Habits of Reading: Narrative and Genre in Europe and America

Description
"Myth," "novel," "epic," "thriller," "romantic comedy"—why do people bother making these distinctions between types of narratives, and how do we make them? From defining self ("I’m a sci-fi geek") to organizing society ("only kids read comic books"), genres help us make sense of what we read and perform a variety of other and related artistic, social, personal, and commercial functions. In this class we will closely examine a variety of primary materials. In addition to helping us consider genre in relation to authorial intention and reader response, our readings will enable us to address contemporary questions about readership, fan fiction, and interactivity. When and why do we find it necessary to classify our stories into categories, and who benefits? How do genres reflect and contribute to the cultures that produce them? How do media shape genre and vice verse? How has genre constrained and inspired European and American authors? How do narrative genres prompt distinctions between fiction and truth, affect taste judgments, and shape opinion?

Required Readings and Viewings

All films are readily available for purchase or rent on the web; most will also be on reserve at Avery Fisher. All other readings are on order at the NYU Bookstore or will be distributed in class and/or the NYU Classes site. Secondary and supplemental readings may be added to the syllabus over the course of the semester. Books you must obtain:

Kurt Vonnegut Slaughterhouse Five (Dial)
Homer The Odyssey (Penguin Classics, Fagles translation)
William Shakespeare Midsummer Nights Dream (Folger Shakespeare)
Albert Camus The Stranger (Vintage)
Raymond Chandler The Long Goodbye (Vintage Crime)
John Le Carré The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (Penguin)

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.
Attendance Policy

Attendance is vital, especially because we meet only once a week. Please email me in advance if you miss a class.

| Class Participation (including oral reports) | 25% of grade |
| Short Essays | 35% |
| Final Paper: | 40% |

Assignments

*All the assignments (you will quickly see) reflect major genres in school-based writing and speaking.* Please note that all written assignments must be emailed to me (kah3@nyu.edu) as Word (or Word-readable) documents. No pdf's, please.

(1) Monday, January 30 – Wednesday, February 1—Show and Tell

Come to class with something that embodies a concept or feeling related to the day’s reading made. Be prepared to discuss it with us for a few minutes.

(2) Wednesday, February 8 – Collage

Bring a "collage" to class – in analog or digital form – that expresses an idea about *Slaughterhouse Five* and genre.

(3) Wednesday, March 1 – Book Report

Due: A 2 -3 page paper focusing on why you would consider *The Odyssey* to be "epic" or "AN epic" … or not.

(4) Friday, March 31 – 5-Paragraph Thesis Essay (3 – 4 pages)

Due: An argumentative essay about whether comedy is best seen as a “genre” or “mode” – more particular prompts will be developed and distributed throughout our discussions. Examples must be drawn from the assigned readings.

(5) Friday, April 7 – Critical Review Essay

Due: A “review” of one of the readings or films on the syllabus between April 10 and May 3. Evaluate the text(s) in relation to your understanding of the generic codes that govern it. N.b. This means that you can write about horror or thriller texts before we turn to them in class.

(6) Monday, April 24 – Monday, May 8 – Oral reports on Research Projects

Come to class in these weeks prepared to discuss the thesis and preliminary findings of your independent research project. We will work out a presentation schedule in advance.

(7) Wednesday, May 8

Due: Critical Research Paper due (10 – 12 pages). Topics to be developed over the course of the second half of the semester.
*Syllabus* * = to be distributed via NYU Classes and/or hand-out

**WHAT IS GENRE?**

*Monday, January 23* Introductions

*Wednesday, January 25* *James Joyce, “Araby”  
*Karen Russell, “Vampires in the Lemon Grove”

**THE FANTASTIC**

*Monday, January 30*  
*Edgar Allen Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”  
*Franz Kafka, “Metamorphosis”

*Wednesday, February 1*  
*Tzvetan Todorov, from The Fantastic (Chaps 1 -3)*  
*Film: Victor Fleming, The Wizard of Oz (1939)*

*Monday, February 6 – Wednesday, February 15*  
*Kurt Vonnegut, Slaughterhouse Five*

*Monday, February 20*  
*PRESIDENT’S DAY*

**EPIC AND HERO**

*Wednesday, February 22 - Wednesday, March 1*  
*Homer, The Odyssey*

*Monday, March 6 - Wednesday, March 8*  
*Film: John Ford, The Searchers (1956)*

*Monday, March 13 – Wednesday, March 15*  
*SPRING BREAK*

**COMEDY AS NARRATIVE GENRE**

*Monday, March 20 - Wednesday, March 22*  
*William Shakespeare, Midsummer Nights Dream*

*Monday, March 27 - Wednesday, March 29*  
*Film: Howard Hawks, Bringing Up Baby (1938)*  
*Film: Preston Sturges, The Lady Eve (1941)*

**THE SHORT STORY**

*Monday, April 3 - Wednesday, April 5*  
*Charles Chesnutt, “The Passing of Grandison”  
*Henry James, “The Tree of Knowledge”  
*Flannery O’Connor, “Revelation”*
GENDER AND GENRE, PART ONE: THE KILLER MALE

Monday, April 10  
Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942)

Wednesday, April 12  

Monday, April 17 -  
John Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963)

Wednesday, April 19  
Film: Robert Aldrich, *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955)

Monday, April 24 -  
Film: Jean Luc-Godard, *Breathless* (1960)

Wednesday, April 26  

GENDER AND GENRE, PART TWO: THE LETHAL VICTIM

Monday, May 1 -  
Brian de Palma, *Carrie* (1976)

May 3  

CONCLUSIONS

Monday, May 8  
Last Class