ENG 318.003: Historical Fiction from its Origins to Mad Men
Winter 2016

M/W 1:10-2:30pm, Angell Hall G232

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Office Hours: M/W 4:00-5:00pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will provide students with an overview of the genre of the historical novel, starting with its origins in early-nineteenth-century Scotland and Ireland. The historical novel bakes into the cake some of the central questions about what it means to think critically and imaginatively about the past. Throughout the course, we will ask: What distinguishes historical fiction from fiction in general, and do we hold it to a higher standard of “truth” because it depicts historical events? What is at stake in imagining the past in the present, and how does the historical novel comment on the status quo? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of the different ways that historical novels use, incorporate, or invent history? And what does the historical novel have to say about history’s victims—the people whose lives or livelihoods were destroyed by historical change, or whose voices are lost from the historical record?

We will read works by Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens, as well as influential critical theorizations of the historical novel as a genre. At the end of the semester, we will examine how historical fiction has adapted to the twenty-first century, looking at popular examples like Mad Men, but also at revisionist historical novels like Emma Pérez’s Forgetting the Alamo (2009), whose protagonist is a Chicana lesbian cowgirl in nineteenth-century Texas. Throughout the semester, students will work toward producing a final research paper that takes up an interpretive question related to one of the works we have read. Preparing for this capstone assignment, we will visit the library to learn to use digital databases to find relevant sources, will practice developing debatable thesis statements, and will produce an annotated bibliography.

Fulfills the pre-1900 requirement for the English major.

Learning Goals

1) To develop our analytical writing, research, and communication skills
2) To analyze the distinctive formal features and rhetorical situations of novels set in the past
3) To study the different ways that fiction invents history
4) To consider the ways that historical fiction comments on the status quo
5) To think critically about our own project of studying the past by examining the way novelists do it
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

Essay 1 10%
Summary Assignments 10%
Essay 2 15%
Blog posts 15%
Reading Quizzes 10%
In-class participation 10%
Research Paper Proposal 10%
Final Research Paper 20%

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS

Write a three-page essay that makes a coherent and insightful argument about a passage in Walter Scott’s *Waverley*, using the text’s formal features as evidence. Your essay should analyze how the language and structure of the text work together to create subtle meanings. Due Friday 29 January, 1:00pm.

Summary Assignments.
Write a one-page summary of the selection from Georg Lukács’s *The Historical Novel*. Without using direct quotations, paraphrase Lukács’s argument in your own words. Do not evaluate the argument or express your opinion about it; simply relate its key points as best you can. Due Monday 1 February, 1pm. Repeat the exercise with Michael Gamer’s “Waverley and the Object of (Literary) History,” due Wednesday 10 February, 1pm.

Essay 2. Close Reading of Text and Image.
Write a three-page essay that makes a coherent and insightful argument about a passage and corresponding image in W. M. Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, using their formal features as evidence. Your essay should analyze how the work’s textual and visual components complement and/or compete with each other to produce subtle meanings. Due Monday 7 March, 9:00am.

Blog Posts.
Posts on our private course blog will provide students with an informal context in which to work through complicated ideas, discuss connections between the course materials and wider cultural trends, and practice the argumentation skills they will use on formal writing assignments. Topics will vary.

Students will be split into Maize and Blue groups and asked to complete four posts to the Discussions section of the course Canvas site on the schedule indicated below. Posts are due 24 hours before the class meeting, and should be about 500 words long. During the intervening day, all students will read the postings and prepare to discuss them in class.

Reading Quizzes
Reading quizzes are designed to ensure that students are prepared to contribute to our in-class activities. They will be administered at the beginning of class, without advance warning. Quizzes will take many forms, sometimes asking factual questions about the assigned
reading, and at other times asking interpretive questions that jump-start our discussion.

In-Class Participation.
Your daily preparation for and participation in class activities are integral to your success in this course. The structure of the course has been designed so that students take an active role in their own and their classmates’ learning. Consequently, a good participant will not merely speak in class; they will make contributions that respond to the discussion and help to build the group’s collective understanding of the text or issue that concerns us. Good participation depends not only on quantity but also quality. Active and sincere participation creates the challenging but safe environment that is necessary for learning. For this reason, comments that are rude or disrespectful to others will not be tolerated.

Please submit a multi-page proposal for your final research paper. The proposal should include a few sentences describing your paper topic and explaining why it interests you, a draft thesis statement, a list of passages from the primary text that you plan to analyze, and an annotated bibliography of secondary sources, following the format we practiced in the Summary Assignments. Due Friday 8 April, 1pm.

Final Research Paper.
Write a ten-page research paper that advances a coherent and insightful argument about one of the texts we have read this semester. The paper should contextualize your claim by citing at least three external sources, which can be either recent academic criticism, contemporary reactions to the work, or other relevant texts. You can find these texts using the databases that we explored during our library session. As always, you must support your claims with detailed close readings of one or more passages from the novel. Due Wednesday 20 April, 4pm.
COURSE POLICIES

Attendance.
Absences detract from the classroom community. For that reason, I reserve the right to reduce your final grade by one-third of a letter for each absence more than three. Further, any student who misses five classes may fail the course. Please contact me well in advance if you know that you will miss. Excessive tardiness will negatively affect your grade as well.

Use of Technology.
No phones or small gadgets may be used in the classroom. You may bring a laptop or tablet for note-taking so long as you are able to focus on the class; I reserve the right to ban laptops and tablets at any point if necessary.

Late Work Policy.
1) Late blog posts will not be accepted for credit.
2) Late essays are strongly discouraged and will be penalized as follows: you will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for each day the essay is late.
3) Please speak to me (ideally well in advance) if you encounter a major problem completing your work on time. Occasionally, serious life circumstances get in the way of academic work; if that happens, please see me to develop a plan to complete the course requirements.

