

Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

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Intro to Grad Studies Capital-L Literature

Dr. Lindsey Chappell

What counts as Literature?

With an undergraduate degree in English or a related field, maybe you feel like the question above is stupidly basic (a fair point). At this moment, though, you might be transitioning from your role as an undergraduate participant in a curriculum to your new role as an advanced literary scholar within an institutional community. As such, some deceptively basic questions are now your responsibility—not only to answer but also to justify how you answer:

- What counts as Literature?
- What texts and approaches are important to your research?
- What, of all the things ever written, is important enough to assign to students?

How you answer these questions (or even try to avoid answering these questions) will shape your work and carry institutional weight beyond yourself. Yeah, it's kind of a big deal.

Welcome.

In this class, we will explore how past scholars have answered these questions (and, at times, built research and policy around their answers). We will examine the political, historical, and social contexts of literary studies in order to trace the invention of “English literature” as a discipline in the nineteenth century to the literary studies in which we participate today. Taking a metatheoretical perspective of the field and its history, we will construct a context for the deeper work you will do with specific theories, literatures, and methods in your seminars and thesis projects. Finally, we will interrogate what counts as “Literature” in a given time and place, explore who decides what texts carry cultural value and why, and examine what approaches and methods have held scholarly weight at different historical moments.

As indicated in the course learning outcomes below, this course also focuses on building your skills as a scholar. We will work on a variety of research and writing techniques to help you create your scholarship. Please let me know as soon as possible if there's something you want to work on (something specific—don't just ask for help

with “writing,” but rather ask me how to structure a conclusion or how to find relevant scholarship on “Ozymandias”).

Objectives and Assessments

Learning Outcomes

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

1. Apply different theoretical and critical approaches to literature.
2. Initiate, develop, and conduct a graduate-level research agenda.
3. Produce graduate-level writing of varied lengths and genres, leading up to a final project.

Grade Breakdown

Intellectual Narrative: 5%

Meta-Narrative: 5%

Close Reading: 10%

Scholarly Conversation: 10%

Portfolio: 10% at each scheduled grading; 50% total

Participation (in-person and online): 20%

Portfolio

Each student will create a digital course portfolio in which they will compile all weekly notes on the assigned readings, reflections, writing components for in-class practice, and guest-speaker forms. Basically, you will keep all the work you do for this course in your portfolio, and I will give you a grade for doing work that typically goes unrewarded (like taking notes). That also means if you do not take notes on the assigned materials, you will not earn those points. Tricky how that works.

You will build your portfolio as a Google folder, which you will share with me. I will check these weekly as part of your participation grade, but I will also grade the working portfolio more substantially on five set dates (roughly every three weeks, as outlined in the course schedule below). You will turn in the finished portfolio with any revisions and a course reflection as your final project.

You must decide how to organize your notes (yes, please do adjust your system over the semester as you learn what is most helpful for you). I need to be able to navigate your portfolio for grading purposes, but the main goal here is for you to develop a note-taking system that serves your research agenda.

Participation

Consistent participation is required. There are many different ways to participate, including discussion, in-class writing, note-taking, and online collaboration (via platforms like Perusall and shared Google files). You will learn the most by participating via every method (even the ones you dislike).

Free-Standing Assignments

- *These are graded separately, but you can keep them in your portfolio for convenience. You will receive a detailed assignment sheet for each project.*
- *There is no such thing as perfect writing. So, for each assignment, I invite you to include an informal note to me explaining what you tried to do and how you might develop the project if you had infinite time and resources.*

Intellectual Narrative: Based on George Saunders's "Thank You, Esther Forbes," this assignment gives you the opportunity to look back on your experience as a writer and reader so far and to cultivate your authorial voice by writing about an author or text(s) that has been important to your intellectual development. It also gives us all a chance to get to know one another as readers, writers, and thinkers since you will post your intellectual narrative for the whole class (I will write and share one too).

Close Reading [5pp. max]: Your close reading should confront the specific components and organization of a poem from this course. A close reading should draw attention to the text's individual parts in order to make an argument about the text as a whole. It should also consider the relationship between the form of the text and its content. *Above all, a close reading must analyze rather than summarize.*

Meta-Narrative [5pp. max]: This assignment challenges you to analyze a canon as a scholar. You might look at an anthology, a curriculum, a syllabus, or a library collection. You will essentially close read whatever canon you choose, looking for patterns, making observations, and coming to interpretive conclusions about your object of analysis. Some questions to consider: According to this object, what is Literature? What informed how your object decided what counts?

