

ENGL-UA 101.022

# Introduction to the Study of Literature

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

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Autumn 2017. 45 West 4th St, Bo7

R, 9:30–12:15

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

## 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, (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.

## Goals of the course

- to make you better readers and writers by
  - introducing you to
    - \* the history of literature as an object of study;
    - \* tools and resources provided by the university for literary 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

- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot* (1949)
- Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower* (1994)

- Mohr, Nicholasa. *Nilda* (1974)
- 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. 1602) [optional]
- Stoppard, Tom. *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

**25%** 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,
- having considered the reading and found points of entry into class discussion via questions about specific passages,
- participating in class discussion in ways that build upon contributions from others, and
- refraining from the use of electronic devices.

#### 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. It should also include, marked on the page, the various "templates" (in the Graff and Birkenstein sense) you make use of. It should be handed in by 5 p.m. on the due date in my mailbox on the second floor of 244 Greene St.

## 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, and it should also feature the aforementioned templates.

## Presentation

**20%** Throughout the semester, secondary texts have been paired with with primary reading for that day. At the beginning of the semester, you will choose a secondary text and present on it later in the semester. The presentation should be 10–15 minutes long. A good presentation will provide context for the secondary text itself, feature a thorough summary of the secondary text and its argument, and close with links between the secondary text and that day's primary text. Slides, etc., are not necessary. The presentation will be accompanied by a short document (800 words) laying out the same information as the presentation did to be turned in at the same time as the presentation. For guidelines on giving a good presentation, see my webpage on presentation tips<sup>1</sup>.

The texts for the presentations will not be easy to read, understand, or even summarize. These presentations will, hence, require time to prepare. As with any assignment, make use of office hours to help clarify any questions you may have.

## Final essay

**20%** 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 at least one of the secondary texts from the course. A short précis of the essay (up to 600 words) is due two weeks earlier. It should be the essay in miniature—a prose outline, illustrating the essay's structure, context, and argument.

Because of the expanded context and argument, the essay will include some added research, aided by the skills learned at the library. The strategies Graff and Birkenstein provide will help frame this context and build the argument. The final version of the essay should be 1800–2200 words long.

## 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, *except* for the second essay and its rewrite, which must be submitted in paper form. I prefer 2up (two pages per sheet), two-sided printing. Documents should be formatted sanely: 12pt type and double-spaced.

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.

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<sup>1</sup><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](mailto: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 integrity<sup>2</sup>. 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 webpage<sup>3</sup>. A pdf version is also available<sup>4</sup>. The source code and documentation for this document is available at its Github repository<sup>5</sup>. The syllabus is ©2017, 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.

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup><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.* The texts for presentations.

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

- Thursday, 7 Sep: Introductions

## 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, 14 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, part 1.
- Thursday, 21 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, parts 2 & 3.
- Thursday, 28 Sep: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Petals of Blood*, part 4; D. A. Miller, “The Novel and the Police.”
- Thursday, 5 Oct: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter”; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Reparative Reading.”
- Thursday, 12 Oct: Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*.
- Thursday, 19 Oct: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton;” Franco Moretti, “Trees.”

## 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, “Goodbye to All That”; Mary McCarthy, “Portrait of an Intellectual as a Yale Man.”
- Thursday, 2 Nov: Claude McKay, “The White House,” “A Capitalist at Dinner,” “The Tropics in New York,” “If We Must Die,” “Harlem Runs Wild”; Hughes; Edith Wharton, ...
- Thursday, 6 Nov: Pedro Pietri, *Selected Poetry*; Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York*.
- Thursday, 13 Nov: Nicholasa Mohr, *Nilda*; José Martí...

## 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, 27 Nov: Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*.
- Thursday, 4 Dec: Aristotle, *Poetics*; Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.1 (and rest as necessary).
- Thursday, 11 Dec: Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia*.
- Thursday, 18 Dec: **Final Essay Due**

## References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Prieta." In *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 4th ed, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 198–209. 1983. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015.
- Baldwin, James. "Me and My House . . ." *Harper's Magazine*, November 1955, 54–61.
- . "Stranger in the Village." *Harper's Magazine*, October 1953, 42–48.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. 1949. Grove Press, 2011.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 253–264. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Blacks*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1987.
- . "kitchenette building." In *Blacks*, 20.
- . "obituary for a living lady." In *Blacks*, 34–35.
- . *Riot*. In *Blacks*, 469–480. 1969. Chicago: Third World Press, 1969.
- . "the mother." In *Blacks*, 21–22.
- . "the soft man." In *Blacks*, 25.
- . "when Mrs. Martin's Booker T." In *Blacks*, 24.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. 1955. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.
- Cheah, Pheng. "Missed Encounters: Cosmopolitanism, World Literature, and Postcoloniality." In *What Is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, 1–22. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. "The Melancholy of Race." *The Kenyon Review* 19, no. 1 (1997): 49–61.
- Dimock, Wai-chee. "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents." *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2005): 85–101. doi:10.1353/nar.2005.0025.
- Fernández Retamar, Roberto. "Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America." Translated by Lynn Garafola, David Arthur McMurray, and Robert Márquez. *The Massachusetts Review* 15, nos. 1/2 (1974): 7–72.
- Foucault, Michel. "Las Meninas." In *Order of Things*, 3–16.
- . "Preface." In *Order of Things*, xv–xxiv.
- . *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. 1966. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Hughes, Langston. "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria." In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 143–146.
- . *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David E Roessel. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- . "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 23.
- . "The Weary Blues." In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 50.
- . "White Man." In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 194–195.
- McKay, Claude. "A Capitalist at Dinner." In *Complete poems*, 136.
- . *Complete Poems*, edited by William J. Maxwell. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- . "The Tropics in New York." In *Complete poems*, 154.
- . "The White House." In *Complete poems*, 148–149.

- Mohr, Nicholasa. *Nilda*. 1974. Houston: Pinata Books, 2011.
- Moraga, Cherríe. *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. Expanded 2nd ed. 1983. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. 1990. New York: Washington Square Press, 2002.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Petals of Blood*. 1977. New York: Penguin Classics, 2005.
- Pietri, Pedro. *Pedro Pietri: Selected Poetry*. Edited by Juan Flores and Pedro Lopez Adorno. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2015.
- Roy, Arundhati. *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.
- Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. 1966. Grove Press, 2017.

## 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. “P:” is the secondary text for which a student will be presenting that day.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday	Plenary
4 Sep	(Office Hours)	Introductions	
	<i>Investigations</i>		
11 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
18 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
25 Sep	(Office Hours)	Ngũgĩ	
2 Oct	(Office Hours)	Poe	Gitelman plenary
9 Oct	(Office Hours)	Mosley	
16 Oct	(Office Hours)	Doyle	Hoover plenary
	<i>New York</i>		
23 Oct	(Office Hours)	Whitehead, Didion, Ridge	
30 Oct	(Office Hours)	Harlem poetry, Colón	
6 Nov	(Office Hours)	Pietri	Noel plenary
13 Nov	(Office Hours)	Mohr	
	<i>Genre</i>		
27 Nov	(Office Hours)	Butler	
4 Dec	(Office Hours)	Beckett, Aristotle, & Shakespeare	Halpern plenary
11 Dec	(Office Hours)	Stoppard	
18 Dec		<b>Final Project Due</b>	