

Introduction to Literary Studies

Contact information

Instructor	Matthew Wilkens
Course	English 30101:03 – Introduction to Literary Studies
Meetings	TR 12:30–1:45
Location	B036 Geddes Hall
Office hours	320 Decio; T 2:00–5:00 and by appointment Reserve office hour slots at bit.ly/mw_oh .
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Synopsis

An introductory-level survey of problems and methods in academic literary studies.

Description

This course is a prerequisite for all upper-division English classes. It's intended to do two fairly different things: (1) Give you a sense of the range of primary texts you'll encounter in the future as an English major, and (2) introduce you to some of the working methods of professional literary studies. To this end, we'll divide the semester into three roughly equal units. The first will deal with close readings of poetry, specifically Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and a handful of other works. The second will examine theoretical and philosophical engagements with drama, community, and the law via Sophocles' *Antigone* and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. And the third will read Thomas Pynchon's short novel *The Crying of Lot 49* and study contemporary critical essays concerning its place in modern culture. There's nothing necessary about these pairings of object and method, but they'll serve us well enough on our tour of the discipline.

Objectives

This course has three primary objectives, which can be arranged in order of increasing generality. First, it aims to provide a specific body of knowledge about a narrow selection of primary and secondary literary texts. Students who complete this course will be prepared to undertake more advanced work in literary studies and to begin making their own contributions to it. Second, it provides a basis for further work in the literary humanities, cultural studies, and interpretive social sciences generally. It introduces students to methods and critical vocabularies employed in these fields and familiarizes them with the resources used in conducting independent literary research. Third, it seeks to build students' skills in critical and metacritical analysis, including their ability to evaluate competing forms of argument, evidence, and justification.

Written work and grading

A paper of moderate length will follow each of the first two units. The first – on poetry and close reading – will be worth 15% of your grade. The second – on Sophocles, Hans-

berry, and theory – will be worth 20%. The third – on Pynchon and contemporary fiction – will involve several preliminary assignments and presentations that, together with the paper itself, will be worth 40% in sum. Weekly discussion postings will be required (10% in sum) and class participation (15%) will also factor into your grade. *You must satisfactorily complete all assignments to pass the course.*

Readings

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*. 1958. New York: Vintage, 2002.
 Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. 1965. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
 Sophocles. *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*. c. 441 BCE. Ed. and trans. Griffith et al. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2013.
 Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*. 1855. Ed. Michael Moon. New York: Norton, 2002.

Additional readings will be available online. Details will be announced as the semester proceeds. Expect to spend several hours reading for each class meeting.

Policy statements

Attendance

Two absences (one week of meetings), no questions asked. Additional absences will lower your grade.

Late work

Late work is generally not accepted. If you find yourself in exceptional circumstances, talk to me well in advance of the deadline and we may be able to find an accommodation.

Collaboration and plagiarism

Talking to other students—especially those in the course—about your ideas is a good thing. Taking other people’s words or ideas without attribution is plagiarism and will result in honor-code-related unpleasantness. When in doubt, cite. And feel free to ask me about specific cases or problems and about the mechanics of research documentation. For references and guidelines, see the library’s [plagiarism](#) and [documentation](#) sites and the university’s [academic code of honor](#).

Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities who need accommodations or have questions should speak with me directly and contact the [Office of Disability Services](#).

Email

Email is a useful tool, but it is not (generally) secure. I will discuss grades and other confidential information over email only if you use encryption software (typically PGP/GPG).

Sakai

We'll be using a course management system for discussion forums, grades, and digitized readings. It's called Sakai; access it via <https://sakailogin.nd.edu>.

Schedule

NB. All dates and assignments subject to change.

WEEK 1 (1/14)	Welcome and introduction; Keats
WEEK 2 (1/21)	Keats; Whitman, "Song of Myself"
WEEK 3 (1/28)	Whitman, "Song of Myself"
WEEK 4 (2/4)	Whitman, "Song of Myself" and additional poems
WEEK 5 (2/11)	Whitman criticism
WEEK 6 (2/18)	Paper I , Tuesday, 2/18; Sophocles
WEEK 7 (2/25)	Sophocles; Goethe, Hegel, Lacan
WEEK 8 (3/4)	Butler
WEEK 9 (3/11)	Spring break, no class meetings
WEEK 10 (3/18)	Hansberry
WEEK 11 (3/25)	Paper II and library session (exact date TBA); Critical race theory
WEEK 12 (4/1)	Pynchon
WEEK 13 (4/8)	Pynchon and criticism
WEEK 14 (4/15)	Criticism and presentations
WEEK 15 (4/22)	Criticism and presentations
WEEK 16 (4/29)	Conclusions and review
FINALS WEEK	Final paper due in lieu of exam (Monday, 5/5 by 12:30 pm)