This class examined English writers’ ability to create textual worlds of all sorts by exploring works written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, periods marked by religious controversy, exploration and scientific discovery, foreign and civil war, and the flourishing of literary culture. English writers in the period were deeply invested in writing about the virtues of their own country. The period’s literature often extols the qualities that made England different from (and, in their minds, superior to) other places. Creating their own versions of this nation in literary texts, they fashioned grand utopias and peopled their rich landscapes with beautiful fairy queens, fierce dragons, and brave knights. But they were not simply content to think about England and earth; they were also fascinated by the prospect of other worlds—and different forms of government—outside of both. In addition to glorifying the English nation, then, they constructed what The Tempest’s Miranda terms “brave new worlds” in Heaven, Hell, and even America. The literary works in which these worlds appear demonstrate the beauty and richness of the human imagination as well as its capacity for fear and cruelty.

Our readings covered a wide variety of works from the 16th including Thomas More’s Utopia (1516), Book I (and in one section, some of Book III) of Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (1596), and Sir Walter Raleigh’s The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana (1595). Shifting into the 17th century, we read poems by Andrew Marvell, Katherine Phillips and John Donne, as well as Book 1 and Book 9 of John Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667) and Margaret Cavendish’s The Description of New World Called The Blazing World (1666). We also read accounts by English travelers in Europe and the Mediterranean, and by English colonists in the Americas and Ireland.

Students wrote short, weekly close reading assignments called “5-on-2s” as well as several longer responses to the course material in class meetings. In order to fulfill an HCLAS objective assigned to the course, they also gave oral presentations and developed, in collaboration, a rubric for assessing the strength of their oral communication skills. In addition to three major exams, students completed a take-home final exam, two essay questions that required them to incorporate at least ten works from the class into analyses on broad and narrow topics.
This course introduced students to the larger landscape of English drama by playwrights other than Shakespeare, examining sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays in the various social and political contexts in which they were produced. We also studied the lives and reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and James I of England, particularly with respect to their relationships to the English Theatres as institutions and to specific playing companies and dramatic works. Reading the drama written and produced during their reigns—a body of work that is equally rich but often quite different from what Shakespeare wrote—students were immersed in a distinctly bold brand of English stagecraft.

Our primary texts for the semester included Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, Christopher Marlowe’s daring over-reacher, *Tamburlaine The Great* (1587), Ben Jonson’s pointed smack-down of the wealthy and corrupt, *Volpone* (1606); John Webster’s creepy *Duchess of Malfi* (1612); Francis Beaumont’s odd and downright silly *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), Thomas Dekker’s citizen/artisan tribute, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1595), and his collaboration with Thomas Middleton, the tobacco-smoking, pants-wearing *Roaring Girl* (ca. 1608).

We also watched the film version of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1606) from 2002 and portions of a 1972 BBC production of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

In addition to these works, each student in the class had the opportunity to read literary criticism on these plays and another play by these authors or an additional playwright, including John Fletcher, Thomas Heywood, Lady Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Cary, or Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley. Our textbook, Peter Womack’s *English Renaissance Drama*, helped guide us through a wide landscape of playwrights, specific plays, acting companies and patrons, dramatic sub-genres, and motifs common to the period. As we studied Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, we considered the troublesome and ever-expanding list known as the “literary canon”; the importance of editing practices in the publication and circulation of early modern plays; and the extent to which all drama from the period exhibits the literary forms and aesthetics we associate with its best-known playwright, William Shakespeare.

Students wrote regular posts on our course Blog about the plays we read and also posted “virtual handouts” that culled salient information from essays in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan’s *A New History of English Drama* (1997) to learn more about the early modern playhouses and their daily operations. The final project for the course allowed them to write a critical analysis of an additional play, or a critical history of a play from the assigned reading in addition to several other options.
I taught English 2 in the final semester the course was offered through the English Department. Accordingly, my course was distinct from the sections now taught in the Writing Studies and Composition Department. Rather than a WAC/WID—a course on writing “in the disciplines”—it was a literature-based composition course, building on the introduction to critical reading and college-level writing from English 1 through the study of multiple literary genres.

