

Philosophy 2901(01): Philosophy of Literature
Dr. Erica L. Neely
Spring 2019

Place and Time: MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m., Burgett 134
Email address: e-neely@onu.edu
Office Hours: Burgett 121, MWF 10-11 a.m., 1-2 p.m., and by appointment
Texts: *Philosophy of Literature: Contemporary and Classic Readings* (ed. Eileen John
and Dominic McIver Lopes)
Never Let Me Go (Kazuo Ishiguro)
Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck)
On the Beach (Nevil Shute)
Brave New World (Aldous Huxley)
Web page: <https://northernonline.onu.edu/>

Aims and Objectives

There are two components to this course. First, we will examine philosophical issues pertaining to literature. What makes something literature? Why do we care about what happens to fictional characters, i.e., how can fictional situations trigger real emotions? How do we interpret literature (and is there a correct interpretation for a given work)? What values do we use to judge a piece of literature? These four themes will serve as the springboard for further philosophical questions concerning literature.

Second, we will be considering works of literature that explore philosophical issues. *Never Let Me Go* addresses issues of personal identity – what kinds of people are we? What is it to be human? *Of Mice and Men* will concentrate on relationships among people and the emotions we feel towards those characters. *On the Beach* highlights how people react to situations they cannot change – what do we do when a situation is beyond our control? Lastly, *Brave New World* raises many questions concerning society and the state.

Assignments and Grading

Short Paper 10% – This is a 3-4 page paper on an assigned topic, the purpose of which is to demonstrate your writing style and ability to construct an argument; I will provide you with detailed feedback on how to polish your writing and construct a rigorous argument. Your performance on this paper is not a large percentage of your grade in the course, but it is not possible to pass the class without completing this assignment.

Midterm and Final Papers 25% each – These papers are roughly 10 pages each on a topic of your choice pertaining to either the philosophical questions raised in literature or the philosophical questions concerning literature. I will give you some suggestions, but you are welcome to explore whatever readings most interest you; I must approve the topic in advance, however. Your papers must demonstrate an ability for philosophical thought – I am not interested in a book report; I want to read your criticisms, arguments, and ideas. I am willing to read outlines or rough drafts; students whose grades on the midterm paper are lower than a B may be required to show me an outline and/or draft of the final paper in advance.

Papers are to be submitted in class on the scheduled date; if you know that you will be absent on the day an assignment is due, please make arrangements to have a classmate hand it in or leave it in my mailbox. Unless something extraordinary prevents you from turning your assignments in on time, late papers will be dropped one step for each day that they are late. (Hence an A- paper that is one day late will be a B+ paper; if it is two days late it will be a B, etc.)

Discussion Questions 15% total – For the topics on philosophy of literature, I will be leading the class discussion, however, there will be a student group responsible for generating some of the discussion questions for that topic. Essentially, I'll assign you to a small group and divide the topics up among you. The group will be responsible for generating at least 2 discussion questions per day that they email me before class. (I won't make anyone do this for the first topic on Classic Sources.) Each person will also be responsible for one of the four works of literature; they will be developing discussion questions for one of our literature discussion days. We will discuss this further closer to the first novel. This is your chance to make sure we cover what you find most interesting about a topic!

Participation 25% – This course will involve a fair amount of discussion; while attendance is not required, you need to read the material before class and come prepared with questions and ideas. Participation will be a factor in your final grade; if you are shy about speaking in class, you may share your thoughts with me through email, on the course website, or after class.

Other Information

Although final grades are limited to whole letter grades, individual assignments will use the plus/minus scale; this will enable you to see whether your B is closer to an A or closer to a C.

Please note that you are responsible for keeping track of all assignments; you are also responsible for any material covered in class.

A day-by-day schedule of readings is included in this syllabus; assignments should be completed prior to class on the date they are listed. You may find it helpful to bring the book we are discussing to class so that you may reference the readings during class discussions.

Required Information from the University

Special Accommodations

Students requiring particular accommodations because of physical and/or learning disabilities should contact their Dean's office prior to or during the first week of classes. For additional information, see: http://www.onu.edu/student_life/disability_services

Academic Dishonesty

The University expects its students to conduct themselves in a dignified and honorable manner as mature members of the academic community and assumes that individually and collectively they will discourage acts of academic dishonesty. The University also expects cooperation among administrators, faculty, staff, and students in preventing acts of academic dishonesty, in detecting such acts, reporting them, and identifying those who commit them, and in providing appropriate punishment for offenders. The University Code of Academic Student Conduct is found in Appendix C of the Student Handbook: http://www.onu.edu/student_life/student_conduct/student_handbook

Title IX

Ohio Northern University does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, transgender status, gender identity, or gender expression in its educational, extracurricular, or athletic programs, or in any admission or employment decisions. ONU is committed to promptly and equitably responding to all reports of sexual discrimination with the goal of eliminating the misconduct and/or harassment, preventing its recurrence, and addressing its effects on any individual or the community.

