

Introduction to Literary Analysis
ENGL 3000.004
Lang 314 | T/Th 11:00-12:20
Fall 2025

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T/Th 2-3 (by appointment)
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I seek, in the reading of books, only to please myself, by an honest diversion; or, if I study, 'tis for no other science than what treats of the knowledge of myself and instructs me how to die and how to live well.

—Michel de Montaigne

Just as philosophy begins with doubt, so also a life that may be called “human” begins with irony.

—Soren Kierkegaard

Morality without a sense for paradox is vulgar.

—Friedrich Schlegel

I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book doesn't shake us awake like a blow to the skull, why bother reading it? So it can make us happy? Good God, we'd be just as happy if we had no books at all.... What we need are books that hit us like a most painful misfortune, like the death of someone we loved more than we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we've been banished to the woods, far from any human presence. A book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us.

—Franz Kafka

As a certain kind of humor depends upon being able to speak without self-consciousness of the parts and functions of the body, so with the advent of decency, literature lost the use of one of its limbs.

—Virginia Woolf

Sartre's conception of the novel was not a model for me. I find Céline, his foe, much more attractive as a writer in his disregard for an obligation to the common good and for his searing high style. I prefer to read the despicable stylists ... I also sort of detest the idea of moral fiction.

—Rachel Kushner

There are gentle souls who would pronounce Lolita meaningless because it does not teach them anything. I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction. Lolita has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm. There are not many such books. All the rest is either topical trash or what some call the Literature of Ideas, which very often is topical trash coming in huge blocks of plaster that are carefully transmitted from age to age until somebody comes along with a hammer and takes a good crack at them.

—Vladimir Nabokov

I don't read a novel for the story. I read it for the sensibility of the author, what his obsessions are, what he's fantasizing about, why this character speaks to him, why he devotes a novel to this character... and you either like it, or you don't.

—Bret Easton Ellis

I like writing disagreeable poems or certainly don't mind if a poem strikes someone as unpleasant. It is possible to offend people still, and my poems not infrequently do. One way to do it is to write beautifully what people don't want to hear. . . . I like poems that are daggers that sing, that for all the power of the sentiments expressed, and all the power to upset and offend, are so well made that they're achieved things. However much they upset you, they also affect you.

—Frederick Seidel



Ottessa Moshfegh

Course Description

Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems.

—Arthur Conan Doyle

ENGL 3000: Introduction to Literary Analysis is the “gateway course” for English majors (typically for juniors) where they fortify their scholarly competence at handling the tropes and genre conventions of drama, poetry, and fiction. Mastering literary-critical vocabulary is an essential skill for close readers of texts who aim to compose academic interpretations and theoretically informed critiques of literary works of art that engage with the history of the discourse of literary studies instead of offering mere personal opinions about one’s personal taste or moral preferences. In this course, you will continue your initiation into the discursive tribe of literary critics.

Handouts (provided)

Brian Morton, “Past Tensio”
T.S. Eliot, “Tradition & Individual Talent”
Jane Gallop, “The Ethics of Reading”
William Logan, “On Poetic Criticism”
Brett Bourbon, “What is a Poem”
Others, T.B.A.

Required Texts (hard copies/no screens)*

Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature*
Sharon Hamilton, *Essential Literary Terms*
Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest & Relaxation*
A.E. Stallings, *This Afterlife*
Frederick Seidel, *Selected Poems*
Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*

***Caveat Emptor (buyer beware): A Kind of Trigger Warning for the Era of Cancel Culture**

No question, issue, or topic is off limits to classroom discussion so long as it is the object of academic rather than political or ideological attention.

—Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time*

Since a wise man can be mistaken, and a hundred men, and many nations, yes, and human nature according to us is mistaken for many centuries about this or that, what assurance have we that sometimes it stops being mistaken, and that in this century it is not making a mistake?

—Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (1580)

It's impossible to offend someone who doesn't want to be offended.

