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### LIT 110L.01: Introduction to Literature

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# LIT 110: INTRO TO LIT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA  
Fall 2021

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## CHARTER, Part 1



*How many things have we put up over the last few decades that would spiritually wound people the world over if they burned down a century from now?*

—Osita Nwaneva

## Part 2

If the imagination is to yield any real product, it must have received a great deal of material from the external world. This is the only way in which its storehouse can be filled. The phantasy is nourished much in the same way as the body...

—Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism*

Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realise the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors... My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented...

—C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*

[In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia] Woolf's ideas are, in fact, few and fairly obvious—at least from our historical vantage. Yet the thinking, the presence of animate thought on the page, is striking. How do we sort that? How can a piece of writing have simple ideas and still infect the reader with the excitement of its thinking? The answer, I'd say, is that ideas are not the sum and substance of thought; rather, thought is as much about the motion across the water as it is about the stepping stones that allow it.

—Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*

## DESCRIPTION

Written in private, read in private, a novel is the most artful act of fragmentation; it is the fragment of a conversation: one person speaks all at once, and then, months or years or centuries later, another listens all at once.

LIT 110 is an introduction to the study of literature—and of the novel, in particular. What is literature and what is its value in a culture like ours? Literature is, among other things, a demonstration of hospitality; *here is a four hundred page thought, carefully considered by a perfect stranger, organized into sentences, paragraphs, chapters.* I'm interested in discussing the shape and substance of a text, but I never want us to stray from the knowledge that a work of literature is, perhaps before it is anything else, the possibility of a vivid encounter. This encounter may be with a writer or with moments from that writer's life; with characters, often no less real to us than our loved ones; with language that does not divide us into our various parts—into intellects, hearts, muscles—but which speaks to the whole of us.

I have chosen our class's texts for their strange and beautiful representations of time and memory, those most private/shared facets of human experience. Who, among all the great variety of specialists in the university, each equipped with her own unique language and powers of description—from physicists to analytic philosophers, from composers to filmmakers—can reflect back to us what it is like and what it means to exist in time. Philosophers, certainly, have much to say on the subject, and filmmakers and composers, too, but I would argue that the novelist, more so than anyone else, has the capacity to evoke a sense of time and its passage, and to describe for us the texture of our own memories.

So, we'll be looking at poems and novels that do interesting and moving things with time, which seems one day to run very fast, and the next to drag endlessly along. Similarly, a moment on the page can take days to read, and a lifetime on the page can span just a sentence. But I'd also like to talk about time and memory in another way. Artistic influence is a kind of memory that one novel has of another; a text from centuries ago can show up vividly in the work of a living writer like a resurrection or immortality.

Finally, I'd like you to think of this class as a communal project, in which we're all building a class together. The premise of this project is the reading you'll do. You'll read on your own, but then we'll come together and engage in conversation. And then, finally, you'll clarify your thinking by composing thoughtful, original essays.

## TEXTS

*Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky; *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson; *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro; *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch; *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo; *So Long, See You Tomorrow* by William Maxwell. Please buy print copies<sup>1</sup> of these titles from wherever you prefer to get your books. With the exception of a film, *Winter in the Blood*, which you will need to stream, all other course materials will be available on our class Moodle page. Please print these texts, read and annotate them, and bring them with you to class.

## OBJECTIVES

To develop your affection and appreciation for a variety of beautiful works of literature; to formulate and express opinions and ideas (in conversation, and in your written work) that are well-developed, logical, and organized; to compose essays for different kinds of readers, different purposes and contexts; to revise written work based on comments from your instructor.

## ASSIGNMENTS & GRADES

### **(2) Essays (40 points)**

For both of these essays, you will compose and support a clear, original thesis. The first of these essays you will revise according to instructor comments, and the second you will turn in at the end of the semester in lieu of a final exam. This second essay should include outside sources, quotes, research, bibliography, and formatted according to the standards of MLA. More on these details later in the term. (6) double-spaced pages each.

