

Writing for the Humanities (English 21001)
“Here We Go Again”: Narrative Through Series

Course Description

Most of the literary texts you’ve read in school and for pleasure – from Elizabethan drama to the Victorian novel to modernist fiction – track the development of a continuous narrative through time. Yet many of the narratives that we consume in our daily lives take the form of a series of episodes rather than a developmental sequence: TV procedurals, newspaper comics, detective stories, sitcoms. How do works of art structured in terms of repetition rather than evolution change our expectations about character, causation, and meaning? Via series, whether explicitly defined as such (e.g. the Sherlock Holmes stories) or implicit but essential (e.g. Byron’s *Don Juan*), we’ll explore genre distinctions (the picaresque vs. the realist novel, sitcoms vs. prestige dramas), critical methodologies, and cultural and sociological definitions of literature and art. Texts range from Ovid to Pynchon, Montaigne to Calvino, Whitman to *Looney Tunes*.

Course Requirements

The primary goal of this course is to prepare you to think, speak, and write critically about the arts in your future college classes and beyond. With that in mind, course expectations include:

- **Weekly responses** (2-3 substantial paragraphs) to our readings, posted to Blackboard. I will provide questions for you to address in your response.

- **Attendance and participation** in seminar discussions. You will get one free absence this semester; any other absences must be cleared with me *in advance*. Repeated lateness or absenteeism will have a negative impact on your grade.

- **Close reading paper** (4-6 pages), due week 7, in which you will select and analyze a short passage in one of our primary texts. We will discuss the special style of argument expected in a close reading in class. Please submit both digital (e-mailed to me) and hard copies.

- **Final paper** (10-12 pages), due December 19. I will provide some prompts, but you are welcome to depart from them as long as you clear your paper topic with me ahead of time. Again, we will discuss paper expectations at length in class. Please submit both digital and hard copies.

Course Goals

By the end of this semester, you will be able to:

- Define and deploy the key terms of literary studies and narrative theory.
- Think analytically about cultural products, whether “elite” or “popular.”
- Read, digest, and respond critically to both primary texts and works of analysis/theory.
- Integrate emotional (“this story is sad”), aesthetic (“this prose is beautiful”), and intellectual (“by using technique x, the author plays with the boundaries of concept y”) responses to an artwork.
- Write a research paper that marshals textual evidence in favor of a focused thesis.

Logistics and Bureaucracy

Grade Breakdown

- Twelve weekly short writing assignments at 5 points each: 60 points (20%)
 - Short close reading paper: 75 points (25%)
 - Final paper: 135 points (45%)
 - Class attendance and participation: 30 points (10%)**
- TOTAL: 300 POINTS

** Two important notes:

1. “Participation” means more than simply talking in our seminar discussions. If, for whatever reason, you are uncomfortable speaking up, don’t despair: you can demonstrate your investment in this class via in-class writing exercises, small group work, and thoughtful responses to your peers’ writing.
2. As per college policy, you are allowed a maximum of **4 absences** over the course of the quarter. Because discussion and small group work are so essential to this course, I will dock your grade for habitual absenteeism or lateness. It would be both respectful and wise on your part to notify me of your absences as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person’s words or ideas. Words copied verbatim from another source must be quoted and the source must be cited. When you paraphrase words or ideas from another source, you must acknowledge the original author *unless the ideas are common knowledge*. If you collaborate with another author to produce ideas or words presented in a written project, you must acknowledge that person’s contribution – just think of citation as long-distance (and sometimes posthumous) collaboration.

Plagiarism is ridiculously easy for instructors to catch and can have dire consequences for your college career. If you find yourself coming up on a paper deadline with nothing whatsoever to turn in, **contact me** and we will work something out; it’s far more common than you may think. (Incidentally, having another student write your paper for you is no better than plagiarism, and maybe a little worse, since it also means punishment for your co-conspirator.)

Violations of the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity – including plagiarizing – can result in an academic sanction such as a grade of F for a writing assignment or a deduction from your final course grade. You can view the Policy at

<http://www1.cuny.cuny.edu/current/upload/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>.

Classroom Etiquette

Most of you have already been at the College for at least a year, so you probably have some idea of the decorum expected in a seminar. Nonetheless, here’s a little refresher, along with some warning about my personal pet peeves.

