



INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY STUDIES

English 110-01
Tuesday/Thursday 9:40-11:00am
Tisch 207
Professor Paul Benzon
pbenzon@skidmore.edu

Office: Palamountain 333
Office Hours: Monday 1:00-2:00pm, Tuesday 3:45-5:45pm, and by appt.
Course Blog: <https://en110section1.wordpress.com>

Course Description

This course introduces students to the practice of literary studies, with a particular emphasis on the skills involved in close reading. The course aims to foster a way of thinking critically and with sophistication about language, texts, and literary production. We will ask such questions as how and why we read, what it means to read as students of literature, what writing can teach us about reading, and what reading can teach us about writing. The goal overall is to make the words on the page thrillingly rich and complicated, while also recognizing the ways in which those words have been informed by their social, political, aesthetic, psychological, and religious contexts. This course is writing intensive and will include some attention to critical perspective and appropriate research skills. (Fulfills the all-college Foundation Requirement in expository writing; prospective English majors are encouraged to take EN 110 prior to enrolling in 200-level courses.)

Course Goals

In this course, you will learn to

- Read literature in a variety of forms closely and critically, paying attention to how various elements of language produce literary meaning
- Engage literary texts with an eye towards larger social, cultural, and historical questions and contexts
- Engage with the ideas and arguments presented by literary critics and theorists
- Develop, revise, and support an analytical argument about literary text in written work
- Participate in class discussions focused on close reading and literary interpretation
- Write thoughtfully and critically about literature in a range of formats and contexts

Required Texts

Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 978-0199691340)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (Vintage, 978-1400033416)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*, Revised and Complete Edition (Theatre Communications Group, 9781559363846)

Ross Murfin and Supriya Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 978-1319035396)

Selected other texts available in Course Packet

Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

Class Participation	15%
Course Blog	15%
Paper One (1/3 draft, 2/3 final)	15%
Paper Two (1/3 draft, 2/3 final)	20%
Paper Three (1/3 draft, 2/3 final)	25%
Critical Portfolio	10%

Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including but not limited to full-class discussions, small-group discussions, writing workshops, and in-class writing. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means completing all reading before class, bringing any relevant texts to class, and being prepared to discuss them thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these on your own as well as in being called on in our conversation. Strong class participation includes contributing regularly to class discussion in a range of ways, listening respectfully and attentively to others, responding thoughtfully to their comments, and working diligently during in-class work both on your own and with others—in order to do well in the participation element of the course, you should expect to do each of these each day. Workshopping one another's drafts will also be an important part of our work in class, and sharing timely, thoughtful feedback with your peers is also central to strong class participation; conversely, late or missing feedback for your peers will have a substantial negative impact on your participation grade. More generally, the more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

In order to facilitate a productive experience for everyone in class, please be in your seat and ready to start at the beginning of class time. Unless I indicate otherwise or there is an emergency, please remain in your seat during class so that we can all remain focused on our work at hand (this means using the restroom, getting water, etc., **before or after class** rather than during class).

Although I will lecture relatively rarely, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Having a record of the class' comments, concerns, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and arguments for further writing and thinking in the course. More broadly, consistently remaining actively engaged in our discussions, even if only as a listener and note-taker at certain moments, will help you to develop as a critical thinker and writer.

During class discussion, I expect you to be attentive to what your classmates have to say and respectful of their ideas and opinions. Thinking critically and openly about complex issues is a crucial part of college education—we all have a responsibility to create a classroom atmosphere where everyone is free to offer their opinion, as long as we all do so respectfully and kindly.

Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for class-related work such as note-taking, class writing, and research. Even if you are using such a device for class work, please put it away promptly if and when I ask so that we can turn our attention to specific other things. If inappropriate computer or electronic use becomes a

problem for some members of the class, I will revoke permission to use them for the class as a whole. If you have questions about whether a certain use of technology is appropriate or not, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Course Blog

Over the course of the semester, you will post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve several purposes: firstly (and most immediately), it will give us a chance to think and talk critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you or that you are curious about. In giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will also help you to generate topics, ideas, and arguments for papers.

