

School of English, Film, Theatre & Media Studies

ENGL 439: Journalism and Literature 2007-8 (3/3)

Course co-ordinator:	Emeritus Professor Roger Robinson VZ 913; ext. 6849; Roger.Robinson@vuw.ac.nz
Guest lecturer:	Dr Nikki Hessell
Dates:	Nov 23, 30; Dec 7, 14; Jan 11, 18, 25, Feb 1.
Venue:	Honours Room, VZ 808; Level 8, Von Zedlitz Bld.

Prerequisites:

The prerequisite for enrolment in ENGL 439 is a BA degree with an English Literature major. Exemptions may be granted to students with special interest and/or equivalent qualification or experience, or who are completing other Honours degrees .

Applications for exemption from prerequisites should be referred to Roger Robinson.

Course Aims and Objectives:

ENGL 439 is a course (officially known since 1999 as “a paper,” now officially changed back to “course” again) in the programme of BA (Hons) in English Literature, one of four courses required for that degree. It will be of particular relevance to students with interests in professional writing, creative writing, contemporary literature or cultural studies, American literature, media studies, the English and American novel, life narrative, travel writing, or “issue-related” literature, or to those considering a higher postgraduate course of study, in New Zealand or overseas. Students from disciplines such as History, Media Studies and Politics have found it of relevance. While not a vocational course in the skills of journalism, this course will provide study relevant to the role and practice of the journalist, particularly in terms of introducing the wider philosophical, cultural, ethical, and political issues that arise through practice in, and discussion of, contemporary media.

The course is internationally unique, offering a new approach to the study of literature, by exploring the relation between “journalism” and “literature” as they have been conventionally defined. As is standard at Honours, classes will discuss a number of literary, cultural, intellectual, philosophical and political issues, e.g. the problems surrounding representation, the politics of genre, the role of narrative, the presentation of individual identity in the form of text, and the epistemological concerns arising from New Journalism. Major texts of fictional and non-fictional narrative are discussed, as well as poetry and several other forms of journalism. *All are required reading.* Texts range from the early 18th century, when both journalism and prose fiction were in the early stages of development, to the 21st century. An innovation in 2007-8 is a selection of “research texts,” offering students choices among a wide range of periods and kinds of writing relevant to the topic of the course.

The aims of the course are to:

- a) develop skills of attentive and critical reading at an appropriately advanced level through the study of the language, form, techniques, and ideas of the selected texts;
- b) provide a body of significant knowledge about literature and journalism across their whole history since the emergence of print journalism in the 17th century;
- c) develop an advanced level of understanding of the literary, cultural, philosophical, and theoretical issues raised through a discussion of the relationship between literature and journalism;
- d) explore questions of genre, representation, and literary conventions pertaining to realism, naturalism and journalism;
- e) provide an extended consideration of many of the theoretical and critical issues relevant to the study of contemporary literature and media.

Course Content:

The prescribed books and shorter texts are required study, plus at least one further text as a “research project” chosen from among a range of options.

The main books (*Moll*, *Homage & For Whom*, plus any needed for your choice of research option) should be bought. Other texts will be supplied.

Programme: Fridays 10am-1pm

November 23 Introduction; a short history; prologues to the “research texts;”
Daniel Defoe, Selected journalism

November 30 Defoe, journalism, esp “criminal biography,” & *Moll Flanders*

December 7 S.T. Coleridge, selected journalism & poetry (Nikki Hessell)

December 14 Charles Dickens, Selected journalism and fiction

January 11 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

January 18, January 25, February 1 Research project options:

Journalism and literary writing by Henry Fielding, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Mary Wollstonecraft or Pat Lawlor;
Robert Louis Stevenson (*A Footnote to History* et al); Robin Hyde, (*Disputed Ground* et al); Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*; Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*; Don DeLillo, *Libra*; Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*; Joan Didion, *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*;
“Occasional Poems;” “The New Journalism.”

Assessment:

Assessment is by the presentation of two in-term written assignments, which will assess students' attainment of the "Aims" specified above. See pages 5 & 6 below for details. Due dates are Friday 21 December and Friday 8 February. As appropriate to a course dealing with the nature of journalism, these are deadlines. Note that the 3/3 schedule is tight, so that no extensions are possible beyond February 8th.

Additionally, it is a **requirement** that students make oral presentations, one short one of about 3-5 minutes on a piece in the selection from Dickens's journalism, and one of about 15-20 minutes on one of the "research texts" or the Orwell or Hemingway books. Topics are allocated early in the course.

Mandatory Course Requirements

- Fully read and carefully study all the required texts and one "research text";
- Attend at least 75% (six) of class meetings. The expectation at Honours is full attendance except for medical reasons;
- Contribute fully to class discussion, including making oral presentations as required;
- Complete two written assignments (6000-7000 words total), at Honours standard;
- Meet deadlines.

Academic concerns and problems

Consult the convenor (Roger Robinson) or the Honours Co-ordinator (Geoff Miles). See also *Calendar*, "Mandatory Course Requirements," "Student Contract," and "Academic Grievance Policy."

