

English 163 (online): Authors in Context
Morrison and Melville
Mayterm 2024



Commented [MOU1]: My course meets the certification criteria: 1) I have assigned more than 16 pages 2) assignments are assigned throughout the semester, and are scaffolded 3) I will provide specific writing instruction in the course with an eye towards genres like the following: close reading essay, book review, research paper

Instructor: Kya Mangrum

Office Hours: By appointment

Meeting Place: Zoom

Meeting Time: M-F-3:15 p.m.—5:05 p.m.

Office Hours Zoom Link: <https://westmont.zoom.us/j/4158878810>

Course Description

In English 163: Morrison and Melville, we will read and write about selected works written by two luminaries in U.S. literary history: Toni Morrison and Herman Melville. As we study the work and careers of Morrison and Melville, we will use their work—and the work of their contemporaries—as lights to guide our explorations of the past, present, and future of U.S. literary history.

Reading Morrison and Melville together will allow us to think through topics like: the ever-evolving roles of writers and other artists in forming and critiquing U.S. life, history, and culture; the role of narrative experimentation in shaping U.S. literary history; the significance as well as the limits of literary canon-building; how the social constructions of race and racism are represented, critiqued, and re-imagined in the works of both writers; and, how class, gender, sexuality, and religion are represented, critiqued, and re-imagined in Melville's and Morrison's oeuvres.

Required Texts

Moby Dick by Herman Melville

Melville's Short Novels by Herman Melville

Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination by Toni Morrison

Beloved by Toni Morrison

Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison

Learning Objectives, Modes of Instruction, and Methods of Assessment

Students will be able:	Instructional Activity	Assessment
To analyze, synthesize, and evaluate written and visual texts	Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops Group Discussions	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews Research Paper Research Paper-Remix
To recognize and analyze the relationship between a text's form and its content	Discussion posts Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops Group Discussions	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews Research Paper Research Paper-Remix
To draft, revise, and present written texts in a variety of different genres All written texts should be attentive to a specific rhetorical situation, i.e. a specific audience, purpose, speaker, medium, and set of historical, cultural, social and/or generic contexts	Discussion posts Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops Group Discussions	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews Research Paper Research Paper-Remix
To identify and consider how writers were influenced by other writers— both their contemporaries, and those who came before them	Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops Group Discussions	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews

Commented [MOU2]: The course requires that students complete both formal and informal writing assignments. Formal writing assignments include the close reading essay, the book reviews, the research paper, and the research paper remix. All of the formal assignments require that students write drafts, and then revise those drafts. The research paper is also scaffolded; students will write a research proposal, an annotated bibliography, and multiple drafts of their research paper.

Commented [MOU3]: The formal and informal assignments in the course require students to consider questions of rhetorical situation.

		Research Paper Research Paper-Remix
To identify and consider connections between the Word of God, U.S. Christian thought, and U.S. literary/visual texts	Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops Group Discussions	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews Research Paper Research Paper-Remix
To identify and consider how a writer's unique historical, social, and cultural contexts (esp. how those contexts were influenced by social concepts like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, ability/disability, and/or class) influences: 1) a writers' content and/or style 2) how readers consume, circulate, and interpretate a writer's work	Group Discussions Lectures Student-led discussions Writing workshops	Reflection Posts Quizzes Close Reading Essay Book Reviews Research Paper Research Paper-Remix

Grading Distribution

5% Lead class discussion (50 points)

5% Quizzes (50 points)

10% Reflection Journal (100 points)

10% Close Reading Essay (100 points)

15% Book Review #1

15% Book Review #2

30%	Research Paper (400 points)	
	Research proposal and tentative bibliography	50 points
	Annotated Bibliography	50 points
	Rough Draft	100 points
	Final Draft	100 points

10%	Research Paper--Remix
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Commented [MOU4]: The research paper is a cite where we will focus, quite a bit on how to revise texts so that they are persuasive, clear, and sophisticated, stylistically.

Commented [MOU5]: In all written assignments students will be graded both not only based on content, but also clarity and style. There will be explicit instruction on how to write strong arguments, and how to revise one's arguments for clarity and grace.