I organized my course on the motif of the sea voyage, a topic with Classical roots but also common in literature produced between the 16th and 21st centuries. Readings along these lines included several poems, Robert Southey’s “The Sailor Who Had Served in the Slave Trade,” (1798) Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (1833), and Robert Hayden’s “Middle Passage,” as well as a play by William Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611) and a novel, Charles Johnson’s Middle Passage (1998). We also watched the 1956 film version of Herman Melville’s Moby Dick.

My first two paper assignments helped acclimate students to Hofstra’s library resources; in the first of these, they wrote a 4-5 page review of academic scholarship on their choice of more than twenty different options on history and culture. Their topics, such as the history of ships and whaling, magic, the American slave trade, and the history of New Orleans, supplied useful contextual information for our study of literary texts. Whereas the first paper assignment required students to report on the state of existing scholarship on a topic, their second paper assignment asked them to make an argument of their own about the material that they had examined. Both papers gave them practice with introducing and integrating secondary sources in addition to giving them a chance to learn about something new and that would enhance the entire class’s experience with the reading. Each student presented her research in class over the course of the semester. For their third paper, students wrote a literary analysis of one or several of our course texts; for their fourth, they used all of the skills and conventions they learned for academic writing in response to a prompt that approximated Hofstra’s Proficiency Exam.
JFK was a fan of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels and invited poet Robert Frost to his inaugural address. Eisenhower liked Zane Grey. President Lincoln was shot during a performance of Macbeth. Bill Clinton once delivered a spontaneous analysis of the same play at a party, impressing literary critic Stephen Greenblatt with his sharp insight about the ambitions and desires of men in power. President Clinton also loved the works of William Butler Yeats and the poet who dedicated poems to President Lincoln, Walt Whitman—an appreciation made notorious after he presented an edition of Leaves of Grass as a gift to a certain favorite intern. Notorious in a different sense for his extended reading of The Pet Goat as the Towers burned on 9/11, George W. Bush (husband of a librarian) also read more challenging fare, Albert Camus' The Stranger, while 'vacationing' in Crawford. To paraphrase a slogan from a 1960's television commercial, Reading is Presidential!

This class, developed as a 1-credit course in conjunction with the final Presidential Debate in October of 2008, was designed to be a fun but also thoughtful jaunt through the world of the Presidential Reading list. Toward that end, we contemplated the intersections of political life and literary meaning in Shakespeare's Macbeth, selections from Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Camus' The Stranger and Fleming's From Russia With Love. These particular works allowed us to discuss the rights and responsibilities American citizens have, as well as different kinds of political authorities and governments, from monarchs and tyrants to presidents and representative democracies. Throughout the semester, we contemplated these rulers and ruling structures as abstract concepts and as terms that take on deeper resonance in the context of specific presidents. For instance, President George W. Bush announced a “Global War on Terror” as president, and presided over several controversial executions as Governor of Texas; what did he think about a novel in which the protagonist murders an Arab and awaits his own death by execution?

These works also allowed us to discuss issues related to citizenship and to think more deeply about how political power in America functions. Although our discussions were primarily concerned with how the “leader of the free world” lives within and outside of the fictional, entertaining worlds authors create in literature, our readings often forced us to think about the ordinary people whose lives are affected by decisions made by those in power. Indeed, we were constantly struck by the large role that Presidential elections play in American life in comparison with those involved in local governments. This course was a wonderful reminder of Literature’s capacity to allow us to inhabit multiple positions and perspectives, if only temporarily, and think about what it means to be in charge or deprived of a political voice. It invited students to think of literature not as an escape from the problems of the day, but rather, a way to represent, comment upon, resolve, or reconfigure them imaginatively. And, it encouraged students to read about the upcoming election and, above all, to vote!

