

English 624-902-902: *The New Yorker* (Graduate Seminar)

Spring 2021: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:00-5:15

Professor Bryant Mangum (307 Anderson House; 828-1255; bmangum@vcu.edu)

I. Book List

A. Required Texts:

1. Each weekly issue of *The New Yorker* (beginning with the issue for the second week and continuing through the final week of class). I think the best way to get this (and the one that gives you weekly access to the digital edition of the magazine and the digital archives) is to go to <http://www.newyorker.com/>, click on Subscription Services (at the bottom of the page), and order a year's subscription with a credit card, at the same time creating a *New Yorker* account. As soon as you do this you will be given a password that allows you to access the current issue as well as the digital archives.
2. *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made* by Ben Yagoda
3. "Anthology" of *New Yorker* fiction and poetry: Online through **Blackboard**; "Anthology" only indicates a group of *New Yorker* stories that we will read and discuss in class and that I will upload to Blackboard. Details to be announced.

B. Background and Reserve Texts (most available through at the Reserve Shelf of the library or on loan from a shelf in my office):

Adler, Renata	<i>Gone: The Last Days of The New Yorker</i>
Corey, Mary.	<i>The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury.</i>
*Gill, Brendan	<i>Here at the New Yorker</i>
Grant, Jane	<i>Ross, The New Yorker and Me</i>
Kahn, E.J., Jr.	<i>About The New Yorker and Me</i>
Kramer, Dale	<i>Ross and The New Yorker</i>
* Kunkel, Thomas	<i>Genius in Disguise: Harold Ross of The New Yorker</i>
Ross, Harold.	<i>Letters from the Editor: The New Yorker's Harold Ross</i>
Ross, Lillian.	<i>Here But Not Here</i>
Mehta, Ved.	<i>Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker</i>
Thurber, James	<i>The Years With Ross</i>

Check our "Reserves" link through the library web page for additional texts.

C. Suggested Text:

Strunk and White *The Elements of Style*

II. Course Description and Objectives

The *New Yorker* short story probably “causes more debate, and results in more distemper, than anything else about the magazine,” observes Dale Kramer in *Ross and The New Yorker*. In this seminar we will read and discuss early *New Yorker* stories as well as every story that appears in the magazine during the semester. We will attempt to determine if there is such a thing as “a *New Yorker* story” and if it makes sense to talk about *The New Yorker* School of Fiction, particularly in light of changes in the magazine after the Harold Ross and William Shawn eras of the 1920s through the 1980s. We will also examine historical details about the magazine, including the editorial principles upon which Ross founded it in 1925 and the degree to which Shawn carried Ross's vision into the 1980's. While we will focus sharply on *The New Yorker* of Ross and Shawn, the “old” *New Yorker*, we will at the same time be looking at the “new” *New Yorker*, the magazine that has evolved since Shawn's departure in 1987—*The New Yorker* of editors William Gottlieb, Tina Brown, and now David Remnick. There will be two short papers, two seminar reports, and an end-of-term paper with annotated bibliography.

III. Assignments

- A. Assigned readings, including short stories, poems, and background readings. Participation in seminar discussions of readings and, perhaps, occasional Blackboard postings. **10% of course grade.**
- B. 10-minute seminar report—historical and anecdotal—and paper which grows out of it. **15% of course grade** (5% for the presentation, 10% for the 3-5-page page written paper that follows). You will write a paper drawn from your work on the topic. The paper is due two weeks after you have given your oral report and will include a list of works consulted.
- C. Bibliography for your author (primary and secondary) and Prefatory Note explaining your process. **15% of grade.** (Parameters of bibliography will follow.)
- D. A 15-minute oral report on your work in progress as your research develops on the author you have chosen (for C above and for your final paper). This report will introduce members of the seminar to your author (to important biographical details and to such things as his or her style and subject matter). Your talk will conclude with your leading the class in a discussion of one of the stories (or poems) by your author—one that all members of the class will have read prior to your presentation. The material you discover in your research for this report will likely become the foundation for your long, end-of-term paper. **10% of course grade** (5% for presentation of research; 5% for leading of discussion of story).
- E. A 3-5-page paper growing out of your report. This paper will be a thesis-driven paper growing out of your research for the seminar report above and centering on one story by your author (possibly the story we discussed in class, though possibly not). The paper will contain a bibliography of relevant sources. **15% of course grade.**

