English 243: Genre

Talia Schaffer M, W 1:40-3:30pm; RA 106

Office: Klapper 614 Office hours: M 4-6pm

Phone: x7-4675 and by appointment

E-mail: talia.schaffer@qc.cuny.edu

Required texts:

Bechdel, Alison, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Mariner Books: ISBN 9780618871711)

Behn, Aphra, *Oroonoko* (Penguin, ISBN 9780140439885)

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* (Penguin, ISBN 9780141439556)

Shakespeare, William, *Othello* (The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello, ISBN  9780199535873)

\*means that it will be available on Blackboard

About this course:

What does a ‘genre’ mean; why do we use it in English classes; and what would happen if we did away with it altogether? In this class, we will explore what’ a novel’ means, largely by discussing test cases - things that might or might not fit the category. Doomed love will be our theme – attempts to imagine interracial and same-sex love in cultures that claim such relationships are impossible. We’ll start with a section on genre itself, reading some theory and some non-novels, particularly Shakespeare’s “Othello.” “Othello” will also give us a chance to start thinking about staging; is a performance of a text a different genre? We’ll then explore one of the earliest attempts to form a modern kind of prose narrative, Behn’s 18th-century story of an enslaved martyr-prince. What makes *Oronooko* different from “Othello”*,* genre-wise, and why might those differences matter (or do they)? As the centerpiece of the course, we’ll read *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that was so radical in its sexual and racial politics that it was almost inexplicable in its own period. Still adored today as a great romantic story, *Wuthering Heights* is a hybrid of multiple types of fiction, particularly Gothic and realist fiction, and reading it will give us a chance to talk not only about the novel but also about types of novels and how and why they differ. We then move fully into the visual realm, picking up some of the staging issues we discussed with “Othello” in order to compare two film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* and asking about what happens when stories change into cinematic form. We will end with *Fun Home,* a graphic novel (and now Broadway show), looking at what happens to the novel when it becomes visual art as well as text, when it turns to songs and drama as well as story. We’ll take advantage of the generous class sessions to see lots of movies, and we’ll vary our discussions with group work, art, music, and other in-class activities. Requirements include a blog and three essays.

English 243 is a 4-hour/4-credit course, with English 170W as its prerequisite or co-requisite.

Definition of genre:

GENRE [zhahnr] The French term for a type, species, or class of composition. A literary genre is a recognizable and established category of written work employing such common conventions as will prevent readers or audiences from mistaking it for another kind. Much of the confusion surrounding the term arises from the fact that it is used simultaneously for the most basic modes of literary art (lyric, narrative, dramatic); for the broadest categories of composition (poetry, prose fiction), and for more specialized sub- categories, which are defined according to several different criteria including formal structure (sonnet, picaresque novel), length (novella, epigram), intention (satire), effect (comedy), origin (folktale), and subject-matter (pastoral, science fiction). While some genres, such as the pastoral elegy or the melodrama, have numerous conventions governing subject, style, and form, others – like the novel – have no agreed rules, although they may include several more limited subgenres. Adjective: generic. See also DECORUM, FORM, MODE, TYPE. For a fuller account, consult John Frow, Genre (2005).

Source: Chris Baldick, The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Third Edition. Oxford University Press, 2008. 140.

Learning Goals

In this course I hope you will:

• learn to ask investigative theoretical questions

• understand that literary categories are not immutable truths, but constructed to serve certain purposes, and challengeable and changeable

• practice close, attentive textual readings

• learn to do basic literary-critical readings

• see how race and sexuality have changed over time

Course Schedule

*Theoretical Introduction*

M, Aug 31 introduction to genre: Rothman handout

W, Sept 2 \*Chandler

define a genre in our classroom

M, Sept 7 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

W, Sept 9 \*Bakhtin (read only pp.321-328, 330-331, 338-342, 347-351)

\*The Odyssey, Book 1

R, Sept 10 (Mon schedule) Othello, Act I

M, Sept 14 NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH

*Early Race Stories*

W, Sept 16 Othello, Acts II and III

M, Sept 21 Othello, Acts IV and V

film clips: Parker’s Othello, Orson Welles’s Othello

W, Sept 23 NO CLASS: YOM KIPPUR

M, Sept 28 Behn first half

W, Sept 30 Behn to end

M, Oct 5 Writing day

**assign 1 given: Behn and Shakespeare**

*Wuthering Heights*

W, Oct 7 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch. 3

M, Oct 12 NO CLASS: COLUMBUS DAY

W, Oct 14 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch. 7

\*Rena-Dozier article

**essay 1 due**

M, Oct 19 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch. 10

\*period reviews

W, Oct 21 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch.14

**essay 1 returned**

M, Oct 26 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch. 20 (or Vol II Ch 6)

