

English 98r: Junior Tutorial
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Office Hours: By appointment

21st-c. American Hybrids



Double-spread from Richard McGuire, *Here* (2014)

. . . Podcasts. Prose poems. Pixar. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Celebrated books nominated for both “poetry” and “criticism” by the same prize-givers. Concept albums, mash-ups, mixtapes. Mixed-race authors, fusing traditions. A novel by a poet about a novelist who writes poems. “Mockumentary” supplanting documentary. Parody joining the spectacle. “Genre-bending.” “Cli-fi.” “Autobifictionalography.” A labyrinth of a hip-hop album subtitled “A Short Film.” TV seasons binged like ten-hour-long movies. “The New Mestiza.” Spanglish. Sophisticated satire with horror-movie jump scares. *Lincoln in the Bardo*. Travel (and time-travel) writing. A 24-hour film. A five-minute video game in MoMA’s permanent collection. Twitter short stories, Instagram poems. A biographical musical blending 1770s eloquence with callbacks to 1990s hip-hop. A

mash-up history of nineteenth-century African American performers. Poetry that starts Western and ends cyberpunk. A graphic novel that holds space constant but spans three billion years . . .

What do the above texts, taken chiefly from the twentieth-first century (with some twentieth-century precursors), have in common? Not a single category but an approach to categories: to read them with a rigid sense of form, genre, tradition, identity, or media would be to subject them to serious distortions.

We could call them *hybrids*—to use a flexible, contested term that a variety of contemporary critics, from all across literary studies, are now taking up. For the critic Jahan Ramazani, the poetry of our globalizing, postcolonial age is written under *The Hybrid Muse*; for the anthologists David St. John and Cole Swensen, *American Hybrid* seems the right term for today’s fusions of centuries-old lyric tradition and avant-garde provocation. For first-generation authors, hybrid origins beget hybrid texts: “To be Caribbean,” Junot Díaz has said, “means that one is a member of the most mixed together, hybrid area in the world,” and so Caribbean novelists have “an invitation to use all the words, every part of history.” For other commentators, a “hybrid” text comes loaded with nefarious connotations: the Mongrel Coalition Against Gringpo awards an ironic “GOLD STAR FOR LOVING ‘HYBRID’ BOOKS. BY HYBRID EVERYTHING THAT IS HODGEPODGE WHITEWASHED DISEMBODIED OH SO CLEVER.” New media confuses our categories even further: according to cultural critic Alan Kirby, we have moved from postmodernism into *digimodernism* (short for “digital modernism,” with its digital technologies and interacting digits). We are in, Kirby announces, “the era of the hybrid or borderline text.”

This Junior Tutorial charts an idiosyncratic course through twenty-first-century American literature and culture: it does not try to sum up our ongoing century (what course ever could?). Across four units—one on defining our moment, one on genre-bending narratives, one on hybrid poetics, and one on digital forms—we will ask: Why does our century feature so many hybrids, hard-to-classify texts, novel and untried combinations? How can hybrid texts bridge traditions within an increasingly diverse, pluralist, combinatorial culture? How might different readers or communities classify the same text in different categories? How are hybrid texts particularly suited to document the present moment, flanking it from several angles? How do hybrids revisit and remix the literary past, or cobble together a sense of our future? Together, we will examine some very recent texts not only for their overwhelming breadth but for their unexplored depth; individually, we will develop our own research projects that situate these new, underserved texts within or between familiar critical categories.

GOALS

Your primary goal in this (and any other) Junior Tutorial is to guide you through cooking the entrée of the honors program, from prepwork to presentation: **a twenty-to-twenty-five-page research paper**. As in any Junior Tutorial, we will learn how to:

- Design a research question.
- Approach that question from diverse methods.
- Develop a critical bibliography around that question.
- Connect that question to secondary criticism.
- Articulate a clear, provocative, synthesizing argument.
- Pursue that argument in writing that sustains originality, precision, and consistency.

READINGS

Most of our primary texts are books. Read the entire book by our meeting. Come prepared with thoughts, questions, scribbles, etc. In the order we read them:

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)
Richard McGuire, *Here* (2014)*
Ben Lerner, *10:04* (2014)
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014)
Charles Burns, *Black Hole* (2005)
Valeria Luiselli, *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), trans. Christina MacSweeney
Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (2015)
Cathy Park Hong, *Engine Empire: Poems* (2012)
Tyehimba Jess, *Olio* (2016)

* This remarkable book takes only an hour or so to read: only buy or rent a copy if you want.

The common Junior Tutorial practice is *not* to order course books to any bookstore. You can buy (and often rent) our books, new or used, at the Coop, Harvard Book Store, the Grolier Poetry Book Shop, Raven Used Books, and Porter Square Books (to name only a few Cambridge bookstores). Also great: the internet.