F. Final paper: a paper of approximately 15-20 pages in which you explore an original thesis about the short fiction of the author you have chosen. **35% of course grade.**

IV. Expanded Notes on the Assignments

A. Seminar Participation. **10% of course grade.** In addition to the readings and seminar discussions, there may be a call for occasional postings on Blackboard if topics come up that beg for responses beyond our class discussion of them.

B. Historical/Anecdotal Talk and Paper: **15% of course grade** (5% for the presentation; 10 % for the written paper). This talk is designed to acquaint the class with some item related to *The New Yorker*—generally confined within historical parameters. A list of possibilities will be given to you, and we will discuss ways of dividing up the topics. My plan is that you will give your presentation during the Zoom session scheduled for your presentation. We'll discuss this, but I'm thinking you may want to do this through PowerPoint. We'll work out the details for this, but my thought is that you will send me your PowerPoint as a pdf and I will advance the slides as you talk through them for your presentation. Stay tuned for details, which we will discuss.

You will turn in a written paper that grows out of this report (three to five or so pages, with bibliography). I expect this to be one of the most enjoyable parts of the research that you will do in the course. The work you will do will fill in gaps for other members of the seminar. In the talk itself, be sure that you focus your topic sharply enough that you can present it in a ten- or fifteen-minute report. (Time yourself before the presentation to make certain that you are within the limit.) Create a context for your topic for the class and clearly organize the material that you present. Your paper will give you a chance to crystallize your ideas and perhaps elaborate on things you were not able to present in class. Because this paper will call on you to compress large amounts of information on a broad topic from a variety of sources, your paper will need to contain a claim that narrows the broad topic and makes it manageable. Organize your paper around your narrowed claim, and make certain that each paragraph in the body of the paper is clearly related to your claim or thesis. Document your paper, using footnotes and a bibliography (MLA style).

C. Bibliography and Prefatory Bibliographical Note: **15% of course grade.** Select the *New Yorker* author you wish to study in detail. Do a job as thorough as possible of compiling a bibliography which has the following headings: (1) Novels by (2) Poems by (3) Essays by (4) Short Stories by (annotated to include, when possible, subsequent reprintings of each story) (5) Books about (6) Articles about. This will ultimately be the bibliography that informs and accompanies your end-of-term paper. The bibliography is due two weeks before end of the semester. If you would like feedback on your final paper-in-progress turn it in with your bibliography, and I will return it with feedback. The purpose of the bibliography and note is to acquaint the reader with the number and kinds of writings **by** the author and with the amount of critical work that has been done **on** the author. I recognize several variables that will affect the completeness of your

bibliography, and ask only (or mainly) that you demonstrate in it an honest attempt to explore the resources available. If a bibliography (book-length) is available, list it in your own bibliography and describe its strengths and weaknesses. Is it outdated, for example? Does it seem complete based on your own spot checking of a few of its entries? If there are useful selected bibliographies contained in other books, list them. On the other hand, if there appears to be no bibliography available for your author (available to you, anyhow), your own bibliography will include only those things that you have been able to locate yourself. If this is the case, be sure to say so in your prefatory note. We will discuss the parameters of this assignment further in class. In any case, do the following in your bibliography:

1. Avoid duplicating someone else's bibliography. Simply refer the reader to it.
2. Place an asterisk by those works that you actually consulted, leaving without an asterisk those works you know of only second-hand.
3. Include a bibliographical note (probably before the bibliography proper) which describes the procedures you followed and the problems you encountered in researching your author. Don't overdo this note: your efforts will usually show.
4. Follow the MLA style consistently in your entries.
5. We will discuss documentation of electronic resources in class.

