

LITERARY THEORY : STORY / NARRATIVE / FILM

ENGL 485-901  
Hibbs Hall 428  
Tue./Thu. 5:30–6:45 pm  
Fall 2018  
adamabraham.info

Dr. Adam Abraham  
Office: Hibbs Hall 323  
Office Hours: Thu. 3:00–5:00 pm  
or by appointment  
asabraham@vcu.edu

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

—*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

“There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time.”

—*Slaughterhouse-Five*



Stories surround us—in novels, films, and television; in jokes and anecdotes; in the “narrative” of a political campaign or a marketing pitch. This course will consider the structure and purpose of storytelling. Do we make stories, or do they make us? Because the subject is so vast, we will focus on narration and authorship. We will evaluate rhetorical strategies used in a few key novels and analyze the personae of their fictional narrators: chatty and opinionated, reserved and nonjudgmental, or entirely absent. Examples here might be drawn from Anthony Trollope, Gustave Flaubert, and Virginia Woolf, among others. We will also consider the profession of authorship in the age of capitalism: what does it mean to “sell” a story? How have authors conformed to prevailing modes of fiction? And what experiments have been employed to deviate from traditional modes? Each topic will be illuminated by cinematic examples as well, from classical Hollywood narrative (Alfred Hitchcock) to recent variants (Quentin Tarantino). This course will serve as an introduction to narratology, and it is designed for readers and writers who want to better understand how stories are generated and deployed in society.

### **REQUIRED READING:**

- Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Translated by William Weaver. 1979. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1981.
- Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. 1956. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
- Clowes, Daniel. *Ghost World*. 1993–1997. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2005.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary: Provincial Lives*. Translated by Geoffrey Wall. 1856. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Gissing, George. *New Grub Street*. 1891. London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Trollope, Anthony. *Barchester Towers*. 1857. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. 1925. New York: Harcourt, 1981.

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!)

All other readings will be available in a coursepack. Please purchase a copy at Uptown Color, 1205 West Main Street.

### **ASSESSMENT:**

- I. Attendance: 10 points
- II. Preparation and participation: 10 points
- III. Creative essay: 10 points
- IV. Analytical essay: 20 points
- V. Final essay: 50 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 a few more, then you are at risk of receiving a failing grade.

### *Participation*

We learn by articulating ideas and refining those ideas in conversation with others. This is a seminar-style course, so, to some extent, you are the course. Prepare each reading carefully and come to class with questions, comments, and passages that puzzled you. You are also required to bring the relevant text (paperback or coursepack) to each class.

### *Note-Taking*

Because this is a seminar-style course, I do not expect elaborate note-taking. Naturally, you are encouraged to jot down any ideas that strike you. In order to focus fully on our in-class discussions, I ask that you do not use laptop computers during class. They have a tendency to be distracting to yourself and to those around you. Further, studies show that students who take notes *by hand with a pen or pencil* earn higher grades than those who take notes on a laptop.

### *Electronic Devices*

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.

### *Screenings*

Whenever the syllabus says "SCREEN," you are expected to watch that film before the class date mentioned. For all eight films on the syllabus, you have two options. One, you may borrow a DVD copy of the film, which will be made available at the ground-level information desk in the James Branch Cabell Library. Two, you may access the film through purchase, rental, or streaming.

### *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. Over the

semester, each student will write two brief essays (approximately 1,000 to 1,500 words). These will demonstrate two skills that the job market demands: creative thinking and critical analysis. At the term's end, each student will also write a longer, final essay (no more than 2,000 words) on any topic related to narrative. 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. Further 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. Note that this policy *does not extend* to the final essay. Any work submitted after Thursday 13 December will receive a score of zero.

