

**ENG 6075
LITERARY THEORY: ISSUES**

**THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL NOVEL:
TOWARDS THE GLOBAL**

Professor Phillip Wegner
Tuesday 6-8 (12:50-3:50 p.m.)
Turlington 4112

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and by appointment

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In the concluding chapter of *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), Fredric Jameson wonders, “What kind of History can the contemporary historical novel then be expected to ‘make appear’?” In our seminar, we will take up Jameson’s question by examining some of the most interesting historical novels published in the last few decades. We will begin our study by reading one of Walter Scott’s founding works in the genre along with Georg Lukács pioneering study, *The Historical Novel* (1955). We will then tarry with the solutions offered to the problem of “making history appear” developed by two of the most important English language modernist authors, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, before turning in the second part of our semester to a variety of different versions of the historical novel from some of the most notable writers working in the genre in the decades bracketing the inauguration of the twenty-first century. We will then conclude our survey with two works that have been published just this year—one of which happens to be set in Florida.

Texts

Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1955)
Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-lothian* (1818)
James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928)
 Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise* (1993)
 Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997)
 Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002)
 Russell Banks, *The Darling* (2004)
 David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)
 Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)
 Wu Ming, *Altai* (2009)
 Sofka Zinovieff, *The House on Paradise Street* (2012)
 Jo Walton, *Lent* (2019)
 Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys* (2019)

Students will be responsible for procuring copies of all the readily available readings for the semester. Harder to find, out-of-print, and shorter texts will be made available on our Canvas site as the semester progresses.

Aims and Methods

1. Full presence in every spatial, ontological, existential, and intellectual sense of the word, as well as active and engaged participation in the seminar discussions. Given your enrollment in this course, I assume that all of you are looking forward as much as I am to having the opportunity for a serious and careful engagement with these texts. Thus, the most general expectation that I have for this semester is that all of you intend to read these works, and to do so in a responsible and rigorous fashion, and in a spirit of good faith, generosity, and intellectual camaraderie. I would ask then that you make every effort to engage in, to use a much abused term, a *dialogue* with these works, being attentive to their respective voices, acknowledging their particular historical and otherwise contingent beings in the world, and finally working to imagine how we today might best retool the insights and modes of analysis of their various “unfinished projects.” In this way, I hope that we will develop a much more complex and profitable understanding of both the power and originality of these arguments and traditions.

2. In order to facilitate and enrich our discussion of these works, I want to ask each of you to be responsible for introducing and situating some of our readings. As I imagine all of our work fundamentally to be a collective project, you will do this in pairs, with each group being responsible for the readings on two different occasions. Each group will be asked both to provide a brief introduction to the material and to serve as general “experts” on the readings for that week. Your group can take a variety of approaches to this task: you may want to highlight some of the central issues the readings address; briefly outline their main arguments; note the ways they engage with what has come before; place them in historical, intellectual, and political contexts; note connections to other models and practices; give overviews of some of the secondary readings on these works; offer some questions for

discussion; provide creative illustrations and applications of the thesis; and so forth. I only ask that you keep the opening comments brief (15 minutes maximum total) so that we can begin our general discussion as soon as possible. I also hope that your groups will continue to work together throughout the semester, sharing ideas, giving support, discussing research projects, sharing drinks, and other important tasks. I will be very happy to meet with your group beforehand to suggest some secondary readings and discuss approaches and tactics.

3. The Twenty-Second Annual Conference of the Marxist Reading Group will be held the weekend of April 2-4, with keynote addresses by Kathi Weeks and Holly Lewis. As there will be a good deal of discussion relevant to our class, I ask that all enrolled students plan to attend some of the sessions and events. There will also be a number of other important scholarly events throughout the semester, and I will try and notify you of them and encourage you to attend as many as possible.

4. For the major written component of the course, I will ask each of you to develop an independent research program, which will take one of two forms: either a) two shorter essays of 10-15 pages in length examining the questions or issues raised by the material in more depth, or drawing connections between these works and other areas of interest; *or*, b) a major critical research project of some 25-30 pages in length. The aim of the longer project will be to produce: 1) a sustained engagement with some of the works we discuss in class; 2) a further independent examination of the issues raised by the work we have looked at; 3) a discussion drawing upon some of the recommended secondary or additional readings; or 4) an original reading of another other work, deploying the concepts and models we elaborate during the course of the semester. I would also like to ask that all Ph.D students plan to pursue option b, with the goal of producing an essay that will serve either as the basis of a dissertation chapter or a publishable essay (or even both). I ask each of you who choose this second option to turn in a detailed paper proposal, complete with bibliography, about a month before the paper is due. If you require additional time to work on this project, I am happy to allow you to do so. However, in order to avoid extending the course indefinitely, I expect that the project will be completed by the end of the summer term; work turned in after that time should not expect to receive extensive comments.

Grading Criteria

Attendance and Participation: 25%

Group presentations: 25%

Seminar paper: 50%

UF Policy Statements

1) Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

2) UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>

3) UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class.

4) Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/> (Links to an external site.)

5) Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Tentative Discussion Schedule

1. January 7 - Introduction

2. January 14 -

Readings: Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-lothian* (1818)

3. January 21 -

Readings: Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1955)

4. January 28 -

Readings: James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

5. February 4 -

Readings: Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (1928)

6. February 11 -

Readings: Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise* (1993)

7. February 18 -

Readings: Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997)

8. February 25 -

Readings: Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002)

9. March 3 - SPRING BREAK

Optional 10-12 page paper #1 due March 14

10. March 10 -

Readings: Russell Banks, *The Darling* (2004)

11. March 17 -

Readings: David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)

12. March 24 -

Readings: David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)

Fredric Jameson, "The Historical Novel Today, or, Is it Still Possible?"
in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013)

Final Project Proposals Due March 30

13. March 31 -

Readings: Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)

14. April 7 -

Readings: Sofka Zinovieff, *The House on Paradise Street* (2012)

15. April 14 -

Readings: Jo Walton, *Lent* (2019)

16. April 21 -

Readings: Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys* (2019)

17. April 28 - FINAL PROJECTS DUE by 10 a.m. (in order to receive spring grade)