

ENGLISH 242: LITERARY HISTORY

SPRING 2018 / PROFESSOR JASON TOUGAW

<http://242literaryhistorysp18.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/>

T/Th 10:05-11:55
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This course explores literary history as a mode of inquiry, asking how authors and their creations have responded to predecessors, and how such responses have transformed literature in English over time. The course examines both how literary traditions have been constructed in the past and what conceptual tools we now have available for defining and describing literary traditions. The course includes material from before 1800 and after 1800, as well as material from at least two national literatures. The texts included span at least two centuries, with at least one portion of the course focused on poetry.

What are the defining features of humans? What do humans share with other animals, monsters, or technologies? What don't they share? Why is it so difficult to define the human? Each of the literary works we'll read in this section explores these questions, building on literary predecessors and influencing successors—sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, minimally, or obliquely. In every case, these texts reveal particular (and sometimes surprising) ways that writers have defined the human. We'll discuss how those definitions are influenced by philosophical thinking, how they shape social behavior and personal relationships, and how writers from a variety of eras and cultures have contributed to evolving debates about the species that can't seem to stop redefining itself.

Requirements

Annotation 1: 10%
Annotation 2: 20%
Essay 1: 30%
Essay 2: 40%

Course Texts may be purchased through the [QC Online Bookstore](#). I've included links to short readings on the [Calendar](#) page.

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Anchor)

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (Picador)

Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves* (Picador)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Bedford St. Martin's)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Bedford St. Martin's)

Course Goals

- To reflect on literary history, drawing connections among works across the boundaries of genre, chronological period, and national literatures.

- To gain a sense of debates and ideas when it comes to defining and understanding what it means to be human.
- To practice close reading of literary texts
- To gain a sense of how historical and social contexts can illuminate literary texts.
- To become acquainted with a number of fundamental literary and cultural concepts and key terms.
- To continue to build your writing and research skills, focusing on the nuances of making an “argument,” as well as of entering into conversation with the ideas and claims of other scholars.

Special Accommodations

If you have any condition that requires accommodation in this class—for example, a medical condition or a difficulty with cognition or psychology—please let me know. You should also contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870. That office will strive to offer any services students need.

Academic Integrity

A student’s work should be his or her own. But a student’s ideas should also engage the ideas of other thinkers and writers. Communication gives ideas meaning and creates a community of thinkers. This is where citation and plagiarism can become tricky. Plagiarism is, of course, a serious issue. It is important that you establish your own point of view, make it clear what ideas are yours and which come from your sources, and respond to your sources critically. Be sure also to cite all sources appropriately, using [MLA style](#). Finally, if you’re struggling with your ideas, your writing, or your sources, be sure to talk to me. Plagiarism sometimes arises from confusion and sometimes from desperation. If you are feeling panicked or just unsure about a writing assignment, talk to me. I can help you with the process. I count on you to take your academic integrity seriously, and I take any breach of [the college’s policy on plagiarism](#) seriously, too. You should familiarize yourself with that policy, and let me know if you have any questions about it.

Formatting Guidelines for Writing Assignments

All your formal writing should be typed, double-spaced, with 1” margins. Please proofread carefully, so that your essay is polished and free of typographical errors. Give every essay a title and include your name as well as the course name and number. Be sure to include a list of works cited. Use [MLA guidelines](#) for citing sources and constructing your works cited list. We will discuss my expectations in class, but in general I expect essays to contain serious thought, analysis, and reflection, not simply summary or description.

CALENDAR

Tuesday, January 30

Emily Dickinson, "I have not told my garden yet" (c. 1850-1870) + Paul Legault, 605 (2012)
Emily Dickinson, "I bring an unaccustomed wine" (c. 1850-1870) + Paul Legault, 126 (2012)
Emily Dickinson, "I felt a funeral in my brain" (c. 1850-1870) + Paul Legault, 340 (2012)

Thursday, February 1

Three Emily Dickinson poems of your choice, each paired with Paul Legault's "English-to-English translation" of the poem from *The Emily Dickinson Reader*

Before class: 1.) Search The Emily Dickinson Archive to view the manuscript versions of the poems you choose; spend some time with them; look closely 2.) Be sure to bring hard copies of the poems to class. You'll need to write on them.

Tuesday, February 6

William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 14" (1609) + Matthew Rohrer, "Untitled" (2012)
William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 82" (1609) + Caroline Bergvall, "Untitled" (2012)
William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 8" (1609) + Eugene Ostashevsky, "1 = 0" (2012)
William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 9" (1609) + Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Trans-Literalization of Sonnet 9 into a 28-Line Dialogue" (2012)

Before class: Choose any of Shakespeare's sonnets to translate into another form. We'll do the translating in class, so be sure to bring the sonnet with you.

Thursday, February 8

"Intertextuality" (Literary Devices)

Robert S. Miola, "Seven Types of Intertextuality"

Tuesday, February 13

Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman* (2010)

Thursday, February 15

Siri Hustvedt, *The Shaking Woman* (2010)

Tuesday, February 20

No class: CUNY Monday

Thursday, February 22

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) & "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper" (1913)

Tuesday, February 27

Tim Urban, "What Makes You You?" (2014)

Christopher Smart, "My Cat Jeoffry"

Thursday, March 1

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Tuesday, March 6

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Thursday, March 8

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Tuesday, March 13

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

Rousseau, Excerpt from *The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1755)

Thursday, March 15

Frederick Douglass, Excerpt from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, American Slave* (1845)

Mary Wollstonecraft, Chapter 1: [“The Rights and Involved Duties of Mankind Considered,”](#) from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Tuesday, March 20

Jordan Peele (dir.), *Get Out* (in-class screening) (2016)

Thursday, March 22

Jordan Peele (dir.), *Get Out* (2016)

Tuesday, March 27

Workshop: Essay 1

Thursday, March 29

No class

Tuesday, April 3

No class: Spring break

Thursday, April 5

No class: Spring break

Tuesday, April 10

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Draft workshop: Essay 2

Thursday, April 12

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Additional readings TBA

Tuesday, April 17

Langston Hughes, “Slave on the Block” (1934)

Eudora Welty, [“Where Is the Voice Coming From”](#) (1963)

Maud Casey, “Mystery in Character: The Uses of Discomfort” (2018)

Kaitlyn Greenidge, [“Who Gets to Write What?”](#) (2016)

Essay 2 due

Thursday, April 19

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (2015)

Tuesday, April 24

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (2015)

Kevin Young, [“Paul Beatty’s *The Sellout*”](#)

Thursday, April 26

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (2015)

Daniel Hack, [“The Sellout and a Tradition of Black Anglophilia”](#)

Annotation 2 due

Tuesday, May 1

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Leon R. Kass, “Beyond Therapy”

Brian Christian, Excerpts from *The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive* (2011)

Thursday, May 3

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Workshop: Essay 2

Tuesday, May 8

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Thursday, May 10

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Tuesday, May 15

Draft Workshop: Essay 2

Tuesday, May 22

Essay 2 due