Plagiarism Policy.
The academic community depends for its functioning on the free exchange of ideas. Plagiarism is a form of fraud: it is the taking of ideas or language from another person for one’s own use without proper documentation. Please ask questions in advance if you find that you are confused about what constitutes plagiarism, or if you need help citing sources properly. If you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment and possibly the course, and I will forward your case to the appropriate Dean.

Accessibility Statement.
I am committed to the principle of universal learning, meaning that our classroom, virtual spaces, practices, and interactions should be as inclusive as possible. Any student with particular needs should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (https://ssd.umich.edu/) at the start of the semester. Then, please contact me and we will work out the details of any accommodations needed for this course in order to ensure the best learning experience for you.

Contacting me.
1) Please visit during my office hours to discuss any concerns you have about the course and your work. If you are unavailable during my office hours, email me and we can set up an alternate time to meet.
2) I check email frequently but not all the time, so please leave sufficient lead-time if your question is about an assignment that is due soon.
3) I prefer to discuss graded work in person, rather than over email and recommend that you wait 48 hours after receiving a grade before you contact me to arrange a meeting.
**COURSE CALENDAR**

*Please note that reading assignments are due on the day they are listed.*

Wed 6 Jan:
- Introduction to course
- Students introduce themselves
- Discussion: What are some historical novels? What works do we think of when we use that term?
- Watch and discuss one or two scenes from *Mad Men*

Mon 11 Jan: Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, pp. 1-97

Wed 13 Jan: Walter Scott, *Waverley*, pp. 3-88
Short lecture on the Jacobites
Discussion of *Waverley’s* debts to *Rackrent*

[[MLK Day]]

(Tue 19 Jan: Blog Posts Due – Maize Group, 1:00pm)

Read all blog posts from Maize Group
Practice close readings

(Sun 24 Jan: Blog Posts Due – Blue Group, 1:00pm)

Read all blog posts from Blue Group
Practice close readings

Workshop: What makes a good thesis statement?
Introduction to the Summary Assignment

(Fri 29 Jan: Essay 1 Due, 1:00pm)

**Summary Assignment Due, 1:00pm**

Wed 3 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 1-114

Mon 8 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 115-222

Wed 10 Feb: Michael Gamer, “Waverley and the Object of (Literary) History”
**Summary Assignment Due, 1:00pm**
They Say, I Say (excerpt: p. 55-101, but skip the Exercises)
Discussion of rhetorical moves for using criticism in your writing
(Sun 14 Feb: Blog Posts Due – Blue Group, 1:00pm)

Mon 15 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 222-326
Read all blog posts from Blue Group

(Tue 16 Feb: Blog Posts Due – Maize Group, 1:00pm)

Wed 17 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 327-429
Read all blog posts from Maize Group

Mon 22 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 430-568
Session with librarian Sigrid Cordell on finding sources for research paper
Meet at the Hatcher Gallery Lab, Room 100

Wed 24 Feb: W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, pp. 569-689

[[Spring Break]]

Mon 7 March: **Essay 2 Due, 9:00am**
Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, pp. 7-99


(Sun 13 March: Blog Posts Due – Maize Group, 1:00pm)

Read all blog posts from Maize Group


(Sun 20 March: Blog Posts Due – Blue Group, 1:00pm)

Read all blog posts from Blue Group

(Tue 22 March: Blog Posts Due – Maize Group, 1:00pm)

Wed 23 March: Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, pp. 3-107
Read all blog posts from Maize Group
Workshop on choosing a research topic


**Research Paper topics due**

Wed 30 March: Emma Pérez, *Forgetting the Alamo*, pp. 1-106

(Sun 3 April: Blog Posts Due – Blue Group, 1:00pm)
Mon 4 April:  Emma Pérez, *Forgetting the Alamo*, pp. 107-206
Read all blog posts from Blue Group

Wed 6 April:  *Mad Men*, episodes 1-2

(Fri 8 April:  Research Paper Full Proposals Due, 1:00pm)

Mon 11 April:  No Class. Meet with me to discuss research paper proposals

Wed 13 April:  *Mad Men*, episodes 3-4

Mon 18 April:  *Mad Men*, episodes 5-6
Synthetic discussion; Party

Final Assignment:
**Wed 20 April, 4pm**  Final Research Paper due
**COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Required Books to Purchase**


*Total cost (estimate from Amazon): $87.99*

**Materials Provided on Canvas Course Management Website**


Grading Rubric for Formal Papers

When I grade your papers, I will consider the following issues, which I list here in decreasing order of importance. Use this as a guide as you draft and revise. Hint: you want the answer to each of these questions to be “Yes!”

Thesis/Argument
- Is there a clear thesis? Is it specific, original, or debatable?
- Does the argument demonstrate genuine insight? Does it give the reader a new way of seeing?
- Is the larger significance of the essay apparent? Does the essay communicate why its argument matters?

Evidence
- Does the essay support all claims with adequate evidence?
- Does the essay properly cite and thoroughly analyze that evidence?
- Does the essay address relevant counterarguments and anticipate possible resistance from the audience?

Structure and Development
- Does the introduction present the topic in a compelling way? Does the conclusion add something to the essay?
- Does the essay build and develop as it goes along, arranging ideas in a meaningful order and paying attention to transitions?
- Do the topic sentences propel the essay in a clear direction?

Style
- Is the essay clear and concise?
- Is the tone appropriate to our academic context?
- Does the command of language and grammar further the argument rather than impede comprehension?