

Carleton University
Fall/Winter 2018-2019

ENGL 4115A Culture and the Text/
5900X Selected Topic in English Studies I

Melodrama and Repetition: Soaps, Superheroes, and Seriality

Department of English

Prerequisites (for ENGL 4115A): fourth-year standing
or permission of the department.

Preclusions: none.

Time: Mondays 8:35-11:25 a.m.

Location: Dunton Tower 1816

Instructor: Prof. B. Johnson

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Phone: (613) 520-2600 ext. 2331

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:00 p.m.



Melodramatic narratives are driven by the experience of one crisis after another, crises involving severed family ties, separation and loss, misrecognition of one's place, person, and propriety. Seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealousy, incurable illness, obsession, and compulsion—these are part of the familiar terrain of melodrama.

—Marcia Landry

This course examines the poetics, pleasures, and politics of melodrama as a mode of excess, with an emphasis on the ways that seriality intensifies and complicates melodramatic narratives. In the opening weeks of the course, we will orient ourselves to the history of melodrama and to the critical debates that this complex, often contradictory, mode has occasioned. Subsequently, the course turns to interpenetrating case studies of serial melodrama in several media: the pocketbook, television, film, and comics. The narrative preoccupations and emotional registers of paperback romances, superhero comics, TV soap operas, and superhero films owe a common debt to melodrama, and among the tasks of the seminar will be to explore (1) how each genre has appropriated melodrama in the interest of manufacturing pleasure for specific audiences at historically specific moments, (2) how each medium articulates seriality differently at the level form, (3) how serial melodramas in these media elicit different modes of reception, and (4) how various types of serial melodrama interact with each other historically.

Learning Outcomes: Students taking this course can expect to develop competency in genre and media theory related to melodrama and popular serialization, as well as in the history of melodrama as a mode. They will also have the opportunity to practice and develop their skills in the following areas: (1) reading, summary, and synthesis of complex theoretical arguments; (2) critical analysis and comparison of theoretical claims and methodologies; (3) practical critical analysis and comparison of complex primary texts from several media; (4) oral presentation and facilitating group discussion; (5) advanced writing and research including: topic development and project execution.

Required Texts: Texts for the course are available electronically through **comixology.com** (you will have to open an account and purchase comics online for digital download) and **ARES** (Carleton Library Electronic Reserves). Films and television shows that are not already available online through **globaltv.com** or **Netflix** will be screened on campus prior to the days in which they are scheduled to be discussed. Screening times will be based on a poll of student availability conducted during the first class of term. Students who are not available to attend the screenings can make arrangements with the professor to view the film and video components of the course at alternate times. Some of the television clips are available at **youtube.com**.

Course Calendar

NOTE: In addition to the class meeting times listed below, students are expected to be available for screenings of several films and TV shows at a mutually agreed-upon time outside of regular class hours. Screenings will be on campus. Students who are unable to attend screenings are expected to rent and view the films on their own. More difficult-to-find TV episodes will be available to borrow and watch in the English Department from the professor.

Jan 7

Introduction to the Course

Screening: *All That Heaven Allows*

Ongoing Viewing Assignment: Begin regularly watching *Days of Our Lives* (NBC), available online at globaltv.com. Note that Global allows you to view only the most recent 5 episodes of *DOOL* at any given time, after which they become archived and unavailable for viewing without a cable subscription. In order to keep up, you will have to tune in at least once a week for the duration of the course. In order to take notes in anticipation of the assignments due on Feb 11 and 25, students are advised to read Williams, Carol Traynor. "*It's Time for My Story*": *Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response*, Chapter 6 "Princesses, Tentpoles, and Real Ericas: Soap Characters as Story 'Functions'" and Chapter 7 "Blocking and Weaving: The Structure of Soap Opera" (127-57, 159-82) early in the term (available on ARES).

Jan 14

What Is Melodrama?Sirk, Douglas (dir.), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955)Cawelti, John G. "The Best-Selling Social Melodrama." *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976. 260-295. (ARES)Elsaesser, Thomas, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." (1972) Marcia Landry, ed. *Imitations of Life: A Reader in Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 68-91. (ARES)Brooks, Peter, "The Melodramatic Imagination." *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976. 1-23. (ARES)

Jan 21

What Is Melodrama?Rapper, Irving (dir.), *Now, Voyager* (1942)Berlant, Lauren, "Remembering Love, Forgetting Everything Else," *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 169-205. (ARES)Geldhill, Christine, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation." Christine Geldhill, ed. *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Suffolk: British Film Institute Press, 1987. 5-39. (ARES)Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revisited." N. Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. (ARES)Ankler, Elisabeth Robin. "Melodramas of Failed Sovereignty," *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. 225-57. (ARES)

