

## *Do Our Stories Matter?*

**The Reality Effect:  
Documentary Film**

**Modern  
Metamorphoses**

**Cool Britannia**   
Exporting Britishness

**A Close look  
at Craft**

### *What If? Alternative Histories and Speculative Fictions*

**ENGLISH 2880. FALL 2017. 4 credits. S. Davis and staff.**

<http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl2880-2890>

ENGLISH 2880 offers guidance and an audience for students who wish to gain skill in expository writing—a common term for critical, reflective, investigative, and creative nonfiction. Each section provides a context for writing defined by a form of exposition, a disciplinary area, a practice, or a topic intimately related to the written medium. Course members will read in relevant published material and write and revise their own work regularly, while reviewing and responding to one another's. Students and instructors will confer individually throughout the term. Topics differ for each section.

**Each section limited to 17 students. Students must have completed their colleges' first-year writing requirements or have the permission of the instructor.**

**Modern Metamorphoses  
Seminar 101: MWF 12:20-1:10**

**Sara Schlemm  
6125**

In ancient myths, humans are transformed into animals, plants, and other shapes and states of being. Why do such stories haunt us in the digital age? How fluid are our own identities, and are we capable of metamorphoses of our own? To answer these questions, we will discuss contemporary ideas about gender, sexuality, epigenetics, legal personhood, digital lives, and creative autobiography. We will also develop expository writing skills through a wide range of assignments. Course materials may include Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, films such as Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, scientific journal articles, Supreme Court opinions, and other cutting-edge theories of what it means to be human - and maybe more.

**The Reality Effect: Documentary Film  
Seminar 102: MWF 1:25**

**Becky Lu  
6126**

We trust documentary films to portray the “real” world, yet engaged viewers understand that reality looks different from different perspectives, and documentaries have the power to shape and alter the truth in the process of reporting on it. In this course you'll practice critical reading and viewing, paying close attention to how recent documentaries construct, maintain, reimagine, and/or challenge our understanding of the world and of ourselves. In discussion and writing, we'll consider the ethics and politics of representation and the question of who speaks for whom. Films may

include *Grizzly Man*, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, *Stories We Tell*, *Citizenfour*, *Cameraperson*, and *The Act of Killing*, as well as adjacent genres like reality television and mockumentary.

**Creative Nonfiction: Do Our Stories Matter?**  
**Seminar 103: MW 2:55-4:10**

**Aurora Masum-Javed**  
**6127**

Can a story take down a system? Under what conditions? This course will examine the role of the personal narrative as a political weapon. We will analyze the impact of art on the sociopolitical landscape through the works of James Baldwin, Adrienne Rich, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Rebecca Solnit, and many others. We will then interrogate our own biases, assumptions, desires, relationships, and fears in order to write the self into a global context. The essays we craft will confront the intersections of political and personal trauma, history and family, identity and theory. Ultimately, we will ponder, "Do our stories matter? Why or why not?"

**Cool Britannia: Exporting Britishness**  
**Seminar 104: TR 11:40-12:55**

**Jane Glaubman**  
**7925**

A century ago, Britain ruled the largest empire in the history of the world. By 1960, most of that empire was independent; yet Britain still seems to be everywhere. Instead of troops, plantations, and the King James Bible, the U.K. now exports itself. In pop music (The Beatles), fantasy fiction (*Harry Potter*), comedy (*Monty Python's Flying Circus*), spies (James Bond), science fiction (*Doctor Who*), and costume dramas by the score (Jane Austen any way you want her), we keep buying Britain. What is Britishness, anyway? How did this small island hold on to its outsized cultural influence? And what role did its former colony, the USA, play in this process?

**What If? Alternative Histories and Speculative Fiction**  
**Seminar 105: TR 1:25-2:40**

**Ji Hyun Lee**  
**8665**

What if the Axis powers had won World War II? What if the Great Depression had never ended? What if single-sex societies had evolved through reproductive innovation? Speculative fiction plays with such possibilities and can present us with new pasts, opening up new presents and futures. We'll read a range of alternative histories such as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and James Tiptree, Jr.'s "Backward, Turn Backward," exploring the mechanisms that make these strange tales possible and bringing them into conversation with theoretical texts on psychoanalysis and trauma theory. Essays and class discussions will ask: why are such alternatives so alluring?

**Creative Nonfiction: A Close Look at Craft**  
**Seminar 106: 2:55-4:10**

**Kirsten Saracini**  
**9044**

What techniques do writers use to tell a true story well? This class will analyze sentences, voice, scene-building, and argumentation to explore the specific elements that create persuasive, immersive writing. We'll read essays exploring race (James Baldwin), gender (Rebecca Solnit), politics (George Saunders), culture (Roland Barthes), sexuality (Maggie Nelson), television (David Foster Wallace), and philosophy (Albert Camus). In our writing, we will use our personal experiences to explore what forces shape us, what roles we play, how we are coping, and more—always with a eye on craft.