



F i c t i o n

English 211-001
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:05am-10:00 am
Palamountain 300
Professor Paul Benzon
pbenzon@skidmore.edu

Office: Tisch 327
Office Hours: Monday 10-11:30am, Thursday 1:30-3:00pm, and by appt.
Course Blog: <https://fictionf16.wordpress.com/>

Course Description

What does it mean to write a story? What does it mean to read one? How and why do authors use written narratives to produce certain effects? This course is designed to give you an introduction to reading fiction thoughtfully and critically. Focusing on key elements such as setting, discourse, genre, and voice, we'll spend time thinking about how narrative texts produce certain impressions and ideas, as well as the bigger questions of what fiction is and what we do when we read it and write about it. To give our discussions a common thread throughout the course, we will focus on texts that address the relations between humanity, writing, and monstrosity. We'll think about how these texts represent the monstrous, what role the monstrous has in raising social and cultural issues, and what relations there are between monstrosity and the art of fiction itself. Readings may include novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*. In order to give further context to our reading and thinking, we'll also consider a range of other material—including film, music, and digital texts—that will help us to think more fully about how fiction works and what it can do.

Course Goals

In this course, you will

- Gain familiarity with significant literary works from the 19th century to the present, preparing you for further coursework in English
- Learn to read fiction closely and critically, paying attention to how various elements of narrative language produce meaning
- Engage literary texts with an eye towards larger social, cultural, and historical questions, aided by theoretical and critical concepts and writings
- Participate in class discussions focused on close reading and literary interpretation
- Draft and revise critical writing about fiction in a range of formats and contexts

Required Texts

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (with Online Critical Edition Package) (Broadview Press, 978-1554812592)

Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (Eastgate Systems, 1-884511-50-3)

Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Broadview Press, 978-1551111360)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (978-1400033416)

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (978-0307387899)

Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (978-0307588371)

Selected short stories and essays, available in Course Packet

Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

Class Participation	20%
Course Blog	20%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	20%
Final Paper	25%

Late work on any major writing assignment will be marked down one grade level for each class period after the due date (for example, from a B+ to a B for one late day). Extensions will only be granted in the case of an emergency documented by a college dean.

Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including but not limited to full-class discussions, small-group discussions, and in-class writing. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means printing out (if necessary) and completing all reading before class, bringing the reading to class, and being prepared to discuss the reading thoughtfully. You should have interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these and to be called on in our conversation. The more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

Although I will rarely lecture, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Having a record of the class' comments, concerns, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and arguments for further writing and thinking in the course. More broadly, consistently remaining actively engaged in our discussions, even if only as a listener and note-taker at certain moments, will help you to develop as a critical thinker and writer.

Laptops and tablets may be used in class only for class-related work such as note-taking, class writing or reading, and research. If inappropriate computer or electronic use becomes a problem for some members of the class, I will revoke permission to use them for the class as a whole. If you have questions about whether a certain use of technology is appropriate or not, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Course Blog

Over the course of the semester, you will post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve several purposes: firstly (and most immediately), it will give us a chance to think and talk critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you or that you are curious about. In giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will also help you to generate topics, ideas, and arguments for papers.

Blog Posting. Note that the blog is located on our independent course website at <https://fictionf16.wordpress.com/>, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post, and you should include your name or other identifying information in your posts so that we can all follow the conversation online and I can give you credit for your work. The current post will appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your writing.

Blog Content. The topics and focuses for your posts to the blog are largely open-ended: while I may occasionally suggest issues or questions for you to write about, what you focus on will largely be up to you. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should always ground your writing in quotation and close analysis of our reading for the day, and you should offer interpretations and critical questions rather than summaries or solely personal responses.

Each week on the blog, you should submit **one main post of your own and one response to a classmate's post.** Your main post should be at least 250 words (this is roughly equivalent to one double-spaced typed page—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer). Your response post can be shorter than your main post, but should address your classmate's post thoughtfully and substantively—rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing, you should build upon, expand, complicate, or otherwise analytically engage their ideas just as you would in a live classroom discussion. Depending on what is already on the blog when you go to post your main post of the week, you may choose to make that main post a response to a classmate's writing; however, that post should still be at least 250 words, and you should still make a second shorter response post later on.

Blog Scheduling. Unless I specify otherwise, each week's main blog post will be due before Monday's class (consult the course schedule below for specific details). In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to read comments and absorb the online discussion before we meet on Monday, **main posts are due by midnight on Sunday night. Response posts are due by class time on Wednesday. Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts and responses will not receive credit.**

Blog Grading. I will grade your main blog posts on a scale of 1-4 each week. Criteria for each grade are as follows:

Grade Characteristics

- 1 The post is missing, late, or severely underdeveloped, showing minimal engagement with the text and the issues it raises.
- 2 The post is underdeveloped: it meets at least some of the technical requirements of the assignment, but consists mostly of summary or personal response rather than close analysis of or critical thinking about the text.
- 3 The post is successful: it uses textual or other material to make analytical claims, and begins to develop them, but those claims or connections are not fully developed or analyzed.
- 4 The post is exceptional: it uses textual or other material to make thoughtful, original analytical claims and/or connections, and engages and analyzes the issues it raises in independent, in-depth ways.

I will grade response posts on a credit/no credit basis based on your completing them substantively and on time.

Papers

You will write two analytical papers during the course. These papers are an opportunity to apply the skills of close reading and critical analysis we will practice in class and on the course blog towards a larger analytical argument about questions and issues in the texts that interest you. The first of these

papers will be 4-5 pages, and the second will be 5-6. I will provide more specific guidelines for these papers in advance of individual due dates.

