

## The Literary Ensemble: Form, Sociality, Politics

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Office Hours: TBD

### Tutorial Description:

Ensembles are everywhere in fiction—from novels bursting with minor characters, to films featuring vast constellations of interconnected characters, to musicals with chorus lines, to long-running TV shows with “revolving door” casts. But what exactly is an ensemble? Does the intuition that a work features an ensemble arise automatically once a cast hits a certain size? Or are there further criteria—related to *how* characters are connected, or to the narrative role of their numerosness—that must be met for the “feel” of an ensemble to kick in? This tutorial sets out to answer these questions. By studying an array of works with large casts of characters, we will develop a working theory of the literary ensemble that accounts for its deep historical roots and broad contemporary purchase. Our authors will range from canonical figures, like Chekhov, whose ensemble dramas were ahead of his time, to modern reinterpreters of the socially sprawling nineteenth-century novel, like Zadie Smith. We will consider how the media where ensembles are most commonly found—the novel, drama, film, TV—pave the way for different types of ensemble stories. We will ask why certain settings and social units are mainstays of ensemble literature, regardless of medium or time period. We will interrogate the label “ensemble,” asking how the term holds up in the face of potentially conflicting elements, such as the presence of a clear protagonist. Finally, we will reckon with the inherently political nature of literary ensembles. Who can be bonded to whom in a character network, and who gets to take up what Alex Woloch calls “character space,” are matters that have always been shaped by the social regimes in which characters (and their authors) are enmeshed. With help from postcolonial, materialist, and feminist criticism—and formalist criticism that reveals how form no less than content can be ideologically charged—we will query ensembles not just as literary phenomena, but as keys for understanding the social realities that they inevitably reflect.

### Tutorial Goals:

The main goal of this tutorial is to prepare you to write an advanced work of literary criticism: your junior paper. You will finetune your literary analytical skills by closely and carefully engaging with our primary and secondary sources. You will learn new strategies for seeking out existing literary criticism, and for putting these sources into conversation with your own ideas. You will also learn new strategies for translating your ideas into scholarly writing that is clear, concise, and well-organized (the more complex your ideas become, the harder good writing is to achieve!).

In this tutorial, we will also pursue objectives specific to our subject matter. You will acquire a sophisticated grasp of the different forms and affordances of literary ensembles, and of the relationship of ensembles to different literary genres. You will gain an understanding of the imbrication of literary ensembles with sociopolitical concerns, and of how we can use fictional ensembles to better understand the dynamics and the impacts of real-life groups and networks.

**Assignments:**

1. **Preparation and participation.** Your thoughtful and regular participation in our tutorial discussion *every week* will be vital to the success of our course. [Grade percentage: 20%]
  - a. **Due weekly: Three thoughtful questions about the readings of the week,** posted to a shared course Google Doc at least three hours before class. (Across your questions, you must pose questions relevant to all or all but one of the week's readings.) [Factored into your participation grade]
  - b. **Due week 10: Tutorial workshop.** Each of you will provide thoughtful feedback about whatever material a fellow tutorial member has produced so far for their junior paper. [Factored into your participation grade]
2. **Due week 5: Five-page close-reading paper.** This paper will analyze one passage (or, with my approval, one narrow theme) from a primary course text. If you so choose, you *may* support your argument using one or two (no more!) secondary sources. [10%]
3. **Due week 8: Two-page prospectus and annotated bibliography for your junior paper.** Your prospectus will summarize the topic and intended argument of your junior paper. Your annotated bibliography will list 8-10 sources that you intend to use for your junior paper. Each source in your bibliography should be accompanied by a few sentences explaining the potential relevance of the source to your paper. [15%]
4. **Due week 11: 10 pages of your junior paper draft** [Ungraded; failure to turn in these pages will be reflected in your participation grade]
5. **Due week 12: Draft (at least 15 pages) of your junior paper,** to be returned with comments by the end of week 13. [15%]
6. **Date TBD: Five-minute presentation on your junior paper** delivered at the Junior Tutorial Conference. [Ungraded; failure to participate will be reflected in your participation grade]
7. **Reading period: Your junior paper!** A 20-25 page research paper on a topic relevant to our course. [40%]

All writing assignments should be double-spaced and written in size 12 font. Apart from the three weekly questions and the feedback you provide each other for the tutorial workshop, **assignments should be submitted to me by email by 11:59PM on the due date.**

