

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 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 short writing assignments both in class and as homework,
- 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. 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

15% 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

20% 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 5–7 minutes long. time as the presentation. 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.

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.

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.

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

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 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.

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.* 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,” “The Adventure of the Scarlet Band”; Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, “Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story”; Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature”.

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”; Mary McCarthy, “Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man.”
- Thursday, 2 Nov: Claude McKay, “The Tropics in New York,” “If We Must Die,” “Harlem Runs Wild”; Edith Wharton, “After Holbein”; Lola Ridge, “Manhattan,” “Flotsam,” “Bowery Afternoon.”
- Thursday, 6 Nov: Pedro Pietri, *Selected Poetry*; Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York*.
- Thursday, 13 Nov: Nicholasa Mohr, *Nilda*;

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*. Lauren Berlant, “Introduction: Affect in the Present.”
- 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

- 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.
- Didion, Joan. "Farewell to the Enchanted City." *Saturday Evening Post* 240, no. 1 (1967-01-14): 62–67.
- McCarthy, Mary. "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man." In *The Company She Keeps*, 165–246. 1942. Mariner Books, 2003.
- 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.
- Moretti, Franco. "The Slaughterhouse of Literature." In *Distant Reading*, 63–90. London: Verso, 2013.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Stoppard, Tom. *Arcadia: A Play*. New York: Farrar, Straus / Giroux, 1994.
- . *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. 1966. Grove Press, 2017.
- Wharton, Edith. "After Holbein." In *The New York Stories of Edith Wharton*, 356–380.
- . "Roman Fever." In *The New York Stories of Edith Wharton*, 438–452.
- . *The New York Stories of Edith Wharton*. Edited by Roxana Robinson. New York: New York Review Books, 2007.
- Whitehead, Colson. "City Limits." In *The Colossus of New York: A City in Thirteen Parts*, 3–11. New York: Anchor Books, 2004.

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, Miller | |
| 2 Oct | (Office Hours) | Poe, Sedgwick | Gitelman plenary |
| 9 Oct | (Office Hours) | Mosley | |
| 16 Oct | (Office Hours) | Doyle, Shklovsky, Moretti | Hoover plenary |
| | <i>New York</i> | | |
| 23 Oct | (Office Hours), 1st essay draft due | Whitehead, Didion, McCarthy | |
| 30 Oct | (Office Hours), 1st essay due | McKay, Wharton, Ridge | |
| 6 Nov | (Office Hours) | Pietri, Colón | Noel plenary |
| 13 Nov | (Office Hours) | Mohr | |
| | <i>Genre</i> | | |
| 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 | |