D. 15- Minute Oral Report: This report should have two purposes: to acquaint the class with your author (through giving biographical and bibliographical details, as well as information related to such things as the author's subject matter and style) and to introduce the class to the author through a close analysis and discussion of one of his or her works. To accomplish this last purpose you should select a *New Yorker* story (or poem) by your author. We will arrange for copies of it to be available to everyone one week before your report. Everyone will read the story or poem, and you will briefly introduce us to the author's themes, style, etc. through comments about the specific work. Here the object is to have you give other seminar members benefit of your research on the author you have chosen to work with, using a specific story or poem by that author. In each case, everyone will receive a copy of the work that you will use and read it before the class during which you are to lead the discussion. The material you present will likely help you form a foundation for your long, end-of-term paper. **10% of course grade** (5% for oral report; 5% for leading of discussion of the work). (Here plan generally on 5-10 minute presentation on your research on the author and 5 or so minutes setting up the story for discussion; we'll play by ear the length of the discussion itself).

E. The 3-5-page paper that grows out of your report should be a "close reading" paper containing a clearly limited main claim (i.e., it should be thesis driven). It should build on and evolve from your research for the seminar report, and it should center on one story by your author. The paper will contain a bibliography of relevant sources and, when possible, include some of the critical discourse that you have encountered in your research on the story. (In some cases there may be little or no critical discourse.) **15% of course grade**.

F. Final Paper. **35% percent of course grade.** I would like for you somehow to relate

your thesis to *The New Yorker* even if this means that you will simply restrict your discussion to the author's *New Yorker* stories (or poems); or you will perhaps want to compare his or her *New Yorker* stories with the author's stories from other magazines. If all this fails, see me. We will discuss this in more detail in class. The final paper will be due on the day scheduled for the final examination. There will be no final examination, but we will meet as a group that evening for a wrap-up of the class and for you to turn in your papers.

You are free to choose any writer who has published a story (or poem) in *The New Yorker* as a subject for your research. Some authors will be better suited to this study than others. For example, the more "contemporary" an author, the less likely you are to have to pour through volumes of criticism, etc.—not to mention the greater likelihood that you will be able to "break new ground" with your study. **Above all, select a writer you care about.**

V. Seminar Participation and Attendance: Much of our seminar will consist of discussion over Zoom of the works we are reading. If you see that you will have to miss a Zoom session, please send me an email beforehand. If you miss a session due to unforeseen circumstances, please send me an email note letting me know after you've missed. We'll exchange emails about the material you missed.

VI. VCU Honor System: "Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education." This class will be conducted in strict adherence to VCU's Honor System policies. In essence, you should not use another student's work. You should not falsely present source material as your own. Whenever you use material from another source, you must credit this source clearly, whether you are quoting directly, summarizing, or paraphrasing. Conscious and uncorrected acts of plagiarism (either from another student's work or from an academic source) will result in a failing course grade. In other words, respect the work of others and in no way present it as your own. If you have additional questions about academic integrity and plagiarism consult VCU's policy at the following web address: <http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/rg7honor.html>

VII. Students with Disabilities: "Virginia Commonwealth University is committed to providing students with disabilities equal opportunities to benefit from all programs, services and activities offered." Students with disabilities should identify to the instructor at the beginning of the course the services that they will need.

VIII. A Note on Computers: Much of the work in this course will depend on regular use of Blackboard and on email sent to and from your VCU email address. If you do not have a user ID and password that will allow you to access Blackboard and your VCU email, be sure to get one before the second class meeting. You will be able to access all of the course materials by going to <http://blackboard.vcu.edu>. If you do not have a computer ID number and password you can get one by following the steps listed at the following web address: <http://www.vcucard.com/>

IX. Online Information: The address for my VCU website is
<http://www.people.vcu.edu/~bmangum/>
Our course website is <http://www.bryantmangum.net>

X. What to Know and Do To Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU:

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>).
Keep your information up-to date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>)
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

XI. Daily Assignment Sheet to Follow: I will upload a copy of the basic assignment sheet to Blackboard. This will be updated periodically on blackboard, which will contain the most recent modifications.