—Friedrich Schlegel (c. 1798)

Literature explores all kinds of marvelous, heroic, altruistic, angelic, villainous, strange, outrageous, *outré*, decadent, louche, illegal, immoral, unethical, and disturbing things about human beings. Nothing is forbidden in art; all things are permitted. “Acceptable” terms, definitions, categories, slang, concepts, tastes, biases, opinions about what is harmful or offensive or relatable, morals and social mores, and so on, nearly *ad infinitum*, get debated, renegotiated, and redefined. Paradigms shift in art as in science. Literary intellectuals understand that certain things acceptable to some (in some eras) are not to others (in other eras), and that’s just the way it is—and that’s how we like it. We understand that *an instance* of discrimination or a *description* of prejudice in an imaginative work of art is not itself *an act* of violence—it is (or may be) an accusation or an exposé or a specimen we can examine in the safe “laboratory” space of literary discussion. No one *makes* anyone read anything they’d prefer not to, and hardly anyone is awaiting our “hot take” on this probably-not-really-all-that-pressing-matter. We literary critics ally with authors as they explore the complex nature of themselves and of other humans engaged in the conflicts and inequities in both fictional and real worlds. We do not “cancel” something or someone from the past or the present if they do not happen to take our currently fashionable political stand on the social concerns deemed most crucial this week.

Free people make free choices about their individual activities, values, inclinations, lifestyles, beliefs, the books they read, and the classes they take. They have a right to those, and we value their rights and our own right to disagree or choose differently. Some of our literary texts may contain potentially triggering material to some. There is no way to know, in advance, what triggers whom. It is your responsibility, as one voluntarily enrolled in this class, to preview all material assigned **before deciding to remain enrolled in the class**. If you are enrolled in **this** class, you are expected to complete **these** assigned readings and engage in scholarly discussion and exams about **them**. If you’re not comfortable with that, there are multiple sections of ENGL 3000 offered this semester (and every semester) with different teachers and readings you may find more suitable.

Part of becoming educated citizens of a democracy is learning strategies to negotiate a plurality of uncomfortable or irreconcilable views. We are all bound to have problems with certain works of literature—and certain people or their ideologies or beliefs—for a variety of reasons, but all our classroom discussions need to suit the occasion: this is an upper-level college class in a secular public university meant to **train English majors in scholarly ways of analyzing literary texts and genre conventions**. None of us are here—in this classroom—to take a political stand for or against anything. We’re here to understand more about the art of literature than we did before by reading things we’ve likely not already read, or reading them in new ways. Before arriving at a judgment or committing to an interpretation, a reaction, or taking a stand on the-hill-you’re-prepared-to-die-on, consider, instead, being cosmopolitan, urbane, diplomatic. Ask pertinent intellectual, contextual, historical questions of yourself, the text, your teacher, and your classmates. Emotional reaction is not scholarly engagement. Being offended may be normal, but it is not an appropriate intellectual response in an academic setting. Remaining enrolled in this class means you’ve agreed to abide by this syllabus, do the work assigned, maintain a scholarly perspective, and be a civil member of this academic community.

This Instructor’s Responsibilities

I aim to follow Stanley Fish’s advice in *Save the World on Your Own Time*: the job of someone teaching in a university is to

(1) introduce students to bodies of knowledge and traditions of inquiry they didn’t know much about before; and (2) equip those same students with the analytical skills that will enable them to move confidently within those traditions and to engage in independent research should they choose to do so. Teachers should show up for their classes, prepare lesson plans, **teach what has been advertised**, be current in the literature of the field, promptly correct assignments and papers, hold regular office hours, and give academic (not political or moral) advice. ... That’s it, there’s nothing else, and nothing more.

A university, for Fish, is a place for teaching and research, not advocacy for social issues:

The unfettered expression of ideas is a cornerstone of liberal democracy; it is a prime political value. It is *not*, however, an academic value, and if we come to regard it as our primary responsibility, we will default on the responsibilities assigned us and come to be *what no one pays us to be*—political agents engaged in political advocacy. The only advocacy that should go on in the classroom is **the advocacy of intellectual virtues**.

Should controversial issues arise in our class, realize they do so in “an academic context.” They should be discussed in “academic terms” as “objects of analysis, comparison, historical placement, etc.” and judged “on craftsmanship and coherence ... *is it well made?*”

does it hang together?” That is, we should always “**academicize**”: “an academicized classroom,” Fish claims, should pursue and practice “intellectual virtues.” “Opinion-sharing sessions,” he says, “are like junk food: they fill you up with starch and leave you feeling both sated and hungry. A sustained inquiry into the truth of a matter is an almost athletic experience; it may exhaust you, but it also improves you.”



A. E. Stallings

Artificial Intelligence: It Is Absolutely Forbidden!

*We suffer ourselves to lean and rely so strongly upon the arm
of another that we destroy our own strength and vigor.*
—Montaigne, “Of Pedantry”

Use of AI to write, edit, or revise is plagiarism (“the practice of taking someone else’s work or ideas and passing them off as one’s own”), cheating, unauthorized assistance, and academic misconduct violating the UNT Honor Code (<https://vpaa.unt.edu/ss/integrity>). You may get points deducted, fail an assignment, fail the course, and/or have your academic dishonesty violation referred to the Academic Integrity Office.

Assignments and Grades

In-Class Genre Exams (3 @ 10 points each)	30 points
In-Class Explications (3 @ 15 points each)	45 points
Attendance	15 points
Participation	10 points
Total	100 points

Genre Exams (3 @ 10 points each = 30 points)

You will sit for three in-class genre exams, fiction, poetry and drama. These will test your knowledge of literary terms and concepts and your abilities to connect those to our literary texts. **You will write these in provided blue books. You must be present to take the exam. “Make-up” exams will only be allowed for extraordinary extenuating circumstances.**

In-Class Explications (3 @ 15 points each = 45 points)

You will sit for three in-class explication essays, one for each genre: fiction, poetry, and drama. To “explicate” means to unfold, unfurl, or uncoil—as a flower opens, petal by petal. It is to explore how a literary text develops, or evolves—how its meanings, its words, lines, and tropes make the whole more than the sum of the parts. When one explicates, one explains, makes clear(er), discloses—that is: analyzes and interprets. An explication is a careful, slow, close reading that pays intimate attention to the elements of a text. It uses objective, formal details as primary evidence to explain possibilities of *what* and *why* and *how* the text means. In your explications, you will display your skill as a close reader of literary works of art. You will be provided with a poem or passage from our texts. You will apply your knowledge of genre conventions to describe how they structure the passages and how literary meaning is “made” from the metamorphic interactions of these elements. **You will write these in blue books. You must be present to take the exam. “Make-up” exams will only be allowed for extraordinary extenuating circumstances.**



Frederick Seidel



Edward Albee

Attendance, Make-Up Work, & Being Tardy (15 Points)

Please discuss any **ODA accommodations** (and provide ODA documents) with the professor ASAP > <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access> <.

For the full UNT Policy 06.039, Student Attendance and Authorized Absences, excerpted here, see our course Canvas page.

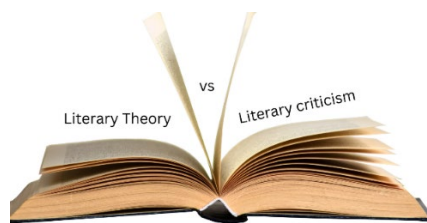
Earning Attendance Points: 1) show up on time for and attend every class; 2) there is no #2. You are allowed **2 “free” absences** in this class. Do **not** think of them as **“skip days”** that you get in addition to other days missed for “extenuating circumstances.” **You may have unplanned “extenuating circumstances.” If you’ve skipped and then also had “extenuating circumstances,” you don’t get to double dip.** After your two “free” absences, **3.5 points each** will be **deducted** for **unexcused absences 4, 5, 6, and 7.** A student missing **more than 7 classes** will need to meet with the professor and may **fail** the course due to absence or **face further point deductions.** If the student is allowed to remain in the course with the hope of passing, the final grade will be no higher than a “C.” Unexcused absences cannot be “made up.”

Things that are **not** excused as “extenuating” include things such as:

- “I feel/felt sick”
- “I couldn’t get out of bed”
- “Traffic”
- “Bus was late”
- “I have scheduled a non-emergency doctor/dentist/etc. appointment”
- “I have an appointment with my advisor”
- And anything else that could be scheduled for a time other than class time

Tardiness: Roll is called when class begins. A student 5-29 minutes late will be counted tardy. Two tardies = one unexcused absence. A student more than 30 minutes late to class will be counted absent.

Make-Up Work: Students with **an excusable absence** will be permitted to **make up missed work** when practicable or may be given special consideration so they are not penalized. A student is **responsible for requesting, in writing, that an absence be excused, providing satisfactory evidence to the faculty member to substantiate the claim, and delivering the request personally to the faculty member.** When an absence is excused, the faculty member will provide a reasonable time after the absence for the student to complete an assignment. A student who completes a make-up assignment **within a reasonable period** after the absence will not be penalized. A student needing assistance verifying absences due to any circumstances listed above should contact the Dean of Students office. The faculty member may take appropriate action if a student fails to provide proper evidence or satisfactorily complete an assignment within a reasonable time. **ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS CONTACT YOUR TEACHERS ASAP: WE CAN ONLY HELP YOU IF WE KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON.**



Participation (10 Points)

Contradictions of judgments neither offend nor alter. They only rouse and exercise me. We evade correction. We ought to offer and present ourselves to it, especially when it appears in the form of conversation, and not of authority. At every opposition, we do not consider whether or not it is dust, but, right or wrong, and how to disengage ourselves. Instead of extending our arms, we thrust out our claws. I could suffer myself to be rudely handled by my friend, so much as to tell me that I am a fool and talk of I know not of what. I love stout expressions among friends and for them to speak as they think. We must fortify and harden our hearing against this tenderness of the ceremonious sound of words. I love a strong familiarity and conversation, a friendship that pleases itself in the sharpness and vigor of its communication, like love in biting and scratching.

