

Introduction to the Study of Literature

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

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R, 9:30–12:15

Office hours: 244 Greene, 506, T 13:30–16:30

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) alongside a wider scholarly apparatus that has tried to codify, restrict, 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.

Goals of the course

- to make you better readers and writers by
 - introducing you to
 - * the history of literature as an object of study;
 - developing your skills in
 - * reading literary texts carefully and analytically;
 - * summarizing and presenting analytical texts in class;
 - * engaging with opinions in academic writing;
 - * writing short analytical essays about literary texts;
 - * revising writing; and
 - * writing analyses that are cogent and syncretic, making use of the various methods on hand.

Books

- Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2015)
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot* (1949)
- Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower* (1994)
- Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990)

- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Petals of Blood* (1977)
- Pietri, Pedro. *Selected Poetry* (2015)
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet* (c. 1601) [optional]
- Stoppard, Tom. *Arcadia* (1994)
- ———. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966)

Course requirements & policies

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

10% 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.

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*.

In a discussion-oriented class, "active participation" involves the following components. All of these are necessary to receive maximum points for participation:

- being in class on time,
- arriving having done the reading for that day,
- participating in short writing assignments in class,
- participating in class discussion in ways that build upon contributions from others, and
- refraining from the use of electronic devices.

Reading journal

15% For each class meeting, you will be required to email me the latest entry in your reading journal a half hour ahead of time (at the latest). A reading journal provides you with the opportunity to jot down both your thoughts regarding that meeting's reading and points of entry to the text that will help kickstart class participation with questions about specific passages. The journals can be written as emails and should be around 400–600 words in length. These are experimental moments for you, so do not hesitate to take risks in your interpretations. That said, they should be written clearly. Additionally, this is a moment to use Baldick's dictionary of literary terms to expand your critical vocabulary by using the headwords I provide for each class. Read the entries and see how they relate to the meeting's readings.

First essay

15% The first essay will be in response to a prompt. It should be 900–1200 words long. It will be emailed to me by 23:59 on Tuesday, 21 Oct. You will all read each other's papers, and we will spend part of class on the 23rd critiquing each other's work. Revisions will be due at 23:59 the following Tuesday. The grade will depend on the coherence and originality of your argument, as well as your participation and response during the critique. As with all the papers, your work should be your own and not merely a reproduction of our discussions in class.

Second essay

20% The second essay depends on the genre you choose to write about. If you are writing about poetry, choose a few poems and demonstrate a link between them. If you are writing about prose, choose a passage (about a page or less), and demonstrate its importance to the text as a whole. This essay should also be 900–1200 words long. As with the previous essay, it should be emailed by 23:59 on Tuesday, 25 Nov. Again, we will critique each other's work in class on the 27th, and then revisions will be due the following Tuesday.

Presentation

15% At some point in the semester, you will present secondary material of your choice regarding the text we are reading for that day. The secondary material should be contemporaneous with the original text, so book reviews in magazines and the like are the best fit. The presentation should be up to five minutes long. For guidelines on giving a good presentation, see my webpage on presentation tips¹.

Final essay

25% The final essay is a critical work on one of the texts we have read. It should build on the reading techniques from the first two essays, arguing a larger point. You cannot write about a text you have already written about. A short précis of the essay (up to 600 words) is due by 23:59 on 9 Dec. It should model the essay in miniature—a prose outline, illustrating the essay's structure, context, and argument. We will discuss the précis in class. The final version of the essay should be 1700–2000 words long. I am looking for the same things as above, but also expect a richer critical vocabulary as you investigate your topic of choice.

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.

The writing can be submitted electronically. For paper printouts, I prefer 2up (two pages per sheet), two-sided printing. Documents should be formatted sanely: 12pt type and double-spaced. Please include your word count at the top of the document, along with your name.

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.

¹<http://moacir.com/courses/presentation-tips/>

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 document. 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 integrity². 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 the course webpage³. A pdf version is also available⁴. The source code and documentation for this document is available at its Github repository⁵. The syllabus is ©2017, Moacir P. de Sá Pereira. It is licensed as Creative Commons 4.0 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.

²<http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>

³<http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/english-101-2017a>

⁴<http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/english-101-2017a/syllabus.pdf>

⁵<http://github.com/muziejus/english-101-2017a>

Schedule

Required readings indicated with quotation marks (“”) will be available as pdfs. *They should be printed out for use in class.* Headwords to read and help you with writing your journal entries from Baldick’s dictionary of literary terms follow each meeting’s readings in monospace.

The list of references at the end of the pdf version of the syllabus provides bibliographic details for all the texts for the course.

1. Investigations

Studying literature is often compared to being a detective, so we begin with thinking about how detection is used in literature, as well.