Final Paper

The final paper for the course is an opportunity to think synthetically and connectively about the larger questions we have pursued over our readings. It will ask you to discuss *Gone Girl* in dialogue with another course text of your choosing. This paper will be 6-8 double-spaced typed pages in a standard twelve-point font. A draft of this paper will be due for a workshop prior to the final version, and will count for part of your grade for the paper. I will provide more specific guidelines for the final paper later in the semester.

Attendance

You are permitted a total of **three absences** throughout the semester without penalty. For each subsequent absence, your final course grade will drop one-third of a letter (e.g., from an A- to a B+), and after four absences, you risk failing the course. Repeated or excessive lateness will also count as an absence.

If you miss all or part of a class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work for the course—make sure to follow the syllabus, stay on track with the reading, turn in any written work that was due for the day, and consult a classmate, check the course website on Blackboard, or come see me during my office hours to talk about what you might have missed in class.

Office Hours

I want each of you to be successful in this class. Helping each of you develop as readers, writers, thinkers, and students of literature is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals and succeed in my class. More importantly, I have a great deal of interest in the material we will be working on this semester, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment and excitement from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, the English Department, life at Skidmore, future academic or career plans, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we're doing in class, please come see me. I encourage you to think of meeting with me not just as a last resort or something to do when you need help, but as a central part of making your learning more productive, meaningful, and enjoyable. My office hours are Monday 10-11:30am and Thursday 1:30-3:00pm in Tisch Hall 327—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren't free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help, or for any other reason at all.

Accessibility

If you anticipate needing accommodations regarding any element of this course, please come talk with me early in the semester so that we can work together to address these issues. You should also visit the Office of Student Academic Services at <http://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/index.php> for more information.

Academic Integrity

Independent thinking and writing are crucial elements of both your work in this course and the intellectual culture of Skidmore more broadly. All of your work in this course is subject to the college Honor Code. Violating these principles through plagiarism or other academic dishonesty is a serious offense. Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade for the assignment and may result in more serious consequences as well. If you have any questions about citation, attribution, or plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me before you hand in your work. For more information about Skidmore's academic integrity policy, visit <http://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/index.php>.

Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact of any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct is also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore College faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. If a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender-based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and to address the situation through the college's processes. If the student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, The Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

More information can be found at <https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/> or by contacting the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

Course Schedule

The schedule below may change over the course of the semester. I will announce any changes in class and/or via email. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email regularly, and contacting me or coming to my office if you have any questions.

What Is Fiction?

Wed. September 7	Course Introduction
Fri. September 9	Extreme Fictions: John Updike, "Problems" John Barth, "Frame-Tale" Ernest Hemingway, "Untitled" First Blog Post Due Midnight Thursday

Bodies, Transformations, Tellings, Retellings

Mon. September 12	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> 47-110 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. September 14	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> 111-160 Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. September 16	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> 160-220
Mon. September 19	Devon Hodges, "Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel" Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. September 21	Shelley Jackson, <i>Patchwork Girl</i> Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. September 23	Shelley Jackson, <i>Patchwork Girl</i> cont'd Shelley Jackson, "Stitch Bitch" Mark Amerika, "Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author As Cyborg-Femme Narrator"

Modernity, Technology, Writing

Mon. September 26	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> 29-108 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. September 28	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> 109-181 Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. September 30	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> 182-245
Mon. October 3	Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i> 246-328 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. October 5 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* 329-384
Response Post Due by Class Time

Fri. October 7 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* 384-419

Deformation, Realism, Satire

Mon. October 10 Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis"
Paper One Due 5:00pm Sunday, October 9
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. October 12 **No Class: Yom Kippur**
No Response Blog Due

Fri. October 14 Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" continued
Response Post Due by Class Time

Mon. October 17 Stephen Crane, "The Monster"
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. October 19 Nathanael West, "A Cool Million" 63-118
Response Post Due by Class Time

Fri. October 21 Nathanael West, "A Cool Million" 118-179

History, Memory, Trauma, Narrative

Mon. October 24 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 1-75
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. October 26 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 75-146
Response Post Due by Class Time

Fri. October 28 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 146-208

Mon. October 31 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 208-256
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. November 2 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 257-324
Response Post Due by Class Time

Fri. November 4 Angela Carter, selections from *The Bloody Chamber*

Mon. November 7 Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* 1-77
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

Wed. November 9 Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* 77-136
Response Post Due by Class Time

Fri. November 11 Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* 136-193

Mon. November 14	Cormac McCarthy, <i>The Road</i> 193-250 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. November 16	Cormac McCarthy, <i>The Road</i> 251-287 Ashley Kunsu, “Maps of the World in Its Becoming’: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy’s <i>The Road</i> ” Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. November 18	Open/TBA Paper Two Due Midnight Friday, November 18
Mon. November 21	Edgar Allan Poe, “William Wilson” Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. November 23	No Class: Thanksgiving
Fri. November 25	No Class: Thanksgiving

Deception, Structure, Disappearance

Mon. November 28	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 1-70 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. November 30	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 71-141 Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. December 2	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 142-215 <i>Dateline NBC</i> , “Written in Blood”
Mon. December 5	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 216-300 Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
Wed. December 7	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 300-366 Response Post Due by Class Time
Fri. December 9	Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> 367-415
Mon. December 12	Final Paper Workshop
Wed. December 14	Final Class: Conclusions, Reflections, Celebrations

Final Paper Due Monday, December 19