### Graduate Courses in English

#### 2024-25

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English 403
Writers’ Studies in Literature
Plot is Life: Autofiction, the Campus Novel, and Narrative Engines
Juan Martinez

Plot is easy to define and difficult to execute. We know that narratives require some form of animating force, and we know that this force hinges on a series of causally-linked events, sometimes. Not always. In this seminar we’ll work through two seemingly disparate novel genres---autofiction and the campus novel---to tease out what makes for compelling story-telling energy: a crisis, a disconnect between public and private behavior, politics, subgenres and their expectations (there’s a hilarious epistolary novel in our list, but there are also striking examples of science fiction, the fantastical, and the crime novel), hunger, desire, hypocrisy, satire (academic and otherwise), setting, ticking clocks and timetables, and our direct lived experience. The latter is crucial: we find our most interesting plots in life. We’ll also be sure to connect these elements beyond the novel and into each of our genres: we’ll discover how these same narrative engines animate poetry and creative nonfiction.

We’ll work through a considerable deal of material together, and we’ll help each other find ways to explore the possibilities of that material. But I’ll also ask each of you to bring in a short published piece that you love that we’ll all read; it should be a piece in your primary genre---a short story or a poem or an essay---that you feel best exploits one of the topics discussed.

Every week, we will all (1) read a novel, (2) respond, (3), read the short piece chosen by one of our classmates. In addition, one of us will be responsible for a presentation on the chosen short piece.

Reading list will include:
- Sofia Samatar’s The Practice, The Horizon, and the Chain,
- Annie Ernaux’s Simple Passion,
- Claire Louise Bennett’s Pond,
- W.G. Sebald’s The Emigrants,
- Amy Gentry’s Pnin,
- Mary McCarthy’s The Practice, The Horizon, and the Chain,
- James F. English, Playing in the Dark
- Giorgio Agamben, What is an Apparatus and Other Essays
- Gayatri Spivak, Death of a Discipline
- Bruce McComiskey, English Studies Reimagined
- James F. English, The Limits of Critique
- Julie Schumacher, Dear Committee Members
- Claude Levi-Strauss, The Poetics of Dissolution
- Evan Mwangi, The Poetics of Dissolution

Teaching Method(s): class discussions, library visits, guest lectures

Evaluation Method(s): Weekly self-evaluation, presentations, 13-page essay

Texts include:
- Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark
- Giorgio Agamben, What is an Apparatus and Other Essays
- Gayatri Spivak, Death of a Discipline
- Bruce McComiskey, English Studies Reimagined
- Rita Felski, The Limits of Critique

English 411
Studies in Poetry
The Poetics of Dissolution
Ivy Wilson

Frantz Fanon has famously written that the conditions of modernity have rendered blackness increasingly illegible, fraught with contradictions that push it outside the realm of facile comprehension and explicable. Taking Fanon’s polemic as a cue, this graduate seminar will look at a number of late twentieth-century textual and performance sites with radical instances of experimentation where articulations of blackness move into the interstitial space between meaning and non-meaning, coming into being precisely at the moment when the compositional logic of their anticipated forms are ruptured. The course will focus on three primary sites where black artists engage what might be called the poetics of dissolution to examine and critique the
processes of racial formation: poetry (where the form of the line or stanza dissolves); music (where sonic interpolations puts additional, if not different, claims on the lyrical content), and visual culture (where the moves toward graphic mimesis are refused delineation). The material under consideration may include work by the poets Nathaniel Mackey, Douglas Kearney, and Harriet Mullen; sound alchemists King Tubby, Alice Coltrane, and MF Doom; and visual artists Glenn Ligon, Hank Willis Thomas, and Bethany Collins. Theoretical texts may include work by Emily Apter Barthes, Baudrillard, Fred Moten, and Saussure, as well as ethnomusicologists and linguistic anthropologists.

Texts include:
- Darby English, How to Read a Work in Total Darkness
- Douglas Kearney, The Black Automaton
- Nathaniel Mackey, Discrepant Engagement.
- __________. Splay Anthem.
- Fred Moten. In the Break.
- Christina Sharpe. Ordinary Notes.

English 431
Studies in 16th-Century Literature
Queering the Crown: Marlowe and Shakespeare, Pre-texts and Afterlives
Jeffrey Masten

This course will simultaneously engage a set of methods within/around literary/performance studies and interrogate the transhistoricity of queerness. It follows the long representational career of Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II (c. 1592): from Holinshed’s Tudor-era chronicle history and other “pre-texts” through Shakespeare’s adaptation/revision/rewriting in Richard II, to the emergence of the theatrical-alienation effect in Bertolt Brecht’s early twentieth-century translation/adaptation Leben Eduards des Zweiten, twentieth-century productions and films tied to the early gay-liberation movement (Ian McKellen in repertory as both kings) and the early AIDS crisis (Derek Jarman and “New Queer Cinema”), to contemporary re-writings – Tom Stuart’s play After Edward; a German opera that weaves together antisemitism and homophobia; the recent rom-com “Red, White, and Royal Blue.” Critical readings in the history of sexuality, queer theory, “source” study, history of the book, adaptation theory, theory of tragedy, critical race studies and casting, and performance studies.