Our other primary texts run the gamut from texts online to soundtracks, films to book excerpts—in order:

David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction”
(1993)
Timothy Donnelly, “Hymn to Life” (2014)
Christian Marclay, excerpt from *The Clock* (2010)
Jordan Peele, dir., *Get Out* (2017)*
Songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton* (2015)

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)
Poems from *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*, ed.
David St. John and Cole Swensen (2009)
Jennifer Egan, “Black Box” (2012)
Jason Rohrer, *Passage* (2007)
Andrew Stanton, dir., *WALL·E* (2008)*
Poetry on Instagram
Brian Read, *S-Town* (2017)
Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham, “We Go to S-Town,” *Still Processing*
(2017)
A yet-to-be-determined binge-able TV season, to be voted on by Week 11

* We’ll organize a screening, time and place TBA.

All our books and films are on reserve at Lamont: check Canvas for the whole list. Everything else—book chapters, articles, reviews, videos, songs, games—is available on our Canvas site, linked to, or will be handed out.

ASSIGNMENTS

For almost every meeting of this tutorial, you will hand in a piece of writing. This, like every Junior Tutorial, culminates with a **twenty-to-twenty-five-page research paper**, due during reading period. That may be longer than any paper you have yet written, or will ever write, as a Harvard undergraduate, so helping you along are some intermediary assignments (and deadlines): a **two-page prospectus plus annotated bibliography** (week 8), **two ungraded prove-you’ve-started-working excerpts** (the first due week 10, which can take the form of an outline; the second due week 11, which has to be prose), and a **rough draft** (week 12). (Those are the mandatory steps. You’re very welcome to turn in or meet about additional drafts, half-drafts, rambblings, etc.: be in touch with Chris.)

When you are not working on your research paper, you may be doing **short writing or research exercises**. You will also write one **1500-word short essay** on one of our early texts, due week 5.

To get you on your way with those assignments, plan to meet with Chris three times this semester (at a minimum):

- Week 1–2: Get-to-know-you meeting: talk about a short-essay topic.
- Week 6–7: Bring Junior Essay ideas: Chris can help you refine your topic.
- Week 12–13: Talk to Chris about what to do between rough draft and submission.

To enrich and expand our meetings, we’ll have a weekly responsibility: for every meeting we will have a presenter, whose duties are a) to give unobjectionable Wikipedia-shallow background on that week’s album, readings, and/or topic and b) to open up our discussion with a few minutes of thoughts on what surprised, what stood out, what didn’t square. No materials necessary for these presentations, though the following are nice:

1. a handout or email before the meeting with ideas or quotes to share;
2. photocopies of additional poems or readings;
3. books or physical objects to show and tell;
4. some sort of PowerPoint or pyrotechnic display;
5. careful coordination between your outfit and the text/topic/author under discussion.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation, attendance, presentations	20%
Short assignments	10%
Short paper	10%
Research paper	60% ¹
– Prospectus plus bibliography	– 10%
– Rough draft	– 10%
– Final submitted draft	– 40% ²

POLICIES

Submission. Submit everything through email: cspaide@g.harvard.edu. In many English courses, assignments are due in class, or the day of. The results, in my experience, are no good: students come to class having read the readings *or* worked the work *but* never both. So: all written assignments are due 48 hours before our tutorial meeting. Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade per day, except for the final paper, which (by departmental decree) must be turned in to the department by the due date. Students who fail to turn in a final paper will fail the tutorial.

Extensions. Up-to-three-day extensions may be granted in certain circumstances—ask before the day of. For extensions longer than two days, show Chris a note from HUHS or your dean. No extensions on the final submission.

Attendance. Your attendance is vital to the tutorial’s success, your own success, and my faith in the youth. So is your attendance in General Meetings. Everyone gets one “free” absence—no excuse necessary. Any subsequent absence decreases your participation grade. Excessive unexcused absence: you fail the course.

Disability accommodation. Students with disabilities are encouraged to request accommodation, as soon as is convenient, through Harvard’s [Accessible Education Office](#): “Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term Failure to do so may result in the Course Head’s inability

¹ I’m not a math student, but that’s over half of the course!

² You have to do it!

to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”

Gadgetry. Laptops and tablets are allowed for certain things: sharing music and videos, reading ebooks, taking notes, and looking up things. If you use them for social media or time-wasting, you will be noticed, and your participation grade will go down.

Academic honesty, collaboration, citation. Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit.³ Consequences of plagiarism can range from failing grades on assignments, to dismissal from the course, to even more serious actions. Here’s [The Harvard College Honor Code](#):

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

If you have questions about what constitutes proper collaboration, or about how to cite sources and peers, ask me.

³ Full disclosure: I copied-and-pasted this sentence from a syllabus written by Prof. Andrew Warren, who deserves a my gratitude and b. a proper citation. If you don’t yet know how to do b., ask me.

