

English 399W
Fall 2011-Spring 2012 English Honors Seminar
Section 3668: M 1.40-4.30, Powdermaker 104
Section 3674: W 6.30-9.20, Klapper 708

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Klapper 643
Office Hours: M 5-7 &
W 3-5 or by appt.

The Observed Life: Gossip, Secrecy and the Making of Social Knowledge

The practice of gossip is as old as language itself, assuming a dominant role in our daily interactions and calling up powerful cultural embodiments from Virgil's creaturely portrayal of the goddess *Fama*, covered with a multitude of eyes, ears, and tongues, to the disembodied voice-over and distilled malice of Kristen Bell's *Gossip Girl*. Confronting the negative connection of gossip with women and its progressive denigration as a loose, idle, and unproductive mode of speech, feminists—and other subgroups/counterpublics—have sought to reclaim gossip as a form of subjugated and subversive discourse, resistant to and critical of majority culture. Other gossip theorists in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication theory have explored how gossip functions both as an instrument of behavioral control and as a form of exchange in which information is lucratively traded for other goods in the social marketplace. We'll be drawing on these theorizations of gossip and considering how useful they are for capturing its operations in different historical moments, across oral, scribal, printed, and digital media, and within changing legal and normative conceptions of public-private relations. Most important, we'll be exploring gossip's hermeneutic power as a narrative model, pressing the continuities between sites, protocols, and modes of gossip and works of literature which not only thematize its practice but reflect on their relation to its forms.

The seminar is designed to model the sort of flexible, multileveled analysis that I wish you to pursue in your Honors Essay. I do not expect to resolve the generic and methodological complexities we encounter, nor do I intend to marshal our texts into a definitive or unified narrative. It is my hope that the very heterogeneity of our reading might help to suggest the range of projects that can spring from our central theme.

Learning Goals

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

1. Bring local, dynamic, and form-sensitive interpretations together to pose questions, locate contradictions, and frame arguments.
2. Glean essential and experimental ideas from academic writing that may be dense, abstract, or otherwise alienating, and interplay your own ideas with them.

3. Identify genuine intellectual problems and conduct original research, attentive both to the conventions of literary analysis and the boundaries of disciplinary thinking.
4. Find and incorporate relevant source materials into your writing, using appropriate scholarly resources such as books, journals, indexes, online catalogues, web search engines, and libraries. Learn correct citation methods (Chicago style, MLA), and use of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

NOTE: Please remember that the grades I give you in the seminar are different from the determination at the end of the year whether you receive honors and what level of honors (honors, high honors, highest honors) it might be. Those distinctions are awarded by the Honors Committee which makes its determination not on your fulfillment of the course requirements given below, but solely on the basis of your performance on the Honors essay, your performance on the Honors examination, your overall GPA and your GPA in English.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (15%)

Regular attendance and active participation are essential. Plan to attend every class meeting and to arrive on time, especially when we have guests visiting the class. If an absence is unavoidable, it is your responsibility to obtain any materials, notes, and instructions that you have missed.

For a classroom to be truly collaborative, everyone must feel comfortable expressing his or her ideas. We need to respond to each other with respect, even if we do not agree.

Open Class Blog (15%)

From the second week of the semester, you are required to produce a weekly blog post. Each post should be the result of 15-20 minutes of concentrated thinking and writing or at least one paragraph long (approx. 200 words). Make sure that your post is timely: that it reflects critically on a recent or future reading, draws connections to previous discussions and readings or comment constructively on someone else's post. You will not receive credit if your post recapitulates thinking that has already been done, either in class or elsewhere on the class blog.

I will read your posts and respond to them on the class blog at least once a week. I may also refer to posts during class meetings and you should feel free to do the same.

Nancy Foasberg, the Humanities librarian who will be working with you on your Honors Essays, will also be responding on the class blog, when appropriate. Please make sure to read her advice and follow her instructions carefully.

You can access our class blog at <http://gossip.qwriting.org/>. The password is walkden.

Oral Presentation (10%)

A 10-minute oral presentation on a course "key word" followed by a short (5-minute) class Q and A. Please consult the presentation assignment sheet for further guidelines.

Research Essay (60%)

The formal writing assignment will be a 18-25 page (typed/double spaced/12 pt. font) research essay on a topic developed by you in consultation with me. We will be working on these essays

across the length of the semester, and the assignment will include four formal stages (as well as a variety of informal ones). These four formal stages are:

1. Draft Prospectus (10%)
2. Revised Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (15%)
3. Preliminary Essay Draft (25%)
4. Peer Review (10%)

After winter break, for those continuing in the Honors program:

5. Revised Draft and Argument Abstract

We'll discuss each stage in more detail as the semester progresses. Due dates are indicated on the syllabus. All written assignments are to be submitted both digitally and in hard copy, unless otherwise indicated.

Conferences

I will arrange one-on-one conferences a couple of times during the semester, one to discuss your prospectus draft and one to discuss your essay draft in progress. If you must reschedule a conference, please let me know 24 hours in advance. Otherwise, I cannot guarantee that the conference can be rescheduled.

Required Texts

(all available in the QC bookstore).

Please buy these editions. If you already own a text in a different edition you may use that instead, but keep in mind that you will need to locate passages quickly so as not to hold up class discussion.

Additional readings will be given out in hard copy or be available for you to read and print out on the class blog.

