



THE SEVENTIES

Instructor: Chris Schlegel

cbschlegel@gmail.com

Graduate student, Department of English, Harvard University

[Tuesdays, 11 am to 1 pm]

[Office hours: Tuesdays, 10 to 11 am]

Tutorial description

What were the Seventies? What were '70s novels, poems, non-fiction pieces, films, and theoretical texts like? What were their problems, motifs, preoccupations, and formal and generic conventions? What was their relationship to ideas about history, and to divisions between “avant-garde” and “popular” culture? How did artists and thinkers conceive of their practice during that time? In our semester together, we'll answer those questions using works in English, primarily but not exclusively American.

The Seventies help us understand 2017. Falling real wages ... rising income inequality ... financialization of the world economy ... fluctuation in petroleum markets ... many of our problems have their roots in the problems of that decade. Other historical phenomena—fears of collapse of industrial centers across the country; New York City's bankruptcy woes—are now modulated in discussions of gentrification, “young creative” habitation of mid-sized cities, privatization of public transit, charterization of public schools. And there is the specter of Watergate, *the* American political scandal of the Seventies—to which all ensuing Presidential scandals are compared.

We'll look at “the popular,” things like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Love Story*, and at “the avant-garde”—*Shamp of the City-Solo* and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. We'll consider representations of sexuality (*Falconer*), of the culture industry (*Play It as It Lays* and *The White Album*), of politics and fringe life (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*). We'll examine, each week, a critical text and/or companion piece shedding light on the primary artifact under review—a bit of a documentary, a movie write-up, an article from a scholarly journal, a philosophical or theoretical paper. **Most importantly, we'll read—over the course of the term—the entirety of Thomas Pynchon's 800-odd-page postmodern masterpiece, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).**

A note on the Pynchon. This tutorial is for *anyone* interested in developing as a writer and reader (see the “Goals” section below). You **need not** have read *Gravity's Rainbow* before class; you don't have to be a Pynchon specialist *in any way*. Our reading, from week to week, will be significant, and we'll talk during the first session about how we'll approach it. But fear not! Part of the course's experiment is this kind of semester-long engagement—which will help us draw out the political, social, generic, discursive, scientific, mathematical, military, and just-plain-batty resonances and allusions in the novel. It'll be fun!

Tutorial goals

All Harvard English Department Junior Tutorials share the following general goals. Students will:

- Design a research question
- Develop a critical bibliography around that question, incl. diverse methods and viewpoints
- Put secondary criticism in conversation with their own ideas and with other criticism
- Write with greater clarity and precision

THE SEVENTIES expands on these goals, and tailors them to its syllabus in the following ways. Students will also:

- Examine creative works together, to see how they describe an historical period (in this case, ten-or-so years toward the end of the twentieth century, roughly 1969 to 1980)
- Think about how genres develop as genres, and how they inform one another—how film explains novels, novels poems, poems methods of criticism, and so on
- Consider historical and political context in critical writing
- Complicate divisions between “avant-garde” and “pop” culture in the art of the Seventies
- Engage with a single, significant, “encyclopedic” work of fiction—*GR*
- Think about “postmodernism” as a category and descriptor—and about its manifestations and contradictions

Assignments and grading

- **Response 1** (due in Week 2; on *Gravity's Rainbow*; no grade)
- **Short Paper** (due in Week 4; close reading; more info TK): **15%**
- **Small Intro Talk** (on a critical text or companion; timing varies by student): **5%**
- **Prospectus + Annotated Bibliography** (due in Week 6): **10%**
- **Response 2** (due by Week 10 at the latest): **5%**
- **Full Draft of Semester Paper** (due in Week 13; required; no grade)
- **Conference Presentation** (Week 13): **5%**
- **Final Paper** (due at the end of Reading Period; **must** be completed on time to pass): **45%**
- **Participation + Preparation** (throughout): **15%**

Required texts

All required texts (unless otherwise noted) will be available at the Coop. I'm not a stickler for editions. I'll also place books on reserve at Lamont, and I encourage students to share copies if they'd like to cut down on expenses.

Fiction

- Angela Carter. *The Bloody Chamber*. 1979.
- John Cheever. *Falconer*. 1977.
- Joan Didion. *Play It as It Lays*. 1970.
- Jaimy Gordon. *Shamp of the City-Solo*. 1974.
- Alex Haley. *Roots*. 1976.