### **(3) Letters (30 points)**

Think of these letters as the place to explore whatever it is you're thinking about whatever text we've read that has interested you most. These letters are not thesis-driven, just reflective—but they are, most importantly, real letters addressed to real people you know.

A couple of thoughts here. The person to whom you address a letter is, in many ways, as important a choice as the subject and focus of your letter. What goes on when we sit down to compose a letter? Something deeply mysterious. No other form of writing makes so many of your writerly decisions for you. The recipient is, I think, a kind of writing partner, helping to make decisions about both style and substance. The way you might talk about *Hamlet* with, for instance, a depressed cousin would almost certainly be different from the way you would talk about *Hamlet* with your 12-year-old child. A recipient shapes not only the style of your communication, but your focus: a particular reader has great powers of selection. My sister, as a potential recipient, stokes my interest in Ophelia, whereas my father-in-law focuses my attention on Shakespeare's affection for puns.

I want you to write to people that you feel are, in one way or another, good partners. I suspect that you are mysteriously hilarious with one friend, and yet utterly solemn with another; so you should choose the person that makes you want to (and perhaps able to) write about whatever text it is that interests you.

I expect you to engage seriously with whatever text you've chosen—a selection as brief as a sentence, or as long as a passage—but also to think of these letters as pieces of literature themselves. What might that mean? Can a letter you write to a friend contribute to the beauty of Shakespeare? We'll talk more about this question, and other questions related to letter writing, throughout the term.

Note: These letters would be a good place to try out an idea you have for one of your two longer essays. (500) words each.

### **Final Portfolio (10 points)**

Your final portfolio should include:

- 1-page reflection on the revisions made to Essay 1;
- revision of Essay 1;
- Essay 2

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<sup>1</sup> Print v. Digital

—Newly-printed copies of Letters 1, 2, 3

**Late Work:** Except in the case of documented circumstances, no late work will be accepted. To avoid losing work due to a crash, consider signing up for Dropbox, or some other cloud service. If an assignment must be turned in late, if we've come to an agreement about why and when, please do not e-mail it to me. Bring it to our next class period in hardcopy.

**Essay Formatting:**

Your Name LIT 110 Due Date
Your Title Here
Be sure to use a 12 pt. serif typeface, something like Times or Georgia.
Also, double-spaced text, 1" margins, and page numbers.

**Letter Formatting:**

Your Name Lit 110 Due Date Word Count
Dear _____,
[Text of letter, 500 words, single-spaced.]
Sincerely [or whatever appropriate valediction you prefer],
Your Signature

**Conversation (15 points)**

Come to class having read and thought about each author's work. To paraphrase Annie Dillard: How we spend our class periods is, after all, how we spend our semester. So, how good a course this is will largely depend on two things: how well you read the assigned poems, novels, and essays, and how willing you are to talk, to listen and respond to, with genuine interest, the thoughts of your peers.

I want you to know that I am genuinely interested in what you have to say, and that when you are not in class, I do wonder where you are. Because much of this class is about engagement with not just our texts, but with each other, and with each other's interpretations of those texts, it is important that you come to class having completed the assigned reading.

**In-class Recitation (5 points)**

1 poem, 10-20 lines. Pre-1900. See schedule for recitation dates.

**GRADES II**

## Essays

**A** Superior essays will demonstrate initiative and rhetorical sophistication that go beyond the requirements. An essay at this level is composed of clear, well-edited prose, and in which contains a clear, original thesis that the writer supports with textual evidence. In subsequent drafts, the writer demonstrates an ability to analyze the work, reflect on it, and revise accordingly.

**B** Strong essays demonstrate a clarity of purpose; in sum, all the major pieces are there and functioning well, with no need for major revisions. The writer is able to reflect meaningfully on the first draft and make some thoughtful choices about revision.

**C** Coherent essays meet the basic standards set for the assignment, yet the writing would benefit a great deal from further revisions—of purpose, evidence, writing style/mechanics, perhaps of all three.