SCHEDULE (BUT DEFER TO [SCHEDULE, DELUXE ED.](#) ON CANVAS)

WEEK	READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
	<p>Unit 1: Where are we now?</p> <p>Questions: <i>What moment are we in? How might we describe it, in its own terms or relative to what came before (and what will come after)? What would a literary critic say? A climate scientist? A philosopher? A historian of race? Which twentieth-century categories still apply today? What was postmodernism, and what comes after it? How have current events and new technologies refashioned, or rendered obsolete, reliable forms and genres?</i></p> <p><i>First meeting scheduled in Google Form</i></p>
1	<p><i>Postmodernism (and post- it)</i> Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> (1985) Jean-François Lyotard, “Defining the Postmodern” (1986) [Canvas] David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” <i>The Review of Contemporary Fiction</i> 13, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 151–194 [original printing as PDF]; archived here as searchable text; collected in <i>A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments</i> (1997)] “Don DeLillo,” “Tiny Silver Death Machine: Election Coverage 2008,” <i>The Onion</i>, 26 September 2008 [online]</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter: Chris</i></p>
2	<p><i>Extinction and the end of the world</i> Timothy Donnelly, “Hymn to Life,” <i>Poetry</i> 204, no. 4 (July/August 2014): 320–331 [online]; PDF of entire issue on Canvas] Richard McGuire, <i>Here</i> (2014) [reserve at Lamont and Child] Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Sixth Extinction?,” <i>New Yorker</i>, 25 May 2009, 52–63 [online] Timothy Morton, excerpts from <i>Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World</i> (2013) [Project MUSE]</p> <p>Assignment: In around 500 words, classify “Hymn to Life” or <i>Here</i>. Can you relate it to more familiar or canonical texts? Can you build an equation that adds up to, or subtracts down to, one of these texts? What parts of your text conforms most closely to an expected form or genre; what part stands out as the most irregular?</p> <p>Meeting: Have your get-to-know-you meeting with Chris; come with ideas for your short essay (due week 5).</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter: _____</i></p>

WEEK	READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
TBA	General Meeting #1: “Tutorial Program Welcome and Overview”
3	<p><i>The Anthropocene</i> Ben Lerner, <i>10:04</i> (2014) Christian Marclay, excerpt from <i>The Clock</i> (2010) [YouTube] Roy Scranton, “Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene,” <i>New York Times</i> The Stone blog, 10 November 2013 [online] Tony Tulathimutte, “Why There’s No ‘Millennial’ Novel,” <i>New York Times</i>, 11 December 2016 [online]</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter:</i> _____</p>
4	<p><i>Race in the 21st century</i> Claudia Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> (2014) Claudia Rankine, excerpt from <i>Don’t Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric</i> (2004) [Canvas] Christopher Nealon, “Bubble and Crash: Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism,” in <i>The Matter of Capital: Poetry and Crisis in the American Century</i> (2011) [Canvas] Virginia Jackson’s definition of “lyric” in <i>The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics</i>, 4th ed., ed. Roland Green and Stephen Cushman (2012), 826–834 [Project MUSE]</p> <p>Assignment: In around 500 words, puzzle over <i>Citizen</i> as an example of “An American Lyric.” How do these texts, with the multitudes they contain, add up to one unified “American Lyric”? Where does that text deviate from standard definitions of “Lyric”? Or “American”?</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter:</i> _____</p>
TBA	General Meeting #2: “Introduction to Critical Methods”

Unit 2: Genre-bending fictions

Questions: *How do we define genres today? Who gets to decide? What does “genre” mean, variously, for authors, for critics, for reviewers, for publishers, for Amazon.com? What distinguishes “genre” from “literary” fiction, “popular” from “serious”? How do genres fuse or bend or break? To what extent is genre the imposition of readers or communities? How might our readings change if we approach texts with different genres in mind? How have authors of color repurposed different genres, and to what ends?*

