

# ENG 400 Descriptions

## Summer 1, 2021

### **Activist Rhetoric**

**Seth Kahn**

This course investigates the rhetorics that activists use in their work as educators, organizers, and mobilizers. We will approach activist rhetoric from three directions.

- We will consider an array of theories of persuasion and deliberation, theorizing rhetoric as the basis upon which democracy depends.
- We will take a case-study approach to several activist campaigns, some of which you will select as part of your research for the course (e.g., environmental, human rights, reproductive rights, health care reform, education reform).
- We will study the first-person accounts of activist rhetoricians, who describe their own activist work, and how they understand rhetoric's place in it.
- Research projects may result in either critical/rhetorical analyses of a specific activist campaign; or elaborated arguments that theorize activism, or activist rhetoric. I'm also open to possibilities that haven't occurred to me yet.

## Summer 2, 2021

### **Toni Morrison: The Trilogy**

**Cherise Pollard**

Toni Morrison is perhaps the most popular contemporary African American woman novelist and cultural critic. Morrison's work has garnered multiple high profile prizes and honors, including the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, The Nobel Prize for Literature, and The Presidential Medal of Freedom and her novels and criticism are widely taught. The primary focus of this seminar will be Toni Morrison's Trilogy: Beloved (1987), Jazz (1992), and Paradise (1997). This trilogy is not defined by any shared character or plot line; instead, the connection is thematic. Issues related to American culture, history, memory, spirituality and religion unite these texts. Throughout this seminar, we will ask the following questions: what commentary do these texts make individually and as a group? How might we situate these novels in relation to Morrison's larger body of work, including literary criticism and cultural commentary? How might we position Morrison's late twentieth century work in relation to African American and American literary history?

## Fall 2021

### **Something Wicked: Witches in Youth Literature and Media**

**Emily Aguiló-Pérez**

The witch figure has long been the quintessential female villain. This has been the case in texts and media for young people. On the surface she is menacing and dangerous because she casts harmful spells and hurts children. But on a deeper level the witch is a threat to the stability of heteronormative and patriarchal societies, an outcast, and a vehicle for change. There is much to examine about witches when it comes to their depictions in youth literature and media. This course offers a study of the development of witches, from evil and dangerous, to misunderstood outcast, to helpful and good. More specifically, this course will examine the child as witch and will pose questions about gender.

By examining early witch narratives established by folktales and early children's books, we will explore how more contemporary youth literature authors rewrite those narratives to challenge common ideas about witches. Drawing from approaches in race and cultural studies, gender studies, and childhood studies, we will investigate the representation of witches in youth literature and media through reading, discussing, and researching books that feature Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, queer, and trans protagonists. Students can learn more about the instructor's research interests through the English Department's website and the instructor's academic website: [emilyaguiloperez.com](http://emilyaguiloperez.com)

### **Literature and the Problem of History**

**Erin Hurt**

In his work, Tim Parrish explores "narrative authority in the post-modern age" to explore "[w]hat historical narrative is, who masters it, who distributes it, who receives it, and who controls it" (2). This course uses Parrish's statement as its foundation, and it explores texts by American authors that address these aspects of history in a variety of ways. This course defines the study of history alongside the study of literary texts, drawing comparisons to the work each field does. The primary goal of this course is to help students think critically about how American novels (and at least one film) respond to and rewrite accepted dominant versions of history (e.g., Manifest Destiny, slavery and reconstruction, white identity in the South, the annexation of Mexico, the Iraq war, etc.). In terms of methodology, this course helps students to build skills of literary and textual analysis, as well as learning about the discipline of history and historiography.

### **Steampunk**

**Kristin Kondrlik**

Over the past forty years, creative work that returns to the past to imagine alternatives to our own present has established a new category of genre fiction and arguably a subculture: "steampunk." Inspiring novels, films, television, videogames, and fashion, unlike forms of science fiction that look to possible futures or to other worlds, steampunk looks to the past--and particularly to late Victorian styles, grammars, and modes of presentation and representation. It does so at least in part in order to construct alternative, critical histories of our own day. What is at stake in a returning to the past in order to gain critical perspective on the present? And why does the period from roughly 1885-1920 seem to provide steampunk its most compelling material? Such questions will guide our exploration of texts that have become central to conceptions of steampunk both as a mode of genre fiction and as a cultural style. We will pay close attention to steampunk's roots in the late-Victorian eras.

Over the course of the semester we will treat popular literature from this period, including H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, as well as contemporary writing by authors such as Michael Moorcock, Philip Pullman, Cherie Priest, Esi Edugyan, Jaymee Goh, and related works including graphic novels (*The*

*League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*), television shows (*Doctor Who*) and a student-selected steampunk film. The course will include four 1-page blog posts, a short analysis paper (3-4 pages), a digital archival collection (5 historical sources with short annotations); and a final research project (10-12 pages).

Interested students can find further information about Dr. Kondrlik on her personal website ([kekondrlik.wordpress.com](http://kekondrlik.wordpress.com)) or the English Department website.