Plagiarism:

Students are reminded of the School's and the University's policy on plagiarism. Assignments in English, especially at this advanced level, are designed to develop and assess your own ability to think about literary text and express your response.

Material downloaded from the Internet is not acceptable within assignments unless fully acknowledged in the same way as published source and reference materials.

Plagiarism from whatever source, including the Internet, may lead to your failing the course without further notice, or receiving a lower grade if replacement work is permitted.

Students with disabilities:

Victoria makes every effort to enable students with disabilities to study without disadvantage, including the policy that reasonable accommodation will be made with respect to assessment procedures. For further assistance, students should contact Student Disability Services, 1st Floor, Robert Stout Building, ph 4636070, email disabilities@vuw.ac.nz

General University Requirements:

It is students' responsibility to be familiar with the University's requirements regarding course of study requirements, assessment, academic grievance procedures, etc. These are contained in the statutes in the *Calendar*, and on the University website. The University also requires that all members of its community are able to work, learn, study, and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect.

Student input:

Students' responses and suggestions are welcomed, and those from students in previous years have been incorporated.

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Assessment

- The function of academic assessment is to evaluate your achievement of the course aims and objectives, fully set out in the Course Outline.
- This is one of four courses required for the degree of BA (Honours). As each student's programme of study is examined as a single entity, the grade awarded for ENGL 439 remains provisional until the complete programme has been assessed. If you are taking ENGL 439 as part of an Honours degree other than English, the provisional grade is reported to the Programme concerned.
- Assessment in ENGL 439 is in-term, which means that the total word-length required may be more than for courses with final examinations. It also means that high Honours-level standards will be expected in every respect.
- Two written assignments are required, the first of 2000 words (worth 30%), the second 4000 words (worth 70%). Permission may be given for first-draft, additional or substitute work to be submitted (but no grade undertaking can be given for first-drafts).
- For style and presentation, see *Guidelines for English Students*, available on the SEFTMS website.
- Two hard-copy printouts of each assignment must be given to Roger Robinson. One copy will be annotated and returned, and the extra copy retained for the process of external assessment when overall Honours grades are finalised. Email submission will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- Roger is available most days for discussion of work in progress, depending on commitments in other summer courses. Please be sure first that you are familiar with the course objectives, have "fully read and carefully studied" the texts, and have attended class meetings.
- Topics for Assignment 2 will be announced later. Requests or suggestions are welcome. At this stage you should be pursuing your own interests and developing your strengths to the highest possible level.

Assignment 1
Deadline: Friday December 21, 5pm.
2000 words

Write an essay **OR** a literary feature article of 2000 words, providing a literary-critical account of the relationship between the journalistic and imaginative writing of Defoe and/or Coleridge and/or Dickens. That is, you can focus on one, or write more widely on two or three, as you prefer. There will also be a later opportunity to write more fully on the works of Defoe, especially. But do not, for obvious reasons, write both assignments primarily on the same author.

The starting point is (if you write in the form of the feature article you might imagine this as a directive from the editor) that the writer(s) concerned are famed for “imaginative” works (novel or poetry) such as *Moll Flanders*, “Fears in Solitude,” or *Hard Times*, but their journalism is neglected and deserves considered literary-critical attention.

You should then take whatever approach you think best, choosing a selection of journalism and relating it in some way to a selection from the “imaginative” work, or an overview of it. If you choose to write as a feature, do it as if for a journal such as *New Zealand Listener* or *New Zealand Books*. Whether you write in conventional essay form or as a feature article, the essential literary-critical process is identical, and will be the main basis of assessment. As a journalist, you would simply imagine that you are writing for a wide though well-informed audience, rather than to please an academic marker, so would be more at liberty to write personally than is customary in academic essays. Obviously this is an appropriate skill to develop in this course. Look at examples from the journals suggested. And beware! Magazine readers are at least as touchy as professors about accurate grammar, punctuation and quotations.

As content, express your own considered literary-critical response. You could argue that knowledge of the journalism is crucial to a full understanding and appreciation of the imaginative work; or that it simply deserves recognition for its own merits; or that it is deservedly neglected; or any other position - whatever you judge most interesting, most illuminating, and most valid. The topic is intended as a starting point that should enable you to pursue your own response to the texts and interests in or around them.

If you prefer, you could write in the form of a “review article,” which means covering a particular book and the issues it raises. For example, you could imagine that a new edition of some of Defoe’s journalism has just arrived (or Coleridge’s, or Dickens’s). Such editions do get published, so this is not an abstract idea. You would still need to link the selection of journalism to the other writing, as part of the “article” function on top of the “review.”

Some good models are in *Under Review*, edited by Lauris Edmond, Harry Ricketts and William Sewell (reviews selected from *New Zealand Books*). These journals are offered only as readily available models of the required kind and level of writing. There is no implication that you need give your piece a “New Zealand angle.”

The only requirement is that you show that you know, and are able to discuss critically and closely, both the journalistic and the imaginative work. This link is the point of the course.

Please indicate whether you are writing a feature article, review article, or conventional essay.

RR, Nov 26, 2007