- Thomas Pynchon. *Gravity's Rainbow*. 1973. (All page listings below from the first-edition paperback.)
- Erich Segal. *Love Story*. 1970.

Poetry

- Lucille Clifton. *Two-Headed Woman*. 1980. (Available in digital edition)
- Lyn Hejinian. *My Life*. 1980.

Nonfiction + journalism

- Joan Didion. *The White Album*. 1979.
- Hunter S. Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. 1972.

Film (made available digitally and/ or via library reserves)

- John Cassavetes. *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. 1976.
- D. A. Pennebaker. *Town Bloody Hall*. 1971.
- Steven Spielberg. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. 1977.

Criticism + secondary sources (made available digitally)

- Roland Barthes. *The Pleasure of the Text*. 1973.
- Vincent Canby. "Cassavetes is director of bland effort." *The New York Times*. February 16, 1976.
- John Cheever, with Annette Grant. *The Art of Fiction*, No. 62. *The Paris Review*.
- Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. 1978.
- Joan Didion, with Linda Kuehl. *The Art of Fiction* No. 71. *The Paris Review*.
- Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. 1973.
- Fredric Jameson. "Periodizing the 60s." *Social Text*. No. 9/10. Spring/Summer 1984.
- Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. 1991.
- Charles R. Larson. "Why *Love Story*?" *Journal of Popular Culture*. Spring 1971.
- Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics*. 1970.
- Rick Moody. "Writers and Mentors." *The Atlantic*. Summer 2005.
- Richard Rorty. "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing." *New Literary History*. Vol. 10, No. 1. Autumn 1978.
- *The Seventies*. CNN documentary. 2015.
- David Thomson. Excerpts from introductory material on John Cassavetes. *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*. Sixth Edition.
- Robert Torry. "Politics and Parousia in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*." *Literature/Film Quarterly*. Vol. 19, No. 3. 1991.
- Michael Wood. "Rocketing to the Apocalypse." *The New York Review of Books*. March 22, 1973.

Schedule

Unit 1: Genre(s)

Week 1: Periodization

When we say “The Seventies,” what do we mean? How do historical periods, such as decades, differ? Why might they matter, as means of understanding historical events and aesthetic artifacts? How do novels help us to see historical periods?

GR: 3-60

Love Story.

Critical text (I): Fredric Jameson. Excerpts from the Introduction and Chapter 1 (“Culture”).

Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

Critical text (II): Fredric Jameson. “Periodizing the 60s.” *Social Text*. No. 9/10. Spring/Summer 1984.

Critical text (III) [skim]: Charles R. Larson. “Why *Love Story*?” *Journal of Popular Culture*. Spring 1971.

Week 2: Pleasure (and Pain)

*What kinds of pleasure does the reader encounter in *Falconer*? How do we make sense of these pleasures as they unfold in the novel?*

Response 1 due in class

Junior Tutorial Workshop 1 (more info TBA)

GR: 61-136

Falconer.

Biographical companion: John Cheever, with Annette Grant. *The Art of Fiction*, No. 62. *The Paris Review*.

Critical text: Roland Barthes. Excerpts from *The Pleasure of the Text*. 1973.

Week 3: The Culture Industry

What does Didion’s novel tell us about California life? About the film industry? How might we compare Didion’s style to that of Cheever and Segal?

Library visit (first half of class)

Conference with me, re: Short Paper idea

GR: 137-205

Play It as It Lays.

Biographical companion: Joan Didion, with Linda Kuehl. *The Art of Fiction* No. 71. *The Paris Review*.

Week 4: Fairy Tales

How does Carter repurpose “magical” storytelling? To what ends? Feminist? Otherwise political?

Junior Tutorial Workshop 2

Short Paper due

GR: 205-279

The Bloody Chamber.

Critical text (I): Rick Moody. "Writers and Mentors." *The Atlantic*. Summer 2005.

Critical text (II): Short excerpts from Kate Millett. *Sexual Politics*. 1970. (Reviewed in class)

Week 5: Poetry and Self-Writing

How do Hejinian and Clifton write "the self"? How do their methods differ?

One-on-one conference to discuss graded Short Paper (during the week)

GR: 281-392

My Life and Two-Headed Woman.

Critical text: Richard Rorty. "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing." *New Literary History*. Vol. 10, No. 1. Autumn 1978.

Unit 2: History and Politics

Week 6: Fact and Fiction

What does Haley describe, and how does he describe it? Does the "fictionality" of Roots matter?