Students in the course wrote four short response essays about these works, posting them on our class blog and offering additional comments in class and on their classmate's posts online. They also completed a semester-long group project compiling a list of literary references used by past and future presidents, television pundits, and journalists, giving literature renewed life during the election cycle.
This Graduate-level course (offered in Spring 2008, Spring 2009, and Spring 2010) examined two of Shakespeare’s most dramatized subjects: warfare and the soldiers who engaged in it. His portrayals of these figures in action enabled discussions of the literary aesthetics of violence and battle and the capacity or limitations of the English stage to portray them. We also grappled with the issue of personal responsibility in national affairs, not just as an early modern problem, but as a postmodern dilemma that Shakespeare’s works prompt us to explore in our own complicated world.

The course reading lists included history plays and tragedies, two genres that the bard apparently found most fitting for plays about warfare. We began with one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays (and that bears evidence of multiple hands or collaboration), 1 Henry VI (1592). With compelling figures like Talbot and Joan la Pucelle, and depictions of both the English and French armies, this play helped lay out several lines of inquiry that would be important with later works. For instance, Joan’s status as Amazon-cum-witch enabled discussions of gender and the roles women play in times of war that would inform our readings of female characters in later plays, from Lady Percy and Lady Mortimer in 1 Henry IV (1594) to Lady Macbeth (ca. 1605) and Volumnia in Coriolanus (ca. 1608). Additionally, the perfect warrior Talbot and his son provide useful analogues for the recently-deceased Henry V and his disappointing successor, a Christian ruler utterly lacking his father’s stomach for war. Reading about Henry V’s funeral at the beginning of 1 Henry VI changes the stakes of reading Henry V, for like Shakespeare’s Elizabethan audiences, we know that France is always already lost. Together, 1 Henry VI and the plays of the second Tetralogy raise questions about the function of war in English history and historiography, as well as the role that the institution of monarchy plays in perpetuating it.

The class also examined comic treatments of war, both in Shakespeare’s plays (focusing especially on figures in the Second Tetralogy such as Falstaff, Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym) and in brief skirmishes with light-humored works about war by his contemporaries, including the anonymous Famous Victories of Henry V and Thomas Dekker’s The Shoemaker’s Holiday. We continued our examination of war and governments as we shifted to the tragedies, focusing on monarchy and tyranny in Macbeth and on war and republicanism in Coriolanus. As striking contrasts to aristocratic soldiers like Talbot and royal soldiers like Henry V, the titular figures in the tragedies also allowed us to discuss the extent to which a soldier’s temperament and experience on the field renders him unfit to rule or ill-equipped for other forms of public service.

Critical Readings in the course gave students the opportunity to learn more about military issues in the early modern period, but they also provided good models of academic writing and research. Students read significant portions of a scholarly monograph as well as several articles, describing the former in a Précis and the latter in an annotated bibliography. As the developed their own critical arguments about the works we studied, students gained experience writing and writing about their work in several conventional forms, including a research proposal and an abstract. Students also had ample opportunity to play around with Early English Books Online in a “scavenger hunt” assignment. All of this work, of course, helped prepare students for their final paper for the course, a conference paper- or article-length critical study on wars and warriors.
The title of this course derives from the popular Chicago Public Radio program, *This American Life*, a weekly, one-hour radio program that features stories about, well, just about anything that happens in the lives of people all over America. My course used episodes of *This American Life* along with several additional models of storytelling to contemplate social issues and philosophical questions with important implications for academic study, civic discourse, and daily life.

We spent a significant portion of the semester with forms of audio-visual media such as documentary films and podcasts of radio shows to stimulate discussions on storytelling and on subjects that affect us all as human beings. Yet the course was not a class on radio, journalism or film. It covered a wide variety of general academic topics and focused on communication skills useful to students of all majors, including research methods, the use of new media technology, and general academic writing conventions, in addition to matters of literary structure and style.

