

THE ENGLISH AGGIE

September 2024

Hyperbole Bookstore | Special Topics Courses | UPREP | Science Fiction and Fantasy



An Interview with Hyperbole



Kalena and Kathy Miller are both mother and daughter and co-owners of College Station's Hyperbole Bookstore. This haven for any book lover is located in Southern College Station, and contains every genre you can imagine. I had the opportunity to interview the owners regarding their experiences owning a bookstore and being avid readers themselves.

Before opening Hyperbole, "Kalena was in school and Kathy was on the faculty at Texas A&M." They noticed the lack of an independent

bookstore in College Station, and took the leap; leaving their careers in academia and publishing in Minnesota, and returning to the hot humidity of Texas.

After opening they were surprised by "the sheer number of fantasy readers in the community." This has caused them to hold launch parties catered towards their fantasy-lovers of all ages. After visiting myself, I can attest that they have an incredible fantasy section ranging from Sarah J. Maas to Tolkien.

"[E]vents like new release parties for popular titles [are] super fun, and we love being a place where people come looking for the next hot fantasy title."

They claim the most important aspect of owning a bookstore is having an immense knowledge of literature and pop culture. Their current favorites include *Frozen River* by Ariel Lawhon, *Martyr!* By Kaveh Akbar, *James* by Percival Everett, *The Ending Fire* trilogy by Saara El-Arifi, *The Will of the Many* by James Islington, and *A Fate Inked in Blood* by Danielle L. Jensen. They stress the importance of "actively reading new and popular titles" to ensure good recommendations. When recommending a book to a customer, they emphasize "[w]e try to avoid the general 'what do you like to read' because the answer is often

'everything.'" It depends greatly on the age group and their previous interests. "Being able to handsell titles, make smart choices, and stay current on reading trends is so important to the job." But, most importantly, Kathy and Kalena have fostered a passionate community of readers through their love of literature at Hyperbole.

If you're interested in finding your next great read I would wholly recommend visiting Hyperbole. They have an excellent selection of both new and used books—you're sure to find whatever you're craving! Keep an eye on their social media for any exciting events they might be holding.



SPECIAL TOPICS COURSES

ENGL 303: Approaches to English Studies

Everyday Horrors: Literature of Fear, Anxiety, and Dread Then and Now

Dr. James Francis

The science fiction-horror text is no stranger to literary criticism; in its written and visual forms, scholars have unpacked the ways in which the hybrid genre often tackles and represents shared sociocultural—including religious, political, and economic—terrors and apprehensions through thematic, symbolic, and metaphorical story elements. When we examine a specific time period and the sci-fi horror narratives produced during that era, we discover that the texts serve as historical time markers, responding to global concerns that link our transnational humanity and perspectives in remarkable ways. From early written works to the 1950s-1970s heyday period of sci-fi horror film texts (mostly adaptations), examining narratives from this time span will allow us to consider how past anxieties transition into fears of the early 21st Century zeitgeist. As an introduction to the English major, we will engage with various types of narrative forms (poem, short story, novel, fiction film, television) that confront science and horror as natural aspects of everyday living and genres (separate and combined) that fascinate us and therein develop strategies for reading, interpreting, researching, and writing about the narratives to gain a communal understanding of representative concepts in literature, rhetoric, and creative writing.

Gaming Literature

Dr. Regina Mills

This course explores games as a literary category and examines how we make games out of literature. We will look at how games make narratives through story and design. From fan fiction, in which readers of literature play with the literature they adore, to tabletop and online role-playing games, in which a gamemaster or game developer builds worlds and players characterize their created personas (avatars) through actions and dialogue, games of all kinds use and play with the conventions of literature. “Gaming Literature” is about seeing games as literature and viewing literary studies as a field of exploration and experimentation. This course provides a robust introduction to the major, showing students the many avenues of research available to English majors. From “literary studies” methods like close reading, area studies approaches such as Black studies and Latinx studies, queer studies, feminist studies, cultural studies (with a focus on pop culture and even folklore approaches), digital humanities, creative writing, rhetoric, film studies and the study of visual culture. There will be guest lectures from game developers and scholars across the country (via Zoom) who will introduce you to a variety of ways to approach games and other literary productions. This is a portfolio-based course, meaning that students’ final grades depend heavily on their ability to reflect on feedback, learn from failure (just like you do in Mario when you fall into a pit or hit a Goomba over and over), and revise their work. Students will also create their own game (digital or analog) - a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure that will test their ability to use worldbuilding, characterization, and storytelling tools. Students will be required to complete traditional, academic reading (short stories, novels, academic articles and chapters, etc.) but also play games with strong narrative or character-focus, including table-top games, video games, and card games. Students in this class should be curious, open to trying new things, and willing to learn from and with each other. There will be no assumption that students are “gamers” or have ever played a game before. Dr. Mills will provide resources and guidance, so whether you’re a newbie to games or a life-long lover of games, this class is for you!