Scholarly Conversation and Annotated Bibliography [3-5pp.]: This assignment allows you to practice synthesizing and engaging with existing scholarship (which you will need to be able to do efficiently for your thesis!). It consists of a short paper and a collaborative annotated bibliography. In the short paper, you will draw the broad strokes of existing literary criticism on a defined topic of your choice (any topic in literary studies—yes, it can be work for another class), connecting at least one assigned prose source from this class. For the annotated bibliography, you will contribute 7-10 sources to a shared class Google doc, which we will all revise together.

Revisions

You may revise any free-standing assignment listed above as part of your final portfolio *provided you meet all the revision criteria* (available on the learning management system). Revisions missing any element of these criteria will not be considered for a grade.

Guests

Throughout the semester, we will host several guest scholars (in person or via Zoom). Some of our guests may choose to assign additional reading ahead of their visits, so watch the learning management system for updates. During these visits, our guests will talk with us about how they work (research, write, revise, and participate in conferences), and you will be able to ask questions and hear different perspectives.

Expectations

You are a professional. I expect you to come to every class—with your texts and prepared to contribute. I expect you to complete all assignments to the best of your ability and with a scholarly willingness to engage difficult ideas and materials.

General advice: Take advantage of office hours to develop your ideas. Begin assignments with adequate time to complete them to the best of your ability. Turn in all assignments on time in the proper format. Remember that *it is your responsibility to make everything useful* and to relate it to your individual goals.

Beyond those basic expectations, remember that **this is a graduate class**. I will make assumptions about what you already know and what skills you have mastered. I will sometimes assume incorrectly. Take responsibility for your learning and speak up, either in class or privately, to let me know you'd like a bit more instruction or a refresher. At the very least, when you identify an area where you lack knowledge, you should try to fill that gap. That's why you're here. You have a plethora of resources at your fingertips; use it well.

A Further Note: Or, What to Expect When You're Expecting to Be a Grad Student

This introduction to graduate studies will likely be disorienting, uncomfortable, and perhaps scary—something like entering a building only to discover (on going through the door) that it doesn't exist in the way you thought from the outside. But I hope (and expect) that the work we do now, as your introduction to graduate studies, will prepare you to work with literature critically, as a scholar.

We are going to read and think and write. A lot. The expectations and standards of scholarship are high, and we will all regularly be confronted with how much we don't know. You may experience a decline of confidence akin to falling off a cliff. This is perfectly normal. The trick to recovering confidence is to look at things you don't (yet) know as opportunities to learn rather than as failures for not having already learned.

Please do not limit your knowledge in order to maintain the feel-good confidence of the ignorant. As you develop complexity of thought, it will become more difficult to articulate your ideas with the degree of polish to which you may have become accustomed. The knee-jerk overcorrection in this instance tends to be simplistic ideas delivered in polished prose. Alas, this kind of work can't get you the payoff it (perhaps) earned you as an undergraduate.

Keep all this in mind when we interact as a class community, whether in person or online. I expect you to **hold one another and yourself to a high standard**. I equally expect you to **be generous with one another and yourself**, especially when you are reaching for ambitious ideas. These two golden rules should frame all our interactions with one another over this semester. Sharing writing in particular is a vulnerable but valuable experience. We will honor that by meeting every piece of work where it is and doing everything we can to help the author make it as strong as possible.

Schedule Overview

- You may receive schedule updates during the semester.
- This schedule is interactive. For Weeks 1-3, I have indicated ways you might prepare to actively shape our class. After Week 3, I have indicated what writing assignments you should bring and generally left the rest of the box blank for your use. I expect you to think deliberately about how you want to engage with the material before class and to work it into your schedule.

Week 1 (Monday, August 16, 2021) Texts that Shape Us

Read for Class	Prep for Class
1. George Saunders, "Thank You, Esther Forbes" 2. "Athletic Annotation" handout 3. 7131 syllabus and learning management system site	1. Write out questions you have after reading the syllabus. 2. Practice "athletic annotation" with something you're reading this week. How might you adapt this to suit your learning? 3. What is something you are excited about doing in this course? Something you are nervous about? Come ready to discuss. 4. Bring your planner and all course syllabi (that you have so far) to class for our workshop on time management.
Assignments Due By End of Week	1. Write and post your intellectual narrative . 2. Read all the intellectual narratives.

Week 2 (Monday, August 23, 2021) Canonization

Guest:

Read for Class	Prep for Class
Poems 1. Thomas Wyatt "Whoso list to hunt" 2. William Shakespeare, sonnet 116 3. John Donne, "Death be not proud"	1. After you've read all the poems, pick one or two to analyze more closely. What do you notice beyond what they tell us directly? What's one thing you find confusing? 2. After you've read the prose selections, freewrite about how they might inform your reading of the poetry.