WEEK	READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
5	<p><i>Social horror</i></p> <p>Charles Burns, <i>Black Hole</i> (2005) [reserve at Lamont and Child]</p> <p>Jordan Peele, dir., <i>Get Out</i> (2017) [screening TBA]</p> <p>Christopher Pizzino, “Rolling in the Gutter: Charles Burns,” in <i>Arresting Development: Comics at the Boundaries of Literature</i> (2016), 134–162 [Canvas]</p> <p>Assignment: Short essay (5–7 pages).</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter:</i> _____</p>
6	<p><i>Dickens + MP3 ÷ Balzac + JPEG</i></p> <p>Valeria Luiselli, <i>The Story of My Teeth</i> (2015), trans. Christina MacSweeney</p> <p>Dana Stevens and Leslie Jamison, “Do Genre Labels Matter Anymore?,” <i>New York Times Sunday Book Review</i>, 30 June 2015 [online]</p> <p>John J. Stuhr, “Genres, Hybrids, Crossings: Mixings, Samplings, Mash-Ups,” <i>The Journal of Speculative Philosophy</i> 29, no. 1 (2015): 4–15 [Project MUSE]</p> <p>Meeting: Meet with Chris about Junior Essay topics.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter:</i> _____</p>
TBA	General Meeting #3: “Seniors Tell All: Reflections on the Junior Essay”
7	<p><i>Restaging history</i></p> <p>Colson Whitehead, <i>The Underground Railroad</i> (2016)</p> <p>Songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda, <i>Hamilton</i> (2015) [links on Canvas]</p> <p>Salamishah Tillet, “Free Is and Free Ain’t,” <i>Public Books</i>, 10 February 2017 [online]</p> <p>Assignment: Research exercise: Choose a critical work or history that centers on a single form or genre or category: after spending an hour reading and skimming it, write up a 500-word Canvas post about what use that work might have for you or others. Be prepared to present, informally, your findings.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Presenter:</i> _____</p>

Unit 3: Hybrid poetics

Questions: *How have 21st-c. poets bridged different poetic traditions—lyric and anti-lyric, avant-garde and identity-based, American and postcolonial? How do the most acclaimed books of 21st-c. American poetry use prose? Quotation? Visual art? Book design? How do boundaries between genres or forms resemble boundaries between genders, races, nations? What arguments have been made in support, or defiance, of hybrid poetics?*

- 8 *Borderlands of identity*
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (2015)
Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness,*”
in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)
Assignment: Prospectus and annotated bibliography.

Presenter: _____

- 9 *Frontiers of empire*
Cathy Park Hong, *Engine Empire: Poems* (2012)
Jahan Ramazani, excerpts from *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English*
(2004)
Introduction and poems from *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*, ed. David St. John and Cole Swensen (2009)
“The Gold Star Awards... A message from The Mongrel Coalition Against Gringpo,” post on the Poetry Foundation Harriet blog, 2 April 2015
[[online](#)]

Presenter: _____

- 10 *Mash-up poetics*
Tyehimba Jess, *Olio* (2016)
Kevin Young, excerpts from *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*
(2012) [Canvas]
Selected mashups [links on Canvas]
Assignment: Excerpt 1: 3–5 double-spaced prose, 5–10 single-spaced outline.

Presenter: _____

Unit 4: Digital media and distribution

Questions: *How have new media, smartphones, social networking, Netflix, etc., reshaped familiar literary forms? Are any genres particularly suited to, or excluded from, new media? What are the new reading experiences of our time—binge-watching, skimming, swiping, scrolling, switching tabs? Which once-obsolete forms seem newly relevant in our current media environment—radio drama, serialized novels, editorial cartoons? How might new media help us reconsider our approaches to literary history, “old” media, and the edges of form and of genre?*

11 *Digimodernism*

Jennifer Egan, “Black Box,” *New Yorker*, 4 June 2012 [[online](#); also [serialized on Twitter](#); read about its serialization [on the New York Times Media Decoder blog](#)]

Jason Rohrer, *Passage* (2007) [[play online](#)]

Andrew Stanton, dir., *WALL·E* (2008) [screening TBA]

Poetry on Instagram [links on Canvas]

Alan Kirby, excerpts from *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (2013) [Canvas]

Assignment: Excerpt 2: 3–5 double-spaced prose.

Presenter: _____

12 *New New Journalism: Podcasts*

Brian Read, *S-Town* (2017) [[online](#)]

Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham, “We Go to S-Town,” episode of *Still Processing*, 13 April 2017 [[online](#)]

Ellen McCracken, ed., excerpts from *The Serial Podcast and Storytelling in the Digital Age* (2017) [Canvas]

Assignment: Rough draft: at least 15 pages, with a beginning, middle, and end.

Meeting: Set up a time to meet with Chris about what needs to happen between your rough draft and your final submission.

Presenter: _____

WEEK	READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS
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13	<p><i>Binging as reading, literature as media</i> [A binge-able season of a very recent TV show on Netflix, Amazon Prime, HBO, YouTube, etc., to be decided by Week 11] Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “This Faithful Machine,” <i>Paris Review</i> Daily blog post, 11 May 2016 [online] Caroline Levine, excerpts from <i>Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network</i> (2015) [Project MUSE] Meredith L. McGill and Andrew Parker, “The Future of the Literary Past,” <i>PMLA</i> 125, no. 4 (October 2010): 959–967 [JSTOR] Assignment: Optional meetings and additional drafts with Chris.</p>
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Presenter: Chris

Reading period	Day, time, place TBA: Extra-long all-hands-on-deck it’s-imminently-due office hours, room TBA.
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Day, time TBA: Final submission due to the department!

Day, time, place TBA: Conference.