Jane Austen, *Emma*. Penguin Classics, ed. Fiona Stafford, 2003.

ISBN 978-0141439587

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Oxford Word Classics, ed. Landa and Roberts, 2010

ISBN 978-0199572830

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings*. Norton Critical Editions, ed. Leland S. Person, 2004

ISBN 978-0393979534

Zoë Heller, *Notes on a Scandal: What Was She Thinking?* Picador, 2006.

ISBN 978-0312426095

Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour*. Dramatists Play Service, Inc.; Acting Edition, 1953

ISBN 978-0822202059

Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo and Laura*. Broadview editions, ed.

Michael J Drexler, 2008

ISBN 978-1551113463

William Shakespeare, *Four Great Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. Signet Classics, ed.

Barnet, Kernan and Fraser. 1998

ISBN 978-0451527295

Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1999
ISBN 978-0061711299

Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome and Summer*. Modern Library edition, ed. Elizabeth Strout, 2001
ISBN 978-0375757280

Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*. New Mermaids, Methuen Drama, ed. Ian Small, 2002
ISBN 978-0713666670

Films (Assigned)

The Conversation (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)

Das Leben der Anderen, The Lives of Others (dir. Henckel Von Donnersmarck, 2006)

Easy A (dir. William Gluck, 2010)

The Social Network (dir. David Fincher, 2010)

Films (Recommended)

The Children's Hour (dir. William Wyler, 1961)

Notes on a Scandal (dir. Richard Eyre, 2006)

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (dir. Richard Neame, 1969)

Tenative Reading Plan

This schedule may change according to our class needs

1.

Monday August 29

Wednesday August 31

Introductions

Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4, 239-265

Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2* (1.1.1-22), “Enter RUMOR, *painted full of tongues.*”

Norman Rockwell, “The Gossips,” for *The Saturday Evening Post* (1948)

Gossip Girl, “Pilot” (dir. Mark Piznarski). CW. 19 Sept. 2007

Hesiod, *Melampodia* 3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.316-338 (Tiresias)

Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal: Papers in Honor of Melville J. Herskovits,” *Current Anthropology* 4.3 (1963): 307-16.

(Monday September 5 – Labor Day)

2.

Wednesday September 7

Monday September 12

Chaucer, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” lines 193-256 and 525-542; “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and “The Manciple’s Tale”

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2. 537-632 (Phoebus and Coronis); 11.146-93 (Midas)

3.

Wednesday September 14

Monday September 19

Shakespeare, *Othello*

Kenneth Gross, “Denigration and Hallucination in *Othello*,” Chapter 4 of *Shakespeare’s Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 102-130

GUESTS: Frederick Buell, Chair of the Honors Program, and Jacek Belc, Honors Student 2010-11

4.

Wednesday September 21

Monday September 26

Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*

(Wednesday September 28 – no class scheduled)

5.
Monday October 3
Wednesday October 5

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome," *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5-25

(Monday, October 10 – Columbus Day)

6.
Wednesday October 12
Monday October 17

Leonora Sansay, *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo*

GUESTS: Duncan Faherty and Sian Silyn Roberts (Monday only)

7.
Wednesday October 19
Monday October 24

Jane Austen, *Emma*

Patricia Mayer Spacks, "The Talent of Ready Utterance," Chapter 7 of *Gossip* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 147-70

Blakely Vermeule, "Gossip and Literary Narrative," *Philosophy and Literature* 30 (2006), 102-17. (PROJECT MUSE)

8.
Wednesday October 26
Monday October 31

Jane Austen, *Emma*, ctd.

Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury': Gossip and the Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," *Representations* 31 (1990), 1-18 (JSTOR)

9.
Wednesday November 2
Monday November 7

2 Samuel 11-12 (David and Bathsheba)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Draft Prospectus due

10.
Wednesday November 9
Monday November 14

Edith Wharton, *Summer*

Easy A (dir. William Gluck, 2010)

GUEST: Karen Weingarten

Small group meetings with Nancy Foasberg

11.

Wednesday November 16

Monday November 21

Lillian Hellman, *The Children's Hour*

Esther, 1-10

John Weir, "Where Do You See Yourself?" from *What Did I Do Wrong: A Novel*

D.A. Miller, "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets," *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 192-220

Eve Sedgwick, "Epistemology of the Closet," *Epistemology of the Closet* (rpt. 2008, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 61-90

GUEST: John Weir (Monday only)

Small group meetings with Nancy Foasberg, ctd.

(W. November 23 – class cancelled before Thanksgiving Recess; makeup class W. Dec 14)

12.

Monday November 28

Wednesday November 30

Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*

Zoë Heller, *Notes on a Scandal: What Was She Thinking?*

Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due in class

13.

Monday November 5

Wednesday November 7

The Conversation (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1974)

Das Leben der Anderen, The Lives of Others (dir. Henckel Von Donnersmarck, 2006)

14.

Monday December 12

Wednesday December 14

The Social Network (dir. David Fincher, 2010)

Preliminary Essay Draft due in class (please remember to bring two copies)

Monday December 19

Peer Response due (digital submission only)

Important dates – Spring semester

Wednesday February 8	Revised Draft and Argument Abstract due
Monday February 13	Workshop led by Nancy Foasberg – What We Do When We Cite
Wednesday February 15	
Wednesday February 22	Submission of Honors Essay
Friday March 30	Honors Examination
Wednesday May 9	Honors Conference