Jan 28

What Is Popular Seriality?Haynes, Todd (dir.), *Far From Heaven* (2002)Frank Kelleter, "Five Ways of Looking at Popular Seriality," Frank Kelleter, ed., *Media of Serial Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2017. 7-34. (ARES)Frank Kelleter and Kathleen Loock, "Hollywood Remaking as Second-Order Serialization," Frank Kelleter, ed., *Media of Serial Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2017. 125-47. (ARES)Constantine Verevis, "New Millennial Remakes," Frank Kelleter, ed., *Media of Serial Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2017. 148-66. (ARES)Goldberg, Jonathan, "Preface" and "Identity and Identification: Sirk – Fassbender – Haynes," *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. ix-xvi, 23-79. (ARES)

Feb 4

Reading Serially: Romance**Popular Romance Critical Review Due (summary due on cuLearn by 4 pm Feb 3rd)**

Student-selected Romances and summaries

- Radway, Janice, *Reading The Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Chapter 4 “The Ideal Romance” and Chapter 5 “The Failed Romance,” Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991. 119-185. (ARES)
- McCracken, Scott, “Reading time: popular fiction and the everyday.” David Glover and Scott McCracken, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 103-121. (ARES)

Feb 11

Serial Melodrama: Soap Opera and Form

Soap Opera Study 1: Story Structure Due

- Excerpts from *Dallas* (1978), TBA
- Dallas* (1978), Season 3, episode 12, “Ellie Saves the Day” (series episode 49; air date: Friday, November 30, 1979)
- Days of Our Lives* (January 7-present)
- Ang, Ien, “*Dallas* and the Melodramatic Imagination,” Marcia Landry, ed. *Imitations of Life: A Reader in Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 473-95. (ARES)
- Allen, Robert C., “A Reader-Oriented Poetics of the Soap Opera,” Marcia Landry, ed. *Imitations of Life: A Reader in Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 496-524. (ARES)
- Williams, Carol Traynor. “*It’s Time for My Story*”: *Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response*, Chapter 6 “Princesses, Tentpoles, and Real Ericas: Soap Characters as Story ‘Functions’” and Chapter 7 “Blocking and Weaving: The Structure of Soap Opera,” London: Praeger. 127-57, 159-82. (ARES)

Feb 18

Reading Week

Feb 25

Serial Melodrama: Soap Opera and Fantasy

Soap Opera Study 2: Character Function Due

- Days of Our Lives*
- Modleski, Tania, “The Search For Tomorrow in Today’s Soap Operas,” Marcia Landry, ed. *Imitations of Life: A Reader in Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. 446-65. (ARES)
- Scodari, Christine. Introduction and Chapters 1-3, *Serial Monogamy: Soap Opera, Lifespan, and the Gendered Politics of Fantasy*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2004. [Chapters 2-3 available on ARES; Intro and Chapter 1 are at the reserve desk – you will have to photocopy them from the book.]
- Spence, Louise. “‘They killed off Marlina, but she’s on another show now’: Fantasy, Reality, and Pleasure in Watching Daytime Soap Operas.” Robert C. Allen, ed. *To Be Continued... Soap Operas Around the World*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 182-98.

Mar 4

Serial Melodrama: Superhero Comics

Superhero Melodrama Critical Reviews on *The Avengers* Due

The Avengers (1963-1996) #57 "Behold...the Vision!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #58 "Even an Android Can Cry!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #59 "The Name Is...Yellowjacket!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #60 "...Till Death Do Us Part!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #161 "Beware...The Ant-Man!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #162 "The Bride of Ultron!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #227 "Testing...1...2...3!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #228 "Trial and Error!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #229 "Final Curtain!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #230 "The Last Farewell!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #264 "Stings & Sorrows!" (Comixology)
The Avengers (1963-1996) #271 "Breakaway!" (Comixology)

Sergi, Joe, "Tales from the Code: You've Lost That Loving Feeling," *Comic Book Legal Defense Fund*, 14 February 2013. <http://cbldef.org/2013/02/tales-from-the-code-youve-lost-that-loving-feeling-the-rise-and-fall-of-romance-comics/> (ARES)

Bainbridge, Jason. "'Worlds Within Worlds': The Role of Superheroes in the Marvel and DC Universes." Angel Ndalians, ed. *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*. New York: Routledge, 2009. 64-85. (ARES)

Easton, Lee. "No Endings? No Problem! Reboot, Rinse, Repeat." Lee Easton and Richard Harrison. *Secret Identity Reader: Essays on Sex, Death, and the Superhero*. 237-51. (ARES)

Mar 11 **American Race Melodrama, Film, and Superhero Seriality**

Coogler, Ryan (dir.), *Black Panther* (2018)