Class Participation

Positive class participation requires that you are fully present—in both mind and body—as a contributing member of our classroom community. This should include respectful commentary, attentive listening, and focused and timely readings of the assigned texts. Positive participation also requires that you meet with Dr. Mangrum for an individual appointment at two different points in the semester.

Individual appointments

Each student is asked to meet with Dr. Mangrum twice during the semester. Once during the first three weeks of the semester, and once at some other point in the semester (each meeting should average about 30 minutes). Each time, please bring a draft of an upcoming assignment.

Lead Class Discussion

You will lead the class's conversation on one of the assigned texts. You will be given 30-35 minutes of class time to either provide contextual information on one of our assigned texts, and/or lead a class discussion. You are welcome to work in groups or present individually.

Reflection Journal—Your reflective journal does two jobs. First, you should write a brief synthesis of that week's assigned readings. This synthesis should be 1-2 paragraphs long—no longer—and should be completed before you come to class. You must choose to place at least three of the assigned texts in conversation with each other.

You will share part or all of your reflections at the beginning of each class. The second job of the reflective journal requires that you choose a very short excerpt from one of that week's literary texts to close-read. Your close-reading of your chosen text should be no longer than one paragraph.

Close Reading Essays

You will write a thesis-driven close-reading essay on any of the assigned literary texts. The essays should include detailed close readings focused on the writer's use of language. You should write a rough draft of your essay, and a final draft of your essay. Please be sure to have Dr. Mangrum, a Writing Center tutor, or a peer in the class read your rough draft.

Book Reviews

Book Review #1

You are a literary critic writing during the 1850s. You have been charged to write a book review of one of Melville's short novels for an anti-slavery literary magazine. In your book review, you should make an argument about not only the book's literary and social value then, but also its literary and social value for the future, i.e. now.

Your review should include several different close-readings, all of which should provide support for your overall argument. The review itself should be between 3—4 pages long, and should follow MLA formatting.

You should write a rough draft of your review, and a final draft of your essay. Please be sure to have Dr. Mangrum, a Writing Center tutor, or a peer in the class read your rough draft.

Book Review #2

It is 2002. Oprah's Book Club is a powerful tool to encourage Americans to read U.S. Literature. Four of Toni Morrison's novels are included on Oprah's list: *Song of Solomon*, *Paradise*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Sula*. You and your friends are trying to decide what to read next. Write an email to your friends persuading them to read one of the books above. You'll want to help them understand both the novel's themes, and Morrison's writing style without giving away key plot points. Be sure to also talk about how the novel you chose might provide insight into social issues of the time, particularly as it relates to gender, class, and race in the early 2000s.

Your review should include several different close-readings, all of which should provide support for your overall argument. The review itself should be between 3—4 pages long, and should follow MLA formatting.

You should write a rough draft of your review, and a final draft of your essay. Please be sure to have Dr. Mangrum, a Writing Center tutor, or a peer in the class read your rough draft.

Research Paper

In an 8—10 page research paper, you will focus on the work of either Morrison or Melville, crafting an argument about the evolution of that writer's work over time. Your paper should include 3—5 primary texts (texts written by your chosen author) and 7—10 secondary sources (scholarly works of literary history or literary criticism). Please follow MLA guidelines.

More specifically, your paper should:

Commented [MOU6]: The English department has pinpointed English 163 as a course that will ask students to write a research paper. In my section of the course students will be asked to write a research paper that guides them on how to engage scholarly sources—both in the sub-fields of literary criticism, literary history, and theory—in their research.

- 1) include the critical analysis and evaluation of 3—5 works written by your chosen writer. Be sure to include plenty of close-readings (detailed analysis) of the writer’s work. How might you describe the writer’s style? What patterns do you notice as it relates to the relationship between content and/or form in the writer’s work?
- 2) establish the historical and cultural context(s) in which your writer was producing the bulk of their output, e.g. what historical events took place; what genres and/or styles of writing were popular at that time; what were some of the new technologies that changed how readers saw the world around them; what was popular in other aesthetic forms, e.g. music, visual arts, and dance? Which of these historical and cultural contexts shaped the writer’s work? In what ways did these contexts shape the writer’s work? And how did these contexts shape how readers and critics received the work?
- 3) address how scholars write about your author’s place in U.S. literary history.

