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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 episodary 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 Bad Habits
• Mary McCarthy’s The Groves of Academe
• Vladimir Nabokov’s Pnin
• Julie Schumacher’s Dear Committee Members
• James Hynes’s The Lecturer’s Tale
• Lucy Ives’s Landermilk

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 explicability. 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*
Jeff 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 chronicler 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-Hadj, 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, In Light of Another’s Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages; Shayne Aaron Legassie, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages; and Shirin Khanmohamadi, Silence in Light of In Light of In Light of).

Our discussions will trace connections between the storytelling

English 471, sec 20
Studies in American Literature
Women on the Verge: Obsession and Melodrama, 1900-1965
Julia Stern

Women’s fiction and films of the classical Hollywood era, 1929-1950, feature heroines on the brink of madness, suicide, and death. Melodrama, a dramatic form that flourished in the nineteenth century and featured making virtue and evil visible, structures many of the works in our course. We will explore how and why female artistic production from the beginning of modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, and the heyday of the “woman’s picture,” 1933-1950 featured women on the brink, rejecting the 19th-century “marriage plot,” for a different set of endings. We will discuss the significance of “the New Woman,” the last throes of the “cult of domesticity” and the work of arguably classic Hollywood’s greatest actress, Bette Davis, whose films took up those historical issues.

Mode of evaluation: two take-home close reading exams (2 pages total) and a final project on a Davis film not on the syllabus. Works may include The Awakening, Ethan Fromme, Sapphira and the Slave Girl, Plum Bun, Quicksand, and The Street. Films may include Of Human Bondage, Jezebel, Dark Victory, Now, Voyager, In This Our Life, and Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?

We will read selected theoretical works from object relations psychoanalysis, feminist film theory, star theory, genre theory, and Lauren Berlant’s The Female Complaint.

English 471, sec 21
Studies in American Literature
Sovereignties Across the Americas
Mariajosé Rodríguez Pliego

The terms “sovereignties” and “Americas” in the title of this course stand at the crossroads of old and new dialogues about their meanings. This course considers Indigenous and Native American notions of sovereignty that imagine nationhood outside of the nation-state framework. It reads these theorizations of sovereignty and nationhood alongside Latin American and Latinx anti-imperial writing. We will consider José Marti’s late nineteenth-century articulation of “Our America” alongside the rise of the Guna word “Abiayala” and its use by Indigenous activists from Latin America, and “Turtle Island” as the name that Native American creation stories give to our continent.

Our discussions will trace connections between the storytelling
traditions of Native American, Indigenous, and Latinx authors across the hemisphere. We will study the narrative forms that authors take up as they construct or critique nationhood: essays, short stories, novels and poetry.

We will also examine how authors break down these forms by taking up communal authorship, orality, visual media, and multilingualism as narrative strategies that provide aesthetic and ideological challenges to canonical articulation of nation-state sovereignties.

**Evaluation Method(s):** Conference abstract, paper, presentations, and participation in discussions.

**Assigned texts:** will likely include essays by Emíl’ Keme, José Martí, Gerald Vizenor, Shari M. Huhndorf, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Walter Mignolo.

**Primary materials:** will include works by Leslie Marmon Silko, Luz Jiménez, Tommy Orange, Yuri Herrera, and Natalie Díaz, as well as excerpts from Popol Vuh and Florentine Codex

All materials will be uploaded to Canvas.

**Eng 481**
Studies in Contemporary Literature
*The Environmental Humanities*
Sarah Dimick

This graduate seminar explores core concepts, questions, and methodologies within the environmental humanities. Rather than reading literature and literary scholarship in isolation, we will trace their entanglements in environmental history, anthropology, philosophy, geography, and other adjacent disciplines. What, we will ask, are the unique affordances of literary study when confronting environmental questions and challenges? What are the risks and rewards of conducting interdisciplinary environmental research?

The syllabus will be tailored to support the particular interests and pursuits of students in the course, but topics may include climate writing, environmental justice literature, environmental racism, global and local scales, militarized and nuclear environments, and queer ecologies. Collectively, the readings will ensure familiarity with classic texts in the environmental humanities and introduce students to the cutting edges of this wide-ranging field.

**Evaluation Method(s):** Conference abstract, paper, presentations, and participation in discussions.

**Assigned texts** will likely include scholarship by Lawrence Buell, Ursula Heise, Rob Nixon, Olufemi O. Taíwò, Anna Tsing, and Kyle Powys Whyte. Primary materials will include works by Rachel Carson, Jamaica Kincaid, Imbolo Mbue, Arundhati Roy, Indra Sinha, and Karen Tei Yamashita.

