

Spring 2026  
**ENGLISH 6931**  
**TOPICS IN ENGLISH**  
Thematic Title: *Genre, Utopia, Theory*  
Th 3:30-6:00 PM  
David Straz Nursing 233

Professor Gerry Canavan  
Marquette Hall 115A  
[gerry.canavan@marquette.edu](mailto:gerry.canavan@marquette.edu)  
Office Hours: MWF 11:00-11:45 AM or by appointment

The law of genre, Derrida wrote, is “a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy.” While genres may initially appear to us to be discrete, even obvious publishing and marketing categories, in fact these boundaries are often incredibly fluid, and difficult to define or police. In this course we will thus explore texts that operate at the weird intersections of genres – texts which seem to operate in more than one generic mode, or which switch fluidly or unexpectedly between genres, or which challenge our understanding of the aesthetic structures, commercial pressures, and political-ethical assumptions that undergird our generic categories. As the second and third terms of the subtitle for the course suggest, a particular focus will be on the relationship between genre and theory, particularly the core critical concept of utopia as it has been deployed by thinkers like Fredric Jameson, Carl Freedman, John Clute, Ursula K. Le Guin, and others. The course includes both literary and popular texts, allowing us to explore how genre circulates within multiple contexts and communities of discourse; the reading list is also chosen to reflect texts and authors that are commonly taught at the undergraduate level, which will allow us to bring consideration of literary pedagogy to our discussions.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Investigate major concepts, methods, and theoretical movements that have shaped the practices of contemporary literary studies;
- Study and critically analyze major works of twentieth- and twenty-first-century global literature and genre fiction;
- Explore the relationship between the concept of utopia and interrelated ideas of literature, genre, history, futurity, race, gender, sexuality, ability and disability, and empire;
- Produce cogent academic writing in a variety of modes and media forms;
- Hone pedagogical skills for teaching literature at the college level.

## SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONAL EMERGENCIES

Everyone at Marquette recognizes that this continues to be an extremely difficult time which may be filled with many different sorts of uncertainty as we move forward with the academic year. Your safety, health, and well-being are our primary concern and we want to be able to support you in any way that we can.

The university also understands that you may be facing personal obstacles that may make it difficult to meet your typical academic goals. Please refer to the Student Resources page on the Marquette COVID-19 Response webpage for information and resources on basic needs such as housing, food, financial aid, and medical and mental health; the webpage also offers information on official University communications, access to technology, and student services. Faculty and staff are also here for you.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your situation outside of class, please don't hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. You are not alone.

## REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BookMarq on 16<sup>th</sup> Street)

Octavia E. Butler, *Bloodchild*

Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

China Miéville, *The City & the City*

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

Ling Ma, *Severance*

Abdourahman A. Waber, *In the United States of Africa*

Any edition is fine, including electronic ones.

Selected additional texts will also be made available through D2L, as well as during class.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation	20%
D2L Forums	20%
Jameson mini-essay	10%
Discussion Leader	10%
Proposal	5%
Paper micro-talk	5%
Final Paper	30%

*Class Participation:* You are expected to attend every class having read the material and ready to discuss it, and to participate actively in our conversation. Please let me know in advance of our meeting if you find you will need to miss a session.

*Discussion Leader:* Beginning with Week 5, each member of the class will have one day in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion based on the readings for that day. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be

asked to (1) succinctly describe the project of the text; (2) articulate a brief critical response to the material; and (3) direct our collective attention to major problems in, questions about, and/or particularly important moments in the text. My expectation is that the discussion leader(s) for each day will, collectively, lead a significant portion of the class period (though not the entire thing); you should feel free to use pedagogical and classroom management strategies that work for you, including handouts, free writes, small group discussions, creative activities, and the like. A signup sheet for this role will be distributed in class.

*D2L Forums:* This course will make extensive use of the forums on D2L, where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over. You are asked to contribute a short 250-500-word response to the material at least five times over the course of the semester. (Longer is perfectly okay).

These “sandbox” posts do not have to be formal written posts, but can also take the form of a podcast, a short video, a work of art or music, a short story or fan fiction, a comic, or more; any response of any sort is fine, provided it is thoughtful and substantial. These can even be done collaboratively. The idea is to respond collectively to the material we are studying together in a way that is not stifling, anxious, or overstructured by academic expectations that cannot really apply to this odd and altered educational context; my hope is to strip away grading strictures that can only be dysfunctional in the current moment and foster instead more multifaceted, more generous, and hopefully richer intellectual encounters, driven by your interests.

I encourage you to think of these comments as possible “seeds” for the final paper; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there. You are also highly encouraged to kill two birds with one stone by posting a forum comment on the days you are scheduled to be the discussion inaugurator.

*Jameson Mini-Paper:* After reading the two Jameson essays for January 22, I ask you to produce a brief 500-1000-word utopian “reading” of some text or object from contemporary life, along the lines of the way Jameson reads *The Godfather*, *Jaws*, the armed forces, and Wal-Mart. This will be due February 5.