**D** Weak essays do not fully meet the basic standards set for the assignment. Brief and underdeveloped, these essays show a composing process that is not yet elaborated or reflective of a sufficiently thoughtful reading of the relevant text. Essays generally require extensive revisions to purpose, development, and/or style and mechanics.

**F** Unacceptable essays are fundamentally unclear, showing little to no effort on the writer's part. No thesis presented. Style and mechanics are in tatters. An essay will also earn an F if it is not the writer's original work, either if the words presented belong to another writer, or if the words were submitted, for credit, in a previous class.

## Participation

**A** The student shows initiative and excellence in written and verbal work; helps to create more effective class discussions through verbal and written contributions; engagement with peers is thoughtful, specific, insightful, and original.

**B** Student demonstrates active engagement in written and verbal work; plays an active role in the classroom but does not always add original insight to the discussion. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. Interaction with peers is tactful, specific, and helpful.

**C** Student demonstrates consistent, satisfactory written and verbal work. Overall, the student is prepared for class, completes assigned readings and writings, and contributes to class discussions. Reading and writing assignments are completed on time.

**D** Student demonstrates inconsistent written and verbal work. Often, the student may be late to class, unprepared, and may contribute infrequently or unproductively to classroom discussions or small group workshops. Reading and writing assignments are not turned in or are insufficient. Contributions to class discussions do not show evidence of thought engagement with the assigned reading.

**F** Student produces ineffectual written and verbal work. The student may be excessively late to class, regularly unprepared, and not able to contribute to classroom discussions. This student may be disruptive in class. Reading and writing assignments are regularly not turned in or completed incorrectly.

## CLASS POLICIES

**Excused Absences:** I may excuse absences for reasons to do with illness,\* injury, family emergency, religious observance, cultural or ceremonial events, or participation in a University sponsored activity. (University sponsored activities include for example, field trips, ASUM service, music or drama performances, and intercollegiate athletics.) I will excuse absences for reasons of military service or mandatory public service; please provide appropriate documentation (see below).

Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an

authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.

Students in the National Guard or Reserves are permitted excused absences due to military training. Students must submit their military training schedule to their instructor at the beginning of the semester. Students must also make arrangements with the instructor to make up course work for absences due to military service.

Except in the case of unusual circumstances or excused absences, each class you miss beyond (4) will lower your final grade by 1/3 of a letter—an A- drops to a B+. Keep in mind, also, that you will not receive a passing grade if you miss more than (7) classes. Further details below.

**\*COVID-19:** All students and teachers at UM are required to wear masks while in class. Please do not congregate outside our classroom before or after class. Please maintain and respect physical distance. Drinking liquids and eating food is not allowed within the classroom because doing so requires masks to be removed. Above all, please stay home if you feel sick and/or if you are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, or if anyone in your household is showing symptoms. If you are sick or think that you might be, please contact Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.

**Academic Honesty:** "All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code: [http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)."

**Cell Phones & Laptops:** If during class you receive, or know in advance that you will receive, an important or difficult text message, please excuse yourself from class to sort out your response. Nothing good comes from texting during class. Your focus is taken up, as is, very likely, the focus of your neighbor, and I am always aware when a phone comes out, especially when every effort is made to keep that phone a secret. You are welcome to use a laptop to keep notes, but two thoughts in response: 1) there is a vast body of literature which details the positive, cognitive benefits of taking notes by hand; 2) laptops are frenetic things, and the Internet is strobing billboard.

**University Assessment:** All courses, including this one, that are Approved Writing courses participate in the University-wide Program-level Assessment (UPWA). Therefore, this course requires an electronic submission of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the writing program. Your papers will be stored in a database. This assessment in no way affects either your grade or your progression at the university.

## ACCOMODATIONS

**Office of Disability Equity:** "The Office of Disability Equity, formerly known as Disability Services for Students, ensures that programs at the University of Montana are accessible and usable by students with disabilities. Access is a civil right; therefore, reasonable modifications must be made. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is not a sound response to students with disabilities who are seeking appropriate modifications. Therefore, our staff works with each student individually and modifications are provided on a case-by-case basis."