Despite the course’s radio-program inspiration, then, literature and literary theory played central roles. The course was organized around three basic contentions: first, that we use narratives and stories to organize and give meaning to our lives; second, that we typically do so according to structures and conventions for fiction described in ancient and literary works; and third, that our engagement with academic subject matter is enhanced by acts of personal storytelling. We began the semester with theories of dramatic structure and action from Aristotle and Freytag; we also read short stories, historical narratives, and Hayden White’s “emplotment” theory of historiography. In addition to episodes of *This American Life*, we examined various works that, like *This American Life*, exemplify thoughtful engagement in public arenas. Alongside the episode “Act 5,” on a production of *Hamlet* put on in a maximum-security prison by incarcerated actors, we read *Shakespeare Inside*, Amy Scott-Douglass’ personal narrative of getting to know these actors, and watched the documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Looking at three different ways of telling the same story, we examined issues of narrative structure and voice while also learning about the intersections of an academic subject and life inside a structure that is very different from the “outside” and the so-called “ivory tower” associated with university life.

Course assignments gave students an opportunity to explore library and other resources on campus and contemplate the stories affecting other communities that overlap with the university, including those in Long Island and New York City. Students applied what they learned about style and organization from their reading to a series of audio projects and analytical essays. For the course’s final project, they each produced a long segment for the class’s collaborative series, 50-minute narrative episodes for our own series, “This Hofstra Life.” In creating this segment, students learned the craft of turning daily life and intellectual pursuits into compelling narratives with meaning, but also gained a greater familiarity with Hofstra University and the people who make it the vibrant, diverse, and storied place that it is.
My most recent graduate course examined Shakespeare’s works and Shakespeare Studies more broadly as they exist in aftermath of the critical movements loosely and closely bound under the label of “The New Historicism.” Looking at the ways in which scholars approached (and still approach) Shakespeare’s poetry and dramatic works, at the works themselves, and at the college-level textbooks produced in response to the critical renaissance of the 1980s and 90s, we considered the gains, losses, and opportunities for the scholarly study of Shakespeare that those movements left in their wake.

The background image in my course banner is a detail from Pieter Bruegel’s *Children’s Games* (1560), a painting Stephen Greenblatt discusses in the Foreward of our course textbook, the essay collection *A New History of English Drama* (1997). Greenblatt describes the painting in classic New Historicist terms, noting that the games it depicts represent aspects of culture that we must approach seriously; forms of “play,” Greenblatt teaches us, warrant just as much critical attention as more “official” versions of history. While the painting includes more than eighty different games in progress, Greenblatt is transfixed by what is happening in the upper corner: a group of people are burning someone at the stake for being a witch. This detail, then, becomes the linchpin of the argument that acts of “playing” are not merely joyful trivialities for children; by extension, acts performed by the players at the English Theatre are essentially political.

The Foreward is a wonderful example of the elegance and engery of New Historicism: it invites us to see the ideological import in a culture at play and reminds us that doing so takes work. But the Foreward also exhibits the New Historicist tendency to fashion grand claims out of elaborate critical fictions. Indeed, I’ve never been able to find anything that looks like witch burning in the painting, nor could any of my students.

My work is heavily influenced by New Historicism, and I developed this class, in part, to show students the exciting proliferation of Shakespeare criticism that it inspired in an earlier generation of scholars. Of course, I also wanted to make clear that the school was not without its critics, and that we all need to think carefully about how we understand and use historical evidence. In addition to reading primary works by Shakespeare and other contemporary documents that illuminated the historical and cultural conditions in which he wrote, my students gained familiarity with several schools of thought that are typically associated with New Historicist work, most prominently among them Feminism, Marxism, and Cultural Materialism. The class also discussed the schools to which prominent New Historicists forged their methodologies in explicit opposition: New Criticism, Biographical Criticism, “Source Studies” and “Old” Historicism. We covered several subjects important to the study of historicist methodologies more broadly, including questions of authorship and issues of print culture as invigorated by a coincident interest in the “New Bibliography.”