### **Sexuality, Identity, and Desire: A Sociolinguistic Approach.**

**Joshua Raclaw**

Over the past thirty years, linguists have examined the various ways that language works to construct our understanding of human sexuality. How do speakers use language to articulate sexual identities and desires, and how are we socialized into these different linguistic practices throughout the lifespan? How does language contribute to our understanding of sexual consent? How do we assign social meaning to flirting, sexting, and interactions on dating and hookup apps? How does a focus on language highlight how sexuality intersects in meaningful ways with gendered, racial, national, and religious identities? We will examine how linguistic researchers have used a range of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate these and other questions across global communities and contexts. Interested students can learn more about Dr. Raclaw's research interests on the English Department website.

### **Environmental Sustainability and the Rhetoric(s) of Science**

**Justin Rademaekers**

Environmental sustainability has proven to be a wicked challenge both as a course of study in higher education and as a practical pursuit for contemporary societies. One significant reason sustainability is so challenging is that it is deeply interdisciplinary and intersectional: requiring engagement and collaborative thinking among academic disciplines and professions in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. To better understand the challenges surrounding sustainability studies, scholars of language can find fertile ground for inquiry in the rhetorics of science. Environmental science, economics, and political science, for example, are all discourses of power that converge in the pursuit of sustainability. By interpreting these academic disciplines as discourses of power with distinct rhetorical features, English Studies scholars can identify the communicative and collaborative challenges facing environmental sustainability, and can prepare to play a vital role as knowledge brokers in these vital conversations. You can learn more about environmental rhetoric and the rhetoric of science on Dr. Rademaekers faculty page.

### **Case Studies in Historicisms**

**Carolyn Sorisio**

This seminar builds upon ENG 295, asking how and why we study texts from the past. Beginning with my scholarship on the nineteenth-century American Indian activist Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, we will consider what constitutes a productive historical inquiry; how we summarize and synthesize existing scholarship related to an inquiry; how we identify gaps in the scholarship; and, how we locate and conceptualize an archive for research that produces new knowledge and challenges previous assumptions. Additional case studies will underscore how exciting historical discovery can be, especially as related to the recovery of unknown or neglected authors. It will also allow us to consider the political implications of archival work and archives. You will perform historical research for a final project, based

on our case studies, suggested topics, or a text or author you want to study through historical methods. Interested students can learn more about my research at this link: [Carolyn Sorisio's faculty page](#).

### **Queer in the Country: Reading the Rural in Queer Young Adult Literature**

**Jason Vanfosson**

Rural places in the United States have a reputation as sites unwelcoming to those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Despite this stereotype, a number of queer bodies come of age and continue to live in rural areas in what critics have termed queer anti-urbanism. Larger cultural discussions of rural spaces—particularly about Appalachia, the US South, and the Midwest—erase these queer bodies and experiences. This seminar explores representations of queer rurality in young adult literature and culture to challenge a dominant narrative of urban queerness found in LGBTQIA+ YA books. In this class we will read YA novels, comics, and poetry featuring queer and trans protagonists, as well as consider cultural texts that represent adolescent queer rurality, such as film, songs, music videos, and social media campaigns. Students interested in learning more about Dr. Vanfosson's research interests and the topic of this seminar can visit the English Department's website.

### **Comics at the End of the World**

**Kyle Vealey**

There is no doubt that our world is in crisis—socially, environmentally, economically. With our increasing awareness of large-scale, complex problems, such as climate change, racial injustice, and viral pandemics, and subsequent calls to action to address them, it is also no wonder that such crises have become encoded and/or reflected in popular media such as comics. And historically this has always been the case for comics. Since its rise in popularity from the 1930s onward, the comic medium has long been used to address social, environmental, and economic crises in ways that communicate, translate, or frame them for a larger public. For example, in the months following the 1945 bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, people both in and out of the US clamored to better understand what atomic energy was and its significance for the future of war and peacetime. As atomic historian Ferenc Morton Szasz notes, one of the leading efforts to explain atomic energy took the form of comic books: “with circulation figures reaching into the millions, [comic book artists and writers] played a major role in forging the nation’s atomic awareness for over three generations” (Szasz, 2012). Comics, in the face of looming nation-wide uncertainty, functioned as a public rhetoric in shaping the way people thought, felt, and acted.

In this ENG 400 seminar, we will delve into the way comics and other visual narratives help us grapple with our world's most complex and wicked problems—both historically and contemporarily. Specifically, we will consider questions such as: what role do comics play in explaining social, environmental, or economic crises? How are comics used to make technical, scientific, or medical information public and/or visible? How are comics used as educational resources as well as instruments of propaganda? What are the rhetorical and/or visual affordances of the comic medium? And in what way can comics and other forms of visual narratives work to help us address contemporary matters of concern, such as climate change? The seminar will culminate in students researching a visual narrative that works to explain and sustain engagement with a complex problem threatening the world today.