

Forms and Contexts of Literary Studies: Fall 2021

Tuesdays 1:30-4:30 East College 303

Class website: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/403lit/>

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Course Description

This class will prepare students for writing a senior thesis. By exploring central questions of literary scholarship and by analyzing the process of framing a scholarly question, we will explore how research has been conceptualized at different periods in history and at different junctures in the evolution of literary studies. Throughout the term, our seminar meetings, workshops, and assignments will be geared toward engaging students with the critical skills, investigative methods, conceptual models, and writing practices that ground and inspire literary scholarship, including their own.

More specifically, in preparation for the senior thesis in English, this seminar develops your facility with several methods and models for literary and cultural scholarship. The course aims to strengthen your grasp of the history and current configuration of literary studies and related disciplines; engage you in framing your own literary research questions; facilitate your arrival at and independent work in the specific field or fields in which you will situate your 404; and hone your critical self-awareness as a reader, researcher, discussant, and writer.

Course Materials¹

For our class I have **not** ordered books through the bookstore. We will, however, have some texts you will need to acquire. I am allowing you to decide if you would like to order books, OR if you would like to print PDFs of reading for our class. If you chose to print PDFs rather than purchase the books, please factor in about \$30-50 extra that you will need to add to your printing costs for the term. See the specific instructions below. Links are to amazon.com.

Must purchase:

- [*Beloved*](#) by Toni Morrison. ISBN: 978-1400033416 (used is about \$9.00; new \$16) You can have any edition of this text.

Must purchase OR be ready to print:

- [*Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction 2nd edition*](#) by Jonathan Culler. ISBN: 978-0199691340 (used is about \$7.50; new is \$12)

Must purchase OR be ready to photocopy or print:

- [*Writing Analytically 8th edition*](#) by David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen. ISBN: 978-1337559461 (this is a more pricey book. If you already have a copy, great! Otherwise, I would suggest printing). If you have an edition other than the 8th edition, please let me know ASAP!!

¹ **Content Note:** Some of the texts presented in this course are explicit in their treatment of sex, of bodies, and of violence. Reading and discussing these texts can be demanding in ways that are often unexpected, and your success in this class will require an open engagement with the material. I will make every effort to work with students who have difficulty; however, if you feel you are not inclined or able to work with explicit material, I encourage you to come and talk to me as soon as possible.

Additionally, I will provide access to our other two core texts plus a range of handouts:

- *Underneath the Bough* (1893) by Michael Field
- *Rear Window* (1954) dir. Alfred Hitchcock

Finally, if you have any difficulty ordering books please let me know. (If you can't order online, you have a particular scholarship that requires you to order through the bookstore, or there is financial difficulty, etc.) I have done my best to keep costs low, but do be in touch if there are any problems or questions.

Attendance and Participation

Preparation, attendance, and participation are crucial to this course and your success in it. Regular attendance and conscientious preparation for class are assumed and expected. Because this is a seminar, the stakes are even higher. **I require you to be at all class meetings.** If you need to completely miss seminar for an extenuating circumstance, please be in contact with me as soon as possible. In return, I will expect you to write a 2-page short essay on the course readings to stand in for your missed participation.

Your participation grade will be calculated based on the following criteria:

- You come to class having done the day's reading.
- You prompt discussion and/or respond to your peers.
- You enter the conversation without dominating or silencing others.
- You offer more than just personal opinion or anecdote – that is, you root your comments in the text we are discussing. (In other words, people who try to comment on things they have not read will lose points.)
- You attend peer review sessions with a complete rough draft.
- You work collaboratively with people to achieve learning goals when you are placed in a small group.
- You are present and engaged in every class. Therefore, you take care of your needs before you come to class. You will lose all of your participation points if you make a regular habit of excusing yourself in the middle of class to take a phone call or to use the restroom.

I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester. In addition, if extenuating circumstances arise that are interfering with your ability to attend and/or participate in this class or others, please come see me as soon as possible. Dickinson has many resources available to you that might help you navigate a challenging a time or situation and I can help you locate those resources. As a general rule of thumb, if you are struggling in some way, please see me as soon as possible.

Papers

All papers (first and final versions) must be word-processed and meet standard format practices. Throughout the paper, the citations and documentation style should be consistent. **Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade.**

Evaluation Policies for Writing Assignments

In general, I will evaluate your writing by considering how well you have achieved the following goals (developed by the Writing Program):

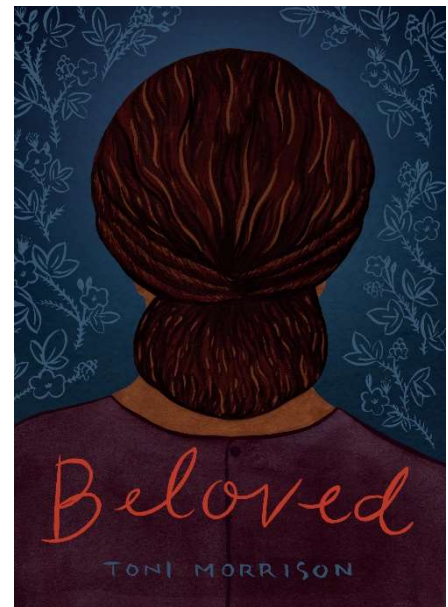
1. The author crafts an introduction that identifies a question, frames the question, and states a thesis.
2. The author organizes the writing, demonstrates a progression of ideas, and maintains a consistent focus or thread.

3. The author contextualizes the question and supports it with evidence.
4. The author sustains analytical inquiry throughout the assignment.
5. The author effectively incorporates relevant outside information.
6. The author engages the intended audience with a consistent, distinctive voice appropriate to the task.
7. The author adheres to appropriate standards for language use.
8. The author conforms to appropriate formats for citation of source material.

Requirements and Grading

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on regular short writing assignments, class presentations, independent research, and your thesis proposal. The relative weight of each component is as follows:

Attendance and participation	10%
6 short essay blog posts	25%
12 comments on peer posts	10%
Independent field work (including: reading list, field report, and class presentation)	35%
Thesis Proposal	20%



Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D = 60-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	F = 0-59
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

Grade Calculations:

I use an excel worksheet to calculate my grades. If you would like to discuss graded work, please take at least two days to review my comments, along with the grading criteria for the assignment. While I don't negotiate grades, I am happy to discuss strategies for improving your writing and therefore your grade.

Extra Credit:

If you attend any Dickinson College screening, workshop, or lecture and write a 1-2 page reflection stating how the event related to this class and what was interesting about it for you, I will award 1 point extra credit. You may complete up to 5 extra credit reflections. These points will be added to your final exam grade at the end of the semester. I will reject any reflection I feel is insufficient or unsuitable.

Lateness, Cell Phones, and Other Disruptions:

Please make an effort to be on time. Class begins promptly and if you are more than ten minutes late, I will record you as absent. If you have a reason that may cause you to be late from time to time, please let me know. Please remember to turn OFF all cell phones unless otherwise directed. If you are a student athlete or member of a student group that requires you to miss class for a university-sanctioned event, please let me know as soon as possible.

Electronics:

This class may be recorded for accommodation purposes. Laptop use is by permission only—just ask me. Tablets for textbooks are fine, as long as you refrain from surfing the web, etc.

Deadlines:

Deadlines are firm. Unless you have asked for and received prior permission to extend the deadline or you have extraneous, extenuating circumstances, late assignments will lose one grade increment per day late. I cannot accept assignments more than one week late.

“How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” – E.M. Forster

Blog Posts:

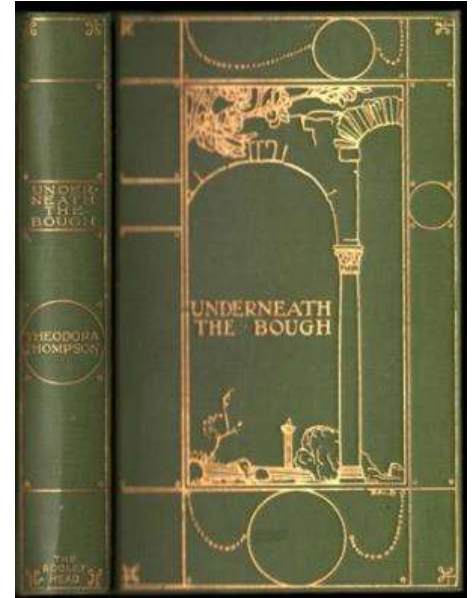
You will complete a number of blog posts over the course of the semester as well as comment on other posts made by your classmates. These posts will be in response to prompts handed out in class or of your own direction. Over the course of the posts, I expect you to engage with the readings and discussions and not simply summarize them. I also expect you to make connections to other sources, media, and class texts so please add quotations, images, links, videos, etc. that relate to the week’s topics and your interpretation of them. We will explore these skills in class.

Privacy

I request you all create a screenname under which you blog for our class. Part of our class will be trying out new and different perspectives and positions. I recognize that these positions can change and grow; by using screennames we give ourselves the room to experiment. **I am happy to remove any blog posts at the end of the term and/or you may remove your own writing. I ask that you let me know.**

Norman M. Eberly Writing Center:

Writers of all levels and abilities need feedback in order to develop their ideas and grow as writers. Dickinson’s trained writing tutors can help you generate ideas, begin drafting, revise a rough draft, figure out your professor’s preferred documentation style, understand and respond to professor feedback, edit your writing – among other things. Make appointments online here: <https://dickinson.mywconline.com/>. For more information about hours and procedures, visit the writing center’s website.



Academic Integrity

With respect to all assignments in this course, I expect you to do your own work. You are certainly encouraged to discuss course content and readings with your fellow classmates, but your work in papers must be your own. Regarding outside sources, you will need to cite all of your sources. We will discuss ways of doing this before your first paper is due. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please feel free to ask.

Accommodations

I am committed to including all students in this course and am happy to discuss accommodations with students, provided that this conversation happens **early** in the semester and definitely before any papers/projects are due. From Dickinson College’s ADS:

“Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical condition– that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation needed to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more

about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ADS, email access@dickinson.edu, call (717)245-1734, or go to the ADS office in Room 005 of Old West, Lower Level (aka "the OWLL").

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan. If you will be using any test-taking accommodations in this class, be sure to enter all test dates into your Access Plan in advance of our meeting. ADS will be happy to provide any assistance you may need."

Physical Accessibility

My office is located on the fourth floor of East College, which has an elevator, located in the Classics department. Our classroom is located on the third floor of East College. If there is ever a malfunction with the elevator, please let me know and I will gladly arrange an alternative location or meet on Zoom.

Other Needs:

If you have a concern or issue regarding this class, your ability to participate in it, or the material we are covering, please stop by my office hours or email me to set up an appointment. **The sooner we can talk about your concerns, the better I will be able to help you negotiate a solution.**

I am committed to providing equal educational opportunity to all students.

NOTE: The policies, procedures, schedules, and requirements in this syllabus are subject to change—should any occur I will make every effort to give you plenty of notice.

Class Contacts:

If you miss class for ANY reason it is YOUR responsibility to contact another member of the class to see what you may have missed. Please make sure you have at least three contacts.

NOTE: The policies, procedures, schedules, and requirements in this syllabus are subject to change—should any occur I will make every effort to give you plenty of notice.



ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE & GRADE BREAKDOWN

The assignment sequence is designed to foster a spirit of experimentation and exploration in you as individual students and as a 403-404 group. It will also get you in the habits of steady, self-directed reading, writing, research, and conversation. For each assignment, your audience is our seminar.

1. *Participation, consistent and ongoing, with one turn as seminar discussion leader.*
Discussion leaders will begin discussion and be responsible for posing questions to the class about the readings. You will then write a short reflection about your time as a discussion leader
2. *6 methods, models, and keywords blog posts.* 500-750 words each; top 5 = 20% of course grade. Please see each assignment prompt for details.
3. *12 comments on peers' methods, models, and keywords experiments.* (See assignment prompt for details).
4. *Independent fieldwork in three stages.* To be handed in to me (not posted) to our class blog.
 - a. Create an independent reading list. Due **October 1** (20% of fieldwork grade)

In conversation with each other, me, and at least one other professor (in any department/program), you will create an exploratory independent reading list for the fall semester. Rather than narrowing down to a specific writer, text, or question just yet, your list will begin to point to a field or fields—that is, to the area/s of inquiry in which you think your thesis will work. The list should: (i) include 3-5 secondary or theoretical works (monographs, collections, articles, or journal special issues/edited collections) you will read on your own this fall; (ii) choose one academic journal of which you will survey the last year's worth of issues; and (iii) be informed by 1-3 far-reaching key terms (these can be methods, or theories, etc).

- b. Field report. 1500-2000 words; due **November 19** (40% of fieldwork grade)

Write a 1500-2000-word report on your independent reading. In clear, engaging prose, your report should: (i) provide critical summaries of the works you've read, as well as an account of how they speak to one another, if at all; (ii) lay out your sense of the state of the field/s you've begun to explore—e.g., what questions or problems motivate this field? what are its current preoccupations? blindspots? what are the go-to primary or secondary texts in the fields? which methods or models best serve, or could best serve, work in this field? etc.; and (iii) describe how your independent fieldwork has shaped your sense of your emerging (still emerging! that's ok!) thesis project.

- c. Lead a 20-25-minute seminar. In class on **Dec 3 or Dec 10** (40% of fieldwork grade).

Select a short (no more than 10-page) reading to assign to our group. On either date, lead a 20ish-minute discussion of that reading during seminar. Your leadership of the seminar should be both informative and exploratory: on the one hand, you should determine how best to lead us through a discussion of the reading you've assigned, illuminating how the particulars of your text scale up to speak to your field and/or emerging thesis project; on the other, you should approach this seminar

as an opportunity to elicit our group's insights into the text, help with knotty questions or problems, and suggestions about where you might take your project from here. This assignment requires you to draw on your independent and assigned reading this semester, and encourages you to bring in other relevant coursework or interests. Please discuss your seminar leadership plans with me at least a week in advance.

1. Thesis proposal, 750-1000 words + map of next steps. Due by **12:00pm on Dec 21st**

Write a succinct, pithy thesis proposal, in which you: (a) describe your project, including its guiding questions, focal texts, and research methods; (b) establish the interest and importance of your project, making reference to critical/field conversations with which you have become familiar and/or to the contexts or occasions (e.g., political, social, environmental, etc.) that motivate your work; and (c) state what you think, at this point, your argument will be.

In addition to your 750-1000 word proposal, you will write a short map of your next steps. While the proposal should exhibit your most polished prose, the map can be organized however best serves you.

Note: you may submit this proposal as many times as you like after Thanksgiving break and before Dec. 15th, so long as the changes you make in consultation with me, each other, and other professors are substantive.

Working with me, working with you:

Our seminar will foster inclusive, rigorous student-driven discussion. You need to show up, in the fullest sense, every week. "Showing up" means having the reading not just done, but prepared: making notes on particularly important or vexing passages, preparing thoughtful questions for discussion, doing mini-research on content or reference questions, making a list of 2-3 things you'd like to make sure we discuss, etc. We may not get to all of your points each week, but I will make a point of turning to students to direct, redirect, or otherwise expand on our group discussion during a given seminar meeting and our accumulating conversation over the course of the semester. "Showing up" for senior seminar also means being aware of your classroom presence, or of how your willingness to contribute ideas, listen actively and respectfully to others' ideas, and think (and revise) on the spot impacts our seminar dynamic.

Finally, please remember that effective use of office hours is also participation. I'm here to brainstorm, guide, push, play devil's advocate, direct you to sources and resources, recommend Dickinson colleagues with particular areas of expertise, hatch research plans... in short: to help.

(Note of Acknowledgement: with many thanks to Prof. Seiler for her 403 syllabus)