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**Spring Quarter**

**English 441**
Studies in 18th-Century Literature
*Novel Utopias: Critique and Normativity in Eighteenth-Century Realism*
Viv Soni

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 Pfa). Our aim will be to arrive at an account of the function of the “embedded utopia” chronotope in early novels.

**English 461, sec 20**
Studies in Contemporary Literature
*Translation Problems*
Rebecca Johnson
Course Description forthcoming

**English 461, sec 21**
Studies in Contemporary Literature
*Digital Aesthetics*
Jim Hodge

This seminar introduces students in the arts-based humanities to the study of digital aesthetics across the arts, including literature, visual art, moving images, and music. It will examine a range of aesthetic forms responsive to the popular emergence of the computer and the internet, including computer-generated prints, video games, electronic music, hypertext, print fiction, and projects inflected by vernacular digital forms such as memes. Moving historically, roughly decade by decade from the 1960s
to the present, the main task of the class will be to consider the difference digital computational technologies make in the creation of aesthetic forms and the experience of them. For instance, what new forms and modes of experience become possible with computers? What exactly makes something "digital"? And how can we tell (or not) -- and does it matter at all -- if something was made with the aid of automated processes? And finally, how do the answers to these questions change as we move from one computational era to another, e.g. from the mainframe and hobbyist eras to the domestic reception of popular electronics and computers in the 1980s to the emergence of the World Wide Web and social media and smartphones in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s up to and possibly beyond our historical present.

The seminar will also emphasize the formal analysis of a range of both experimental and popular works across media, taking care to measure the aesthetic and historical meanings of the digital in the changing imagination of computers as central to society. Finally, students will encounter and write about forms native to their chosen discipline (literature, visual art, the moving image, music) but also about newer forms that do not fit easily into discipline-specific histories. Possible texts and objects of aesthetic analysis include computer-generated prints in the collection of Northwestern's Block Museum, the Detroit Techno and Chicago House electronic music scenes, fiction by William Gibson and Patricia Lockwood, net.art by Mendi + Keith Obadike and Ricardo Dominguez, films by Ridley Scott and the Wachowskis, glitch art by JoDi, Takeshi Murata, Jon Satrom, Rosa Menkman, and others, a group session devoted to video game play, meme aesthetics, and a class devoted to experimenting with artificial intelligence. Assignments will likely include a short presentation, a short formal analysis paper, and a final paper or project on digital aesthetics on an approved topic of the student's choosing.

English 471
Studies in American Literature
The Black Novel
Justin Mann

In this course students will assess how the novel has figured in the development of Black literature and life over the long 20th Century. Through our engagement with this form, student's will examine how long-form narrative fiction has captured the historical and social realities of Black life since the turn of the 21st century and how it has called for different worlds through innovative technique and style. We will read topically from the end of the 19th century through to the 21st century and will consider how the novel has evolved as a form that takes in multiple genres. In addition to fiction, students will also read theories of narrative written by black and non-black authors to better understand how narrative works.

Some conceptual questions for consideration include:
What historical, stylistic, aesthetic qualities produce the novel? How do Black American novels innovate formally, stylistically, and narratively? How do such innovations (or, on the contrary, adherence to tradition) help us understand literature and culture's work in the project of Black freedom?

Texts Include:
- Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man
  ISBN 978-1636003672
- Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God
  ISBN 978-0060838676
- Ellison, Invisible Man
  ISBN 978-0679732761
- Brooks, Maud Martha
  ISBN 978-0883780619
- Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain
  ISBN 978-0375701870
- Butler, Kindred
  ISBN 978-0807083697
- Bambara, The Salt Eaters
  ISBN 978-0679740766
- Morrison, Beloved
  ISBN 978-1784876432
- Everett, Erasure
  ISBN 978-1555975999
- La Valle, The Changeling
  ISBN 978-0812985870

English 481
Studies in Literary Theory & Criticism
Mimesis and Its Doubles
Will West

Mimesis names a relation of likeness: the way a work of art or literature is like something else—not the only way, but a uniquely central way in theories of representation in the traditions of Europe and the Mediterranean. Since Plato and Aristotle, mimesis has often stood for a kind of natural relation of one thing to another. It thus paradoxically is a relation that often goes without saying: you are supposed to recognize likeness when you see it. This course will explore some of the things that literature is supposed to be like (action? the world? other literature?), but also what it means for one thing to be said to be like another thing at all. We will balance theoretical discussions of mimesis with theatrical and other explorations of its role, as well as strategies for representation besides likeness, representing things that are like nothing, and hierarchies implied or subverted by the concept of mimesis.