Blog Posting. Note that the blog is located on our independent course website at <https://en110section1.wordpress.com>, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post, and you should include your name or other identifying information in your posts so that we can all follow the conversation online and I can give you credit for your work. The current post will appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your writing.

Blog Content. Your work on the blog will take different forms at different points in the semester. Sometimes I will post a question for you to respond to, while at other times your posts can be more open-ended; sometimes I will ask you to address a particular passage or other element from the reading, while at other times I will ask you to think about a broader issue or question that connects several texts. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should always ground your writing in quotation and close analysis of our reading for the day, and you should offer interpretations and critical questions rather than summaries or solely personal responses. The more engaged an approach you take, the stronger your posts will be and the more you will be able to bring to our discussions.

Each of your posts should be **at least 250 words** (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer).

Blog Scheduling. Unless I specify otherwise, each week's blog post will be due by 9:00am before Tuesday's class (consult the course schedule below for specific details). **Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts will not receive credit.**

Blog Grading. I will grade your blog posts on a scale of 0-4 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

Grade Characteristics

- 0 The post is missing or late.
- 1 The post is severely underdeveloped: it shows superficial thought and/or minimal or no engagement with the text and the issues it raises.
- 2 The post is underdeveloped: it uses textual material in a minimal, incorrect, or overly generalized manner, consisting mostly of summary, generalization, and/or personal response rather than close analysis of or critical thinking about the text.
- 3 The post is successful: it uses correctly integrated textual material to make analytical claims that demonstrate a clear, solid understanding of the issues at stake, but does not engage those issues at the level of an exceptional post.
- 4 The post is exceptional: it uses correctly integrated textual material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections, and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

Papers

The main focus of our work over the semester will be on three analytical papers, each of which will give you the opportunity to engage critically with a different genre of literature. These papers will allow you to expand and deepen your work with the methods of literary analysis we practice in class and on the blog, explore literary topics and questions that interest you, and develop complex arguments about the stakes of literary texts.

Our process for these papers will emphasize the importance of revision and constructive critical dialogue to the writing process: for each assignment, you will submit a first draft for peer workshopping, and I will give you feedback on this draft in written form as well as in individual conferences at various times throughout the semester. In order to make the most of this process, it is necessary to approach both stages of the essay writing process fully and seriously: rather than a “rough draft,” your first draft should be a full-length essay, with an argument that you develop through consistent close analysis of the text in question. Similarly, your revised draft should go beyond mechanical and stylistic editing to make substantive changes to the essay’s argument, structure, and/or use of text.

In grading papers, I focus on the issues and characteristics described in the rubric at the end of this syllabus. I will provide more specific information on each paper assignment over the course of the semester. **Papers will lose one grade level (e.g., from a B+ to a B) for each day past their due dates for both first and revised drafts. Work submitted after the due time on the due date is considered one day late. Late or missing peer critiques will negatively impact your class participation grade.**

Critical Portfolio

As a culmination of your work and your development as a scholar of literature over the semester, your final assignment will be a critical portfolio. This portfolio is a chance for you to show how your thinking and writing about literature have improved throughout the course, both generally and in terms of each assignment. Your portfolio should include a revised version of Paper Three, further revised and annotated versions of Papers One and Two, and a final reflection cover letter discussing your work over the semester.

Attendance

You are permitted a total of **two absences** throughout the semester without penalty. For each subsequent absence, your final course grade will drop one-third of a letter (e.g., from an A- to a B+), and after four absences, you risk failing the course. Repeated or excessive lateness will also count as an absence.

If you miss all or part of a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work for the course—make sure to follow the syllabus, stay on track with the reading, turn in any written work that was due for the day, and consult a classmate, check the course website on Blackboard, or come see me during my office hours to talk about what you might have missed in class.