*Final Paper:* Your final paper will be on a topic chosen and developed by you with some connection (however tenuous) to the material discussed in this class. The project will move through several stages:

Proposal: You will submit an abstract for the paper you plan to me by Thursday, March 26, alongside a call for papers, a journal special issue, a conference announcement, etc. that you might theoretically write the paper towards. (The sooner the better!) You should get in the habit of watching the CFP clearinghouse for English studies at [call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu](http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu) in order to find a CFP that is a good fit.

Symposium: The last week of our class will include a mini-conference describing your papers in progress. You will all present a micro-talk version of your paper in a roundtable-style presentation, **with each participant having a maximum of 5 minutes**

**to speak.** Ideally this “elevator pitch” style presentation will help you hone your final paper for submission in the following week.

**Final Paper:** The final 12-to-25-page paper is due to me by 5 PM on Friday, May 8, via D2L’s Digital Dropbox. The final paper should endeavor to be an original scholarly intervention in a contemporary debate about literary studies, very broadly conceived, with an eye towards conference presentation and eventual publication. This means your final paper should demonstrate both its originality and participation in an existing scholarly conversation through appropriate citation of existing work (both primary and secondary sources). Such sources might include: other texts by the author(s) under consideration; secondary criticism of those or other texts; relevant cultural or literary theory and criticism; historical research and documents; scholarship from other academic disciplines on related issues and themes; popular criticism; research into patterns in the critical and popular reception of a text; and fan scholarship.

To produce an “A” essay, you must construct an essay that does more than simply summarize or comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

---

*Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.*

—Kenneth Burke, “The Philosophy of Literary Form”

---

## **FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK**

Your final paper should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, johnnytruant-finalpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even forum comments.

Given the usual conventions of our discipline, I suggest either MLA bibliography or Chicago footnote style for citation.

## DOUBLE SUBMISSION OF PAPERS

I do not object to double submission of papers if that works for your course plan. In fact, I encourage it! However, you must ask for permission in advance from both professors and your proposal must satisfy the requirements of both assignments. Your paper should be approximately twice as long as a single-submitted paper to reflect its dual purpose.

## INCOMPLETES

Please talk to me, as soon as possible, if you feel as though you will not be able to meet the deadline for the final paper. Of course things happen, but I strongly advise against trying to use incompletes as a task-management strategy in graduate school.

## PAPER SUBMISSION

The final paper should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date, Friday, May 8, by 5 PM. Your other written work, including the sandbox posts and the Jameson mini-paper, will be posted in the D2L forums. Remember that the sandbox assignments will have flexible due dates driven by your own interests and responses. **It is thus your responsibility to make sure you are properly keeping up with your work in this course in a timely fashion.** Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

## TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

## ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

**Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **two unexcused absences** over the course of the spring semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you may receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

**Merely being present in class is insufficient for an “A” in class participation.** Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

## **COVID AND ILLNESS PROTOCOLS**

Everyone in this class will be expected to follow the current illness policies in effect on campus, including current guidance on quarantines and on masks.

## **EMAIL**

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions. I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

## **LAPTOP POLICY**

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. **Please do not abuse this privilege or distract your fellow students.** I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. Except in unusual cases of personal emergency, cleared with me at the start of class, no use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

## **CONFERENCES**

**All students are asked to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least twice during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it.** Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss work-in-progress in excess of this requirement, as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly drop-in office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

## **ACCOMODATIONS**

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building). ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at [ods@marquette.edu](mailto:ods@marquette.edu).

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in the graduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

### **SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (“AI”)**

You are expected to produce your own text for all coursework for this class. Unmarked use of LLMs (like ChatGPT) for any assignment violates academic integrity. Incorporating any part of an AI-generated response in your work for this course without permission falls under the definition of plagiarism and will be treated accordingly. Our little scholarly utopia is for human minds alone.

### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

### **RESPECT**

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

### **KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!**

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger research agenda. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

### **READING LOAD**

A graduate class that meets once a week for two-and-a-half hours at a stretch necessarily entails a significant weekly reading load. I have done my best to modulate this reality as best as I can, including strategically using Spring and Easter Break to give you extra time on especially long or difficult texts, but at the end of the day there is only so much that can be done!

In general, you should expect to read half-a-novel to a full novel each week, with some secondary materials typically provided that I hope you can also find time to look through, if not always read with the same level of dedication. If you ever find yourself swamped or stuck for time, I would always recommend prioritizing the primary texts for a given week over what I list below as secondary texts.

---

## PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

*Changes will be announced if they become necessary.*

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed reading.