**Required Texts:**

- \*Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (1853) ISBN: 978-0199558308
- Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) ISBN: 978-0061711299
- James Kirkwood, Nicholas Dante, Edward Kleban, *A Chorus Line* (1975)  
ISBN: 978-1557833648
- María Irene Fornés, *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) ISBN: 978-1555541637
- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000) ISBN: 978-0375703867
- Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, *An Octoroon* (2014) ISBN: 978-1559364904

The starred texts are available for free through Project Gutenberg. All of our texts are on reserve at the library. If you choose to purchase our required texts, please try to obtain the editions indicated above. All course texts not listed above will be provided to you electronically.

**Schedule:**

Week 1: Multiplicity

Primary Reading

- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Ch. 1-8)

Secondary Reading

- Caroline Levine, “Network” in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015)
- Alex Woloch, excerpt from “Introduction” in *The One versus the Many* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998) (pp. 12-30 are required; I encourage you to read the rest of the introduction if you have time)

Week 2: Heterogeneity

Primary Reading

- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Ch. 9-15)

Secondary Reading

- Leela Gandhi, “Introduction: Affective Communities” in *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006)
- Hannah Kershaw, “Remembering the Indian Mutiny: Colonial nostalgia in Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 57.6: 868-881.

Week 3: Profundity?

Primary Reading

- Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (Ch. 16-end)

Secondary Reading

- Hilary P. Dannenberg, “A Poetics of Coincidence in Narrative Fiction,” *Poetics Today* 25.3 (2004): 399-436.
- James Wood, “Human, All Too Inhuman” (Review of *White Teeth* in *The New Republic*, July 24, 2000)

Week 4: Sharing

Primary Reading

- Maria Irene Fornés, *Fefu and her Friends*

Secondary Reading

- Piper Murray, “‘They are well together. Women are not’: Productive Ambivalence and Female Hom(m)osociality in *Fefu and Her Friends*,” *Modern Drama* 44.4 (2001): 398-415.
- Aristotle, *Poetics* (parts I to XV)

Week 5: Free week // Library visit

**Short Paper Due [DATE]**

Week 6: Caring

Primary Reading

- Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*

#### Secondary Reading

- Natalya Bekhta, “We-Narratives: The Distinctiveness of Collective Narration,” *Narrative* 25.2 (2017): 164-181.
- Talia Schaffer, excerpt (pp. 1-23) from “Introduction” in *Communities of Care: The Social Ethics of Victorian Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2021)

#### Week 7: Moving Together

##### Primary Reading

- James Kirkwood, Nicholas Dante, Edward Kleban, *A Chorus Line* (read the script and [listen to the original cast album](#))

##### Secondary Reading

- Scott McMillin, excerpts from “The Ensemble Effect” and “The Drama of Numbers” in *The Musical as Drama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014)
- Christin Essin, “Unseen Labor and Backstage Choreographies: A Materialist Production History of *A Chorus Line*,” *Theater Journal* 67 (2015): 197-212

#### **Required meeting with me to discuss your ideas for your junior paper**

#### Week 8: Working Together

##### Primary Reading

- Brent Forrester et al, “The Office,” Season 3, Episode 8: “The Merger” (2006) [**view on Canvas**]
- David Simon et al, “The Wire,” Season 1, Episode 1: “The Target” (2002) [**view on Canvas**]

##### Secondary Reading

- Erving Goffman, excerpts from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1959) (“Preface,” “Teams”)
- [Arun Sundararajan, “The Strength of Weak Ties”](#) [YouTube video]

#### **Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography Due [DATE]**

#### Week 9: Time

##### Primary Reading

- Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Ch. 1-3)

##### Secondary Reading

- Gérard Genette, excerpts from “Order” in *Narrative Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980) (pp. 33-52, 67-79; I encourage you to read the whole chapter if you have time)
- One of two sample junior papers from past years (half of you will read one, half of you will read the other). **We will spend the last 45 minutes of class “reverse outlining” these papers**, pinning down what makes them successful on the level of structure and organization.

#### Week 10: Peril

##### Primary Reading

- Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Ch. 4-6)

Secondary Reading

- Judy Suh, “The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.2 (2007): 86-102.

