interests that occupy our department as well as the diverse faculty itself. Each faculty member will be presenting on work that we will have read in class. The plenaries are scheduled for Thursdays and Fridays, as noted below.

Participation

20% The success of any course is directly related to the levels of engagement brought both by the instructor and the students. As such, class participation is vitally important. Similarly, though attendance is logically required for class participation, it is not sufficient. This class requires active participation both inside the classroom and outside. No “passive consumers,” as a professor of mine put it.

You can miss up to three meetings without penalty, and you can use these opportunities tactically, to provide space and time to either fulfill other obligations or recuperate from the previous night. I don't care why you didn't come. I start to care with the fourth absence, and I start to require documentation. Repeated unexcused absence quickly gobbles up the class participation component of the grade and begins to threaten your ability to even *pass* the course.

Plenaries *cannot be missed*.

Because this course is discussion-oriented, active participation means, most importantly, participating in the discussions in class. But useful and engaged participation in discussions also depends on good preparation, which includes doing the reading for the course. I encourage (but will not collect) you to think of one or two points of entry into a discussion of a text for each meeting. This could be a point of confusion (don't be shy!), a point of comparison/contrast between passages to another work, or a useful parallel to something outside the coursework. Come to class with questions, in other words, and writing them out as mini-prompts may be especially helpful.

First essay

15% The first essay will be in response to a prompt. It should be 900–1200 words long.

Second essay

10% The second essay features a reading of a passage from a work we have read for class. You should show the passage's importance to the text as a whole. This essay should also be 900–1200 words long.

Second essay rewrite

10% The rewrite of the second essay is an opportunity to build upon the second essay by incorporating some of the additional texts you have been exposed to in the presentations. This rewrite should be 1200–1500 words long.

Presentation

20% Throughout the semester, secondary texts have been paired with with primary reading for that day. Once during the semester, you will have to choose a secondary text and present on it. The presentation should be 10–15 minutes long. It should provide context for the secondary text itself, a summary of the secondary text, and close with suggestions towards how the secondary text enhances our understanding of that day's primary text. The presentation will be accompanied by a short document laying out the same information as the presentation did.

Final essay

25% The final essay is a critical work on one of the primary texts we have read. It should build on the reading techniques from the first two essays as well as make use of one of the secondary texts from the course. Additionally, it should include some added research, aided by the skills learned at the library.

4.2 Policies

Assignments

The assignment instructions, though detailed in the syllabus, may be enhanced or supplemented during the course. If you have any questions about an assignment, you should ask for clarification early. The assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus.

All of the writing can be submitted electronically.

Late assignments jeopardize both your and my rhythms in the class, so they will be penalized. I will give you feedback and will happily discuss any work with you, but grades should be considered final.

Attendance

As indicated above, attendance is required. Three absences will be excused without supplemental documentation, and I encourage you to use these tactically. Catching up is your responsibility.

Subsequent absence requires formal documentation. Otherwise it begins to harm your final grade. Though class participation is only part of the final grade, extreme absenteeism (more than six meetings missed) will put your ability to pass the course at risk.

Please show up on time to class, as well.

Electronics

Our time in class is meant as a sanctuary from the distractions of the rest of the world. Additionally, our class relies on discussion and engagement, and the front of a laptop screen is a brilliant shield behind which a student can hide, even unintentionally. During our meetings, then, there can be no use of electronic devices. Please also set whatever devices you have but aren't using to silent mode.

Communication

Communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process, and this course depends on clear communication in both directions. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, the best course of action is to come visit me during my office hours as noted at the top of this page. If your questions, etc., cannot wait until then, then clearly you can also email me. I should respond within 48 hours, but please write again if I do not.

This is a new course, meaning that there will be even more unfinished edges ready to scratch someone than in a typical course. We have a collective goal of learning, however, so if the unfinished edges get to be overwhelming, I'll adjust the parameters of the course appropriately. I'm not out to catch you, nor is this course a process of grotesque punishment. Please don't treat it as such.

Once more, with feeling: *communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process*. If you have concerns or worries, please let me know about them sooner rather than later.