DAY	READINGS
Jan 15	FIRST DAY OF CLASS Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (in-class)
Jan 22	Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” [D2L] Fredric Jameson, “Utopia as Replication” [D2L] <i>Bloodchild</i> : “The Book of Martha”
Jan 29	<i>Bloodchild</i> : “Bloodchild,” “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” “Near of Kin,” “Speech Sounds,” “Crossover,” and “Amnesty” <i>Bloodchild</i> mini-presentations (randomly assigned): 2-3 students will be responsible for collectively providing a reading (or readings) of one of the six remaining stories that speak to Jameson’s concept of the utopian impulse.  <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> , chapters 1-3
Feb 5	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> , chapters 4-14
Feb 12	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> (whole book)  <i>secondary text</i> Gabriel García Márquez, Nobel prize lecture [Web] Gregory Lawrence, “Marx in Macondo” [D2L]
Feb 19	<i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> (first half)
Feb 26	<i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> (second half)  <i>secondary texts</i> Charlotte Sturgess, “The Handmaid as a Romance Heroine” [D2L] Margaret Atwood, “The Road to Utopia” and “What <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> Means in the Age of Trump”
Mar 5	<i>The Testaments</i> (whole book) Find a review or thinkpiece about <i>The Testaments</i> and bring it to class.
Mar 12	SPRING BREAK / NO CLASS
Mar 19	China Miéville, <i>The City &amp; the City</i> (first half)  <i>secondary texts</i> China Miéville, “Cognition as Ideology” [D2L] Carl Freedman: “Marxism, Cinema, and Some Dialectics of Science Fiction and Film Noir” [D2L]
Mar 26	China Miéville, <i>The City &amp; the City</i> (second half)  <i>secondary texts</i> China Miéville, “Notes on Walls” [Web] China Miéville, “Unsolving the City” [Web] Carl Freedman, “From Genre to Political Economy: Miéville’s <i>The City &amp; The City</i> and Uneven Development” [D2L]

Apr 2	<i>EASTER BREAK / NO CLASS</i>
Apr 9	John Clute, <i>Pardon This Intrusion</i> (excerpts) [D2L] <i>House of Leaves</i> (first half)
Apr 16	<i>House of Leaves</i> (second half) <i>House of Leaves</i> television pilot [D2L] <i>House of Leaves</i> fan criticism [Web]
Apr 23	<i>Severance</i> (whole book)  <u>secondary texts</u> Claire Gullander-Drolet, “Imperialist Nostalgia and Untranslatable Affect in Ling Ma’s <i>Severance</i> ” [D2L] Iana W. Robitaille, “Alien Domesticity: Settler-Capitalist Invasion and the Limits of Representation in Ling Ma’s <i>Severance</i> ” [D2L]
Apr 30	<i>In the United States of Africa</i> (whole book) 5-minute micro-talks about your final projects  <u>secondary text</u> Justin Izzo, “Historical Reversibility as Ethnographic Afrofuturism: Abdourahman Waber’s Alternative Africa”
<b>May 8 (Fri)</b>	<b>Final papers and all assignments due by 5 PM.</b>

---

#### **FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH**

*On Facebook (page):* [www.facebook.com/marquettefame](http://www.facebook.com/marquettefame)

*On Facebook (group):* [www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194](http://www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194)  
(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

*On Twitter:* @MarquetteENGL

*On Instagram:* @marquette\_english

I will also be inviting you to English community events periodically during the fall and spring semesters. I hope you can attend!

## Further Reading

Students interesting in continuing their study of the utopian tradition might in interested in some of the following critical texts:

Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*  
 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*  
 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*  
 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*  
 Emma Goldman, *Writings of Emma Goldman*  
 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* and “The End of Utopia”  
 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”  
 Raymond Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction”  
 Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*  
 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*  
 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* and *Archaeologies of the Future*  
 Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*  
 Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*  
 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*  
 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*  
 Edward Said, *Orientalism*  
 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”  
 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*  
 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*  
 Lee Edelman, *No Future*  
 Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*  
 Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*  
 Leanne Besamoke Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*  
 David Graeber, *Debt and Bullshit Jobs*  
 Tom Lutz, *Doing Nothing*  
 Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class*  
 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*  
 Sarah Jaffe, *Work Won’t Love You Back*  
 Sarah Ahmed, *Complaint!*  
 Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O’Rourke, *Transgender Marxism*  
 Christopher Chitty, *Sexual Hegemony: Statecraft, Sodomy, and Capital in the Rise of the World System*  
 Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*  
 Mark Bould and China Miéville (eds.), *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*  
 Ida Yoshinaga, Sean Guynes, and Gerry Canavan, *Uneven Futures: Strategies for Community Survival from Speculative Fiction*  
*Utopia: A Very Short Introduction*  
*Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction*  
*Marx: A Very Short Introduction*

For fiction recommendations, just ask!

## ENTRANCE SURVEY

NAME

ACADEMIC PROGRAM (ADP, MA, PhD, non-degree)

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTELLECTUAL INTEREST

CAREER AMBITION(S)

HOMETOWN / PLACE YOU CALL HOME

---

At a glance, which weeks do you feel like you might most wish to be discussion leader for?  
Are there texts you might supplement or substitute for the ones I've already listed?

Do you already have an inkling about what you might want to write about your final?  
Share it with me if you like!

Is there anything else you'd like me to know that could help make this class a success?