*For #2 and #3, please critically integrate and analyze multiple scholarly sources.

In addition to the three required criteria above, you should briefly address one of the criteria listed below:

—How does your writer’s work and output compare to the work and output of his or her contemporaries? Which U.S. writers did your writer know, read, admire, or disagree with? Can we see any of these influences in the writer’s body of work?

—Does your author’s work engage with questions of faith and religion? If so, how central are questions of faith and religion to your writer’s work?

Research Paper Re-Mix

In your final project you will translate what you learned in your Author Study to any audience and purpose of your choice with the exception of an academic audience. You may translate your object into a variety of media (e.g. children’s book, short story, graphic novel, t.v. show, film, TED talk, a sermon, a poem, a song, a play, a flash mob performance) with the goal being to help your audience understand the object’s historical and present-day significance. For example, you could make a syllabus in which you focus on how Morrison’s work engages questions of religion and faith. Or, you could design a museum exhibit focusing on the representation of the sea in Melville’s work.

Your re-mix should include a 2-3 page “artist’s statement” in which you explain why you made the creative choices you made, and how your adaptation speaks to questions of history, narrative, memory, and literary canon formation in our own time.

Commented [MOU7]: This assignment asks students to communicate academic knowledge to a non-academic audience. Students will continue to work on their ability to communicate clearly and with elegance. They will also get more practice in writing for particular rhetorical situations.

Classroom Policies

Writing Support

“Writers' Corner is a creative space where student writers can find friendly “test readers” as they develop projects for professors, employers, and others. Tutors support peers as they mature into more skillful and confident writers. Tutorials are free of charge; come visit us in Voskuyl Library 215. Clients with appointments get first priority; drop-ins are also welcome. Make an appointment using WOnline at”: <https://westmont.mywconline.com/>

Library Resources

Please be sure to visit the Library’s Research Help desk to get help finding sources.

Office of Disability Services

“Students who have been diagnosed with a disability are strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the Office of Disability Services. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your equal access to this course. Please contact Sheri Noble, Director of Disability Services. (310A Voskuyl Library, 565-6186, snoble@westmont.edu) or visit the website for more information”: <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability>

Academic Integrity

Please read Westmont College’s Academic Integrity policy. http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/plagiarism/academic_integrity_policy.html Any instance of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will be reported to the Vice Provost’s office.

Take a Professor to Lunch

Consider making use of the “[Take a Professor to Lunch](#)” program. Get to know professors by inviting them to lunch at the DC (Dining Commons).

Electronic Devices

Your use of laptops and tablets should add to your ability to learn the material and contribute

COURSE CALENDAR

Week One

- May 6** Review syllabus
- Excerpts from *The Tenth Muse* by Anne Bradstreet
- Excerpts from *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman
- May 7** “The Bells” by Edgar Allan Poe
- “The Gold Bug” by Edgar Allan Poe
- Excerpts from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* by Edgar Allan Poe
- May 8** Excerpts from *The House of the Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Excerpts from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
- Excerpts from *The Heroic Slave* by Frederick Douglass
- Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison
- May 9** *Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison
- May 10** *Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison
- Research Paper—Proposal and Tentative Reading List due**

Week Two

- May 13** Excerpts from *Typee* by Herman Melville
- “Melville climbs the Canon” by Paul Lautner
- Excerpts from *Playing Indian* by Philip Deloria
- Close Reading Essay due**
- May 14** *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

May 15 *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

May 16 *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

May 17 *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

“Unspeakable Things Unspoken” by Toni Morrison

Book Review #1 due

Week Three

May 20 *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

May 21 *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

Research Paper—Annotated Bibliography due

May 22 *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville

May 23 *Benito Cereno* by Herman Melville

May 24 *Benito Cereno* by Herman Melville

Book Review #2 due

Week Four

May 27 **Memorial Day Holiday**

May 28 *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville

May 29 *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by Herman Melville

Research Paper—Rough Draft due

May 30 *Beloved* by Toni Morrison
“Site of Memory by Toni Morrison

May 31 *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Week Five

June 3 *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

June 4 *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Research Paper—Final Draft due

June 5 *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

June 6 *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

June 7 *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

Research Paper Remix due

Commented [MOU8]: This assignment invites students to think about the uses of academic research for non-academic audiences.