Writing Day 2

**assignment 2 given: Brontë**

W, Oct 28 *Wuthering Heights* through Ch.28 (or Vol II Ch 14)

M, Nov 2 *Wuthering Heights* through end

*Adaptation*

W, Nov 4 \*McFarlane, Shannon

M Nov 9 “Wuthering Heights” film (1939) – Olivier

**essay 2 due**

W, Nov 11 “Wuthering Heights” film (2011)

**essay 2 due**

M, Nov 16 \*Sharon Olds poetry

Sharon Olds poetry reading – extra credit

W, Nov 18 \*Shachar, Haire-Sergeant

**essay 2 returned**

Nov 25-27 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

*Graphic Narratives*

M, Nov 30 Bechdel Ch 1-4

W, Dec 2 Bechdel Ch 5-7

clips from “Fun Home” on Broadway

**assign 3 given: visual culture**

M, Dec 7 Bechdel Ch 6-7

W, Dec 9 TBA

M, Dec 14 final discussion

**essay 3 due with email address if you want comments**

Grading:

Essay #1 20%

Essay #220%

Essay #3 20%

Blogging 20%

Effort grade (see below) 20%

Essays:

There will be three essays of approximately 5 pages each, which must be typed and conform to MLA guidelines. I will hand out assignments and you can pick which topic you’d like to write about. I also encourage you to come up with your own topic, as long as you clear it with me first.

Blog:

Every student must do a close reading of a sentence from that week’s reading 5 times during the semester. To do this, you must copy the sentence and then write a few sentences analyzing it. Every student must also comment 5 times over the course of the semester on someone else’s close reading. 5 posts, 5 comments. For the comment, entitle it ‘comment on [student’s name]’s post,’ ie ‘comment on Nicole’s post’ so I know you intend it as a comment. You will thus have a total of 10 posts and will receive 1 point for each post, for a total of 20% of your final grade.

The blog site is in Blackboard. Log in through www.cuny.edu, with your QC id and password. Blogs are due by Sunday 8pm every week, but you can post them any time once I have opened that week’s forum. You blog about the week’s reading to come, not the week you’ve already done.

No laptops in class

I am instituting a no-electronics policy in class. That means no laptops, no Kindles, no e-readers, no iPads, no phones. This policy will help you stay focused. Research shows that students learn better and classroom discussion works better when everyone is liberated from the constant distractions of electronic media. See:

1. Tal Gross, “This Year, I Resolve to Ban Laptops From My Classroom,” *Washington Post* 12/30/2014:

“Since most students can type very quickly, laptops encourage them to copy down nearly everything said in the classroom. But when students stare at the screen of their laptops, something is lost. The students shift from being intellectuals, listening to one another, to being customer-service representatives, taking down orders. Class is supposed to be a *conversation*, not an exercise in dictation.   
  
This is not just vague worrying on my part. There’s now good research on the topic. Take, for instance, a recent study by two psychologists, Pam Mueller at Princeton University and Daniel Oppenheimer at UCLA. Mueller and Oppenheimer asked 67 undergraduates to watch videos of lectures. Half the students were randomly assigned to watch the lectures while taking notes on a laptop, while the other students were asked to watch the lectures while taking notes with paper and pen. Afterward, the students were all given an exam. The students who took notes longhand scored much higher on conceptual questions than did the students who used a laptop.”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/30/this-year-im-resolving-to-ban-laptops-from-my-classroom/

2. Clay Shirkey, “Why I Just Asked My Students to Put Their Laptops Away,” Medium.com, September 8, 2014

“The final realization — the one that firmly tipped me over into the “No devices in class” camp — was this: screens generate distraction in a manner akin to second-hand smoke. A paper with the blunt title [Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254?np=y" \t "_blank) says it all: *We found that participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.”*

https://medium.com/@cshirky/why-i-just-asked-my-students-to-put-their-laptops-away-7f5f7c50f368

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means the unacknowledged copying of someone else's ideas or words, no matter whether the original material is on the web or in print. It is theft. You are unjustly taking credit for something that you did not produce. This damages you; you're not learning anything if you're just copying someone else's stuff. It damages the other person, who's not getting any credit for her work. And it wastes my time, because I'm making comments that don't help you. If you plagiarize, you will automatically get an F on that paper and you may well fail the course. So if you are in doubt, cite! Put quotation marks around *anything* you copy word for word. Put the reference at the end of the sentence if you paraphrased someone's work or derived this idea from it. It's better to put in unnecessary references than to plagiarize inadvertently. It is perfectly okay to have friends help you with your essays as long as you acknowledge them at the end of your paper, ie, “thanks to my friend Pam Smith who helped me get rid of extra commas.”

