

Introduction to the Study of Literature

ENGL-UA 101.001

TR, 12:30-1:45pm, 194 Mercer, 303

TR, 2:00-3:15pm, Silver Center, 515

Professor Blevin Shelnut

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Office: 244 Greene, 606

Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:30-5:30pm

Course Description:

This course introduces you to the rigors and pleasures of literary study, focusing on the practice of carefully analyzing textual detail alongside cultural, historical, and critical contexts that shape our ideas about what literature is and does. We'll explore primary texts from a range of periods and genres, including poetry, fiction, and drama. In addition, we'll consider examples of literary criticism and theory as a way of gaining exposure to the variety of methods that can be used in reading literary texts. Over the course of the semester, you'll be expected to actively participate in discussion, to work collaboratively with your peers, and to practice writing and revising through a series of short and longer papers.

In addition to our seminar meetings, we will attend along with all other sections of English 101 four plenary lectures by English Department faculty in which they'll discuss their own objects of study and methods for exploring them.

Goals:

In this course, you will:

- consider the different kinds of questions that can be asked about literary texts
- practice reading, analytically and imaginatively
- learn a vocabulary that will help you express your thoughts about what you read in the language of the field
- develop skills in writing thoughtfully and compellingly about literature at the college level
- find and use secondary resources for literary study

Required Texts:

The below books are available at the NYU Bookstore and also through sites like Amazon, but please **use only these editions**.

James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*. Ed. Peter G. Beidler. New York: Bedford, 2010.

Phillip, M. NourbeSe. *Zong!* Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2008.

Pietri, Pedro. *Selected Poetry*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Robert S. Miola. New York: Norton, 2011.

Smith, Anna Deavere. *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
 Strand, Mark. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: Norton, 2000.

*readings marked by an asterisk are available for print-out on NYU Classes

Reference Texts:

Baldick, Chris. *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
 (available online through Bobst Library)

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. New York: Modern Language Association, 2009. (available at Bobst and summarized and searchable online at the Purdue Online Writing Lab, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01)

Course Requirements and Grade Distribution:

Participation	15%
Short written assignments	15%
Midterm test	10%
Group presentations	15%
<i>Turn</i> essay and revisions	10%
<i>Hamlet</i> essay	15%
Final essay and revisions	20%

Participation

- read, take notes, and be prepared to actively participate in discussion about the assigned text(s)
- bring the book or printed copies of the assigned text(s) to class
- treat the classroom as a space for respectful, collegial dialogue

Short Written Assignments

- ten weekly reading responses, to be posted by 10pm each Monday to NYU Classes, exploring a particular line or passage that stood out to you from that week's reading
- a one-paragraph paraphrase of a poem (ungraded)
- a sonnet, authored by you, with a one-page explication
- a two-page reflection on the relation between history and literature in *Zong!*
- a one-page response to a "literary" event that you attend on your own during the semester

Midterm Test

- on the vocabulary and basic skills of reading poetry, short fiction, and drama

Group Presentations

- a group presentation offering a paraphrase, analysis, and discussion of critical interpretations of a Modernist poem or short story
- a group performance of a scene in *Hamlet*

Formal Essays

- a four-page analysis of formal elements in *Turn*, to be revised and resubmitted
- a five-page essay on *Hamlet*, incorporating one critical reading
- a seven-page paper on a topic of your choosing, to incorporate a research component, and to be submitted in draft form, revised, and resubmitted

Policies:

Attendance: It's important that you attend every session. Each unexcused absence reduces your participation grade by one-third of a letter grade (A → A-, A- → B+, etc.). More than three unexcused absences risks failure of the course. Three instances of tardiness count as an absence.

Assignments: Papers should be stapled, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in 12-point Times font, with pages numbered and your last name on every page. Late assignments will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade for each day late (A → A-, A- → B+, etc.).

Electronics and Classroom Etiquette: Laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices are not permitted in class. Beverages as well as un-messy and un-noisy snacks are permitted.

Academic Integrity: Words and ideas that come from another person must be cited in your writing. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, which will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Please consult cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity.

Accommodation: Academic accommodations are available if you have a disability that affects your work. Please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, nyu.edu/csd.

Resources:

The Writing Center: For general writing assistance in addition to my office hours (nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center).

The Student Health Center and Wellness Exchange: For physical, mental and emotional health issues (nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/student-health-center.html and nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/wellness-exchange).

NYU Speaking Freely: free and informal language conversation course (speakingfreely.cas.nyu.edu).

Schedule:**I. Literary Genres and Form**

This unit will introduce the basics of analyzing works of poetry, fiction, and drama. We'll focus on the formal elements that characterize these genres. What makes a poem a poem, and a play a play? What devices tend to appear in the works of poets, fiction writers, and dramatists? These are devices that you can learn to identify and analyze.