**Tutorial Workshop.** You will spend the last 45 minutes of class sharing feedback with your workshop partner. [No later than two days before class, send your workshop partner all of the material that you wish to receive feedback on. At a minimum you should send them your prospectus and annotated bibliography. I highly recommend that you also send them whatever writing or outlining you have done by this point, however sketchy!]

Week 11: History

Primary Reading

- Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, *An Octoroon*

Secondary Reading

- Verna A. Foster, “Meta-Melodrama: Branden Jacobs-Jenkins Appropriates Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon*,” *Modern Drama* 59.3 (2016): 285-305.
- Martin Puchner, excerpt from the introduction to Bertolt Brecht in *The Norton Anthology of Drama, Vol. 2* (2013)

**10 Pages of Draft Due [DATE] // Required meeting with me to discuss your draft so far**

Week 12: Alone, Together

Primary Reading

- Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard* [PDF on Canvas]

Secondary Reading

- Peter Szondi, excerpt from *Theory of the Modern Drama* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)
- Raymond Williams, “Anton Chekhov” in *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London, UK: Hogarth, 1987)

**Junior Paper Draft Due [DATE]**

Week 13: Together Forever <3

Primary Reading

- Richard Curtis et al, *Love, Actually* (2003) [film; view on Canvas]

Secondary Reading

- None!

*If there is interest in watching a different ensemble film this week, let me know, and we can consider swapping it in.*

**Junior Tutorial Conference Presentation Date TBD**

**Junior Paper Due [DATE]**

## Course Policies:

### Absences and Late Days

If you need to be absent from class, please email me as soon as possible letting me know that you will be absent and explaining why. All unexcused absences will affect your participation grade.

**You are entitled to three free late days on assignments.** You may use your late days on any assignment(s) you like **except for your junior paper.** You must turn in your junior paper in on time; if you turn in your junior paper late without an official excuse, you may fail the tutorial.

You may distribute your free late days across your other assignments however you would like. For example, you may turn in your short paper one day late, your prospectus one day late, and your junior paper draft one day late, and you will not be penalized for lateness on any of these assignments.

**After you have used your free late days, all late assignments are subject to a penalty of half a letter grade per day.** For example, if you turn in an assignment one day late after using up all your late days, and you would otherwise have received an A, you will receive a grade of A/A- (one half a letter grade = half the gap between the usual letter grades).

### Class Conduct

It is vital that our course be a place where everyone feels comfortable and respected. Please be thoughtful, generous, and open-minded, and please do not hesitate to come talk to me if there is anything about our course that concerns you.

### Getting in Touch

You can contact me by email at [eadler@g.harvard.edu](mailto:eadler@g.harvard.edu) or come to my office hours. If you email me during the workweek, you can expect a response within 24 hours. If you email me over the weekend, you can expect a response by Monday.

I am happy to answer logistical questions and other questions requiring a brief answer over email. However, I will not discuss assignments or other aspects of the course in depth over email. For conversations of this nature, please come to my office hours or schedule a meeting.

### Office Hours/Required Meetings

Please come meet with me during my office hours! I will hold these weekly, in my office (Barker 075), from [time] on [day]. Office hours can be used to discuss assignments, course texts, and anything else related to our course that interests you.

If you are unable to meet during my office hours, let me know and we will find another time. Keep in mind that if we are close to a deadline, several students may be trying to meet with me, and it may be harder to find a time.

Over the course of the semester, you will also have **three required meetings with me**: an introductory meeting at some point during the first four weeks of the semester; a meeting during Week 7 to discuss your ideas for your junior paper; and a meeting during Week 11 to discuss your progress on your junior paper draft.

I encourage you to meet with me many more times! Especially once we get into the paper drafting process.

### Canvas Site

Please familiarize yourself with our course Canvas site, which you will use to access course readings and recordings.

### Academic Integrity and Collaboration

Please see the College's Academic Integrity Policy for guidelines regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity. You are responsible for abiding by this policy in all of your work for this class. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions about the policy, or related matters.

You are welcome—indeed, encouraged—to discuss your work with your fellow students, and to provide feedback on each other's work. However, if you use an idea from a fellow student, or anyone else you've spoken to, in your work, **you must cite them** as you would any other secondary source.

### Accessibility

If you require accommodations for a disability, please submit your accommodation letters as close as possible to the start of term. If you are not registered with the Disability Access Office, you can contact them at 617-496-8707, or visit their offices on the fourth floor of the Smith Campus Center.