4. John Milton, "When I consider how my light is spent" 5. William Wordsworth, "London, 1802" Prose 1. Stephanie Burt & David Mikics, selections from <i>Art of the Sonnet</i> 2. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan, "Formalisms"	3. Draft a discussion question for each prose reading. 4. <i>Optional:</i> Draft a CV (examples on the learning management system). ←we will be working on this in class.
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Set up your portfolio in Google drive and share it with Dr. Chappell. Add your ongoing CV here so you can easily add to it over the semester.

Week 3 (Monday, August 30, 2021) Going Meta

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. William Wordsworth, "Nuns Fret Not" 2. John Keats, "On the Sonnet" 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Sonnet" 4. Billy Collins, "Sonnet" Prose 1. Overview of Structuralism 2. Overview of Deconstruction 3. Nathan Hensley, Norton review	1. After you've read all the poems, pick one or two to analyze more closely. What do you notice beyond what they tell us directly? 2. After you've read the prose selections, freewrite about how they might inform your reading of the poetry. 3. Write a working thesis statement and be prepared to workshop it in class. 4. Review the Close Reading assignment sheet (on the learning management system) and bring any questions to class.
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Portfolio 1

Optional: Michel Foucault, selections from *Archaeology of Knowledge*

Note: So far in the course, the poetry readings adhere to expectations about what a sonnet is, who writes it, and who is included on a syllabus. In class this week, we use Hensley's blog as a model to step back and analyze this course so far. I list our poetry readings for Weeks 2 & 3 on the board and we ask, "According to the syllabus so far, Literature is ____?" Students are generally surprised when they realize that all the poets have been white men, and they are more surprised to realize that they hadn't even noticed. We then talk about how we internalize canonicity so completely that it seems natural to us even if it contradicts our goals and values.

I do this activity because, in working with graduate students who are preparing their own syllabi for the first time, I kept having to point out that they had accidentally created whole reading lists of exclusively white European men in their desire to cover all the “most important” authors in a traditional literary period and thus serve their students. I find they are less anxious about their teaching if they have already practiced analyzing my syllabus. I am grateful to Rachel Sagner Buurma for suggesting the pedagogical value of beginning with a non-canonical poetry selection, and I may in future open with Jericho Brown’s sonnet and the interview in which he discusses his relationship with the form (currently in Week 9). This would let us begin with a living Black poet and think about “why sonnets?”, though I’m not sure the syllabus analysis would be as effective later on. For those not concerned with pedagogy instruction in an “Introduction to Graduate Studies” course, though, I think starting with Brown would better serve the course aims.

Week 4 (Monday, September 6, 2021) Business in the Form, Party in the Content

LABOR DAY; NO CLASS

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. Percy Shelley, “Ozymandias” 2. E.A. Robinson, “How Annandale Went Out” 3. Gwendolyn Brooks, “To a Winter Squirrel” Prose	<i>There is no in-person class on Monday this week (Labor Day holiday). As you prepare your close reading paper, look at how the three assigned sonnets innovate the form by using it to explore different topics.</i>
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Close Reading

Week 5 (Monday, September 13, 2021) Historical Arguments

Guest:

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. Percy Shelley, “England in 1819” 2. Thomas Hardy, “In the Old Theatre, Fiesole” Prose 1. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan, “Writing the Past” 2. Overview of Marxism 3. Virginia Woolf, “Shakespeare’s Sister” 4. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts”	<i>How can you think through the readings before class so that you are prepared to contribute and to make the most of our limited time together?</i> Plan how you will prepare and use this space to hold yourself accountable.

<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	
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Optional: Hayden White, selections from *Metahistory*

Week 6 (Monday, September 20, 2021) Being Historic

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems Marilyn Nelson, <i>A Wreath for Emmett Till</i> Prose bell hooks, intro to <i>Teaching to Transgress</i>	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Portfolio 2

Week 7 (Monday, September 27, 2021) Rewriting “Laura”

Guest:

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. Mary Wroth, “In this Strange Labyrinth” 2. William Shakespeare, sonnet 130 3. Christina Rossetti, “In an Artist’s Studio” 4. Claude McKay, “The Harlem Dancer” 5. Gwen Harwood, “In the Park” 6. John Donne, “Batter my heart” 7. A.K. Ramanujan, “Mythologies 3” Prose 1. Overview of feminisms 2. Purdue OWL “Gender Studies and Queer Theory”	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	

Georgia voters: Oct. 4, 2021=Last day for a person to register and be eligible to vote in the November General Election and Runoff Election.