Gillman, Susan, "American Race Melodramas and the Culture of the Occult: An Introduction," *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 1-31. (ARES)

Williams, Linda, "Trials of Black and White: *California v. Powell* and *The People v. Orenthal James Simpson*," *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*. 252-95. (ARES)

Mar 18 **Superheroes, Stars, and Melodrama**

Superhero Melodrama Critical Reviews on *Dazzler Due*

Dazzler (1981-1986) #1 Facsimile Edition (Comixology)

Dyer, Richard, "Introduction," *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, New York: Routledge, 2003. 1-16. (ARES)

Mar 25 **Soap Opera, Camp, and the Remake**

Excerpts from *Dynasty* (1981), TBA

Dynasty (1981), Season 4, episode 26, "New Lady in Town" (series episode 87; air date: Wednesday, May 2, 1984.

Dynasty (2017), episode TBA

Feuer, Jane, "Serial Form, Melodrama, and Reaganite Ideology in Eighties TV" and "The Reception of *Dynasty*," *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. 111-30, 131-48. (ARES)

Finch, Mark, "Sex and Address in *Dynasty*," Fabio Cleto, ed. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991. 143-59. (ARES)

Apr 1 Superheroes, Romance, Melodrama, and Camp

Superhero Melodrama Critical Reviews on *Beauty and the Beast* Due

X-Men: Beauty and the Beast (Comixology)

Medhurst, Andy, "Batman, Deviance, and Camp," Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to Superhero Media*, New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-63. (ARES)

Nelson, Tim, "Even an Android Can Cry," *Journal of Gender Studies* 13.3 (2004): 251-57. (ARES)

Fawaz, Ramzi. "'Where No X-Man Has Gone Before!': Mutant Superheroes and the Cultural politics of Popular Fantasy in Postwar America." *American Literature* 83 (2011): 355-88. (ARES)

Apr 8 Melodrama and Seriality Today

Melodrama Today: Case Studies Due

Cooper, Bradley (dir.), A Star Is Born (2018)

Days of Our Lives

Grades and Grading

Submission and Grading of Student Work: Students are expected to submit all assignments in class on the dates specified below or (in the case of presentations) on the dates for which they sign up. Article presentations will be graded and marks for these posted as promptly as possible. All other written work will be graded and returned to students AFTER the final class.

Students who intend to pick up their term work and wish to receive feedback on their seminar portfolios must send me an email to that effect in the final week of class.

Late Penalty and Absences: If you must miss a class for any reason, email me in advance to let me know. If you have work due on a day you miss class, email it to me prior to the start time of the class so that it is not marked late. Three missed classes will be grounds for removal from the seminar. Work submitted for credit outside of class will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

N.B. Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Method of Evaluation

Assignment	Weight	Due Date
Attendance/Participation	10%	ongoing
Article Lesson(s)	15%	various (sign up)
Seminar Portfolio	75%	ongoing (see below)

Attendance & Participation (10%) – In addition to the assignments listed below, you are expected to attend and participate in every class. Effective participation is less about airtime than it is about sustained, informed engagement. Come to class having read or viewed the primary texts ahead of time. Have some thoughts about them that you are prepared to share. Listen actively when your colleagues contribute, and be judicious and thoughtful in your responses to them. It's okay to be quiet for a class or two, but challenge yourself to be an active member of seminar at all times, whether you are speaking or listening. In general, the really important intellectual work all happens in the alchemy of the seminar, so be present for it and be a part of it.

Article Lesson(s) (1 x 15% for students of ENGL 4115A; 2 x 7.5% for students of ENGL 5900X) – The purpose of the article lesson is to develop your pedagogical skills by teaching the secondary source to the class. Your lesson should be short (10-15 minutes max) and must include a 1-2 page handout that concisely and accurately summarizes the main argument of the article in approximately 300-400 words and provides any illustrations, diagrams, and/or examples (drawn either from the article/chapter or from a course text) that help to clarify the article's main claims (approx. 10 minutes). Each presentation should conclude with the presentation of an original example of how one important claim from the article can be brought to bear on a text that you select that is *not* from the course syllabus (approx.. 5 minutes). Due in class on the date(s) for which you signed up. **Students registered in ENGL 5900X must sign up for an additional article presentation; for those students, each article presentation will be worth 7.5%, for a total of 15% of the final grade.**

Seminar Portfolio (75%) – Instead of a final essay, this seminar will ask you to work in a sustained way throughout the term, trying out new ideas in smaller more localized written assignments and then bringing these to class to discuss and share with others. At the end of the course, you will have completed **FIVE** such think-pieces for your portfolio, which will be graded as a single piece of work in April. In addition to an oral presentation, undergraduate students are expected to submit written work totaling 4000 words (roughly 16 double-spaced pages) over the course of the term; graduate students are expected to give two oral presentations and submit written work totaling 5000 words (roughly 20 double-spaced pages). All written work should be in MLA format and must include correct citation and a complete Works Cited list. See portfolio assignment details below. Note that all of the assignment lengths are 250 words longer (per assignment) for students registered in ENGL 5900X).

