

Marymount Manhattan College

New York City Seminar
NYC 102.10 and 102.11
 New York's Literary Women

Fall 2018
 R, 10:00-12:51 and 1:00-3:51

Professor: Tahneer Oksman
Contact: toksman@mmm.edu
Office Hours: W, 10:30-12:30,
 and by appointment

“It is often said that New York is a city for only the very rich and the very poor. It is less often said that New York is also, at least for those of us who came there from somewhere else, a city for only the very young.”

-Joan Didion, “Goodbye to All That”

“[W]e looked, we saw the people trying to dream themselves out. As though there was someplace other than this place. As though there was another Brooklyn.”

-Jacqueline Woodson, *Another Brooklyn*

“...somewhere between Puerto Rico and New York.”

-Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

“Corona, and I’m not talking about the beer. I’m talking about a little village perched under the number 7 train in Queens between Junction Boulevard and 111th Street.”

-Bushra Rehman, *Corona*



A young Billie Holiday in New York (photo by Herman Leonard)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From Nella Larsen and Dorothy Parker to Lena Dunham and Jacqueline Woodson, New York City has existed sometimes as a powerful ideal and sometimes as a painful reality for 20th and 21st century

women writers. Many of these authors have struggled to make ends meet in a city that offers endless potential for excitement, experience, and heartbreak. In this course we will read and look at works exploring some common themes and concerns, including work, love, immigration, identity, friendship, family, and sex. Through our investigations, we will examine the ways that diverse women's experiences are represented in literature composed in a variety of genres, and how life in New York City holds its own particular obstacles and opportunities for women from different backgrounds.



Page from Anya Ulinich's *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*

LEARNING GOALS

When you successfully complete this course, you will be better able to:

- Articulate the role of New York in the public imagination, particularly in relation to women writers who have lived in, and been influenced by, the city.
- Produce formal analyses and creative responses to a variety of literary and artistic texts, exploring the socio-historical and cultural conditions that help shape the works we read and examining their literary styles, structures, and influences

This course fulfills the requirements for the General Education lower-level Disciplinary Studies in Literature and Language category (DS 2). The learning objectives for this category are:

- Articulate an understanding of the role language plays as a system of communication and as a marker of cultural expression and identity.
- Produce formal analyses of how oral or written language reflects the socio-historical conditions that produce it.
- Apply a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyses of written and oral language.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts have been ordered at Shakespeare & Co (939 Lexington Avenue, between 68th & 69th Streets). Additional weekly readings can be found on BlackBoard. These readings should be printed out in-advance of our class sessions. Students are asked not to read from electronic devices in class.

Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I Was Puerto Rican*. Da Capo Press, 1993.

Ulinich, Anya. *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*. Penguin Books, 2014.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Another Brooklyn*. Amistad, 2016.

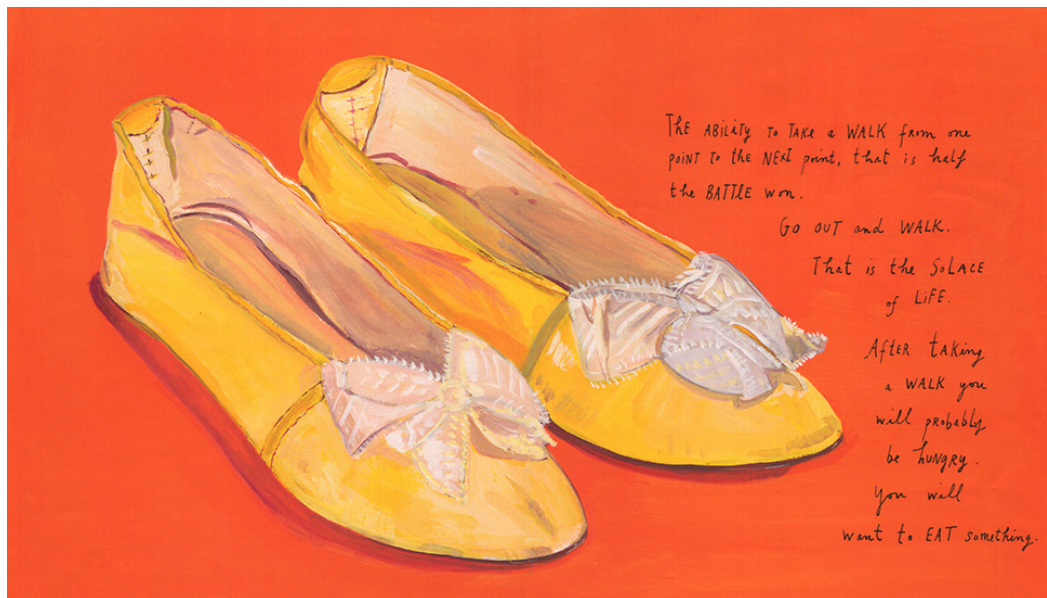
Recommended text (excerpts will be posted on Blackboard):

