

## SERIALIZING FICTION

ENGL 215-901  
Reading Literature  
Hibbs Hall 260  
Mon./Wed. 5:30–6:45 pm  
Fall 2017

Dr. Adam Abraham  
Office: Hibbs Hall 323  
Hours: Thu. 2–4:30 pm  
or by appointment  
asabraham@vcu.edu

Long before AMC triumphed with *Mad Men* and *The Walking Dead* and before HBO aired *The Sopranos* and *Game of Thrones*, nineteenth-century writers perfected the art of serial publication—issuing their novels in weekly or monthly installments. Charles Dickens, famously, published all fifteen of his novels in one serial format or another. His friend Wilkie Collins offered this memorable formula: “Make ’em cry, make ’em laugh, make ’em wait.”

This course will consider what it means to narrate in *time*. What is the relationship between narrative time and lived experience, the days and the years? What is the role played by suspense, repetition, doubling, memory, fragmentation, secrets?

We will begin with that great forerunner of serial narrative, Sheherazade, whose perpetual tale-telling in *The Arabian Nights* literally saved her life. Then we will read examples of Victorian serialization and bring the story up-to-date with modern iterations such as the chapter-play movie serial, television shows, and graphic narrative.



### REQUIRED READING:

Clowes, Daniel. *Ghost World*. 1993–1997. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2005.  
Collins, Wilkie. *The Moonstone*. 1868. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress*. 1837–1839. London: Penguin Books, 2003.  
 Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Cranford*. 1851–1853. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.  
 Wolfe, Tom. *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. 1984–1987. New York: Picador, 1987.

Please use recommended editions so that we are all on the same page (literally).

New and/or used copies are available at the Virginia Book Company, 900 West Franklin Street. (Support local, independent vendors!)

### **ASSESSMENT:**

- I. Attendance: 10 points
- II. Preparation and participation: 10 points
- III. Unannounced quizzes: 10 points
- IV. Essay no. 1: 10 points
- V. Essay no. 2: 10 points
- VI. Group presentation: 20 points
- VII. Final examination: 30 points

TOTAL = 100 points

### **EXPECTATIONS:**

#### *Attendance*

Woody Allen once said that 80 percent of success is showing up. In this course, attendance will count for 10 percent of your final grade. But attendance means more than just showing up. You must be fully *present*: awake, alert, attentive, engaged. Each student is permitted up to five *excused or unexcused* absences. There is no need to tell me your reasons: it's five for free, no questions asked. If, however, you miss six classes (roughly 20 percent of the course), you will earn zero points for attendance. If you miss many more, then you are at risk of receiving a failing grade.

#### *Preparation*

This course is entitled Reading Literature, and that is our primary goal. You should read each assignment in its entirety before the class session listed. Be an *active* reader: underline words, scribble in the margins, write down questions, and make note of passages that confused you. A book that has been read will look like a *used book*; its resale value should plummet. Bring the relevant book to each class session.

#### *Participation*

We learn by articulating ideas and refining those ideas in conversation with others. Try to be a lively participant in each class discussion. Raise points, ask questions. Listen carefully to what others are saying. If you are mournfully shy, then I recommend that

you write out one comment or question in advance of each class discussion. Then you can read your prepared comment or question to the class.

### *Note-Taking*

You should take notes during each Monday lecture. Studies show that students who take notes *by hand with a pen or pencil* perform better on examinations than those who take notes on a laptop. If you insist on typing notes on a computer, please do not glance at emails, shop, or browse the Internet. It is distracting to yourself and to those around you. On Wednesday seminars, the aim is to focus on our conversation and each other, so I ask that all laptops be put away.

### *Electronic Devices*

Because paying attention is one of the goals of this course, I ask that all phones and electronic devices are turned off and placed out of sight. Students texting in class will be marked absent for the day. If there is a genuine life crisis, please pretend that it is 1977 and that you have to go outside to use a payphone *before* texting or making that urgent call.

### *Quizzes*

In order to assess that you are reading the assigned books, there will be four unannounced quizzes over the semester. These will be rather easy if you have completed the assignments. I will drop the lowest grade. Because the element of surprise is essential, you will *not* be able make up these quizzes if you are absent or late.

### *Essays*

Deleuze says that we write “at the frontiers of our knowledge,” and college writing assignments are designed to push those frontiers, to expand our knowledge. I will ask each student to write two essays of no more than 1,000 words each. Each essay must be submitted in *hard copy only* to my departmental mailbox by 4:30 pm on the due date. Essays will be graded in two areas: content and expression. *Expression* refers to English grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so on. If this is a weakness for you, it is not too late to improve. Details for each assignment will be provided when the dates draw closer.

### *Late Work*

You are a busy person; I understand. If you want to submit a late essay, send me an email one or two days before the deadline to request permission to submit late. *Do not tell me your reasons*. Simply ask for permission. I will reply by email and extend the deadline by one calendar week. If you do not seek permission or do so too late, your essay will be marked down by one letter grade. An essay submitted more than one week after the original or extended deadline will be graded without the benefit of comments and corrections from the instructor. Please note that any work submitted after the final exam date (Wednesday 13 December) will receive a score of zero.

### *Group Presentations*

In order to develop your research, public speaking, and collaboration skills, you will work in a group of three students to create and offer a presentation of no more than ten minutes in length. This presentation will be on an aspect of the 1980s relevant to our reading of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Each student individually will be asked to submit a one-page annotated bibliography of the sources of information used. The presentation may be rescheduled only *once* if a member of the group is absent on the assigned day. Further details will be provided when the dates draw closer.