English 465
Studies in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature
Postcolonial Literature and U.S. Empire
Kalyan Nadiminti

After asserting its “manifest destiny” in the nineteenth century, the United States became an unprecedented global power in the twentieth century, especially after World War II. In 1941, the publisher Henry Luce went so far as to coin the phrase “the American century” to describe the new role of the emerging superpower in world affairs. For some, the US became the “indispensable nation,” “world leader,” and an exceptional international figure. For many others, such as the people of the Philippines or Vietnam or Iraq, it became a cruel and coercive imperial force. This course studies how the historical fact of US empire influenced literature and expressive culture. We will examine how both domestic and international writers most impacted by imperial violence—ranging Filipino migrant laborers, Afghan diaspora in the US, Middle Eastern and North African civilians caught in the dragnet of detention—contest the language of empire that the U.S. uses to ceaselessly redefine itself.

This graduate course asks, how has the geography of United States empire shaped and informed the evolution of US empire studies and postcolonial studies in the contemporary moment? In what ways might the intersection between postcolonial studies, ethnic American studies, Pacific studies, Middle Eastern and North African studies, and US empire yield new categories of analyses that have been broached by scholars like Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Eqbal Ahmad, and Amy Kaplan in the 1990s? What purchase do they have on contemporary academic as well as aesthetic developments in the post-9/11 era? Throughout the term, students will be introduced to and learn to grapple with theoretical and historical concepts like sovereignty, Cold War liberalism, counterinsurgency, extralegal internment, extraterritoriality, and neoliberal multiculturalism. We will read monographs almost every week by theorists starting with Said, Kaplan, Junaid Rana, Erica Edwards, Stuart Schrader, Anjuli Raza Kolb, and Darryl Li. We will also work through theorists like Eqbal Ahmad, Jasbir Puar, Judith Butler, Joseph Slaughter, Jodi Melamed, Nadia Abu Al-Haj, and many others to think through complex vocabularies of law, literature, and human rights in understanding the undertheorized intersection between postcolonial studies and US empire.
English 422
Studies in Medieval Literature
*The Global Middle Ages*
Barbara Newman

The term “Middle Ages”—the period “in the middle” between classical antiquity and the Renaissance—derives from European history, and it’s problematic even there. But the global turn in medieval studies enables us to go beyond the field’s traditional focus on Europe alone to explore its ties with the rest of the known world. In this course we’ll do that in two ways. Our first unit will deal with romance, gender, and the aesthetics of eroticism. Court ladies feature as foundational romance authors in two island nations, England and Japan, at opposite ends of the Eurasian land mass. After reading the *Lais* of Marie de France (12th century) and selections from the Tale of Genji by Murasaki Shikibu (11th century), we’ll complicate our study with two transgender romances: Heldris of Cornwall’s Silence and a Japanese tale translated by Rosette Willig as *The Changelings*. In our second unit, dealing with travel and ethnography, we’ll consider two Islamic and two European works: *The Book of Ibn Fadlan* (921-22), *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck* (1253-55), *The Travels of Ibn Battutah* (1325-54), and *The Book of John Mandeville* (ca. 1356). Critical readings will include literary essays on the French and Japanese texts, as well as excerpts from Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*; Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel*; and Shirin Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages*.

**Texts:**
- *The Lais of Marie de France*, ed. & trans. Claire Waters (Broadview)  
  ISBN 978-1-55481-082-6
- *Torikanbaya monogatari* (The Changelings), trans. Rosette Willig available on Canvas

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**English 431**
Studies in 16th-Century Literature
Early Modern Horror
Kasey Evans
Course Description forthcoming

**English 471, sec 20**
Studies in American Literature
*American Women Auteurs (Bette Davis)*
Julia Stern
Course Description forthcoming

**English 471, sec 21**
Studies in American Literature
*Sovereignties Across the Americas*
Mariajosé Rodríguez Pliego
Course Description forthcoming
The utopian tradition plays a significant role in the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century. Novels often include embedded utopias within them, so much so that these might be considered a “chronotope” of the early novel. On the face of it, this is paradoxical. Utopias portray visions of idealized societies, while novels operate in the mode of a critical realism scrutinizing the present. In this class, we will try to understand the place of utopian thinking in eighteenth-century novels. Are utopianism and realism at odds in the early novel? Does the critical potential of realism need the normative guidance of utopian thought to be effective? Why do embedded utopias become more scarce in later novels, and how is realism able to get along without them? This class will read an array of early novels with embedded utopias. (Possibilities include: Cervantes, Don Quixote; Swift, Gulliver’s Travels (book 4); Mandeville, Fable of the Bees; Fielding, Joseph Andrews; Rousseau, Julie; Goethe, Wilhelm Meister; Jane Austen, Persuasion; Mary Shelley, Frankenstein.) We will also read a selection of early utopias such as More’s Utopia and Bacon’s New Atlantis. Alongside these texts, we will read contemporary critical writing about utopias (Bloch, Jameson), realism (Watt, Lukacs, Jameson) and the crisis of ends-oriented thinking in eighteenth century ethics and politics (Horkheimer, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Pfau). Our aim will be to arrive at an account of the function of the “embedded utopia” chronotope in early novels.