Appendix 1

How to approach the readings

In our class, you will read a lot. I also ask that you read each text carefully. Given that these two actions might feel in conflict with one another, I offer the following suggestions:

- 1) **Skim** the text before you sit down to read it. Get a rough sense of its structure and its style.
- 2) **Read** the entire text.
- 3) While you are reading, **take notes**. What catches your eye and/or captures your imagination? Take note of the words, imagery, passages that confuse or concern you. Consider the writer's use of rhetorical tools, repetition, syntactical patterns, allusions, contradictions, or paradoxes. Write your notes in the margins of the book itself and/or in a notebook.
- 4) When you find something that you do not understand or something that you find particularly interesting, **re-read** it. Now, read it again. (And if needed, read it again and again).
- 5) If you find a passage to be particularly interesting or challenging, **read it out loud**.
- 6) **Pace yourself**. I ask that you do your best to read all of the texts. You should not, however, feel as though you need to close-read and re-read *everything*. Save your closest attention and best analytical energy for that which you do not understand or want to understand more about.
- 7) **Ask for help**. Feel free to come and visit me in office hours if you need help, or if you want to talk with someone about something that interests you. You could also organize study groups where you and your fellow students read the texts together.

Appendix 2

How to approach the written assignments

- 1) **Start early.** Keep in mind that writing is a process. Begin the process of brainstorming, researching, drafting, revising, and editing as early as you can.
- 2) **Revise. Revise. Revise.** Revision is different than editing. When you revise, you check for cohesion, coherence, and clarity as it relates to issues of style and argumentation.

The revision process is typically the longest and most demanding part of any writer's process. Setting aside sufficient time and energy for revision is a critical component of the writing process. When you revise, you should assess the effectiveness of the larger structures of your writing (sections and paragraphs) as well as the effectiveness of smaller structures (sentences, clauses, and phrases). Also, be certain to think critically about the effectiveness of your argument—both the internal logic of your overall argument as well as the effectiveness of your choice and use of evidence.

- 3) **Talk** with other people about your writing. You can ask readers to read your work or talk with you about your work at any point in the writing process.
- 4) **Come prepared** for Writer's Workshops. We will have scheduled writing workshops in class. Take care that the quality of the drafts that you submit to writer's workshop are as strong as you can make them. Also, take time to thoughtfully assess both the strengths and the weaknesses of your peers' drafts.
- 5) **Make an appointment with the Writer's Corner.** Take advantage of the opportunity to talk with and receive writing advice from a peer tutor.

Appendix 3

Some advice on literary explication, or "marking up a text" in preparation for a close reading

The act of close reading involves the careful explication (or unfolding) of a text. It entails paying very close attention to every detail on the page and thinking about *how* and *why* each choice matters. It is important to remember that the written text (or any text, for that matter) is a *construction*, a *made-up thing*; the writers you read have made very specific decisions about what words to use and when, what details to include and how. Part of the job of a literary scholar is to figure out how these various elements work together. In order to do the type of detailed reading that this strategy requires, it might be useful to:

1. Work with a hard copy of the text that you're analyzing; read with a pencil in hand and use it often
2. Establish the who, what, when, and where of the text
3. Identify the text's rhetorical elements-figurative language, diction, style, tone, rhythm, argument and, if it applies, characterization-and note their function in the text
4. Think about structure and organization-of a sentence or a line, a paragraph or a stanza, the novel or poem as a whole
5. Look for patterns
6. Ask questions about the patterns you've noticed-especially *how* and *why*
7. Mark contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities
8. Ask questions about the contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities you've noticed-particularly *how* and *why*
9. Pay attention to cultural, historical, and political references
10. Connect what you find to other texts and contexts