Week 1

T, 9/5 Introductions to the course and to each other

R, 9/7 "The Stanza" and "Meter" in *The Making of a Poem*, 136-160
Be prepared to discuss Thomas Wyatt, "They Flee from Me" (1535), George Herbert, "Easter Wings" (1633), William Blake, "The Tyger" (1794), Emily Dickinson, "I died for Beauty" (1924), Jean Toomer, "Song of the Son" (1923), Claude McKay, "The Tropics in New York" (1922)

Due: one-paragraph paraphrase of poem (ungraded)

Week 2

T, 9/12 "The Heroic Couplet" in *The Making of a Poem*, 121-135
Be prepared to discuss Anne Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book" (1678), Phyllis Wheatley, "To S. M., a Young African Painter on Seeing His Works" (1773), Oliver Goldsmith, from "The Deserted Village" (1770), Alexander Pope, from "An Essay on Criticism" (1711), Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess" (1842)

R, 9/14 "The Sonnet" in *The Making of a Poem*, 54-72
Be prepared to discuss William Shakespeare, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" (1609), Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias" (1818), Christina Rossetti, from *Monna Innominata* (1881), Elizabeth Barrett Browning, from *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), Edna St. Vincent Millay, "What my lips have kissed, and where, and why" (1922), Countee Cullen, "From the Dark Tower" (1926)

Due: your own sonnet and explication

Week 3

T, 9/19 Anna Cora Mowatt, *Fashion** (1845) and discuss reading a play, what makes a comedy

R, 9/21 Discuss *Fashion*

Week 4

T, 9/26 Henry James, *Turn of the Screw* (1898) and discuss elements of short fiction

R, 9/28 Discuss *Turn*

S, 10/1 **Due, to my email by 10pm: optional revision of sonnet explication**

Week 5

T, 10/3 **Test on basics of poetry, fiction, and drama**

R, 10/5 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter”* (1844)

R, 10/5 6:25-7:40, Plenary

F, 10/6 11:00-12:15, Plenary

II. Adopting a Perspective

In the next several weeks, we’ll explore how authors adopt perspectives on their subjects in addition to some of the critical perspectives available to readers of literary texts. We’ll discuss the importance of acknowledging that reading and interpretation always depend on point of view, and the ways we usually find perspectives blended in both literary texts and readings of them.

Week 6

T, 10/10 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1600), Acts I-III, 4-85

R, 10/12 *Hamlet*, Acts IV-V, 85-130

Due: four-page analysis of formal elements in *Turn*

Week 7

T, 10/17 Harry Levin, “[Irony in *Hamlet*]” (1959), Elaine Showalter, “Representing Ophelia” (1985), Stephen Greenblatt, “Hamlet in Purgatory” (2001) in the Norton edition of *Hamlet*, 271-308

Discuss New Critical, feminist, and historicist approaches

R, 10/19 Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”* (1904)

R, 10/19 6:25-7:40, Plenary

F, 10/20 11:00-12:15, Plenary

Week 8

T, 10/24 “A Critical History of *The Turn of the Screw*,” “Reader-Response Criticism and *The Turn of the Screw*,” “Marxist Criticism and *The Turn of the Screw*,” in the Beidler edition of *Turn*, 127-45, 152-78, 268-296
Discuss reader-response and psychoanalytical approaches

R, 10/26 Library visit

Due: revision of *Turn* essay

Week 9

T, 10/31 Robert Frost, “Out, Out—”* (1916), Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”* (1919), Marianne Moore, “Poetry”* (1919), W. C. Williams, “This is Just to Say”* (1934), and Ernest Hemingway, “Hills like White Elephants”* (1927)

Group presentations

R, 11/2 M. NourbeSe Phillip, *Zong!* (2008)

Week 10

T, 11/7 Discuss *Zong!*

Due: two-page reflection on history and literature in *Zong!*

R, 11/9 Pedro Pietri, *Selected Poetry* (2015)

R, 11/9 6:25-7:40, Plenary

F, 11/10 11:00-12:15, Plenary

III. The Instability of Text

Our final unit will raise questions about what constitutes a literary text. To what extent can a text be thought of as stable and authoritative? To what extent is it subject to collaboration or revision by actors other than the author? What is the role of the reader in determining a text’s meaning? And who decides what is considered “Literature” or not?

Week 11

T, 11/14 Appendices 1 and 2 and “The Actors’ Gallery,” in the Norton edition of *Hamlet*, 140-149 and 153-163
Review *Hamlet*

Discuss variations in the publication and staging of *Hamlet*, begin preparing group performances of select scenes

Due: five-page essay on *Hamlet*, incorporating one critical reading

R, 11/16 Acting workshop, *Hamlet*

Group performances

Week 12

T, 11/21 Research workshop for final papers

R, 11/23 NO CLASS – Thanksgiving

Week 13

T, 11/28 Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (1994)

R, 11/30 Discuss *Twilight*

Week 14

T, 12/5 Writing workshop for final papers

Due: first draft of final paper

R, 12/7 Aristotle, from *Poetics** (350 BCE)
Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot** (1953), Act I

R, 12/7 6:25-7:40, Plenary
F, 12/8 11:00-12:15, Plenary

Week 15

T, 12/12 NO CLASS – Legislative Day (classes meet on Monday schedule)

R, 12/14 Course wrap-up and evaluations

Due: final paper