Junior Tutorial Workshop 3

Prospectus + Annotated Bibliography due

GR: 392-468

Roots.

Excerpts from the TV adaptation. 1977.

Clifford Geertz. Chapter 1: "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. 1973.

Week 7: Fear and Loathing

How does Thompson make sense of the world around him? How does he "create" a world?

GR: 468-525

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

A/V companion: Excerpts from the film adaptation (1998)

Week 8: "Selling People Out"

What are Didion's methods of historical interpretation and cultural observation? How might we understand her work as participating in, and as a response to, feminist critiques of the period?

GR: 525-563

The White Album.

Town Bloody Hall.

Unit 3: "Popular culture" vs. "Avant-garde"

Week 9: Shamp

What does Gordon create in writing? What is this world? Can we recognize it? Does it exist "outside" its language?

Check-in conferences for Final Paper

GR: 563-610

Shamp of the City-Solo.

Critical text: Jacques Derrida. Short excerpts from *Writing and Difference*. (English edition: 1978).

Week 10: Cassavetes and "Realism"

How does Cassavetes play with crime tropes? What makes this movie "difficult," or "slow," or estranged and estranging?

GR: 610-640

The Killing of a Chinese Bookie.

Critical text (I): Vincent Canby. "Cassavetes is director of bland effort." *The New York Times*. February 16, 1976.

Critical text (II): David Thomson. Excerpts from introductory material on John Cassavetes. *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*. Sixth Edition.

Week 11: The Blockbuster

How does the Close Encounters satisfy our "blockbuster" expectations? How does it subvert them?

GR: 640-674

Close Encounters.

Robert Torry. "Politics and Parousia in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*." *Literature/Film Quarterly*. Vol. 19, No. 3. 1991.

Week 12: GR

In finishing Gravity's Rainbow, what can we say? About genre, history, and high/low divisions in the text? About the future of the novel?

GR: 674-end

Gravity's Rainbow wrap-up.

Critical text: Michael Wood. "Rocketing to the Apocalypse." *The New York Review of Books*. March 22, 1973.

Week 13

Conference presentations

Full draft of paper due

FINAL PAPER due on the last day of Reading Period.

Academic Honesty and Collaboration Policy: Please do not plagiarize, and please feel free to collaborate on certain projects. I will elaborate what I mean by each. Plagiarism, as Louis Menand once told a class of mine, is a failure of citation; it is inclusion of material *without attribution*. Make sure you can chart where ideas come from. Be clear about this. If you take exact words from a source, put them in quotation marks and name the source. If you paraphrase, don't use quotations marks—this indicates the paraphrase—and name your source. If the idea is yours, it will sparkle all the more in the matrix of properly attributed other ideas. Collaboration is wonderful, and I encourage it throughout the course on the level of conversation—please do talk to your classmates about assignments. All written work, however, is to be your own. If you get an idea from your classmate and paraphrase or quote it in a paper, see directions above.

These rules aren't meant to be scary; they should help you navigate the waters of academic writing. And, for the record, this conception of plagiarism is itself a recapitulation of ideas Louis Menand long ago shared with a class at Harvard—indicating just how useful attribution can be.

Here is Harvard FAS's 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.”*

Attendance: Please come to class; please be on time for class. Participate as much as possible. If you have a certifiable excuse (illness; family emergency) with documentation, you can of course miss a session. Otherwise, I expect you to be present. An unexcused absence will lower your participation grade, and three unexcused absences will cause you to fail the tutorial. Two late arrivals are the equivalent of a missed class.

Due Dates & Late Grades: **All assignments are to be emailed to me by 5 pm on their due date.** Late assignments will lose **one third of a letter grade per day**, as determined by the instructor. Final papers will not be accepted late; a late final paper without an excuse will result in failure of the tutorial. As a rule, I give extensions only for documented illnesses and family emergencies. Please ask if you have any questions about these policies!

Email: I'll pass around an email list on the first day; that's how we'll communicate during the tutorial, as it's easier than Canvas for a small course. I can be reached at my Gmail (cbschlegel@gmail.com) and Harvard email (cschlegel@g.harvard.edu). Note that my Harvard email does *not* contain my middle initial, “b.” I have a 48-hour email policy; that is, I respond to all student emails within two days of receipt. If you've messaged me and haven't got a response in that window, feel free to message again.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: *“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, (Friday, September 1). Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”*