Office Hours

I want each of you to be successful in this class. Helping each of you develop as readers, writers, thinkers, and students of literature is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals and succeed in my class. More importantly, I have a great deal of interest in the material we will be working on this semester, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment and excitement from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, the English major, life at Skidmore, future academic or career plans, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we're doing in class, please come see me. I encourage you to think of meeting with me not just as a last resort or something to do when you need help, but as a central part of making your learning more productive, meaningful, and enjoyable. My office hours are Monday from 1:00-2:00pm and Tuesday from 3:45-5:45pm in Palamountain Hall 333—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren't free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help, or for any other reason at all.

Accessibility

If you anticipate needing accommodations regarding any element of this course, please come talk with me early in the semester so that we can work together to address these issues. You should also visit the Office of Student Academic Services at <http://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php> for more information.

Academic Integrity

Independent thinking and writing are crucial elements of both your work in this course and the intellectual culture of Skidmore more broadly. Violating these principles through plagiarism or other academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may result in more serious consequences as well. If you have any questions about citation, attribution, or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me before you hand in your work. For more information about Skidmore's academic integrity policy, visit <http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.php>.

Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a

violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the *Title IX Deputy Coordinator*.

Course Schedule

The schedule below may change over the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class and/or via email. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email and the class blog regularly, and contacting me or coming to my office if you have any questions.

Poetry: Language, Form, and Representation

Thursday, Sep. 5	Course Introduction
Tuesday, Sep. 10	Jonathan Culler, "What is Literature and Does it Matter?" Emily Dickinson, "Black Cake" Blog Post Due 9:00am
Thursday, Sep. 12	<i>The Sonnet Then</i> William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 30," "Sonnet 55" Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias" Roy Thomas and John Buscema, excerpt from <i>Avengers</i> 57 Patera Quetzal, "Somebody Once Told Me..." [<i>Bedford</i> : sonnet, lyric, meter, scansion, close reading, denotation, connotation, iamb, quatrain, couplet]
Tuesday, Sep. 17	<i>The Sonnet Now</i> Randall Mann, "Queen Christina" Marilyn Nelson, "Family" Gwendolyn Brooks, "the rites for Cousin Vit" Blog Post Due 9:00am
Thursday, Sep. 19	<i>The Villanelle</i> Dylan Thomas "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" Sylvia Plath, "Mad Girl's Love Song" [<i>Bedford</i> : villanelle, tercet]
Tuesday, Sep. 24	<i>Free Verse</i> Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro" Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus," "Daddy" Tracy K. Smith, "A Man's World" [<i>Bedford</i> : free verse, enjambment] Blog Post Due 9:00am
Thursday, Sep. 26	Jonathan Culler, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Poetry"
Paper One First Draft Due Sunday, September 29, 11:59pm	
Tuesday, Oct. 1	Paper One Draft Workshop Critique Letters Due in Class

Fiction: Narrative, Time, and Transformation

Thursday, Oct. 3 Jonathan Culler, "Narrative"
Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"
[*Bedford*: point of view, narrator, omniscient, unreliable narrator, free indirect discourse]
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Tuesday, Oct. 8 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 1-86
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Thursday, Oct. 10 **No Class: Professor Benzon away at Conference**

****Paper One Revised Draft Due Sunday, October 13, 11:59pm****

Tuesday, Oct. 15 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 87-173
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Thursday, Oct. 17 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 174-256

Tuesday, Oct. 22 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 257-end
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Thursday, Oct. 24 **Reading Narrative and Image: Class Discussion at the Tang Museum**
Madhu Dubey, "The Politics of Genre in *Beloved*"

****Paper Two First Draft Due Sunday, October 27, 11:59pm****

Tuesday, Oct. 29 **Paper Two Draft Workshop**
Critique Letters Due in Class

Drama: Performance, Space, and Embodiment

Thursday, Oct. 31 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* Act One
Elinor Fuchs, "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play"
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Tuesday, Nov. 5 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* Acts Two and Three
Blog Post Due 9:00am