### *Extra Credit*

Because I believe in fighting chances, each student will have the opportunity to submit one extra-credit assignment on or before the final class date (6 December). Of course, this is optional. If you are interested, then write a magazine-quality review of a new television series (one that premiered in 2016 or 2017). The review should be no more than 1,000 words in length. Submit in *hard copy only* to my departmental mailbox. The review will earn one, three, or five extra points, depending on its quality. Hence a total score of 87 could be raised to 92.

### *Learning Needs*

You are welcome to come to my scheduled office hours to discuss anything related to the course. Other meeting times can also be arranged. If you require accommodation for a diagnosed disability, please notify me privately at the beginning of the semester.

### *Academic Integrity*

It is the assumption that the work you present in this course will be your own. If you incorporate someone else's words or ideas, you must cite that person, text, or source. If you do not know how to cite sources, read chapter 14 of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or ask me for guidance. If you submit someone else's work as your own, in whole or in part, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment.

**SCHEDULE:**AUGUST

Mon. 28 Prologue

Wed. 30 • *The Arabian Nights* (trans. Haddawy), Handout No. 1

SEPTEMBER

Mon. 4 NO CLASS (Labor Day)

Wed. 6 • *The Arabian Nights* (trans. various), Handout No. 2

Mon. 11 Monthly

Wed. 13 • *Oliver Twist*, nos. 1–8 (pp. 3–143)

Mon. 18

Wed. 20 • *Oliver Twist*, nos. 9–16 (pp. 144–305)

Mon. 25

Wed. 27 • *Oliver Twist*, nos. 17–24 (pp. 306–455)

OCTOBER

Mon. 2 Weekly

Wed. 4 • *Cranford*

... **ESSAY NO. 1 DUE** Friday 6 October by 4:30 pm

Mon. 9 Sensation

Wed. 11 • *The Moonstone*, nos. 1–10 (pp. 1–147)

Mon. 16

Wed. 18 • *The Moonstone*, nos. 11–21 (pp. 147–307)

Mon. 23

Wed. 25 • *The Moonstone*, nos. 23–32 (pp. 307–466)

Mon. 30 Hollywood

NOVEMBER

Wed. 1 • *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, pp. 1–135

... **ESSAY NO. 2 DUE** Friday 3 November by 4:30 pm

Mon. 6 NO CLASS

Wed. 8 • *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, pp. 136–277

Mon. 13 Cliffhanger

Wed. 15 • *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, pp. 278–421

• **IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS:** Groups 1, 2, 3, 4

Mon. 20 Television

Wed. 22 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Mon. 27 Satire

• **IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS:** Groups 5, 6, 7, 8

Wed. 29 • *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, pp. 422–685

• **IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS:** Groups 9, 10, 11, 12

DECEMBER

Mon. 4 Graphic

• *Ghost World*

Wed. 6 Conclusion; or, To Be Continued

We will review course content and screen favorite television shows

... **FINAL EXAMINATION**

Wednesday 13 December

4:00–6:00 pm

## UNIVERSITY BOILERPLATE:

### E-mail Policy

Electronic mail or "e-mail" is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost effective and environmentally aware manner. Students are expected to check their official VCU e-mail on a frequent and consistent basis in order to remain informed of university-related communications. The university recommends checking e-mail daily. Students are responsible for the consequences of not reading, in a timely fashion, university-related communications sent to their official VCU student e-mail account. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the university as needed. Mail sent to the VCU e-mail address may include notification of university-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/askit/policies-and-publications/information-technology-policies-standards-baselines--guidelines/student-e-mail-policy/>.

### VCU Honor System: Upholding Academic Integrity

The VCU Honor System policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to this policy, "Members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity." In addition, "All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and,
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases."
- [http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy Library/VCU Honor System.pdf](http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/VCU%20Honor%20System.pdf) . **View the Honor System** in its entirety: (<https://policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Honor%20System.pdf>)

More information can also be found on the **Division of Student Affairs** website: [http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/students/student\\_honor\\_system.html](http://www.students.vcu.edu/studentconduct/students/student_honor_system.html).

### Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the **Faculty Guide to Student Conduct in Instructional Settings**

(<http://www.assurance.vcu.edu/Policy%20Library/Faculty%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Conduct%20in%20Instructional%20Settings.pdf>), "The university is a community of learners. Students, as well as faculty, have a responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that supports effective instruction. In order for faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) to provide and students to receive effective instruction in classrooms, laboratories, studios, online courses, and other learning areas, the university expects students to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner." Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. Also, the university Rules and Procedures prohibit anyone from having "in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university..."

### Students with Disabilities

SECTION 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended require that VCU provides "academic adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" to any student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. To receive accommodations, students must request them by contacting the Disability Support Services Office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or the Division for Academic Success on the MCV campus (828-9782). More information is available at **Disability Support Services** or the **Division for Academic Success**.

Any student who has a disability that requires an academic accommodation should schedule a meeting with the instructor at the student's earliest convenience. Additionally, if coursework requires the student to work in a lab environment, the student should advise the instructor or a department chair of any concerns that the student may have regarding safety issues related to a disability. Students should follow this procedure for all courses in the academic semester.

### Campus Emergency information

What to Know and Do to Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU

- Sign up to receive **VCU text messaging alerts**. Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep his or her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor's instructions.
- Know where to go for **additional emergency information**: <http://alert.vcu.edu/>.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.
- Keep your permanent address and emergency contact information current in eServices.

### Withdrawal from Classes

Before withdrawing from classes, students should consult their instructor as well as other appropriate university offices. Withdrawing from classes may negatively impact a student's financial aid award and his or her semester charges. To discuss financial aid and the student bill, visit the Student Services Center at 1015 Harris Hall or contact a financial aid counselor at <http://www.enrollment.vcu.edu/finaid/contact.html>. The last day to withdraw from classes is 3 November.