

**Literature and Psychology**  
COLI 211B (Section 2), Fall 2009  
TR, 10:05-11:30, RC 204

Instructor: Greg Sevik  
Office: LNG 204  
Office Hours: TBA  
Email: gsevik1@binghamton.edu  
(When emailing, please put “coli 211b” in subject line)

## **I. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Comparative Literature 211B is designed as an exploration of the ways in which the disciplines of literary study and psychology interact and, in some cases, overlap. Generally, courses on literature and psychology focus on two issues: (1) Freudian psychoanalysis, and the way it is both informed by and employed in interpreting literary texts; and (2) the genre of the “psychological novel.” This course will explore, to a certain extent, both of these areas, but it will also probe one issue not generally touched upon in such surveys: namely, the psychology of reading, the aesthetic experience of perceiving literary works of art.

Our semester will be divided into four parts, each of which will focus on a different genre: namely—tragedy, comedy, poetry, and mystery. Although this course entails some engagement with theoretical and literary concepts (e.g., the Oedipus complex, humor theory, prosody, etc.), we will nonetheless emphasize—above all—close, attentive readings of the works at hand.

## **II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **Grading Structure**

The evaluation method employed in this course derives from a system sometimes referred to as “contract grading.” This means that your grade is based not on the evaluation of individual assignments but rather on your having completed a certain number of assignments and projects satisfactorily. Each grade (A, B, C, etc.) corresponds to a certain set of assignments and projects, all of which are graded either “credit” or “no-credit.” If you decide that you want a B, for example, then you must fulfill all of the requirements for the B *and* receive credit for all assignments. Assignments are acceptable and will receive credit if they: (1) are on time, (2) are complete, (3) follow all instructions, (4) demonstrate attentive reading of and engagement with the texts in question and (5) are of acceptable quality. Below is a description of the requirements for each grade as well as a detailed description of each assignment.

### **FOR THE “C”**

- read all of the assigned texts

- attend class regularly and participate
- complete eight of the ten commentaries
- do the prosody exercises
- write both of the essays and essay revisions

#### FOR THE “B”

- complete all “C” requirements
- complete nine of the ten commentaries
- give a presentation

#### FOR THE “A”

- complete all “B” requirements
- complete all ten commentaries
- write the *New York Trilogy* reading journal

### **Attendance**

In order to get the most out of this course you should, ideally, attend every class session. Nonetheless, you are allowed three absences before your grade is directly affected. Every absence after the third will lower your mark by half a grade (from B to B-, for example, or from C to C-). Also keep in mind that any instance of tardiness in excess of 15 minutes will be counted as an absence.

### **Participation and Late Assignments**

This course is not designed as a lecture only. It is also a discussion course and will function best when students participate. Naturally, it is not possible to provide an exact rubric for how you will be evaluated on your participation. If, however, you do not find at least *some* way to contribute positively to the course, this fact—as well as such forms of *negative* participation as habitual sleeping in class, text messaging, and so on—could be grounds for lowering your grade.

As noted above, turning assignments in on time is a condition of receiving credit for them; it is also a reflection of your level of engagement in the course. Therefore, every late assignment after the first will—like every absence in excess of three—lower your mark by half a grade. Furthermore, any assignment later than one week will not be eligible for credit.

### **Submitting Your Assignments**

All assignments will be submitted electronically using Turnitin. *You need not print a hard copy, unless you are meeting with me during office hours to discuss a given assignment.* To submit a project, go to “Assignments” on Blackboard and click on the link for the assignment in question. You will then follow a process very similar to that of attaching a file to an email message.

All projects and assignments are due by 11:59PM on the due date in question. Any assignment not turned in by this time is late (see policy above).

## **Commentaries**

During the course of the semester you will write 10 commentaries. These are in-class responses to the day's reading assignment which will be completed in the first 15 minutes of class; they are normally one to two pages in length. Commentaries are both a way to ensure that everyone is keeping up with the reading and a way to get you thinking about the text before we begin our discussion. To receive credit, you must respond directly to the prompt and demonstrate that you have read the text carefully and attentively. Like all assignments in this course, commentaries are graded on a credit/no-credit basis. They are either acceptable or not. Remember: even a thoughtful, well-written commentary will be considered unacceptable if it does not demonstrate that you have read the assigned text.

If you are absent on the day of a commentary, or if one of your commentaries is unacceptable and you would like make it up, you may write a 750-word reading journal in its place—on the reading assignment in question. Make-up journals may be done a maximum of three times per semester and should be handed in within two weeks of the missed commentary. (See entry below for instructions on how to write a reading journal.)

## **The Essays**

You will write two 4- to 5-page essays for this course. The prompts for these essays will be handed out at least two or three weeks before they are due. These essays should be well-organized; they should be free of grammar, spelling and usage errors; and they should contain page-number citations for all quotes and references. You will have the opportunity—and are required—to revise/rewrite each paper one time in order to receive credit. The specific requirements for each paper will be described in greater detail when I hand out the assignments.