To report sexual misconduct (violence) or sexual harassment, students may contact the Title IX Coordinator, Nancy Sabol, (419) 772-2218, n-sabol@onu.edu or one of the Deputy Title IX Coordinators, Brian Hofman, (419) 772-1878, b-hofman@onu.edu; LaShonda Gurley, (419) 772-3145, l-gurley@onu.edu.

To confidentially discuss sexual misconduct (violence) or sexual harassment, students may contact University Confidential Resources: Counseling Center, (419) 772-2190; Health Center, (419) 772-2086; or Chaplain, (419) 772-2200. For more information, the University's Sexual Discrimination Policy is available at www.onu.edu/title_IX.

Day-by-Day Reading and Assignments

January

M 1/14 First Day of Class

Introduction: Classic Sources

W 1/16 Introduction: 1-4

“Republic” (Plato): 5-14

F 1/18 “Poetics” (Aristotle): 15-24

M 1/21 **No Class – Martin Luther King Day**

W 1/23 “Of Tragedy” (David Hume): 25-28

“The Birth of Tragedy” (Friedrich Nietzsche): 29-35

F 1/25 “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (Sigmund Freud): 36-40

The Definition of Literature

M 1/28 What is Literature?

Introduction 41-44

W 1/30 “Spazio” (Arrigo Lora-Totino): 45

“What Isn’t Literature?” (E.D. Hirsch, Jr.): 46-50

February

F 2/1 “The Concept of Literature” (Monroe Beardsley): 51-58

M 2/4 No new readings

W 2/6 “Literary Practice” (Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen): 59-64

“What is Literature?” (Robert Stecker): 65-72

F 2/8 No new readings

Literary Interlude One: Self and Identity

M 2/11 *Never Let Me Go* (Kazuo Ishiguro)

W 2/13 continued

Short Paper Due

Emotion and Literature

F 2/15 Introduction: 165-166

“Applicant” (Harold Pinter): 167-169

“How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?” (Colin Radford): 170-176

M 2/18 "Fearing Fictionally" (Kendall Walton): 177-184
W 2/20 "The Pleasures of Tragedy" (Susan Feagin): 185-193
F 2/22 "Tragedy and the Community of Sentiment" (Flint Schier): 194-204

M 2/25 No new readings

Literary Interlude Two: Emotion and Others

March

W 2/27 *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck)
F 3/1 continued

M 3/4 **No Class – Spring Break**
W 3/6 **No Class – Spring Break**
F 3/8 **No Class – Spring Break**

Fiction

M 3/11 Fiction: Introduction: 109-110
"Doonesbury" (Garry Trudeau): 111
"The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" (John Searle): 112-118
W 3/13 "Truth in Fiction" (David Lewis): 119-127
F 3/15 "What is Fiction?" (Gregory Currie): 128-135
"Fiction and Nonfiction" (Kendall Walton): 136-143

M 3/18 "Fictional Characters as Abstract Artifacts" (Amie Thomasson): 144-153
W 3/20 "Logic and Criticism" (Peter Lamarque): 154-162
F 3/22 No new readings

Literary Interpretation

M 3/25 Interpretation: Introduction: 251-252
"Who Is Responsible in Ethical Criticism, and for What?" (Wayne C. Booth): 253-254
"Criticism as Retrieval" (Richard Wollheim): 255-261
W 3/27 "The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal" (Alexander Nehamas):
262-272
F 3/29 "Art Interpretation" (Robert Stecker): 273-279
"Art, Intention, and Conversation" (Noël Carroll): 280-290
Midterm Paper Due

April

M 4/1 No new readings
W 4/3 "Intention and Interpretation" (Jerrold Levinson): 291-300
F 4/5 "Style and Personality in the Literary Work" (Jenefer Robinson): 301-310

Literary Interlude Three: Things Beyond Our Control

M 4/8 *On the Beach* (Nevil Shute)
W 4/10 continued

Literary Values

F 4/12 Literary Values: Introduction: 313-314
“Xingu” (Edith Wharton): 315-316
“On the Cognitive Triviality of Art” (Jerome Stolnitz): 317-323

M 4/15 “Literature and Knowledge” (Catherine Wilson): 324-328
“ ‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’ ” (Martha Nussbaum): 329-340

W 4/17 “Literature, Truth, and Philosophy” (Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen): 341-354

F 4/19 **No Class – Easter Break**

M 4/22 **No Class – Easter Break**

W 4/24 “The Ethical Criticism of Art” (Berys Gaut): 355-363

F 4/26 No new readings

Literary Interlude Four: Society and the State

M 4/29 *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley)

May

W 5/1 continued
F 5/3 Closing Class Discussion

W 5/8 **Final Paper Due, 1 p.m.**

Important Dates

W 2/13 **Short Paper Due**
F 3/29 **Midterm Paper Due**
W 5/8 **Final Paper Due, 1 p.m.**