### *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 narratological analysis of a new feature-length film (one that premiered in 2017 or 2018). The analysis should be no more than 1,000 words in length. Submit in *hard copy only* to my departmental mailbox. The assignment 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

Tue. 28 Beginnings, Course Overview, Exemplary Narratives

**I. STORY AND DISCOURSE**

- Thu. 30
- Chatman, pp. 63–79 (in COURSEPACK)
  - SCREEN: *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941) Orson Welles

SEPTEMBER

- Tue. 4
- Booth, pp. 149–165 (in COURSEPACK)
  - SCREEN: *Pulp Fiction* (Miramax, 1994) Quentin Tarantino
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**II. NARRATION**

- Thu. 6 Folk and Fairy Tales
- Bettelheim; Darnton; Grimm; Propp; Zipes (in COURSEPACK)

- Tue. 11
- Little Red Riding Hood variants (in COURSEPACK)

- Thu. 13 Nonnarrated
- Chatman, pp. 166–179 (in COURSEPACK)
  - *The Fall*

••• **CREATIVE ESSAY DUE** Monday 17 September by 4:30pm

- Tue. 18
- SCREEN: *The Atomic Cafe* (Libra Films, 1982) Kevin Rafferty, Jane Loader, Pierce Rafferty

- Thu. 20 Narrated: Covert
- Chatman, pp. 196–209 (in COURSEPACK)
  - *Madame Bovary*, pp. 3–93

- Tue. 25
- Rimmon-Kenan, pp. 71–85 (in COURSEPACK)
  - *Madame Bovary*, pp. 94–259

- Thu. 27
- *Madame Bovary*, pp. 259–327

OCTOBER

- Tue. 2 Narrated: Overt
- Booth, pp. 211–229 (in COURSEPACK)
  - *Barchester Towers*, pp. 5–153

[OCTOBER cont'd]

- Thu. 4       • *Barchester Towers*, pp. 154–217  
 Tue. 9       • *Barchester Towers*, pp. 217–367  
 Thu. 11      • *Barchester Towers*, pp. 367–424
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### III. AUTHORSHIP

- Tue. 16 Romantic Authorship  
       • James, “The Private Life” (in COURSEPACK)  
       • SCREEN: *Shakespeare in Love* (Miramax, 1998) John Madden
- Thu. 18 NO CLASS (Reading Day)
- Tue. 23 Industrial-Age Authorship  
       • *New Grub Street*, pp. 35–293
- Thu. 25      • *New Grub Street*, pp. 294–369
- **ANALYTICAL ESSAY DUE** Friday 26 October by 4:30pm
- Tue. 30      • *New Grub Street*, pp. 370–551

### NOVEMBER

- Thu. 1       • Fitzgerald, *The Pat Hobby Stories*, selections (in COURSEPACK)  
       • SCREEN: *Barton Fink* (20th Century-Fox, 1991) Joel Coen
- Tue. 6 Adaptation  
       • *Ghost World*  
       • SCREEN: *Ghost World* (United Artists, 2001) Terry Zwigoff
- Thu. 8 Anti-Authorship: Parody, Plagiarism, Forgery  
       • Beard/Kenney; Benchley; Borges; Groom; Poe; Pain (in COURSEPACK)
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### IV. EXPERIMENTS

- Tue. 13 Consciousness  
       • *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 3–83
- Thu. 15 NO CLASS
- Tue. 20      • *Mrs. Dalloway*, pp. 84–194

[NOVEMBER cont'd]

Thu. 22 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

••• **FINAL ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE** Monday 26 November by EMAIL

Tue. 27 Metafiction

- *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*

Thu. 29 Metalepsis

- SCREEN: *Stranger Than Fiction* (Columbia, 2006) Marc Forster

DECEMBER

Tue. 4 Self-Reflexivity

- SCREEN: *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (UK, 2005) Michael Winterbottom

Thu. 6 (In) Conclusion, Course Review, Closure

••• **FINAL ESSAY DUE**  
Thursday 13 December  
By 4:30 pm

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

If you are looking for more, if you want to dig deeper, then try one of the following as a starting place. (Obviously, these are not required for the course.)

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Concise and fluent.

Bordwell, David, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 11th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2017. An articulate and authoritative overview of the language of film.

Boyd, Brian. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. Long, repetitious, but wide-ranging and thought-provoking. On the connection between biology and narrative.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. 2d ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Still the best one-volume introduction to the topic.

Fludernik, Monika. *An Introduction to Narratology*. London: Routledge, 2009. Another solid introduction aimed at students. More European than Abbott.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. 2d ed. London: Routledge, 2002. We are reading one chapter of this, but the entire text is lucid and well-organized.

## 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 2 November.