Not all of the course dealt with “meta” concerns, of course; students wrote a formalist analysis of primary works by Shakespeare, and they also spent quite a bit of time learning strategies for conducting sound research in literary studies more broadly. In their final project for the course, students had several options for putting New- and Post- New Historicist approaches to good use, including one that allowed students pursuing advanced degrees in Education, rather than English, to introduce and create a set of lesson plans.
Because English 41 must serve the needs of non-majors in addition to English majors, and because its broad scope, the course presents an incredible challenge in terms of course development and assignment design. According to the Bulletin, it covers “major authors” in the English Tradition; by virtue of its relationship with English 42, a course covering Romantic and Victorian Literature, the first “half” of the survey must give some nod to the notion of coverage of nearly one thousand years of literature.

Because of my research interests in the “New British History,” I find it difficult to embrace the concept of *English* Literature without also providing students with a sense of its “Britishness” over the course of long period apparently covered by the class. This means grappling with the complex relationships amongst England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, as well as accounting for the Britonic Celts before the Norman Conquest and Anglo-Saxon invasion; it also means establishing the wide-range of ethnic populations that inhabited the British Isles before and after major demographic shifts. And most importantly, it means distilling these broad historical elements into lessons on Literary works that are accessible and compelling for students who may have little reason beyond an “LT” credit to care—initially, at least—about the development of literature and language in England over a great length of time.

With the opportunity to teach this important course twice, I have designed two different versions that provide both a sense of coverage and a way for students to organize their reading by way of larger common textual elements and themes. As a scholar, I am wary of constructing narratives that are too general, too pat, or too strictly linear; and so as a teacher, I take great care to create a reading list that allows for connections to be made but also complicated. In the section I taught in the Spring of 2007, I started the class with 5th century Celtic poetry about youth and age and ended with a nod to William Blake’s “Songs of Innocence and Experience,” using the dichotomy from the latter work as a central facet of the literary texts that came before it; how did British subjects chart their journey or transformation from a state of youth and innocence to age, experience, and knowledge in literary works? How was Britain itself conceived of as a nation that was once newly formed and later one of a long history and established literary traditions? Related to this line of inquiry was the question of how writers treat the notion of the individual in relation to social collectives, whether family, church, country, or some other kind of community that people might be part of or find themselves excluded from.

In exploring these basic themes, we were able to consider how writers established distinctly British literary traditions, even as they drew upon Classical or continental works. The texts that enabled these basic organizing strands were diverse, but also clearly connected. After learning about *Beowulf* and reading Anglo-Saxon poems such as *Dream of the Rood* and *Judith*, students were ready to take on other “epic” journeys, in Arthurian Romances, Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*, Book 1 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Behn’s * Oroonoko*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. The three epics by Spenser, Milton, and Pope were particularly useful in demonstrating continuity in literary aesthetics and tradition and device while also providing clear instances of historical change and creative innovation. In all of our texts, protagonists define some salient feature of the self while also being obliged in some way to behave according to social norms or act on behalf of some larger conception of communal or national need; they also find themselves relieved or deprived of innocence in some fundamental way, finding wisdom through age and experience, and sometimes also feeling profound regret.
In the Spring of 2010, I changed the focus of my section of English 41 to reflect a different set of interests; this time, I organized the class around “the body, the bawdy, and the soul.” This way of conceiving the course allowed for the inclusion of a significant number of canonical works, while also shifting my previous course’s focus on the self to the relationship between the physical self and spiritual concerns. The language of the body in literary culture underscores conflicts between pleasure and moral virtue in every century of early British history.

Readings for the course began with Old English riddles and Judith, and included Julian of Norwich’s Showings; selections from medieval Arthurian literature and lore, including Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Early modern works included poetry by Thomas Wyatt, Philip Sidney, Lady Mary Wroth, John Donne, George Herbert, Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell; excerpts from Spenser’s View of the Present State of Ireland; and Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus. From the Restoration and 18th century, we read Book 9 of Paradise Lost; poems by Aphra Behn, the Earl of Rochester, Jonathan Swift, and Katherine Phillips; letters on vaccinations from the Turkish Embassy by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; Swift’s A Modest Proposal; scientific writing from members of the Royal Academy; and multiple selections related to the slave trade in Britain and its abolition.

