

English 200, Section 09
Reading Literature: Language and Meaning
Fall 2010

MWF 2:30PM – 3:20PM, Oddfellows 221

Prof. Ryan S Paul (rpaul@allgeheny.edu)

Office: Oddfellows 213 (x2320)

Office Hours: MW 11:30AM – 1:00PM; Tu/Th 2:00PM – 4:00PM; By Appointment

We read in one form or another every day of our lives: we see words printed on a street sign and follow its commands; we hear a friend or relative tell a story, and from those sounds we construct in our minds a series of images and actions; we watch a TV show, remembering the characters from their previous adventures and guessing what might happen to them next week; and we may even sit down with a novel or a book of poetry for our own enjoyment. While reading, then, is a fundamental part of our lives, we rarely think about how we actually do it or how the words on a page in front of us work together to create meaning. Instead, we simply read passively; we absorb what we see and hear and do not think deeply about how or why or what our reading material means.

In this course, we will read **actively** and **closely**. Our primary aims as readers will be to become self-aware about our own reading processes and to analyze how language – specifically “literary” language – works to create meaning. As writers, our primary aim will be to learn how to discuss the workings of literature in an organized, concise, clear, and thoughtful way. In pursuit of these goals, we will read a variety of literary texts: a number of poems, a few short stories, a novel, and a play. We will develop a number of tools to analyze them, considering issues such as style, form, use of imagery, genre, voice and tone, and so forth. We will also consider some of the bigger, philosophical questions about reading literature: what is literature? What differentiates it from other forms of language? What is the purpose of literary analysis? What do we bring to the practice of reading, and how can we become better and more sensitive readers? And perhaps most importantly, what does literature offer us as individuals, as members of our community, and as young scholars?

Required Books

Sharon Hamilton, *Essential Literary Terms: A Brief Norton Guide with Exercises*. W.W. Norton, 2007. (ISBN: 9780393928372)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. Vintage Books, 1987 & 2004. (ISBN: 9781400033416)

Samuel Becket, *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press, 1954. (ISBN: 9780802130341)

Grades and Other Class policies

Active participation in class discussion and activities is essential for your success and the success of the class as a whole. So, attendance and class participation are **mandatory**. You should come to class every day prepared and excited to engage with the material and your fellow students. Every student will be expected to contribute to class regularly and consistently.

The majority of your grade will be determined by your work on five short essays. Each essay will cover one of the major sections of the course, and each essay will analyze one text. The first three will address poetry; the second will analyze a short story; and the final essay will analyze either *Beloved* or *Waiting for Godot*.

10% of your grade will be based on your participation in a class project. As a group, we will craft a class anthology, selecting our favorite pieces of literature (short poems or extracts from longer works) and writing a short (1 page) commentary for each one. The class will be divided into 5 groups, with each group responsible for selecting a “theme” for their section. Each member of the group will then select a piece for inclusion and write the accompanying commentary. This project will be self-guided and self-graded, with each group responsible for evaluating the work of their individual members and of the group as a whole.

Each student is allowed 3 unexcused absences without penalty, with each additional unexcused absence incurring a 3% penalty to your final grade. Medical, college-related, and religious absences will be excused only with proper documentation, and advance notice is greatly preferred. All students are responsible for making up any missed work; in-class assignments missed for unexcused absences cannot be made up.

Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

- Class participation & in-class activities: 15%
- Essay 1 (Poetry as Action): 10% (Due 9/13)
- Essay 2 (Figurative Language): 15% (Due 9/27)
- Essay 3 (Form and Meaning): 15% (Due 10/13)
- Essay 4 (Short Fiction): 15% (Due 11/1)
- Final Essay (*Beloved* or *Waiting for Godot*): 20% Due 12/14
- Group Project: 10% (Due 12/8)

Daily Syllabus

This schedule is subject to change with reasonable notice.

Dates

Topic

Be sure to have read the assigned material by the date listed

F 8/27

Introduction the course.

M 8/30 – W 9/8

Poetry as symbolic action: words & actions, speakers & addressees; intention, situation, and tone.

Readings: Pound, “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”; Donne, “The Flea,” “The Sun Rising”; Hughes, “Silhouette”; Herbert, “The Collar”; Williams, “This is just to say”; Wyatt, “They flee from me”; Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress”

Hamilton pp. 13-19, 184-197

M 9/13

Essay 1 Due

F 9/10 – M 9/27	Figurative language: metaphor, imagery, symbolism, and other language tropes Readings: Pound, “In a Station of the Metro”; Donne, “The Bait”; Dickinson, “A Bird came down the walk,” “She Sweeps with Many Colored Brooms”; Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Emperor of Ice-Cream”; Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow”; Herrick, “Delight in Disorder” Hamilton pp. 32-67, 68-111
F 9/24	No Class
M 9/27	Essay 2 Due
W 9/29 – F 10/8	Form, Rhythm, Space: Stanza, metrics, white space, emblem, repetition, enjambment & caesura, and rhyme Readings: Marlowe, “The Passionate Shepherd to his Love”; Vaughan, “The World”; Herbert, “The Altar,” “Easter-Wings”; Larkin, “At Grass”; Milton, “Methought I saw”; Bishop, “Sestina”; Dickinson, “Because I could not stop for Death”; Frost, “Acquainted with the Night,” “Design”; Shakespeare, Sonnets 73, 129, 135, 138; Brooks, “We Real Cool”; Cortez, “Tapping”; Blackburn, “Listening to Sonny Rollins at the Five-Spot” Hamilton pp. 226-246, 198-225
10/9-10/12	FALL BREAK – No Class.
W 10/13	Essay 3 Due
W 10/13 – F 10/29	Short Fiction: Narrative, plot, time, setting, voice, point of view, dialogue, structure, etc. Readings: Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (10/13) Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (10/15) Hemingway, “The Killers” (10/18) Williams, “The Use of Force” (10/20) Carter, “The Werewolf” (10/22) Carter, “The Company of Wolves” (10/25) James, “The Beast in the Jungle” (10/27-10/29) Hamilton pp. 8-12
M 11/1	Essay 4 Due
M 11/1 – M 11/22	Toni Morrison’s <i>Beloved</i>
M 11/1	<i>Beloved</i> 1-23
W 11/3	<i>Beloved</i> 24-59
F 11/5	<i>Beloved</i> 60-100
M 11/8	<i>Beloved</i> 101-156
W 11/10	<i>Beloved</i> 157-195

F 11/12	No Class
M 11/15	<i>Beloved</i> 199-235
W 11/17	<i>Beloved</i> 236-277
F 11/19	<i>Beloved</i> 281-309
M 11/22	Finish <i>Beloved</i>
11/24-28	THANKSGIVING BREAK – No Class.
M 11/29	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Act 1 Hamilton pp. 1-7
W 12/1	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Act 2
F 12/3	<i>Waiting for Godot</i> Redux
M 12/6	Course Review/Group Project
W 12/8	Course Review/ Group Project due
Tu 12/14	7PM: Final Essay Due

"Of Mere Being"
Wallace Stevens

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze décor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

Poetry Selections
English 200 Section 09

“The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter”
Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.