First-Year Research Seminar: Writing Evolution  
FIRST-UG748  
TTh 11–12:15

Course Information

“A naturalist's life would be a happy one, if he had only to observe & never to write.” Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, 1867.

Although On the Origin of Species was published more than 150 years ago, evolution remains science’s most controversial theory: inspiring to some, disturbing to others, and provocative to many. This class is about how people have used writing to argue over evolution, to understand it, and to imagine its implications—a topic that students will investigate in seminar discussions and through their own writing. We begin with the Origin, examining how Darwin’s argument for evolution by natural selection was shaped by scientific and non-scientific texts that were important to him, including the Bible, John Milton's Paradise Lost, and William Paley’s Natural History. Next, we turn to imaginative literature, reading Inherit the Wind and Trumpery, two plays that dramatize some of the questions and issues that swirl around evolution. The class culminates with a research paper for which students investigate a piece of writing, of their choice, that engages with evolution and related issues: possibilities include Darwin’s Expression of the Emotions, Richard Dawkins’s The Selfish Gene, Bram Stoker’s Dracula, and neo-Victorian fiction by John Fowles and A. S. Byatt.

Course Goals

In this course, you will

• develop your ability to carefully analyze primary sources, using that analysis to support a thesis

• engage with secondary sources, creating theses that make an original contribution to an existing conversation among published scholars

• structure and organize a long essay that incorporates many sources that you have located through your research

• become skilled at using library resources to do research

Course Readings

1. Books. I have ordered these two books from the NYU Bookstore. You are welcome to obtain them another way, but please do secure hard copies, not electronic editions, and check that your copy of the Origin is the first edition. (Darwin revised the Origin many times over the course of his lifetime, introducing significant changes along the way.)

Peter Parnell, *Trumpery* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2009)

2. There will be some readings available on our Classes site, in the folder titled “Readings” under the Resources link; in addition, some readings will be distributed in class.

3. Film: I’ve put a copy on reserve at Bobst, but you may want to consider purchasing your own (via Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, etc.)

Stanley Kramer, *Inherit the Wind*, 1960 (DVD)

Course Requirements

• Process Writing:

  — Response Papers and Pre-Drafts: Over the course of the semester, you’ll submit a number of response papers and pre-draft assignments. These short assignments are designed to help you think actively about the readings and begin working on your essays. (There will be detailed instructions about each response on the assignment handout.)

  — Cover Letters: with all of the drafts and revisions that you submit, you’ll include a cover letter of about 400 words in which you reflect on your essay and writing process. There will be specific instructions regarding cover letters with each assignment.

  — Draft Response Letters: for a certain number of the papers that we workshop, you’ll write a draft response letter of about 400 words in which you tell the author what works in their essay, what you find problematic, and how you think they should revise. Again, more specific instructions will be included with each writing assignment.

Process writing will be evaluated for effort and thoughtfulness; it will be graded check, check-minus, or check-plus.

• Participation & Citizenship: You should arrive punctually and be prepared for class, which means that you’ve completed the reading and any assignments, and brought with you all necessary materials. You should participate actively in seminar discussions and other activities, which includes contributing thoughtful comments and questions; engaging with other students as well as the professor; and listening attentively.

• Three formal essays:

Paper 1: An essay that examines influences on Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in order to make a claim about how Darwin argues. (Fifteen hundred words; five pages)

Due Dates: Draft (D1)—6 pm on Friday, February 14

Graded Revision (R1)—6 pm on Friday, February 28
Paper 2: An argument about *Inherit the Wind* or *Trumpery* that engages with Kirsten Shepherd-Barr's argument about science plays. (Two thousand words; six to seven pages)

**Due Dates:**
- Draft (D2)—6 pm on Friday, March 28
- Graded Revision (R2)—6 pm on Friday, April 11

Paper 3: A researched argument centered on a piece of writing about evolution. (3000 words; 10 pages)

**Due Dates:**
- Draft (D3)—6 pm on Friday, April 26
- Graded Revision (R3)—6 pm on Monday, May 12

**Grading**

15% Paper 1  
20% Paper 2  
30% Paper 3  
5% Research Proposal  
15% Process Writing  
15% Class Participation

**Grading Standards:** When grading, I evaluate the words on the page. Although neither effort nor improvement is factored into the essay grade, writing does tend to improve through revision. Effort and engagement *do* factor into the class participation and process writing grades.

A paper in the A range demonstrates a high degree of command in the fundamentals of academic writing: it advances an interesting, arguable thesis; establishes a compelling motive to suggest why the thesis is original or worthwhile; employs a logical and progressive structure; analyzes evidence insightfully and in depth; and draws from well-chosen sources.

A B-range paper resembles an A-range paper in some ways, but may exhibit a vague or inconsistently argued thesis; establish a functional but unsubstantial motive; employ a generally logical but somewhat disorganized or static structure; include well-chosen but sometimes unanalyzed and undigested evidence; use sources in a limited fashion; include distracting typos and problems of style.

A C-range paper resembles a B-range paper in some ways, but may also feature a confusing or descriptive thesis; provide a simplistic motive or none at all; lack a coherent structure or rely on an overly rigid structure like the five-paragraph essay; fail to present enough evidence, or present evidence that is insufficiently analyzed; and drop in sources without properly contextualizing or citing them. Confusing prose and typos may at times obscure the argument.

A D paper resembles a C-range paper but lacks a thesis and motive and makes little use of evidence and sources. A D paper has trouble engaging with the assignment and may not show awareness of the conventions of academic discourse. D-range papers may fall short of the page requirement.

Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference.

**Policies**
• Written Work: Deadlines are important in this class; extensions will be granted only in the case of illness, family emergencies, or religious observance and should be arranged in advance. Late papers will be penalized (normally, 1/3 of a grade for each day that they are late). Late drafts may not receive written feedback. Late or missing process writing assignments will also affect your grade.

• Attendance: You may miss up to two classes without penalty; more than two absences for reasons other than illness, family emergency, or religious observance may affect your grade.

• Academic Integrity: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html); we will discuss academic integrity in class this semester.

• Technology: In order to make it easier for everyone to focus on the collaborative and cooperative work of the seminar, I will ask you not to use laptops, tablets, or smartphones in class for any purpose, unless otherwise instructed. This means that you must print out any assignments or papers (your own or your classmates’) needed for class on any given day. Please turn off or silence your mobile phone.

You are welcome to email me with any questions that arise for you. I will respond as promptly as I can, but may not write back immediately (especially if you email me at night or on the weekend). I will use email from time to time to contact you or the class as a whole; please do read these messages carefully.