

Instructor: Kevin Gallin (he/his)
Course: English 208S
Classroom: Perkins LINK 070 (Seminar 4)
Class Hours: TTh 5:15-6:30
Office Hours: Th 2:00 - 4:30
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ENGL 208S: The Genre Turn in Contemporary Fiction

Course Codes: ALP, W, CTM

On recent lists of award-winners and best-sellers, readers may have encountered some surprises. Alongside so-called “realist” novels, hardboiled detectives stalk an abandoned construction site outside Dublin in Tana French’s *Broken Harbour*; spies pass secret notes from South Korea to North Korea in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*; superpowered embodiments of the boroughs of New York City rise up to fight off the powers of gentrification in NK Jemisin’s *The City We Became*; in Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, a ragtag band of entertainers stage both Shakespeare and The Simpsons to adoring audiences across a post-apocalyptic America stricken by a pandemic flu.

This course provides a survey of contemporary novels (2000-present) organized around what critics have called “The Genre Turn.” The genres represented by the novels on the syllabus have, until recently, generally been understood as unserious leisure reading, more appropriate for the beach than for the classroom. But these new novels have literary critics paying attention to the kinds of novels they had previously disregarded. Together, we will work through a survey of exemplar contemporary novels in various genres and consider how their participation in these genres provide new ways of imagining how to navigate our world in the present, and in the future. More broadly, we will consider *why* authors have felt compelled to write in these genres – or perhaps more appropriately, why such experiments in genre seem to compel readers of literary fiction more now than they have in the past. We will also consider what makes an individual text “literature,” how that category was historically constructed, and how its terms have shifted. Finally – and most importantly – we will develop the skills necessary to think critically and write clearly about literary texts, both those on the syllabus and in our own reading practice beyond the classroom.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Develop and defend definitions of “genre fiction,” “popular fiction” and “literary fiction,” including historical context from the 20th and 21st century.
- Identify and analyze the role genres play in establishing readerly expectations of novels, and how they determine what kinds of questions an individual novel is capable of presenting.
- Evaluate the relative strengths and limitations of genre fiction vs. literary fiction.
- Develop, draft, and revise written argumentation and evaluation, developing skills in both providing and incorporating effective peer feedback (short paper, review, final paper, in-class peer review).
- Independently research, archive, and analyze the structures of genre that shape other media outside of the course texts (final presentations)
- Present this research to a class, focusing on the ability to promote discussion with peers.

Required Course Texts

All course texts will be available in the Duke bookstore. Due to their popularity and recent publication, they are also available at local independent booksellers such as [The Regulator](#) or [Letters Bookshop](#) in both new and used condition, or found inexpensively at all major online retailers (including as eBooks).

deWitt, Patrick, <i>The Sisters Brothers</i> (2011)	Mandel, Emily St. John, <i>Station Eleven</i> (2014)
French, Tana, <i>Broken Harbour</i> (2012)	McEwan, Ian, <i>Machines Like Me</i> (2019)
Hamid, Mohsin, <i>Exit West</i> (2017)	Nguyen, Viet Thanh, <i>The Sympathizer</i> (2015)
Jemisin, NK, <i>The City We Became</i> (2020)	Whitehead, Colson, <i>Zone One</i> (2011)

Assignments and Evaluation

Ongoing	Participation, in-class work – 10%
~Weekly	Reading Reflections – 10%
10/15	Short Analysis Paper (3-5 pgs) – 15%
10/29	Review (3-5 pgs) – 20%
11/11	Informal Final Project Proposal – 5% (due in class)
11/23	Ongoing Genre Portfolio (5-10 sources, annotated) + Reflection – 15%
12/8	Final Paper (6-8 pgs) / Creative Project with Cover Letter – 25%

Participation, in-class work

Discussion and communication with your peers are crucial elements of the course. You are therefore expected to come to class having done the reading, highlighted/underlined interesting passages, taken notes, and ready to participate. Being prepared for class and acting professionally in the classroom are both components of being present in class. Throughout the semester we will do informal in-class assignments that will figure into this portion of your overall grade.

Reading Reflections

As a class, we will be using Sakai to create a resource for us to draw on in our discussions. Throughout the semester, you will be expected to post a brief response (~300 words, or roughly 1/3rd of a page, double spaced) to the week's main text, putting it in context with other conversations. **Responses are due on Sakai by noon the day of class** in order to facilitate class discussion. I will generally post a prompt for the first few weeks, but by about halfway through the semester, you should feel prepared and comfortable with an open-ended response to that week's texts. These short reflective writing entries will be graded for completion; they are mostly a chance for you to informally play around with ideas, grapple with our course texts, and explore questions pertinent to our class while also crafting an academic/online persona. You can miss **2 posts** without penalty; extra credit will be given for students who complete all seven.