All of the works we studied invoked the body and its parts as a literary trope and literal object. Students were invited to consider the physical self as a symbol of the state and political issues pertinent to the national body/body politic; as a personal or private thing whose integrity, safety, and heath are challenged or compromised by a larger force, from religion to social collectives (parliament, the “court,” land owners, etc.), and national imperatives; and as an object to be celebrated or denigrated aesthetically as a source of pleasure and pain. That the body was also simultaneously connected to and separate from the soul meant that the literature also figures it as a threat to, or means of, salvation.

As in the section of English 41 that I taught several semesters prior, this course used close reading papers to help tie all the sometimes disparate texts together, and to enable students to see and make connections between works in multiple ways. The prompts for these papers serve as an additional guide through the material, asking them to think about the works more specifically than we would be able to do on any given day in class. The exams for the course—including the final exam—also required a significant amount of writing. Through questions that demand knowledge as well as the ability to reflect analytically on passages from literary texts in the moment, they aimed at giving students an opportunity to show what they had learned, but also encouraged them, in their responses, to keep learning as they wrote.
As the bulletin copy indicates, “Shakespeare, The Early Plays and Sonnets” covers works from Shakespeare’s early career as a poet and dramatist in Elizabethan England. In addition to formal and stylistic elements of these works, my ten sections of this course have examined the political and social issues that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were compelled to explore on stage. Our discussions of the historical and cultural contexts in which these works shed light on Shakespeare’s representations of gender, social hierarchy, and nation, as well as his interest in structures of religious and political authority and in such concepts as rebellion and revenge.

The ten sections I have taught were not always the same with respect to major assignments; I also changed my textbook adoption from the single Bedford Texts and Contexts Editions to an anthology, *The Norton Shakespeare*, which necessarily altered my approach to teaching historical material. For the most part, my sections included the same primary texts: select sonnets, *Venus and Adonis*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *1 Henry IV*, and *Hamlet*.

With this particular list, I cannot claim to have introduced any radical innovation to our Shakespeare course as it appears “on the books,” though I suspect that my inclusion of *Venus and Adonis* is something of a departure. While I certainly teach the sonnets in my course, I primarily address the playwright’s poetry in a work that is not, by any stretch, a sonnet. I like to use the long poem because it provides a nice transition between Shakespeare’s poetic worlds and the worlds he created for the stage. Full of dialogue and action—vertical and horizontal movement of a distinctly dramatic sort—*Venus and Adonis* allows us to see how poetry creates character just like plays do. And the story itself helps inform how we think about the comedy’s women and their suitors by presenting a strikingly different wooing scenario in which a woman overpowers (but also fails to seduce) the young man that she desires; Shakespeare’s eroticized depiction of Adonis’ deadly encounter with the Boar also helps us think about the language of male friendship, competition, and love in the other works.

As I noted in the letter accompanying this file, I emphasize close reading and critical writing in this course in formal paper assignments as well as multiple in-class activities. I also teach historical contexts by way of lectures and supplementary readings in the editions of textbooks, asking students to situate the plays within these contexts in written assignments and exams. In developing assignments for the course, I am always mindful that many students take the course for distribution credit; as an “LT” course, it must address a population that may not consist of English majors and minors. The materials included here represent several different attempts to address this population—that is, they are documents from multiple semesters and thus they exemplify the kinds of work I have my students complete, but may not present a single, cohesive vision.
This course examines the second half of Shakespeare’s career, including the comedies, tragedies and romances written between 1599 and 1613. Like all of our sections of 116, I imagine, my sections of English 116 emphasized particular shifts in Shakespeare’s dramatic style, preferred genres, and subject matter as the Tudor age ended and the Stuart dynasty began.