- Laptops, iPads and e-readers are all permitted for the purpose of taking notes or consulting readings – but, it should go without saying, not for non-class-related activities (Facebook etc.). I tend to pace around the room when I talk, so I will probably notice.

- Eating in class tends to be disruptive, but drinks are fine.

- In the event of an emergency (these things happen) you may of course leave the

classroom discreetly. I'm unlikely to look kindly, though, on anyone who wanders in and out of class as the spirit moves him/her; we only meet for an hour and fifteen minutes, so most bodily needs can be satisfied before or after our sessions. Frequent exits from the classroom will have a negative impact on your participation grade.

Now for the fun part:

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

Wednesday 8/28

Introduction.

In-class reading: Nussbaum, "On Television: Difficult Women."

WEEK 2

Monday 9/2

NO CLASS

Wednesday 9/4

NO CLASS

WEEK 3: The Immortals

Monday 9/9

Read: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Books I-II and IV.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 9/11

Read: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Books V-VI.

Short paper assignment distributed; close reading discussion.

WEEK 4: Theoretical Interlude

Monday 9/16

Read: Auerbach, "Odysseus's Scar."

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 9/18

Read: Genette, selections from *Narrative Discourse*: pages 25-40, 113-127.

WEEK 5: Romance and Repetition

Monday 9/23

Read: Cervantes, selections from *Don Quixote*: Volume 1, Chapters 1-9; Volume 2, Prologue and Chapters 30-33.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 9/25

WRITING CLINIC. Please bring a **draft** of your short paper for in-class workshopping and revision.

WEEK 6: Comedy and Character

Monday 9/30

Read: Molière, *The Misanthrope*.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 10/2

Read: Bergson, "Laughter," Chapter 3.

WEEK 7: Philosophical Interlude: Revising the Self

MONDAY: SHORT PAPER DUE BY 5:00 P.M.

Monday 10/7

Read: Montaigne, "By diverse means we arrive at the same end," "Of liars," "Of cannibals," "Of the inconsistency of our actions," "Of experience."

*No response necessary!

Wednesday 10/9

Read: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*: sections 40-55, 341.

WEEK 8: "I Want a Hero"

Monday 10/14: NO CLASS

Tuesday 10/15: NB! Monday schedule.

Read: Byron, *Don Juan* Cantos I and II.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 10/16

Read: Byron, *Don Juan* Cantos III and IV.

WEEK 9: "I Want a Hero" continued

Monday 10/21

Read: Moretti, selections from *Modern Epic*.
Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 10/23

Read: Byron, *Don Juan* Cantos V and VI.
Final paper assignment distributed; discussion of expectations.

WEEK 10: The Detective

Monday 10/28

Read: Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia," "The Five Orange Pips," "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane."
Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 10/30

Read: Conan Doyle, Preface to *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*; Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction."

WEEK 11: Syntax and Series

Monday 11/4

Read: Whitman, "Song of Myself," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "The Sleepers."
Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 11/6

Watch: *30 Rock*, selected episodes (in class).

WEEK 12: Syndication

Monday 11/11

Watch: *House*, selected episodes.
Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 11/13

DRAFT DUE – FINAL PAPER

Individual conferences. These are mandatory! A sign-up sheet will be distributed.

WEEK 13: Unfinished Narratives

Monday 11/18

Read: Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* chapters 1-3.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 11/20

Read: Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* chapters 4-8.

WEEK 14: Unfinished Narratives continued (unsurprisingly)

Monday 11/25

Read: Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* chapter 9-end.

*No response necessary!

Wednesday 11/27

NO CLASS (Friday schedule)

WEEK 15: History as Series

Monday 12/2

Read: Pynchon, selections from *Mason & Dixon*.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 12/4

Read: Pynchon, selections from *Mason & Dixon*.

WEEK 16: It Was a Dark and Stormy Night

Monday 12/9

Read: Schulz, selections from *The Complete Peanuts*.

Response due by 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday 12/11

Jones and Freleng, *Looney Tunes* selections (viewed in class). Conclusions.

THURSDAY, 12/19: FINAL PAPER DUE BY 5:00 P.M.