****For all of the other assignments, you will be provided with clear instructions and rubrics for assessment at the time they are assigned. ****

Course Policies and Day-to-Day Protocols

Absences and Class Conduct

This course only works as a collaborative one, where we all learn from each other. As such, I commit to coming to class daily, on time and prepared, and I expect the same of you. That said, I also understand that life happens. If I notice an ongoing issue with attendance, I will more likely than not speak to you directly so we can get back on track. In the case of an ongoing personal issue or an extended illness, please meet me during my office hours or contact me via email as soon as possible so we can formally come to an arrangement, along with your Academic Dean, on how best to ensure your academic success.

Communication

Outside of class time, I will contact you via Duke email. I will generally try to respond to emails quickly, but don't expect emails or replies from me late at night or over the weekend. It is your responsibility to routinely check your email and the course's Sakai page to stay informed about the course. Beyond email, I highly encourage you to come to my office hours or set an appointment to meet with me in person or over Zoom when you have questions about assignments or the course in general. **Upload all assignments, unless otherwise noted, to Sakai by noon on the date assigned.**

Academic (Dis)honesty

It is expected that all students comply with the institutional policies present within Duke University. Part of this policy is the referral of students who violate the intellectual and academic integrity of this institution to the Office of Student Conduct (OSC). Because so much of this course is based on writing, it is particularly important that you avoid plagiarism, or the intentional use of another person's work without giving appropriate credit, advertently or inadvertently. Other forms of academic dishonesty include: a.) cheating on a paper or project; b.) **failing to cite sources properly**; c.) downloading an essay from the internet; d.) paying/soliciting another person to write your essays; e.) turning in an assignment that was used for credit in another course; and f.) other similar cases that breach the Duke Community Standard. For more information on academic honesty, please visit <https://registrar.duke.edu/university-bulletins/duke-community-standard>

Respect and Open-mindedness

We will be discussing potentially controversial and politically charged topics throughout the semester. I will do my part to build a classroom that approaches every topic in class with the high level of maturity, empathy, sensibility, rationality, and open-mindedness that is expected from a member of the Duke community, and I expect every student in our class to be a part of that. Essential to tackling such important topics is learning to interrogate our automatic responses and why we think the way we think, but intentionally negative and damaging attitudes and judgments during the discussion of sensitive topics such as race, socioeconomic class, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, documentation status, age, disability, and political views will not be tolerated. If you are unable to approach controversial/charged topics, discussions, and language-use in a sensible and open-minded fashion that recognizes the value of your peers, then you are advised to un-enroll from the course.

Other Resources

Office Hours

What we call “office hours” are really more accurately “student hours.” They are a time I set aside every week to focus on meeting with you, the students, about anything regarding the class, your writing, the study of English, where this class might fit into your degree, philosophical questions big and small, and/or – especially for our class – the novels, films, tv shows, etc we find interesting. I encourage you to drop by 303D in the Allen Building between 2:00-4:30 on Thursdays, shoot me an email to set up a different time to meet, or just find me in the library and say hello.

Thompson Writing Studio

We will be workshopping many of your assignments in class, but you are also highly encouraged to visit the Thompson Writing Studio at least once during the semester to help with the course’s written assignments.

Consultants work with writers during all stages of the writing process from understanding an assignment, to developing a thesis, to organizing a paper, to revising an advanced draft, to editing the final product. The tutors do not write or edit your papers for you. Rather, they help you develop effective and long-term rhetorical strategies for your written work. To learn more about the Thompson Writing Studio and schedule your session(s), see: <https://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>.

Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability, it’s important you get the services you deserve. If you would like to request accommodations for this course, please register with Duke’s Student Disability Access Office (<https://access.duke.edu/students/>). I can also help you navigate this process if you’re unfamiliar with it, and you, I, and the SDAO will make any necessary arrangements together.

Course Schedule

** This schedule is subject to change and it may be amended during the semester. If and when changes do occur, they will be announced in class and shared online**

Our course is organized by units, and by novels within each unit. You should plan to have read each novel by class on Tuesday of each week.