The School Novel

Dr. Mary-Ann O’Farrell

This class is an introduction to English studies organized around a topic (school fiction), a process (thinking self-consciously about what we do when we read, discuss, and write about literature and other kinds of texts), and a set of practicalities (issues involved in being an informed English major at Texas A&M). The hothouse, small world nature of school has made it an appealing setting for fiction interested in exploring issues related to learning and to coming into identity: vulnerability and exposure, exclusion and belonging, the thrill of knowing and the painful surprise of not knowing, and the discovery that one has a relation to personal and to institutional forms of power. This section of English 303 will explore the riches of literary and visual works focused on the experience of school.

ENGL 395: Premodern Medicines

Dr. Whitney Sperrazza

This course explores the history of medicine through the lens of literary texts written during the early British empire (1550-1750). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, plants, animals, insects, and human bodies were transported across the Atlantic as part of England's colonial project. The period's poetry, prose, and drama functioned as both a space to investigate completely new things and a space to test interactions between new and old things. What is this new plant and how do we test its effect on the human body? How might new medicinal knowledge challenge or expand old ways of practicing medicine? In this class, we'll study medicinal recipe books, travelogues, and botanical treatises alongside more traditional literary texts in order to better understand how the history of medicine shaped and was shaped by the literary market.

ENGL 434: Advanced Science Fiction and Fantasy

The Ages of Middle Earth: J.R.R. Tolkien's Great Myth

Dr. Elizabeth Robinson

Speaking of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, J. R. R. Tolkien writes: "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought . . . nothing English" (Letters 144). Thus, he began to create "a body of more or less connected legend" (*The Silmarillion*), followed by *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which ends Tolkien's mythic cycle about Middle-earth. While Tolkien created this mythic cycle partly to create an English mythos, it is also "fundamentally a religious and Catholic work" in which "the religious element is absorbed into the story and symbolism" (Letters 172). This course analyzes the seminal tales of Tolkien's Middle-earth, his "English" myth. It explores topics including the nature of heroes/heroism, good and evil, the created races (Elves, Dwarves, Men etc.), the supernatural and the ways in which the Christian myth "is absorbed" in the larger myth, significant themes, and the roles of women. The course draws upon relevant scholarship, and is informed by consistent reference to Tolkien's letters, his essay, "On Fairy-Stories," and his poem, "Mythopoeia."

ENGL 435: Advanced Studies in Creative Writing

Long-Form Fiction

Dr. Jason Harris

This course will focus on strategies for composing and revising long form fiction: novels and novellas. Students will read several novels and novellas in addition to participating in workshops where they share and give feedback on sections from their own long-form fiction. A revised draft of a significant portion of a novel or novella will be required at the end of the semester.

ENGL 474: Studies in Women's Writers

Politics and Art in Novels by Women, 1800-2020

Dr. Laura Mandell

Based in Feminist and psychological theories, this course explores the relationship between politics and great art in women's writing. We will be examining in novels written by women from 1813 to 2023 the problem of "Othering," which is to say, projecting onto others -- usually those who are oppressed in some way -- all the qualities, capacities, and actions that one hates about human beings. In *The Second Sex* (1949, trans. 1953), Simone de Beauvoir argued that woman is seen as "the Other" by men and even by themselves. Later, the concept as derived from Jean-Paul Sartre was taken up by the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan whose work was popularized by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose in their edition of essays by Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (1982). We have come to recognize "othering" people, whether idealizing or demonizing them (usually both) as instrumental in racism, classism, and imperialism, from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's groundbreaking essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984). The academy tends to discount the aesthetic value of political writing, seeing it as "bad art." Here, we are going to examine efforts by women novelists to expose oppression and its baneful political effects, testing the notion proposed by Jeanette Winterson in *Art Objects* that works objecting to Western culture's process of othering those who are different just is great art.