Disabilities

If you have a disability, you should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. Please inform me *at the beginning of the semester* if you need any special accommodations regarding the assignments.

Academic integrity

Please look at NYU's full statement on academic integrity¹. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in an F and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. Remember that plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intention. Know what it is, and don't do it.

Syllabus

This syllabus is available at <http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/english-101-2017>. A pdf version is available at <http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/english-101-2017/syllabus.pdf>. The source code and documentation for this document is available at <http://github.com/muziejus/english-101-2017>. The syllabus is © 2016, Moacir P. de Sá Pereira. It is licensed as Creative Commons 3.0 by-nc-sa, giving you permission to share and alter it in any way, as long as it is for non-commercial purposes, maintains the license, and gives proper attribution. Further information regarding the license, the history of the document, and influences can be viewed at the Github repository.

¹<http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>

5 Schedule

Readings that are not the four books listed above will be available on reserve or by other means. See the list of references at the end for details.

5.1 1. That Old *Gatsby*, That Critique *Gatsby*

In the first section of this course, we'll be returning to a familiar, canonical work of American 20th century literature, *The Great Gatsby*. Next, we will follow our own reading of the novel with a look at the novel's critical history.

- Monday, 5 Sep: No Class.
- Wednesday, 7 Sep: Introductions and a snippet from Massumi's "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy."
- Monday, 12 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,
- Wednesday, 14 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,
- Monday, 19 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,
- Wednesday, 21 Sep: (Critical presentations begin), Tredell, intro & ch. 1.
- Monday, 26 Sep: Tredell, chs. 2 & 3.
- Wednesday, 28 Sep: Tredell, chs. 4 & 5.

5.2 2. A Theoretical Break

Next, we take a short break to learn about the stresses offered by these more critique-driven forms of reading.

- Monday, 3 Oct: Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature" and Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern."
- Wednesday, 5 Oct: Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You" and selections from Felski, *The Limits of Critique*.

5.3 3. The New *Gatsby*, The Digital *Gatsby*

These five weeks serve as an opportunity to learn new methods of literary criticism, now based in digital tools. We will learn how to use Voyant to quickly see patterns in the text of *The Great Gatsby*, Python to analyze the text within a high-level statistical programming environment, and, finally, NYWalker and Carto to learn how to make maps to analyse the geographical space of *The Great Gatsby*.

- Monday, 10 Oct: *No Class*.*
- Monday, 17 Oct: Introduction to Python
- Wednesday, 19 Oct: (Digital presentations begin), Python and *The Great Gatsby*
- Monday, 24 Oct: Python and *The Great Gatsby*
- Wednesday, 26 Oct: Python and *The Great Gatsby*
- Monday, 31 Oct: NYWalker and *The Great Gatsby*
- Wednesday, 2 Nov: Carto and *The Great Gatsby*
- Monday, 7 Nov: Carto and *The Great Gatsby*
- Wednesday, 9 Nov: Election Day debriefing
- Monday, 14 Nov: Carto and *The Great Gatsby*

5.4 4. The New Novels, The New Systems

The semester closes with reading two new(er) novels that invite a systematic, totalized reading. We close with student presentations on their final projects.

- Wednesday, 16 Nov: Novel presentations begin, Pynchon, chs. 1–3.
- Monday, 21 Nov: Pynchon, chs. 4 & 5.
- Wednesday, 23 Nov: No Class.
- Monday, 28 Nov: Pynchon, ch. 6.
- Wednesday, 30 Nov: Spiotta, pts. 1 & 2.
- Monday, 5 Dec: Spiotta, pts. 3 & 4.
- Wednesday, 7 Dec: Spiotta, pts. 5–7.
- Monday, 12 Dec: Spiotta, pts. 8 & 9.
- Wednesday, 14 Dec: Final presentations

6 Calendar

Week	Monday	Wednesday
1. 5.9, 7.9	No class	Introductions, Massumi
2. 12.9, 14.9	Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald
3. 15.3, 17.3	Spring Break	
4. 20.3, 22.3	Unit 2	electric boogaloo