## FALL SCHEDULE

**Note:** If, for a given text, there is no specific selection of pages given, that means I'd like you to come to class having read the entirety of that particular piece of work. So, for example, you will come to class 9/8 having read all of *What the Ice Gets* by Melinda Mueller. The same is true for "Poetry as Enchantment," an archived lecture for which you will find a link in Moodle; please watch and come to class with notes.

+	<b>POETRY</b>
8/30	Introductions & Metaphors
9/1	No reading due; Discussion: Reading, Language, Time, Literature
9/3	“Poetry as Enchantment” (Moodle); “1944” by Francis Spufford (Moodle)
9/6	<b>No class:</b> Labor Day
9/8	<i>What the Ice Gets</i> (Moodle); “Musée des Beaux Arts” (Moodle)
9/10	In class: Interview w/ Melinda Mueller
9/13	<i>The Endurance</i> (Moodle)
9/15	“Pleasure Boat Studio” by Ou-Yang Hsiu
9/17	“Searching for a Lost Odessa—and a Deaf Childhood” (Moodle); “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity” (Moodle)
9/20	<i>Deaf Republic</i> ; “The Last Leaf” (Moodle)
9/22	<i>Deaf Republic</i>
9/24	<b>Letter 1</b> ; “Can Fiction Interpret the World” & “Does the World Have Meaning?” (Moodle)
+	<b>POETIC PROSE</b>
9/27	<b>No Class:</b> “Interview w/ Justine Eyre” (Moodle)
9/29	Discussion: Audiobooks; “2004” (Moodle)
10/1	“2004”
10/4	<i>Housekeeping</i> (Chapters 1-4)
10/6	<i>Housekeeping</i>
10/8	<i>Housekeeping</i> (5-6)
10/11	<i>Housekeeping</i> (7-9); <i>The Book of Ruth</i> (Moodle)
10/13	<i>Housekeeping</i>
10/15	<b>Letter 2</b> ; <i>Housekeeping</i> (10-11)
10/18	“Fascinated to Presume” (Moodle); “For My Brothers and Sisters...” (Moodle)
10/20	Thesis-writing workshop ( <b>Note:</b> Begin reading <i>Never Let Me Go</i> )
10/22	Additional office hours in lieu of (during) class
+	<b>POETIC NARRATIVE</b>
10/25	<b>Essay 1</b> ; <i>Never Let Me Go</i> (Chapters 1-5)
10/27	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (6-7)
10/29	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (8-9)
11/ 1	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (10-14)
11/3	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (15-16)
11/5	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (17-19)
11/8	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> (20-23)
11/10	In class: Recitations
11/12	<b>Letter 3</b> ; <i>Winter in the Blood</i> (Part 1)



+	<b>"FADE OUT"</b>
11/15	<i>Winter in the Blood</i> (Part 2)
11/17	<i>Winter in the Blood</i> (Part 3)
11/19	<i>Winter in the Blood</i> (dir. Alex Smith & Andrew J. Smith); In class: Interview w/ Alex Smith
11/22	<i>Pedro Páramo</i> (vii-x & pages 3-39)
11/24	Travel day
11/26	Thanksgiving
11/29	<i>Pedro Páramo</i> (40-124)
12/1	Lecture: Research Writing
12/3	<i>So Long, See You Tomorrow</i> (1-3)
12/6	<i>So Long, See You Tomorrow</i> (4-6)
12/8	<i>So Long, See You Tomorrow</i> (7-9)
12/10	Additional office hours in lieu of (during) class
12/15	<b>Essay 2/Final Portfolio:</b> Please slide your portfolio under my office door before 3 PM.

**Our syllabus and schedule** are subject to change, in order to meet the needs of our class. I will be sure to confirm, at the start or end of each class, the following class's assignments: readings, writings, etc. Please be sure to exchange contact information with a peer (or two), so that if you miss a class you have someone who can inform you of any revisions that may have been made to our schedule.