Effort grade (attendance, participation):

This grade rewards those who come to class regularly, participate, and put in the extra work needed to make their writing and reading improve. Your effort grade will drop disastrously if you a) miss many classes without a valid excuse, b) do not participate, or act uninterested or apathetic in class, c) frequently come in late or leave early, d) show no signs of taking writing advice seriously, e) do not complete writing assignments (including blogs). The effort grade is worth 20% in itself, and I will also use it to adjust your overall course grade up or down.

*Attendence*: When you sign up for this course you commit to being here unless some unforeseen emergency arises. Respect the class times. Arrive on time and leave only when the class ends, and if you have to be absent or leave early, tell me about it first. That shows a sense of responsibility and some respect for me. But remember that telling me about it does not mean it is an excused absence. Legitimate excuses do *not* include: taking a relative to/from the airport, meeting another professor, doing an extra shift at work, forgetting something and going home to get it, oversleeping, doing work for another class.

*Participation*: This seminar really depends on your willingness to participate and share your ideas! I know that some people feel uncomfortable speaking in public, but if you do not like to talk, I expect you to demonstrate participation in some other way -- by looking interested, coming to office hours, blogging, attending all classes, etc. I can tell when someone is involved in the class or not.

*Acting appropriately*: When you are in class, you must look as if you are paying attention (even if you’re not) and you must permit others to pay attention. This means you may not read, pass notes, whisper, do homework, check email, etc. See above for no-electronics policy.

*Quizzes*: I am going to start by giving you the benefit of the doubt and assuming you are doing the reading properly. However -- if I find that you are falling behind on the reading, I WILL institute weekly reading quizzes. Fair warning. If you want to deter the quizzes, then keep up and participate.

*Accommodations:* Located in Kiely Hall 171, the Office for Special Services for Students with Disabilities was established to make sure that students with disabilities have access to resources that will allow them to succeed at Queens College. If you have questions about services you might qualify for, visit their website at <http://sl.qc.cuny.edu/oss/index.php>. I’ll also be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have.

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Late papers:

Now, this is something I’m strict about. I will not have papers dribbling in for weeks and weeks. If you have a legitimate reason for needing an extension, contact me and set up a new deadline. I expect the paper to come in by that new date. If you do not get in touch with me, or if you do not meet the new deadline, your paper will drop by *one grade* for every day that it is late. Thus a paper which would normally get a B but is three days late drops three grades (B-, C+, C) and ends up a C.

*Writing Guide:*

Quotes:

I. Picking quotations:

Pick only the words that work best for the purpose; don’t quote huge swaths of prose when only a sentence or two is necessary. You need to give a quotation in the following cases:

A. To back up a controversial point (you don’t have to ‘prove’ basic facts about the book, but you do have to prove arguments)

B. To do a close reading

C. To use the author’s marvelous language instead of your own workaday prose

II. Formatting in-line quotations:

A. In the MLA style, you use parenthetical documentation in the body of your paper, with author’s name and page number *only*. Please note that the period goes *after* the parenthetical reference:

“My metaphor was horticultural,” one character explains (Wilde, 10). OR:

He claimed, “my metaphor was horticultural” (Wilde, 10).

B. Put a list of Works Cited at the end of your paper, with the full references:

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest.* London: Penguin Books, 1966.

III. Formatting block quotes: use this style if you are citing something more than four lines long. Indent it ten spaces on the left (without changing the right-hand margin), single-space it, do not use quotation marks, and you may also make it a smaller font size. In a block quote, for some reason you *do* put the parenthetical reference after the final period, unlike a regular quote.

Since Wilde was a remarkably charismatic and popular individual, he had many friends, but when the great crash came in 1895, few of those friends defended him. He became perhaps the most infamous man in England. His very name was unspeakable. His erstwhile friends vied with each other to pillory him in the public press, and each critique was more cruel than the last. (Smith, 90)

Other writing issues (ie, Things I Hate and You Shouldn’t Do):

I. Word choice: ‘Demise’ does not mean doom; it means death. ‘Blatant’ means offensively, in-your-face obvious – don’t use it if you intend to praise someone. It’s better to say what you mean rather than look for fancy words whose meaning you’re not clear about. Do not trust your on-line thesaurus or grammar checker.

