

**English 499-901: *The New Yorker* (Senior Seminar)**

**Spring 2022: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30-6:45**

**Professor Bryant Mangum (307 Anderson House; 828-1255; [bmangum@vcu.edu](mailto: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 Canvas under the module "Readings." This only indicates a group of *New Yorker* stories that we will read and discuss in class and that I will upload to Canvas. Details to be announced.

**B. Background and Reserve Texts (most available through at the Reserve Shelf of the library):**

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, postings in response to prompts on the Discussion section of Canvas. **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 below.)
- D. A 10-minute background 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 (likely 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 10-12 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 will be a call for postings on Canvas of topics that come up and 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. Given that our course is online, I will likely choose the topic for your presentation (you can always discuss with me possibilities for a change of topic). 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. Also, I'm aware of the fact that some of you are more familiar with PowerPoint-type presentations, and we'll leave room for alternate approaches.

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. It will provide our “narrative strand” for the evolution of the magazine. 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.**

This will be a partially annotated secondary-source bibliography. The bibliography should contain fifteen sources that you have at least looked at that relate directly or even indirectly to the topic that is the subject of your final paper. Ten of the sources should be annotated. This means that ten of the sources will have brief descriptions of the contents of the source, preferably a source that at least has (or will have) some direct bearing on

the subject of your final paper. If, for example, the Yagoda book is a source your annotation would include information about what Yagoda says about the subject of your paper—whether the information is broad background information or specific information related specifically to a work you are discussing.

In effect this bibliography probably will wind up as a draft of the Works Consulted for your final paper. I understand that there will be some subjects that have very few specific critical references to your topic. For example, if your topic is focused on ZZ Packer, you may have difficulty finding fifteen sources dealing specifically with the works by Packer that your paper is concerned with. I only ask that you do due diligence in searching for helpful secondary sources. For example, you should do an MLAIB search and follow up on as many of the sources that it yields that you can gain access to. Each bibliography should have a prefatory note (approximately one page long) that describes the process that you went through in locating sources for your bibliography. If you have fewer than the required number of sources, use the prefatory note to explain the reason for this. Tell which databases you used (the MLAIB, for example) gaining access to your source. It should also include the process that led you directly to the article or book that you are annotating (for example, tell if you had to go through JSTOR—or physically to a library to actually obtain the source). Your bibliography should follow the form of the MLA Handbook (indicate which edition of this you used—or if you used an online handbook or guide like Purdue Owl, indicate this in your prefatory note). Your bibliography will 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. Follow the MLA style consistently in your entries. We will discuss documentation of electronic resources in class.

D. 10-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.

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 Canvas 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 Canvas 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 your Canvas site. 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 available through <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 Canvas. This will be updated periodically on Canvas, which will contain the most recent modifications.