1. **Popular Romance Critical Review (15%, summary DUE Feb 3rd; full assignment DUE Feb 4th in class) – 750 words (ENGL 4115A)/ 1000 words (ENGL 5900X).** Purchase and read any popular romance (it does not have to be published by Harlequin, nor does it have to feature a heterosexual couple as protagonists). The purpose of this critical review is to present a concise structural summary of and critical reflection on a romance novel, with reference to Chapters 4-5 of Janice A. Radaway's *Reading the Romance*. Your structural summary of the romance should be objective in tone and economical in style. In one paragraph of finely honed prose, summarize the work in terms of character functions and plot developments rather than retelling the story for the purpose of entertaining the reader. The critical reflection portion of the assignment should follow organically from this structural summary and can record your subjective response to the work, but it should do so with an eye to autoethnographic analysis rather than mere appreciation or censure. (i.e. how you feel about the work is only important insofar as your response is itself treated as data for analysis.) **NOTE: just the structural summary paragraph must be posted to the discussion forum of cuLearn for the class no later than 4:00pm on Sunday, Feb 3rd.** Then submit your complete Critical Review in class on Feb 4th.

2. **Soap Opera Study 1: Story Structure (10%, DUE Feb 11th in class) – Blocking Chart + 500 words (ENGL 4115A)/ 750 words (ENGL 5900X).** Create a 1 page blocking chart and follow-up critical reflection on how *some of Days of Our Lives'* plots and character configurations interweave and on the significance of those interweavings. Your reflection should make reference to at least two secondary sources from the syllabus. Use Chapter 7 of Carol Traynor Williams's *"It's Time for My Story": Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response* (Feb 11) as the basis for this assignment.

3. **Soap Opera Study 2: Character Function (15%, DUE Feb 25th in class) – 750 words (ENGL 4115A)/ 1000 words (ENGL 5900X).** Compare two characters from *Days of Our Lives* in terms of character type/function. The goal of this assignment is either to study contrasting (or complementary) types OR to make fine distinctions between particular instantiations of a single character type. Think about how characters are set in relationship with each other within the show (as friends, relatives, couples, enemies, etc.), and think also about how you might compare two characters who could in theory be classed as a single type (hero, heroine, bastard, etc.), and how you might explore the subtle differences between them. Such differences might include variations in storyline, character history (see wikis for deep history), actor/performance, narrative framing (codes), etc. The end result of your analysis should be a clear articulation of how the show envisions a particular character dyad OR a clear distinction between two characters of the same type (including, perhaps, the designation of two subtypes that your analysis would name). Use Chapter 6 of Carol Traynor Williams's *"It's Time for My Story": Soap Opera Sources, Structure, and Response* (Feb 11) as the basis for this assignment, as well as any other sources on soap opera from the syllabus.

4. **Superhero Melodrama Critical Review (15%, DUE in class either Mar 4th, Mar 18th, or Apr 1st) – 750 words (ENGL 4115A)/ 1000 words (ENGL 5900X).** Drawing on any of the

secondary sources on comics, melodrama, and/or seriality, select an issue of *The Avengers* (Mar 4) *Dazzler* (Mar 18) or *Beauty and the Beast* (Apr 1) and develop a critical analysis of the story from that issue as melodrama. How does the superhero comic you are analyzing engage with and transform the melodramatic mode? How do its visual storytelling techniques replicate or complicate those of soap opera? Use this assignment as an opportunity to develop a close reading of a superhero comic as melodrama. Please reproduce any panel or page that receives substantial discussion in your analysis. This assignment is due in class on the date your comic is scheduled for discussion.

5. **Melodrama Today: A Case Study (20%, DUE Feb 25th in class) – 1000 words (ENGL 4115A)/ 1250-1500 words (ENGL 5900X).** Analyze any text—either from the course or a new text of your choosing—that hazards one possible answer to the question: “What is the function of contemporary melodrama, and for whom?” This question asks you to situate a contemporary melodramatic text in relation to both mode and audience, as well as to frame your answer in terms of pertinent aspects of the cultural history and theory of melodrama (or some particular melodramatic form). Your analysis of a Case Study must include reference to at least 3 secondary sources from the course.

Plagiarism: The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in “substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course’s instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Religious obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. carleton.ca/pmc

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>