Introduction

	<u>Topics</u>	<u>What's Due for Class</u>
Week 1: T 8/24	Introductions, Syllabus review	Introductory readings circulated before class
	What is genre? How does it work?	
Th 8/26	What is “genre fiction?” What is “literary fiction?”	First Reading Reflection due by noon (before class)
	Introduction of Ongoing Genre Portfolio	

Unit 1: Survival – Life After Crisis – Westerns, Zombies, Apocalypses and the American Dream

W2: T 8/31	<i>The Sisters Brothers</i> , the Western, and the myth of individualism	Reading Reflection
Th 9/2	<i>The Sisters Brothers</i> , cont'd.	Step 1 of Ongoing Genre Portfolio (see Assignment Sheet) By Monday, 9/6: Reply to 3 classmates' initial Portfolio post
W3: T 9/7	<i>Zone One</i> , zombies, neoliberalism, and the death of individualism	Reading Reflection
Th 9/9	<i>Zone One</i> , cont'd.	Step 2 of Ongoing Portfolio – post to Sakai by noon, be prepared to share provisional definition and at least 2 entries.
W4: T 9/14	<i>Station Eleven</i> , community, and art in the post-apocalypse	Reading Reflection
Th 9/16	<i>Station Eleven</i> , cont'd.	

Unit 2: Sneaking Around Corners – Spies, Detectives, and Globalization

W5: T 9/21	<i>Broken Harbour</i> , detectives and the 2008 financial crash	Reading Reflection
Th 9/23	<i>Broken Harbour</i> , cont'd. Introduction of Short Analysis Paper	
W6: T 9/28	<i>The Sympathizer</i> , spies, Americanization, immigration and (the rejection of) assimilation	
Th 9/30	<i>The Sympathizer</i> , cont'd.	Short Paper Intro / Argument / Thesis Statement – bring to class for workshop
W7: T 10/5	<u>Fall Break – no class</u>	
Th 10/7	<i>The Sympathizer</i> , cont'd. Peer workshops	Short analysis paper – Full Draft due in class.

Mini Unit – Literary Cultures, Literary Fiction, The Art of the Review

W8: T 10/12	Mid-semester check-in “Genre fiction” vs. “Literary Fiction,” revisited. The Literary Review: what to look for in a review Introduction of Review Assignment	Read reviews circulated beforehand
Th 10/14	The Literary Review: how to write a good one – summary, evaluation, argument	Submit reviews of other texts to Sakai for class evaluation and discussion Short analysis paper due to Sakai by Friday, 10/15 at noon.

Unit 3: Our World, but Different – “Speculative” Fiction, SciFi, Fantasy, Adaptation

W9: T 10/19	<i>Machines Like Us</i> , cyborgs, and how we talk about science	Reading Reflection
Th 10/21	<i>Machines Like Us</i> , cont’d.	Portfolio Share Out
W10: T 10/26	<i>The City We Became</i> , fantasy, metaphor, and how we think about space	Reading Reflection
Th 10/28	<i>The City We Became</i> , cont’d. Introduction of Final Paper/Project	Review Assignment Due to Sakai Friday, 10/29 by noon
W11: T 11/2	<i>Arrival</i> / “The Story of your Life,” first contact, medium and adaptation.	Watch <i>Arrival</i> , directed by Denis Villeneuve Read “The Story of Your Life” by Ted Chiang
Th 11/4	<i>Arrival</i> / “The Story of Your Life” cont’d.	

Unit 4: Synthesis

W12: T 11/9	<i>Exit West</i> , genericization, and realist speculation	
Th 11/11	<i>Exit West</i> , cont'd.	Final Paper/Project Proposal Due in class
W13: T 11/16	No Class – Schedule one-on-one meetings with me to discuss final paper/project	Work on Genre Portfolio
Th 11/18	Final text to be decided by the class (including film, television, other media)	Read / Watch / Play(?) whatever we decide on
W14: T 11/23	Ongoing Genre Portfolio Share-out – what do other genres teach us?	Final Genre Portfolio + Reflection Due to Sakai by noon (before class)
Th 11/25	Thanksgiving Break – No Class	

Final Unit: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

W15: T 11/30	Final paper/project workshop	Bring draft of Final Paper/Project to class for workshop
Th 12/2	Final Class: Class wrap up, course evaluations	

Final Paper/Project due to Sakai **Wednesday, 12/8 by noon** in lieu of final.

Questions / Notes: