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{from the trailer to Season 3 of *The Handmaid's Tale*}

Writers have long imagined new worlds as a way of changing this one. “Poets are,” said Percy Shelley way back in 1821, “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” This course asks how literature depicts and intervenes in the world and models new worlds. It reads works addressing a range of pressing issues: climate and the environment; social and economic inequality; immigration; questions regarding race, gender and sexuality. We will begin with Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and end with NK Jemisin’s Hugo award-winning *The Fifth Season* (2015). In between we will read science fiction (Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Ministry for the Future*), realism (Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist*), magical realism (Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*), essays (by Cathy Park Hong and James Baldwin), and hybrid genres such as autofiction (Ocean Vuong’s *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*).

**Textbooks** can be purchased new or used at/through the Harvard Coop. The following are required texts:

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Anchor, 978-0385490818)
- James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Penguin, 9780142437346)
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (Knopf, 978-1400033423)
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (Penguin, 978-0525562047)
- Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (Orbit, 978-0316300148)
- N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (Orbit, 978-0316229296)

## Graduate Credit:

Those students wishing to take this course for graduate credit will be asked to read and present on more difficult critical and theoretical essays (indicated with a “G” in the syllabus). Details on the nature of this assignment will be worked out with you early in the term.

*Schedule: (subject, of course, to change); readings, including ten-hundred word pairings, are to be completed by the dates listed below.*

## Part I. Primed for Change

**Week 1: *Shake your chains to earth like dew // Ye are many—they are few.***

T, 6/21—Percy Shelley, “The Masque of Anarchy,” “Ode to the West Wind,” “England in 1819” (1819); from *The Defense of Poetry*, “Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon” (1821)

William Wordsworth, “The Last of the Flock” (1798)

Margaret Atwood, “Spelling” (1984)

Terrance Hayes, selected *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* (2018)—see **Skills Check**

Th, 6/23—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairings: Kim, “The Importance of Stories: On Margaret Atwood’s The Testaments” (2019)*  
*Balibar, from Violence and Civility (2014) - G*

*Skills Check – Short Response Paper Due on first day of class*

## Part II. Changing Roles

**Week 2: Suspicious Reading** “His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.”

T, 6/28—Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (cont.)

James Joyce, “The Dead” (1906/1913)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Margot Norris, “The Politics of Gender and Art in ‘The Dead’” (2004)*

Th, 6/30—Thomas Pynchon, “The Secret Integration” (1964), James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” (1953)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Cathy Park Hong, “The End of White Innocence” (2020)*

*Personal Reflection #1*

## Part III. Changing Yourself

**Week 3: “It pained him that he did not know well what politics meant”**

T, 7/5—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist* (1916), I-III

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Jameson, “The Twin Sources of Realism” (2013) - G*

**“Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”**

Th, 7/7—*Portrait*, IV-V

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Rei Terada, “The Life Process and Forgettable Living” (2014) - G*  
*Draft of Close Reading Due*

## Part IV. Changing the System

**Week 4: “It is about love. What else but love? Can’t I love what I criticize?”**

T, 7/12—Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Morrison, from Playing in the Dark (1992)*

Th, 7/14—*Song of Solomon*, cont.

## Part V. Changing Bodies

**Week 5: “...the indubitable peculiarity of my body, and the unprovable singularity of my mind...”**

T, 7/19— Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Walter Benjamin, “The Critique of Violence” (1921) - G*

Th, 7/21—*On Earth...*, cont.

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Eli Friedlander, “Myth” (2012) - G*

## Part VI. Changing the Planet

**Week 6: “Now they’re terraforming earth.”**

T, 7/26— Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future* (2020)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Rob Nixon, from Slow Violence (2013; 2353-69)*

Th, 7/28—*Ministry*, cont.

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Felder, “The realism of our time: Interview with Kim Stanley Robinson” (2018)*

*Personal Reflection #2*

## Part VII. Changing the World

**Week 7: “Father Earth’s surface cracked like an eggshell.”**

T, 8/2 —NK Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (2015)

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Fanon, from The Wretched of the Earth (1963)*

Th, 8/4—*Fifth Season*, cont.

*Ten-Hundred Word Pairing: Khatchadourian, “N. K. Jemisin’s Dream Worlds” (2020)*

*Final Project Due*

### Assignments:

- **Personal Reflections (10%):** Two, page-long, singled-spaced reflections on your own experience of social change – in reading our texts, and in other aspects of your life.
- **Close Reading (20%):** A two-page, single-spaced close reading of a passage or two from one of the first four books.
- **Final Project (35%):** A ten-page, doubled-spaced piece of writing that critically and creatively engages with the themes and readings from the class. This should not be a *standard academic paper*, though it can use aspects of such papers (say, close readings, arguments, footnotes, etc.). The paper should be distinct from your response papers and presentations, but can arise from them.
- **Attendance & Participation (25%):** this is primarily a discussion-based course, and your attendance and active participation is crucial. Part of this grade will be connected to a presentation:
  - **The “Ten-Hundred Words” (10%):** Your job in the presentation is to break down an article’s basic argument, and provide us with three important quotations that we can discuss as a group. Breakdown summaries should last no more than five minutes (= about 500 words), though the discussion of the quotations may last longer. Also, there’s a catch – presentations must be written using only the “ten hundred” most common words in the style of Randall Munroe’s *Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff*

*in Simple Words* (2015). You'll do what he does, but with a critical essay, not a space rover. It's actually incredibly fun.

## The Fine Print

### ***Accessibility***

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### ***Academic Integrity/Honesty***

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/policies/student-responsibilities>) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting the wrong draft, or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Resources to Support Academic Integrity (<http://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources-support-academic-integrity>) where you will find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources (<https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>) and two free online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

### ***Publishing or Distributing Course Materials***

Students may not post, publish, sell, or otherwise publicly distribute course materials without the written permission of the course instructor. Such materials include, but are not limited to, the following: lecture notes, lecture slides, video, or audio recordings, assignments, problem sets, examinations, other students' work, and answer keys. Students who sell, post, publish, or distribute course materials without written permission, whether for the purposes of soliciting answers or otherwise, may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including requirement to withdraw from the Summer School. Further, students may not make video or audio recordings of class sessions for their own use without written permission of the instructor.