My particular version of the course included *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*, using the first three works to witness the darkening of Shakespeare’s comedy and embrace his tragic themes. The final text in the list above, *The Tempest* was not the end of the course, but rather, the beginning of a larger conversation about the genre of romance that took place in the final weeks of the semester. Indeed, the class starts with a comedy derived from a romantic source (the story Apolionius & Silla, from Barnabe Riche’s *Farewell to the Military Profession* [1581]) and ends with students reading their choice of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Cymbeline*, or *Pericles*, three plays bound together in an inexpensive edition. Two of these so-called “problem” plays likely include contributions from other dramatists and so they are often excluded from college reading lists; I like to bring these works into the mix so that I can help my students interrogate notions of canonicity and authorship that they have, perhaps, taken previously for granted. Additionally, as a class, we can get a much deeper sense of what the genre looks like when we are able to compare several examples of it. I find that students are often surprised (and sometimes dismayed) by the way Shakespeare’s latest plays are structured; but they also are reassured—and newly circumspect—when their classmates relate having similar experiences with their chosen romance.

In my four sections of the course thus far, students wrote three essays and took a comprehensive final exam. They also worked collaboratively in small groups to present on the cultural contexts in which one of the assigned plays was produced; groups of students taught a 45-minute lesson for each play, noting how those contexts illuminate and complicate our understanding of the dramatic text.
In my first semester at Hofstra, I taught an Honors section of English 1 (now WSC 1). At the time, I was still very much steeped in the forms of composition pedagogy endorsed at one of the largest and earliest free-standing Composition programs in the Country, the University of Texas at Austin. There, our approach to teaching writing was rooted in Classical Rhetoric, specifically Aristotelian Stasis Theory. During my two-year tenure as the Assistant Director of Lower-Division writing, I came into frequent contact with Rosa A. Eberly, a scholar whose teaching and work on American Literature I deeply admired. Although I had not taken classes with Rosa, I was very much influenced by her book, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres* (Illinois UP, 2000). She wrote a textbook for writing based on the same principles, *The Elements of Reasoning*, and I was pleased to adopt it for this course. My English 1 emphasized rhetorical theory and reason as well as the intersections of civic and academic life, with a particular focus on food, labor and public health. I raised this issue with students through our other major course texts, *Fast Food Nation* (2001) and the documentary film, *Super Size Me* (2004).

**Unit I: Citizen Criticism and Basic Rhetorical Theory**

In Unit I, we covered the basic tenets of Rhetoric and argumentation as detailed by Eberly in chapters 1-3 of *The Elements of Reasoning*. I began by teaching students some basic terms and concepts derived from Classical Rhetoric, an art form whose earliest practitioners were philosophers. Because Rhetoric was one of the original seven Liberal Arts, it is unsurprising that the works of Classical Rhetoricians still thrive in University curricula. Yet I also impressed upon students that Rhetoric and writing have also been art forms intended to serve the ends of democracy—and that rhetoric and rhetorical theory may be powerfully employed in writing for the public sphere and social worlds we inhabit alongside and outside of the University.

According to Eberly in Chapter 8, "In a democracy, rhetoric as the actualizer of potential depends on citizens who are able to imagine themselves as agents of action, rather than just spectators or consumers" (131). For Eberly, any person who effectively applies her knowledge of rhetoric and reasoning to real-life situations is a Citizen Critic—that is, someone who performs her civic responsibilities through logic and writing. Our goal in this unit was to understand what constitutes effective citizen criticism and to determine how such arguments are constructed by way of Rhetorical Stasis theory. The ability to do both not only makes us better readers, I argued, but also better writers—and therein, better, more reasonable citizens.

**Unit II: Critical Consumers**

Unit II was organized around the concept of critical consumerism, something that means more than simply having more "purchasing power" or being a "smart shopper." As Eberly notes, "Choosing one from 17 brands of deodorant or from among hundreds of styles and brands of jeans is not the same as being an active citizen in a democracy" (131). Critical consumers, then, are those who think carefully not just about the goods, products, and services that they buy, but also about the ideas and information they encounter through various forms of media each day. Eberly claims that "[t]he barrage of information we face...arguably makes the habit of careful reasoning more and more difficult" (133); yet it also makes "the habit of careful reasoning" more and more important.