Beowulf's Afterlives

Dr. Britt Mize

This course will consider the immense variety of adaptations, versions, and reimaginings of Beowulf that have appeared from the 19th through the 21st centuries. Our collective and individual engagements with these materials will be guided by questions about the nature, definition, and limits of adaptation as a mode of creation. Related to adaptation, but at times discrete from it, is the issue of appropriation and repurposing, and we will consider what the uses (personal, ideological, institutional) of Beowulf have been in specific modern moments. The bulk of the course's subject matter will comprise selections from the many inventive redactions of Beowulf. These include works of belletristic and mainstream fiction as well as sci-fi, fantasy, and detective novels; comic book series and graphic novels; films and television productions; children's books; continuations and sequels; live retellings or recitals; musical settings (including rock songs, a bluegrass musical, and a full opera); stage plays; parodies; and board and video games. We will consider, also, other appropriations of Beowulf's perceived value, such as attempts by religious groups to invoke Beowulf's authority in support of their belief systems, and intellectual and propagandistic assertions of its relevance to real wars.

Consumerism and American Culture

Dr. Sally Robinson

From at least the middle of the 19th century, American culture has been attempting to come to terms with the ever-increasing dominance of consumerism in all aspects of life. Literature, film, and a wide range of nonfiction writing has represented, criticized, made fun of, and celebrated the forms and practices of consumer culture. Whether the topic is profligate shopping, reality television, advertising, brand activism, food trends, neoliberalism and the "marketization" of everything, commercialized religion, or the "Disneyfication" of literature and history, representations of consumerism always raise questions about cultural value. In this class, we will read fiction and nonfiction and view films that actively engage in questions about the meanings of consumerism. Some attack consumerism as "fake;" some celebrate it as empowering; some rely on gender and class stereotypes to categorize "high" versus "low" culture; some imagine consumer culture as a vast conspiracy aiming to control individuals; and some worry about what kind of people consumer culture makes us. Throughout the course, we will challenge common-sense ideas about the meanings of consumerism, with the goal of arriving at a more complex picture of how culture and commerce, art and commodities, interact with and influence each other; and how writers and filmmakers have created narratives to respond to the threats and promises of consumer culture.

Law and Literature

Dr. Mike Collins

Crime, detection, trial, punishment, rehabilitation, parole: This is the familiar cycle of justice in the United States and many other nations. The whole of this cycle, as well as the legal and theoretical frameworks in which the cycle unfolds, is the subject matter of the interdisciplinary subfield of literary criticism and legal studies that is known as "Law and Literature." As a way of introducing "Law and Literature," and its subfield "Law as Literature" (which investigates the literary aspects of judicial opinions and other legal texts), this class will explore works that represent, theorize, or critique all or part of this cycle as the authors explore the intricacies of injustice and its opposite. At a larger level, this class will explore the impact of legal systems on societies like that of the United States. Although the list of texts to be read has not been finalized, previous versions of this class have focused on texts by authors such as fiction writers Louise Erdrich and Walter Mosley and nonfiction writer Sarah Weddington, one of the lawyers who brought the case of *Roe v. Wade* to the Supreme Court.

The Rhetoric of Space Travel

Dr. Joshua DiCaglio

This course takes the Space Race as a central moment that we can use for advanced study of rhetoric and literature. The amount of attention, effort, and narratives generated for and by this transformation make the Space Race an excellent case study in how and why we need more careful and extensive understanding of language and culture. In this course we will look at the rhetoric around space in order to reopen these political, personal, and social questions as they manifested in the 1960s, as well as their legacy for today. We will consider some of the cultural and rhetorical artifacts that set the stage for thinking about space then spend some time looking at the media events and reactions of the actual Space Race, both in their original form and in more recent representations of them. We will then turn to reflections on the value of Space travel, which will lead us to the current rhetoric around NASA, the trip to Mars, and space photographs

UPREP Projects

Gaming Latinidad: Representation, Narrative, and Experimentation in Latinx Games

Dr. Regina Mills

Curricular Possibilities in Technical and Professional Communication

Dr. Michaela Baca

XML Encoding and Correcting Ingestion Errors for the New Variorum Shakespeare

Dr. Kris May

Creative Writing: Communication, Research and Promotion

Dr. Jason Harris

A Digital Variant Edition of Countee Cullen's "Heritage" (1925)

Dr. Ira Dworkin

Collation Tool Development and Transcription for the New Variorum Shakespeare

Dr. Dorothy Todd

English 203 OER, Literature in the Public Domain, and Writing About Literature

Dr. Claire Carly-Miles

Beowulf's Afterlives Bibliographic Database

Dr. Britt Mize

Apply here 



By Nov. 8th

Science Fiction and *Fantasy*

Creative Writing Contest

Open to all enrolled Texas A&M undergraduate students.

Submit any form of Speculative fiction

Winners will have the chance to win cash prizes and perform their pieces at a public reading!

Submit up to 3000 words by **February 10th, 2025**

<https://forms.gle/BcS5etyFAWas3XHAA>



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