Week 8 (Monday, October 4, 2021) A Self of One's Own

Guest:

Read for Class	Prep for Class
Poems 1. Alice Meynell, "Renouncement" 2. Countee Cullen, "Yet Do I Marvel" 3. Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Sonnet-Ballad" Prose 1. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan "Situating Race" 2. Purdue OWL "Critical Race Theory" 3. Ronjaunee Chatterjee, Alicia Mireles Christoff, & Amy R. Wong, "Undisciplining Victorian Studies"	
Assignments Due By End of Week	Meta-Narrative

Optional: Carolyn Betensky, "Casual Racism in Victorian Literature"; Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"; *Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom* pedagogy website

Week 9 (Monday, October 11, 2021) Bodies in Nature

Guest:

Read for Class	Prep for Class
Poems 1. Michael Field, "Nests in Elms" 2. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Caged Skylark" 3. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "No worst, there is none" 4. Jericho Brown, "Tradition" Prose 1. Candace Williams, "Gutting the Sonnet: An Interview with Jericho Brown" https://therumpus.net/2019/04/the-rumpus-interview-with-gericho-brown/ 2. Purdue OWL intro to Ecocriticism	1. Select two body paragraphs you have written (for any class) or draft new ones. Print them out and bring them with you to workshop. 2. Consider: How might this week's readings complicate your thinking about earlier materials in the course? For example, how might Brown's reflections on the sonnet form make you think more deeply about earlier sonnets or even formalist theory? How might Critical Disability Studies add complexity to your reading of Saunders's "Thank You, Esther Forbes" or Milton's "When I consider"?

3. Purdue OWL intro to Critical Disability Studies	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Portfolio 3

Week 10 (Monday, October 18, 2021) National Belonging

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. Claude McKay, "America" 2. Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus" 3. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, "To India—My Native Land" Prose 1. Christina Sharpe, intro to <i>In the Wake</i> 2. Wai Chee Dimock, intro to <i>Through Other Continents</i> 3. Benedict Anderson, intro to <i>Imagined Communities</i>	Select an intro and conclusion you have written (for any class) or draft new ones. Print them out and bring them with you to workshop.
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Scholarly Conversation and Annotated Bibliography

Optional: Wai Chee Dimock, "Genre as World System" and "Global Civil Society"

Week 11 (Monday, October 25, 2021) Language, Morality, & Empire

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems Prose 1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, selections from <i>Birth of a Dream Weaver</i> 2. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Decolonising the Mind" 3. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education" (inc. Norton intro section on "Empire and National Identity") 4. bell hooks, "Language"	

Video Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story” (approx. 20 mins) https://youtu.be/D9lhs241zeg	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	

Optional: Edward Said, introduction to *Orientalism*; Bernard Cohn, selections from *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*

Week 12 (Monday, November 1, 2021) Empire, Colonialism, & Race

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems Prose 1. Engseng Ho, “Empire through Diasporic Eyes” 2. Sukanya Banerjee, “Transimperial” 3. Saree Makdisi, “Preface” and “Introduction” from <i>Making England Western</i>	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Portfolio 4

Optional: Jessie Reeder, “Freedom and Empire in the Nineteenth Century,” from *Forms of Informal Empire: Britain, Latin America, and Nineteenth-Century Literature*

Week 13 (Monday, November 8, 2021) What is Literature?

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems Prose Toni Morrison, “Nobel Speech”	
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	Complete requirements for any revisions. <i>No revisions meetings after Week 13.</i>

Optional: David Damrosch, selections from *What is World Literature?*

Week 14 (Monday, November 15, 2021) Microcosm, Macrocosm

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems 1. John Donne, "I am a little world" 2. Countee Cullen, "From the Dark Tower" 3. Adrienne Rich, "Sonnet 18" from <i>Contradictions</i> Prose Eric Hayot, "Showing your Iceberg"	After reading Hayot, draft three iceberg sentences . Bring them to workshop.
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	

Optional: Pablo Mukherjee, "Victorian World Literatures"; Caroline Levine, "From Nation to Network"

~~Monday, November 22, 2021~~—THANKSGIVING- NO CLASSES 11/22-11

Week 15 (Monday, November 29, 2021) Theory and Practice

Guest:

<i>Read for Class</i>	<i>Prep for Class</i>
Poems Prose bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice"	Freewrite: How might you use theory? What might your lived experience bring to theory?
<i>Assignments Due By End of Week</i>	

Final due **DEC 6TH BY 8PM**: Full portfolio with revisions of assignments and reflection letter. Submit in Google Drive.