—Montaigne, “On the Art of Discussion”

To earn participation points, a student must be present (on time) **and** active in class discussions. Active, engaged participation involves several to-do’s and do-not’s:

- ✓ Be a decent human being.
- ✓ Show up having done your homework, prepared to

- ✓ Listen, but also to
- ✓ Voluntarily ask questions and pose problems so you're
- ✓ Actively participating in and contributing to discussions of the readings
- ✓ And thoughtfully responding to other students' ideas
- ✓ In focused ways that build on what we've been learning,
- ✓ Advancing our conversation, so there is coherence to our semester.
- ✓ Be bold; be memorable; take risks.
- ✓ Understand that not everyone thinks like you, and that's OK.
- ✓ Treat your classmates, your teacher, these texts, and this class with respect.
- ✓ Take yourself and your education seriously: all our futures depend on it.
- ✓ Do not dominate discussion, ramble or belittle others' contributions.
- ✓ Do not consume media on your phone or laptop: NO SCREENS.
- ✓ Do not do work for other classes in our class time.
- ✓ Do not interrupt others or disrupt class by being tardy or by coming-and-going during class.
- ✓ Do not sit there as if before a blanked Zoom screen or as if you're here under protest: you've signed up for the show—enjoy it!

Schedule

Week 1

T 8/19—Syllabus; Morton, “Past Tensio” & Eliot, “Tradition & the Individual Talent”
 Th 8/21—Gallop, “The Ethics of Reading” & Logan, “On Poetic Criticism” (provided)

Week 2

T 8/26—Felski, *Uses of Literature*: “Introduction” & “Recognition” (1-50)
 Th 8/28—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Chapters 1-2

Week 3

T 9/2—*Essential Literary Terms*: “Fiction” (21-24), “Narration” (121-144), and
 “Unreliable Narrator” (49-50)
 Th 9/4—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Chapters 3-4

Week 4

T 9/9—Felski, *Uses of Literature*: “Enchantment” (51-76)
 Th 9/11—Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, Chapters 5-8

Week 5: FICTION EXAM WEEK

T 9/16—**Fiction Exam**
 Th 9/18—**In-Class Explication**

Week 6

T 9/23—*Essential Lit. Terms*: “Poetry” (1-21), “Prosody” & “Poetic Forms” (219-276)
 Th 9/25—Stallings, *This Afterlife*: poems from *Archaic Smile*

Week 7

T 9/30—Felski, *Uses of Literature*: “Knowledge” (77-104)
& Brett Bourbon, “What is a Poem?”
Th 10/2—Stallings, *This Afterlife*: from *Hapax*

Week 8

T 10/7—*Essential Literary Terms*: “Figurative Language” (34-73)
Th 10/9—Stallings, *This Afterlife*: from *Olives* and *Like*

Week 9

T 10/14—Felski, *Uses of Literature*: “Shock” & “Conclusion” (105-135)
Th 10/16—Seidel, *Selected Poems*: *Sunrise*, *These Days*, *My Tokyo*, *Going Fast*

Week 10

T 10/21—*Essential Literary Terms*: “Rhetorical Strategies” (74-120)
Th 10/23—Seidel, *Selected: The Cosmos Poems*, *Life on Earth*, & *Ooga-Booga*

Week 11

T 10/28—Seidel, from *Evening Man & Nice Weather*
Th 10/30—Seidel, *Widening Income Inequality & Peaches Goes it Alone*

Week 12: POETRY EXAM WEEK

T 11/4—**Poetry Exam**
Th 11/6—**In-Class Explication**

Week 13

T 11/11—*Essential Terms*: “Drama” (26-33), “Narration” & “Structure” (144-203),
Th 11/13—Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Act One: “Fun & Games”

Week 14

T 11/18—Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Act Two: “Walpurgisnacht”
Th 11/20—Albee, *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Act Three: “The Exorcism”

Week 15

Thanksgiving Break

Week 16

T 12/2—Screening *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
Th 12/4—Screening *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

T 12/9 10:30-12:30—FINAL EXAM PERIOD
DRAMA EXAM AND IN-CLASS EXPLICATION