## **Presentations**

If you are going for an “A” or “B,” you will be required to give, alone or in pairs, one 10-minute presentation on a topic to be determined early in the semester. I will provide a list of topics, though you will have some freedom to create your own if you so choose. Keep in mind that the purpose of these presentations is neither to “kill time” nor to overwhelm the class with information but rather to contribute, in an interesting and engaging way, to our knowledge and understanding of an author, genre, idea or issue relating to the course as a whole.

## **Reading Journals**

Those aiming for an “A” grade will be required to write a reading journal, of between 1500 and 2000 words in length, on Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy*. (Make-up journals for missed/unacceptable commentaries should be between 750 and 1000 words long.) A reading journal is a series of individual entries written in response to the reading assignment in question. *Each entry should be a response to a specific passage in*

*the text*—for example, to a paragraph in a novel or a few lines of poetry. In other words, a reading journal should be neither a summary of the text nor a general response to the text as a whole. Entries can be about nearly anything in relation to your response to the text: observations about character, form, structure, imagery, philosophical or psychological issues, even personal experiences, as long as they *stay close to the text of the literary work in question* and are *not merely a summary* of the text. Entries can range in length from a couple of sentences to a whole paragraph and need not relate to one another. Each should be indicated by page and/or line numbers. Thus, the format should look something like this:

p. 23: -----  
 p. 37: -----  
 Etc.

Be sure that your journal covers a substantial portion of the reading assignment (in the case of the *New York Trilogy* journal, it should span the entire novel)—and not, for example, only the first half of the assignment or a few isolated passages. Reading journals should be written *as you read* so that that what they capture—as much as possible—is your spontaneous, fresh, authentic response to the literary work in question.

### III. REQUIRED TEXTS

Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy*  
 Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*  
 Tina Howe, *Coastal Disturbances*  
 Molière, *The Misanthrope and Tartuffe*  
 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*  
 Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Miscellaneous (On Blackboard under “Course Documents”)

### IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

#### WEEK 1

Sept. 1: Course Introduction  
 Sept. 3: “Freudian Basics” (Course Documents)

#### I. Tragedy

#### WEEK 2

Sept. 8: *Hamlet*, Act I  
 Sept. 10: *Hamlet*, Act II

#### COMMENTARY #1

#### WEEK 3

Sept. 15: *Hamlet*, Acts III-IV

Sept. 17: Finish *Hamlet*; Sigmund Freud, “The Oedipus Complex” (Course Documents)  
**COMMENTARY #2**

## II. Comedy

WEEK 4

Sept. 22: *Tartuffe*, Acts 1-3

Sept. 24: Finish *Tartuffe*

**COMMENTARY #3**

WEEK 5

Sept. 29: Jerry Farber, “Toward a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Humor in Literature and the Other Arts” (Course Documents)

Oct. 1: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Act I

**COMMENTARY #4**

WEEK 6

Oct. 6: Finish *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Oct. 8: *Coastal Disturbances*, Act I

**\*ESSAY #1 DUE\***

WEEK 7

Oct. 13: Finish *Coastal Disturbances*

**COMMENTARY #5**

## III. Poetry

Oct. 15: Poetic Miscellany (Course Documents)

WEEK 8

Oct. 20: Prosody Exercises (Course Documents); Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” (Course Documents)

Oct. 22: Sonnets I (Course Documents)

**\*ESSAY #1 REVISION DUE\***

WEEK 9

Oct. 27: Sonnets II (Course Documents)

Oct. 29: Sonnets III (Course Documents)

**COMMENTARY #6**

WEEK 10

Nov. 3: Sonnets IV (Course Documents)

Nov. 5: Sonnets V (Course Documents)

## IV. Mystery

WEEK 11

Nov. 10: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter” (Course Documents)

**COMMENTARY #7**

Nov. 12: *The Big Sleep*, Chaps. 1-10

## WEEK 12

Nov. 17: *The Big Sleep*, Chaps. 11-20

Nov. 19: *The Big Sleep*, Chaps 21-26

**COMMENTARY #8**

## WEEK 13

Nov. 24: Finish *The Big Sleep*

**\*ESSAY #2 DUE\***

Nov. 26: NO CLASS MEETING

## WEEK 14

Dec. 1: *The New York Trilogy*, “City of Glass,” Chaps. 1-6

Dec. 3: *The New York Trilogy*, “City of Glass,” Chaps. 7-9

**COMMENTARY #9**

## WEEK 15

Dec. 8: *The New York Trilogy*: finish “City of Glass”; begin “Ghosts”

Dec. 10: *The New York Trilogy*: finish “Ghosts”

**COMMENTARY #10**

**\*READING JOURNAL DUE\***

FINAL: NO MEETING

**\*ESSAY #2 REVISION DUE\*** (Tuesday, Dec. 15, 11:59PM)

**\*Note: This course fulfills the “C” (composition) or “H” (humanities) GE requirement.**

**\*\* Note: Plagiarism, in any form, will not be tolerated in this or any course at Binghamton University. The consequences of plagiarism range from failure of an assignment to expulsion from the university. Anyone caught plagiarizing in this course will receive, at best, a grade of C-, regardless of overall performance. If you have any questions, please consult me or the university’s official policies on plagiarism and academic honesty.**

**\*\*\*Note: I reserve the right to alter the schedule at any time.**