Kalman, Maira. *My Favorite Things*. Harper Design, 2014.

Rehman, Bushra. *Corona*. Sibling Rivalry Press, 2013.

It is strongly recommended that you purchase, or are familiar with, a writing handbook that includes instruction on MLA-style citations. I would recommend Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*. You might also make use of an online writing lab, such as Purdue University's OWL, accessible to the public at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

In addition to course texts, we will be taking some required class trips. You should set aside about \$15 on your metrocard to pay for transportation to/from class trips. There will be an additional optional class trip, which will cost \$8 as well as two rides on a metrocard.



Page from Maira Kalman's *My Favorite Things*

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS and REQUIREMENTS

You will be responsible for formal and informal assignments over the course of the semester. The formal assignments include two response papers, four quizzes (the lowest grade of four will be

dropped), a collaborative in-class presentation, handout or visual, and write-up, and a final reflection. You are also responsible for weekly readings, in-class discussions, and other informal assignments, including those related to our group trips. All written assignments must be typed, printed, and handed in as hard copies. Do not send work by email unless I ask for it; I will not read it. Late assignments will be progressively downgraded.

COURSE GRADE BREAKDOWNS

Response papers (two total)	30% (15% each)
Quizzes (three total for the grade-- lowest of four will be dropped)	15% (5% each)
Collaborative in-class presentation (including handout and/or visual)	10%
Individual write-up of collaborative presentation	10%
Final reflection	15%
Class participation, in-class writing and activities (includes both in class and on required trips: in-class participation, informal assignments, group work, etc.)	20%



Image from Liana Finck's "Met Life"

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

- Week one, Sept. 6** Introduction; syllabus distribution and discussion; *Mapping Manhattan* intro; sign-up sheet for formal presentations
Group visit to Central Park: poems (Greenbaum; Angelou); community norms
For next class: post *Mapping Manhattan* map to Blackboard; print and read Joan Didion's "Goodbye to All That" (on BB)
Note: students must visit me during office hours at least once within the first seven weeks of the semester (through Oct. 18). Those who cannot make it during office hours should contact me immediately to make an appointment at another agreed upon time.
- Event of interest: Sept. 11, 7:20-9:00pm,
Casting and Representation in the Twenty-First Century (Regina Perrugi room)
- Week two, Sept. 13** *Mapping Manhattan* informal presentations; discuss Didion; CRAAP test discussion; hand out for MET trip and planning with peer leader.
For next class (readings in advance of MET trip): Liana Finck's "The Artist's Closet" (NYRB) and "All the Paintings Here Agree" (*The Toast*); Maira Kalman, excerpts from *My Favorite Things* and *The Pursuit of Happiness* (NYT blog); Rutu Modan, "Chez Maurice"; Guerrilla Girls posters (all on BB)
- Week three, Sept. 20** **Group visit to Metropolitan Museum of Art** (with peer leaders)
During visit: select one piece of art and capture it visually (by photographing it, sketching it, drawing it, or other); describe what you see and explain why or how it spoke to you; how does it relate to our class readings or discussion so far? how does it relate to your overall impression of the museum? Post your image to Blackboard to discuss next week; you will also need to hand in a worksheet to your peer leader at the end of your visit
For next class: *Another Brooklyn*, pp. 1-106
- Week four, Sept. 27** Discuss MET trip; group A presentations; discuss *Another Brooklyn* and introduction to Jacqueline Woodson (handout: *Another Brooklyn*, Part 1)
For next class: *Another Brooklyn*, pp. 107-170; also read "On writing *Another Brooklyn*," pp. 171-175
- Week five, Oct. 4** **Reading quiz #1**; discuss *Another Brooklyn*
For next class: *When I Was Puerto Rican*, pp. 1-104
- Week six, Oct. 11** Discuss *When I Was Puerto Rican*; group B Presentations; distribute first response paper assignment
For next class: *When I Was Puerto Rican*, pp. 105-186