- Thursday, 7 Sep: Introductions, D. A. Miller, “The Novel and the Police.”
- Thursday, 14 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, part 1. Analepsis & Prolepsis, Defamiliarization, Fabula & Sjužet, Historical novel, Négritude, Novel, Postcolonial Literature
- Thursday, 21 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, parts 2 & 3. Allegory, Criticism, Dialogic, Discours & Histoire, Heteroglossia
- Thursday, 28 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, part 4. Cultural materialism, Marxist criticism, Realism, Weltliteratur
- Thursday, 5 Oct: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter”; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Reparative Reading”; Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, through ch. 3. Detective fiction, Gothic Novel, Psychoanalytic criticism, Sociology of Literature, Symbolic
- Thursday, 12 Oct: Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, through ch. 20. Diegesis & Exegesis, Form, Formalism, Hard-boiled, Noir, Plot, Stock character, Type
- Thursday, 19 Oct: Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, to end; Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”; Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, “Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story”; Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”. Distant reading, Ficelle, Literariness, Russian Formalism, Textual criticism, Unreliable narrator

2. New York City

Next, we narrow our focus to how literature handles space, in this case the city in which we live.

- Thursday, 23 Oct: Colson Whitehead, “City Limits”; Joan Didion, “Farewell to the Enchanted City”; Edith Wharton, “After Holbein.” Allusion, Autotelic, Hermeneutics, Historicism, Leitmotiv, New Journalism, Short story
- Thursday, 2 Nov: Mary McCarthy, “Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man”; Claude McKay, “The Tropics in New York,” “Harlem Runs Wild”; Lola Ridge, “Manhattan,” “Brooklyn Bridge,” “Flotsam,” “Bowery Afternoon.” Avant-garde, Carnivalization, Harlem Renaissance, Metaphor & Metonymy, Modernism, Naturalism, New York Intellectuals, Sublime, Synecdoche
- Thursday, 6 Nov: Pedro Pietri, *Selected Poetry*; Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York*. Close reading, Epic, Lisible & Scriptible, Lyric, Poetics, Poetry, Proletcult

3. Genre and Multiple Worlds

We close the semester thinking about the contract between author and reader that is genre, as well as the worlds created by the authors.

- Thursday, 13 Nov: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, through ch. 12. Alterity, Dystopia, Ecocriticism, Intertextuality, Narrator, Narratology, Science-Fiction, Speech Act Theory
- Thursday, 27 Nov: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, to end; Lauren Berlant, "Introduction: Affect in the Present." Affective, Feminist criticism, Genre, New Historicism, Polysemy, Queer Theory
- Thursday, 4 Dec: Aristotle, *Poetics* through part II; Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.1 (and rest as necessary). Absurd, Catharsis, Mimesis, New criticism, Pathos, Synchronic & Diachronic, Tragedy
- Thursday, 11 Dec: Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia*. Arcadia, Idyll, Irony, Metafiction, Satire, Textuality
- Thursday, 18 Dec: **Final Essay Due**

References

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- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. 1949. Grove Press, 2011.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Introduction: Affect in the Present." In *Cruel Optimism*, 1–21. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000.
- Colón, Jesús. *A Puerto Rican in New York, and Other Sketches*. New York: Intl Pub, 1982.
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- . "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." *The Strand Magazine*, February 1892, 142–157.
- McCarthy, Mary. "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man." In *The Company She Keeps*, 165–246. 1942. Mariner Books, 2003.
- McKay, Claude. "Harlem Runs Wild." *The Nation*, April 3, 1935, 383–384.
- . "The Tropics in New York." In *Complete Poems*, edited by William J. Maxwell, 154. 1945. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Miller, D. A. "The Novel and the Police." In *The Novel and the Police*, 1–32. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Moretti, Franco. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." In *Distant Reading*, 63–90. London: Verso, 2013.
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- Poe, Edgar Allen. "The Purloined Letter." In *The Gift: A Christmas, New Year, and Birthday Present*, 41–61. Philadelphia: Carey / Hart, 1845.
- Ridge, Lola. "Bowery Afternoon." In *The Ghetto*, 38.
- . "Flotsam." In *The Ghetto*, 33–35.
- . "Manhattan." In *The Ghetto*, 29–30.
- . *The Ghetto and Other Poems*. New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1918.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–152. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Revised ed., edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. Arden 3rd Series. c. 1601. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Shklovsky, Viktor Borisovich. "Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story." In *Theory of Prose*, translated by Benjamin Sher, 101–116. 1925. Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990.
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Calendar

Thursday plenaries are 18:25–19:40 in the Event Space, 244 Greene. Friday plenaries are 11:00–12:15 in the Event Space, 244 Greene.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday	Plenary
<i>Investigations</i>			
4 Sep	(Office Hours)	Introductions, Miller	
11 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
18 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
25 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
2 Oct	(Office Hours)	Poe, Sedgwick, Mosley	Gitelman plenary
9 Oct	(Office Hours)	Mosley	
16 Oct	(Office Hours)	Mosley, Doyle, Shklovsky, Moretti	Hoover plenary
<i>New York</i>			
23 Oct	(Office Hours), 1st essay draft due	Whitehead, Didion, Wharton	
30 Oct	(Office Hours), 1st essay due	McKay, McCarthy, Ridge	
6 Nov	(Office Hours)	Pietri, Colón	Noel plenary
<i>Genre</i>			
13 Nov	(Office Hours)	Butler	
27 Nov	(Office Hours), 2nd essay draft due	Butler, Berlant	
4 Dec	(Office Hours), 2nd essay due	Beckett, Aristotle, & Shakespeare	Halpern plenary
11 Dec	(Office Hours), final essay précis due	Stoppard	
18 Dec		Final Essay Due	