Thursday, Nov. 7 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Perestroika* Acts One-Three

Tuesday, Nov. 12 **Library Research Session – Meet in LI 118**
Paper Two Revised Draft Due Monday, November 11, 11:59pm

Thursday, Nov. 14 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Perestroika* Act Four-end

Film: Movement, Montage, and Reading the Visual

- Tuesday, Nov. 19 Barry Jenkins, *Moonlight*
Watch “How to Speak Movie Part 1: The Camera,” “How to Speak Movie Part 2: Mise en Scène,” “How to Speak Movie Part 3: Editing” (watch before film)
Blog Post Due 9:00am
- Thursday, Nov. 21 Barry Jenkins, *Moonlight* (discussion continued)
- Tuesday, Nov. 26 Jack Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies”
Blog Post Due 9:00am
- Thursday, Nov. 28 **No Class: Thanksgiving**
- Tuesday, Dec. 3 Jonathan Culler, “Literature and Cultural Studies”
Blog Post Due 9:00am

****Paper Three First Draft Due Wednesday, December 4, 5:00pm****

- Thursday, Dec. 5 **Paper Three Draft Workshop**
Critique Letters Due in Class
- Tuesday, Dec. 10 **Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations**
- **Critical Portfolio Due Monday, December 16****

English 110 – Introduction to Literary Studies: Paper Rubric

Professor Benzon

Grade Range	Thesis/Argument	Textual Analysis	Organization and Structure	Language and Mechanics
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument raises thought-provoking, ambitious, independent ideas about the text that go well beyond the scope of class discussion Argument is clearly visible from the outset of the paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes text in unexpected ways and/or using unexpected sections/facets of the text, raising independent ideas that go well beyond the scope of class discussion Textual material is used consistently throughout the paper and-integrated and incorporated in a controlled, correct manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops your argument in a way that is flexible and open to different sides of a question Paper is rationally and coherently organized, with fluid, clear transition and structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is polished and sophisticated in a way that suits the complexity of the topic and argument Very few mechanical errors
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument makes a substantive claim about the text, addressing ideas and issues that may partially repeat class discussion, but also expands, complicates, and/or adds to those ideas and issues Argument is more simple or obvious than that of an A-range paper, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes some more basic dimensions and more obvious sections of the text, but also introduces some new material and/or new interpretations of the text Textual material is used consistently throughout the paper and-integrated and incorporated in a controlled, correct manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movement through the paper is logical and coherent, with few instances of repetition or digression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is clear but not as sophisticated as in an A-level paper Mechanical errors are relatively few and minor
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argument largely repeats ideas from class without augmenting them in substantive ways This is closer to summary or observation than argument, and/or makes overly broad or obvious claims about the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely works with passages already discussed in class without adding any new analysis Analysis is generalized, superficial, or infrequent, containing some moments of misreadings, under-reading, or summary of the text Incorporation of text is disjunctive, disorganized, or incorrect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument in a way that is repetitive or disorganized Movement through the paper is often difficult to follow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is largely competent Mechanical errors are frequent and serious in some cases Paper may be shorter than the assigned length
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little to no recognizable analytical argument Argument consists mainly of plot summary or uncritical personal reactions to the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not work with the text frequently enough or in enough depth to support argument Frequent moments of misreading, under-reading, or summary without analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization is largely random, repetitive, or discontinuous Movement through the paper is unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is too casual and colloquial for the assignment Mechanical errors are severe and frequent enough to partially impede meaning Paper is considerably shorter than the assigned length
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No recognizable argument Relies on serious misreadings or misunderstandings of the text Shows little or no comprehension of or engagement with the specifics of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no textual analysis or citation Textual analysis shows serious misunderstandings of the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization and structure are largely absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language shows little care or attention to correctness Mechanical errors impede meaning Paper is much shorter than the assigned length Paper may include plagiarized material