- Week seven, Oct. 18** **Reading quiz #2;** discuss *When I Was Puerto Rican*
Today is the deadline for your required one-on-one meeting with me outside of class
 For next class: *When I Was Puerto Rican*, pp. 186-end
- Week eight, Oct. 25** Group C presentations; discuss *When I Was Puerto Rican*
 For next class: work on response papers
- Week nine, Nov. 1** **First response paper due;** distribute second response paper assignment;
Group visit to Cooper Hewitt Museum (\$7 per student, paid for by MMC)
 For next class: *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*, pp. 1-184
- Thursday, Nov. 8 -- First/Second Year Advisement Day
 10:30-12:30, additional office hours (email me by Nov. 5 at the latest for an appointment)
- Week ten, Nov. 15** **Reading quiz #3;** group D presentations; sign up for final individual meetings
 For next class: *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*, pp. 185-end
- No Class -- Thanksgiving Break (Nov. 22)
- Week eleven, Nov. 29** **Second response paper due;** in-class viewing of second response paper; hand out final reflective assignment
 For next class: read excerpts from *Corona* (to be posted on Blackboard)
- Week twelve, Dec. 6** **Reading quiz #4;** group E presentations
 For next class: work on draft of final reflection
- Week thirteen, Dec. 13** Individual meetings (bring draft of final reflection)
- Week fourteen, Dec. 20** **Final reflections due**
Class trip, Brooklyn Museum, Half the Picture: A Feminist Look at the Collection; and Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power

Note: There will be an additional class visit planned by your peer leader (optional) to the Nuyorikan Poets Cafe for a Wednesday Slam & Open Mic night. These take place at 9pm at 236 East 3rd Street and admission (to be paid for by students) is \$8.

Group Presentations

15-20 minutes per group

Handout

Write up

On the first day of class, you will each be assigned to a group of two or three people. Each group will receive a letter (Group A, B, C, D, or E) as well as a more specific general topic. Once you have found out your groups, you should immediately exchange contact information. Together, each group will:

- 1) Make a plan to visit with a librarian (you can call or email in advance for an appointment)
- 2) Discuss your topic with your partner(s) and think about what specific angle(s) you might want to tackle in your presentation. For example, you may choose to present to the class a specific text (like a movie, an article, a poem, or a book) addressing the topic. Or you might choose to give the class a more informative overview of some aspect of the topic.
- 3) Discuss your selected angle(s) with a librarian, who will both help you find sources and assist you in shaping your topic. There is no minimum or maximum requirement for how many sources you should use, but between two and four is likely a good amount for this length of a presentation. Remember that you will need to give credit to each of your sources (using a proper citation) and your sources should all be credible. We will discuss both of these things in class, but you can always consult with me and/or a librarian to make sure you are on the right track.
- 4) Once you have your sources and angle(s) set, sit down with your partner(s) and plan your presentation. Each presentation should have some kind of organizational structure, and you should include either a hand-out or a visual, which should include the citations of all your sources.
- 5) In addition to the presentation and hand-out, each individual presenter should compose a one-to-two page write-up of your presentation, to hand in to me on the day of your presentation. The write-up should include the name of the librarian you consulted with and the day of your library visit. You may choose to write about the process of finding and deciding on your topic, what it was like for you to work with a partner or partners, and what you planned to cover in your presentations.

The attached rubric, which we will discuss further in-class, shows you how I plan to grade your presentations. Your in-class presentation and handout or visual will count for 10% of your final class grade (each group will receive one grade); your individual write-up will count for another 10% of your final class grade (each individual will receive a separate grade for this part).

Sept. 27, Group A:

Vietnam and African Americans
Brooklyn and gentrification (eg., Bushwick)
Jazz and Harlem

Oct. 11, Group B:

Puerto Rico in the 1950s (eg., political events)
Esmeralda Santiago

Oct. 25, Group C:

Puerto Rican migration and New York City

Nov. 15, Group D:

New York City and gentrification (eg., activism; select a population/neighborhood, etc.)

Dec. 6, Group E:

Russian American communities and New York City