**Unit III: Citizen Students**

At the beginning of her chapter on Procedure and Proposal arguments, Eberly provocatively asks her readers, "Do you want to change the world?" (111). The third Unit encouraged students to answer "yes!" Building upon the stasis questions covered in previous units, we concluded the course with an exploration of problems and solutions related to public health. They were asked to think critically about their role in perpetuating these problems related to food and the labor involved in its production and invited to develop solutions to them at the local level and in larger communities.

Over the course of the semester, students worked through the stasis of definition (examining the FDA’s definitions of “natural,” for instance) the stases of conjecture and evaluation (identifying the kinds of claims made in advertisements for food and the warrants behind them as well as assessing their effectiveness for certain audiences); and the stasis of proposal (writing to effect change). They also learned methods for documenting sources, how to conduct secondary research using library databases, and practices specific writing skills such as introducing quotations and crafting strong thesis statements.
Although the reading list for my section of English 100 required students to read works in multiple genres, I organized the course primarily around Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), two novels whose female protagonists are forced to develop their own “ways of reading” in environments that seem inhospitable, incomprehensible, and even hostile to their attempts to make meaning. Uncharacteristically, I did not organize my reading list in chronological order, starting the class with *The Crying of Lot 49*. I chose the novel because I think it is ideal for teaching specific critical methods—or rather, it is ideal for getting students to think about methods in meta-critical terms. Its seemingly endless referentialism and its paranoid (but well-supported) suggestion that everything might be connected through interpretive acts gave students considerable practice with formalist approaches. The novel both resists and rewards students’ close attention to the text, encouraging them to recognize recurrent strains of metaphor or allegorical names while also complicating their identification of what initially appear to be easy or familiar signs.

The same aspects of the novel that invite close reading also expose the limitations of strictly formal approaches, and so Pynchon’s work is equally useful for teaching additional ways of reading. It also incorporates and comments upon other genres of fiction, including poetry and song, 17th century revenge tragedy, and literary criticism and historiography. Its invocation and blending of literary and cultural forms enabled productive discussions of intertextuality and allusion, teaching students how to recognize generic conventions for the novel and other forms while also showing them how modern (and pre-modern) writers might exploit and subvert them.

Pynchon’s own mysterious biography and the variety of author-figures within the text itself helped raise important theoretical questions about authorship and biographical interpretation; from the 17th century playwright and 1970s director of Pynchon’s fictional revenge play, *The Courier’s Tragedy* to the enigmatic dead man Pierce Inverarity, the novel provides a complicated account of concepts such as audience reception and authorial intent. As the reader/protagonist and self-described “executrix” of Pierce’s will, Oedipa must confirm—in literal and figurative ways—the death of the author while simultaneously attempting to make meaning of the plot he has apparently set in motion. Moreover, the meaning of Pierce’s will improbably hinges on the plot of the fictional 17th century play, and more precisely, the presence of textual variants within early printed editions of this old work of drama. This aspect of the novel therefore opened up a surprisingly accessible way to teach textual and bibliographical criticism; though students often find this kind of criticism somewhat dry and obscure, the fictional play within the novel sheds particularly compelling light on the challenges that textual variants in literary works pose for reading and interpretation. Finally, the novel’s protagonist, her psychotherapist, and the novel’s setting in Southern California in the late 60s provide accessible ways of teaching the merits of feminist, psychoanalytic, and cultural criticism. References to drug culture, political protest, and the domestic boredom of housewives gained greater significance when we considered the novel within the historical conditions of its composition.

Students wrote a formalist essay on this novel, but used the insight about reading that they gained from it to address later assignments requiring other ways of reading; after a historicist essay on *The Tempest* and a self-conscious analysis of the methods they had used in their English courses, they were prepared to write about *Alice’s Adventures* (or any other work they chose) in a final project from a critical perspective of their choosing.