II. Generalizations: The only time anything is ‘truly human’ is if it’s not possible for an animal to do it (ie using opposable thumbs); the only thing that happened at ‘the beginning of time’ is the Big Bang. Don’t use lazy formulations like ‘in those times’ or ‘there’ when you can specify date and place: ‘in the 1850s, in England.’ It sounds much better. Don’t resort to vague, huge assertions to make your argument sound more important. Instead, try to figure out why your argument really does matter and explain that.

III. Conclusions: In your conclusion you do not need to summarize, unless the paper is exceptionally long or complex. Instead, you should show why your argument is interesting or important. That means really thinking about why what you have written is valuable, why it was worth the reader’s attention.

IV. Organization: Do take a few minutes to jot down the main points of your argument on a scrap of paper before you begin writing. This will save you from going off on tangents, changing your thesis halfway through, getting bogged down, forgetting to mention key points, and a huge number of other problems.

VI. Thesis: Try to pick something that really interests you and explore it. An essay is a chance to work something out, to delve deeper into the reading. Do not simply pick something that is obviously true and go through the motions of proving it, which will bore both me and you.

Final advice:

I. Remember that fundamentally, an essay is you telling me what you think about something. Don’t fixate on rules; instead, try to think of the most interesting thing you can say to me, and say it the best way you can. I want original, complicated, ambitious arguments. I want to see you thinking.

II. Buy and use a writing handbook, if you don't already have one. I recommend the MLA Guide or Diana Hacker’s handbook. Or use the very useful website, the OWL at Purdue: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/

Questions will come up that I can't answer, and you'll be glad to have someplace to look them up.

Grading standards:

These will vary slightly depending on the class’s level, but here is a good general guide.

*Blogs*

• If you do 9 or 10 required posts (or more), and if they are interesting, substantive comments, you’ll get some form of an A for your blog grade.

• If you miss 2 or 3 posts but the rest are still acceptably solid posts, you’ll get some form of a B.

• If you miss 4 or 5 posts, or if the blog posts are rudimentary, disengaged, or minimal, you’ll get some form of a C.

• If you miss more than 5 posts you fail the blog grade.

You are welcome to post more than 10 comments but there is no extra credit grade-wise if you do.

*A level papers: especially great ideas, and no major writing problems*

A+ = this paper is extraordinary – ambitious, original, and beautifully written -- and it has taught me something new. Thank you.

A = this paper is virtually perfect, or so outstandingly original its tiny flaws don’t matter.

A- = this paper has made the leap into something special; it is outstandingly original or insightful; but it has some minor writing flaws (ie, occasional word choice problems, a misunderstanding of one aspect of the text).

*B level papers: good ideas, but some writing problems*

B+ = a very good, well-written paper, but doesn’t have the spark of originality necessary to put it in the A range; or a brilliantly original paper that would normally be an A- but the writing flaws are too great (frequent word choice problems, a lot of passive voice, a poor conclusion).

B = a good paper, solid, well-organized and well-supported. Flaws are usually sentence-level, but they run throughout the paper (passive voice, word choice, tense problems, comma problems, simple declarative sentences, unsatisfying intro or concl.).

B- = good ideas, but writing problems are apparent. Flaws are starting to appear at the level of structure (organization and paragraphing may be shaky), or the problems I’ve listed for a B paper are here but in a more serious form.

*C level papers: acceptable but problematic ideas, and real writing problems*

C+ = ideas are acceptable, and you’ve done some work, but there are real writing problems at the level of thesis, organization, etc. A major self-contradiction, an entire lack of documentation, no thesis, systematic sentence fragments, or problems with comprehensibility can put you in the C range.

C = ideas are acceptable, but it needs a lot more work. This paper may have any of the problems of the C+ range but the problems are worse, and there may be substantial misreadings of the text.

C- = barely acceptable, and I take it only because there’s some glimmer of some effort in it. These tend to be hastily dashed off, badly misunderstand the text, and have serious writing problems.

*D, F level papers: unacceptable ideas and writing*

D = not really acceptable -- very serious writing problems and inadequate ideas. Basically: you handed in something that more or less looks like the assignment, so it’s not an F. I don’t give D+ and D-, on the grounds that a D is already so low it’s ludicrous to make distinctions.

F = not acceptable at all.