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 a 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*, asking how Darwin’s prose seeks to persuade his readers. Next, we consider how Darwin’s ideas are taken up and transformed by writers of narrative fiction, reading H. G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* (1897) and Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love* (1997) alongside texts about social Darwinism and evolutionary psychology. The second half of the course builds towards students’ independent research papers by surveying the impact of evolutionary ideas in a wide range of disciplines: we may consider visual representations of evolution; Richard Dawkins’s concept of the cultural meme; Franco Moretti’s claim that literary history unfolds according to an evolutionary trajectory; and arguments about the implications of evolution for morality.

**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

• become familiar with using library resources to do research

• gain an understanding of evolution and the ways it has inspired important thinkers in a range of fields

**Course Readings**

1. Books. Available the NYU Bookstore. You must have 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.)


2. All other readings will either be distributed in class or available on our Classes site.

*Course Requirements*

• Process Writing:

— Response Papers: Over the course of the semester, you'll submit a number of response papers, whose purpose is to help you think actively about the readings and begin working on your essays. (There will be detailed instructions about each response on the syllabus.)

— Cover Letters: with all of the drafts and revisions that you submit, you'll include a cover letter of about 300 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 in-class workshops, you'll write draft response letters of about 300 words in which you tell the author of a paper 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.

— Leading Discussion: In the second half of the course, you'll work in groups or pairs to lead discussion of one of our readings.

• 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.

• Two formal essays:

1. Controlled Research Paper: An essay that makes an argument about either *Enduring Love* or *War of the Worlds*. (1800 words)

   Due Dates: Draft—6 pm on Friday, March 6
               Final Paper—6 pm on Friday, March 27

2. A researched argument centered on a piece of writing about evolution. (3000 words)
Due Dates:
Proposal—Due in class on Thursday, April 9
Draft—6 pm on Friday, April 24
Final Paper—6 pm on Saturday, May 9

Grading

25%    Paper 1
35%    Paper 2
5%    Research Proposal
20%    Process Writing
15%    Class Participation

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.

All major assignments must be completed in order for you to pass the course.

• Attendance: You may miss up to two classes without penalty; more than two absences for reasons other than illness, family emergency, or religious observance will affect your overall grade for the course. Accumulating a large number of absences for any reason may make it impossible for you to pass the course.

• 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 will usually need to print out any assignments or papers 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.