

**FS English 201: Reading Literature**  
**Fall 2009**  
**Self-Reflexivity in Literature and Film**

**Professor Lloyd Michaels**

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Office Hours: MW 10:30-noon, TTh 3:00-4:30; and by appointment

Required Texts:

FS English 201 Coursepack  
*The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed.  
Sophocles. *King Oidipous* (Focus)  
William Shakespeare. *Hamlet* (Simon & Schuster)  
Milan Kundera. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Course Description:

FS English 201 serves as the introductory course to the discipline as well as the sophomore seminar. As the foundational course in English studies, it is designed to provide you with both appreciation for the value of literature and knowledge of the critical tools for literary study. As the culmination of the FS sequence, it provides further opportunities for critical thinking, extemporaneous and formal speaking, and extended writing.

FS English 201 differs from most other English courses in that its intention is neither coverage of a period or genre nor definitive interpretation of major texts or authors, but rather instruction in the methods of analyzing literature--in other words, *how to read with a purpose*. In the first half of the semester, we will explore several models of literary theory and critical practice to a core of texts—Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist,” Hawthorne’s “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—that lend themselves to a variety of discrete interpretations. Sophocles’ *King Oidipous* will be studied both to engage with the origins of Western literature and the definition of tragedy and to comprehend how the Oedipus myth informs our reading of several later texts. During the second half of the semester, we will analyze in depth Milan Kundera’s modern novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, as well as Philip Kaufman’s film adaptation. Threading throughout the course is the theme of *self-reflexivity*, how various works over the centuries acknowledge and comment on their own status as literature (or film), thereby reminding us of their fictionality and our own credulity.

As with all FS sections, this course will place special emphasis on writing and speaking, which means you can expect weekly assignments throughout much of the course in the form of either critical response essays or oral presentations.

Course Objectives:

1. To become familiar with a variety of critical strategies for interpreting literature
2. To acquire skills in literary research
3. To gain confidence in writing and speaking about literature, thereby “joining the conversation” about literary value and meaning

4. To understand the importance of several enduring statements about the nature of literature
5. To acquire a working vocabulary of literary terms and theories of literature
6. To study independently a single challenging text of modern literature and to “master” its complexity
7. To appreciate the significance and pleasure to be derived from thoughtful reading of literature
8. To examine the relationships among literary genres: fiction, drama, poetry, novel, film
9. To prepare for more advanced study in the English Department

Attendance:

Because FS English 201 is predicated on discussion rather than lecture, regular attendance and informed participation are required. Note that this class meets only twice per week, compounding the importance of steady attendance. *No more than two unexcused absences will be allowed without grade penalty.* Whenever possible, students should notify me in advance if they plan to miss a class meeting. More than simply occupying a seat, students must be prepared to respond to topics announced in advance and to the particular text being discussed each day.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, constitutes a kind of intellectual theft. Plagiarism occurs when you use another author’s language, images, or specific ideas—whether from print, website, or other form such as dvd features—without giving proper credit. It is a violation of Allegheny’s Honor Code and will be treated accordingly.

Be very careful when taking notes, either from print or Web sources, to distinguish between your own words and thoughts and those that originate elsewhere. Be certain to document all secondary sources, both in the text and at the end in a list of works cited. (In this class, MLA documentation style is preferred. See the Learning Commons link <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> for more about citing sources and avoiding plagiarism.)

Documentation Style:

All students should use the MLA (Modern Language Association) style for documenting sources in written work. MLA style can be found in Diane Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference* and at <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/hacker/resdoc/humanities/english.htm>

The Writing Center and Peer Speech Consultants:

All students, regardless of their perceived level of writing competency, should seek assistance from the writing tutors to be found in The Learning Commons, Pelletier Library, second floor. Please consult <http://learningcommons.allegheny.edu/writing/> Also located in The Learning Commons, peer speech consultants are available to help you prepare for oral presentations. Students have repeatedly reported finding this service quite helpful. Please consult <http://learningcommons.allegheny.edu/speech/>

### Academic Requirements:

1. Weekly response papers, usually no more than 1-2 pp.
2. Two formal oral presentations, the first being oral interpretation and brief commentary on a poem, the second a “show and tell” on *kitsch*
3. 3-4 formal essays of increasing length and complexity

### Grading:

Because the opportunities for evaluating students in this course are so frequent and varied, it is impossible to assign precise percentages for each assignment. In general, the final grade will be weighted as follows:

Graded formal essays	50%
Class participation and preparedness	20%
Oral presentations	20%
Improvement	10%

Keep in mind that I do not grade on a curve. Students are invited to visit during office hours at any time during the semester to discuss their current standing in the course.

### Course Design:

FS English 201 is somewhat improvisational in design, which means that we will follow intelligent discussion wherever it leads us. In broad terms, we will begin with the importance of *close reading* (leading to an awareness of the formal properties of a literary text) and *research* (leading to an understanding of the context in which literature is both created and received). We will proceed to explore several critical approaches to literature—philosophical, psychological, political, cultural—and apply them to the core texts.

In the spirit of exploring a variety of critical perspectives and to help acquaint students with the humanities, several professors have agreed to facilitate class discussions in their particular academic disciplines.

*The following syllabus is both tentative and approximate.* It is difficult to predict how much class time will be consumed by the oral presentations and where discussions will lead. Our goal, therefore, is comprehension rather than coverage. The design is front-loaded: that is, the bulk of the reading comes in the first half; the longer, more complex writing and speaking assignments come later.

<u>Week ends</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Th, 8/27	Kafka, “Give It Up!”; from “The Metamorphosis” Graff and Birkenstein, “Entering the Conversation”	Pre-Critical Response
Th, 9/3	Kafka, “A Hunger Artist” Abrams, “Orientation of Critical Theories” Vulpi, “Kafka’s ‘A Hunger Artist’: A Cautionary Tale for Faustian Man”	Approaches to Literature
Th, 9/10	Doctorow, “The Writer in the Family” MacLeish, “Ars Poetica”	Self-Reflexivity

	Shakespeare, Sonnet 18 (“Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?”)	
Th, 9/17	Plath, “Metaphors” Francis, “The Pitcher”; “Catch” Cummings, “since feeling is first”	Oral Interpretation
Th, 9/24	Aristotle, from <i>The Poetics</i> Miller, “Tragedy and the Common Man” Sophocles, <i>King Oedipus</i>	Genre: Tragedy
Th, 10/1	Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i> I-II Jones, “Tragedy and the Mind of the Infant”	Psychological/Freudian Approaches to ‘the Hamlet Problem’
Th, 10/8	<i>Hamlet</i> , III-IV	Meta-Theatre: The Play-Within-the-Play
Th, 10/15	10/13 FALL BREAK	Adaptation
Th, 10/22	Michael Almereyda, <i>Hamlet</i> (film) <i>Hamlet</i> film guide	Shakespeare in Performance
Th, 10/29	Kundera, <i>The Unbearable Lightness Of Being</i> Kundera, from <i>The Art of the Novel</i>	Genre: The Novel Formalist Analysis
Th, 11/5	Dowling, “Prague Spring”	Historical Context
Th, 11/12	Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus” Nietzsche, “Eternal Recurrence”	Philosophy and Literature
Th, 11/19	Denis Dutton, “Kitsch”	Kitsch
Th, 11/24	Pichova and Rhine, “Reading Oedipus in <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i> ” 11/25 THANKSGIVING BREAK	Intertextuality and Self-Reflexivity
Th, 12/3	Kaufman, <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i> (film) <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i> film guide Fellows, “ <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i> on film”	Novel into Film Recapitulation

