Course Description:
Since Classical Antiquity, violence and the memory of violence have often circumscribed the way in which politics and authority are discussed in literary texts. Examples of extreme physical violence, such as decapitation, disembowelment, the severing of limbs, and drawing and quartering, have often been used as vicious propaganda that flaunts the despotic power of a nation. These examples are also implemented with a didactic end, as moral lessons that warn against political disunity while also suggesting that through the extirpation of evil (the removal of a corrupted limb, so to speak), national integrity can be reestablished.

Taking early mythological and literary descriptions of violence and dismemberment enacted upon literal and political bodies as our point of departure, the first part of this course will examine episodes of corporal fragmentation—decapitation in particular—that stand as metaphors for national disintegration and failure. Since the preoccupations with honor, integrity, and authority were some of the most obsessive anxieties of the pre-modern period, particular attention will be given to the societal, cultural, and religious pressures that combine to facilitate acts of violence that link bloodshed and cathartic transformation, whether it be through examples of martyrdom and self-sacrifice to publicly sanctioned demonstrations of violence, such as torture,
beheadings, and even cannibalism. The physical fragmentation of the individual frequently runs in parallel with the body politic’s intense polarization of the king's two bodies, and with political metaphors of the fragility of the national body or the failed polis, left headless in the absence of proper political governance, dismembered in the wake of political strife.

Headlessness and dismemberment are also apt metaphors for the writing process and the nervous treatment of the idea of exemplarity. In the last part of the course we will investigate the tenuous negotiation of authority, gender, status, and power. Indeed, references to headlessness, dismemberment, and decomposition once again offer an interpretive key to understanding the complicated relationship of author, text, tradition, and power, as articulated through descriptions of bodily, ethical, and political integrity—or the lack thereof.

Course Objectives:
The First-Year Seminar aims to put new students into contact with leading thinkers, to introduce them to important subjects, to challenge them intellectually through rigorous standards of analysis and oral and written argumentation, and to prepare them to conduct their own research.

Course Requirements:
This course is designed around reading and writing assignments that introduce students to essential research skills—such as a literature review, critical use of primary sources, the identification of a research problem, critical analysis of texts, and encounters with works of art. In addition to participating actively in class discussions, students are expected to give two oral presentations, complete shorter writing assignments and reading responses throughout the semester, and write a midterm and final paper.

Required Reading:
Texts to be purchased:

Excerpted Texts to be made available for download and printing:

**Selected Poems:**
Askew, de Ávila, Cavendish, Di Morra, Donne, Dryden, Du Bellay, Du Guillet, Garcilaso, Góngora, Labé, Lanier, Marot, Petrarch, Quevedo, Shakespeare, Stampa, Villon

**Critical Texts:**
Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” *The Medusa Reader*, (pp. 133-35)
Sigmund Freud, “Medusa’s Head” *The Medusa Reader*, (pp. 84-86)
Hartzog. “How Columbus Created the Cannibals.” (pp.1-4)
Peter Hulme. “Columbus and the Cannibals: A Study of the Reports of Anthropophagy in the Journal of Christopher Columbus.” *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* (pp. 115-139)
Katherine Rowe. “Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, (pp. 279-303)
Ryan Prendergast. “The Body Politic and Its Parts in El médico de su honra” *Bulletin of the Comediantes* (pp. 31-43)

**Grading Scheme (Percentage of Final Grade):**
- Participation: 15%
- Reading Responses, Short Writing Assignments, Homework: 20%
- Midterm Exam (Take-Home Essay Test, 3-4 pages): 15%
- Oral Presentation I: 10%
- Oral Presentation II: 10%
- Final Paper (10-12 pages): 30%

**Reading Responses:**
Students are required to submit 5 reading responses (roughly 1 page) throughout the course of the semester. As there are 7 reading responses listed, with their discretion, students may opt out of two reading response papers.

**Format for Written Assignments:**
All written assignments (i.e. reading responses, paper) should be double-spaced with standard margins in 12-point font (Times). Documents must include any sources cited and conform to the MLA style.
**Class Preparedness:**
Since in-class activities such as moderated discussions, group work, and workshops will build from completed homework, late assignments will **not** be accepted.

**Participation:**
Class participation is fundamental. Students are required and expected to **actively** engage in the course. You must come to class prepared to discuss the reading—that is, you should be ready and willing to share questions about and responses to the texts. If you come to class unprepared—meaning you are not fully engaged in class discussion or do not have the reading materials with you—your final grade will be negatively affected.

While engaging in discussions, both as a class and in smaller group activities, students are always expected to work with each other in a congenial, respectful, and cooperative manner.

**Attendance:**
Attendance and participation are both essential. Tardiness will affect your grade, and if you are absent, it is your responsibility to obtain and understand any information, readings, and homework you may have missed in order to be prepared for the following session.

**Presentations:**
Each student will be responsible for two presentations. The first (roughly 15 minutes) should be geared towards fostering class discussion and should: introduce a pre-selected section of text, provide a close reading of it, discuss possible interpretations and conclusions, and pose discussion questions to the rest of the class in an engaged and sustained fashion.

The second (roughly 10 minutes) will be a presentation of the thesis and argument of your final paper, and should walk your classmates through choice textual and critical examples that evidence how you have arrived at your final conclusions.

**Academic Integrity:**
It is your responsibility to represent yourself honestly. Plagiarism, which consists of representing someone else’s work as your own, or misrepresenting your own work is not tolerated. This includes handing in a paper that is not your own, using the words and/or ideas from a publication, the web or other source without citation, either in direct quotes and paraphrased ideas. **Always cite your sources.** Plagiarism violates the Honor Code and can result in failure of the course, suspension, or dismissal.

**College of Arts and Science Honor Code**
* As a student in the College of Arts and Science at New York University, you belong to a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry. Honest assessment of ideas and their sources is the foundation of what we do.
* Our University is a community of mutual trust and respect in which personal prejudice has no part in the critical evaluation of ideas. It is a place where differences of opinion can be subjected to deliberate and reasonable examination without animus. As scholars, it is therefore as a matter of honor and good repute that we each commit ourselves to assuring the integrity of our academic community and of the educational pursuits we undertake together.

**Accommodations:**
I want to ensure that all students in class are able to perform to their best. Students requiring any form of academic accommodations should feel free to speak to me as soon as possible.
The University is committed to a policy of equal treatment and opportunity in every aspect of its relations with its faculty, students, and staff members, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender and/or gender identity or expression, marital or parental status, national origin, ethnicity, citizenship status, veteran or military status, age, disability, and any other legally protected basis.

Use of Electronics:
Cell phone use is not permitted in the classroom—phones should be turned off, as should all other personal electronic devices. While not encouraged, the use of laptops and tablets is allowed only for taking notes. I will assign an absence, if personal electronic devices are used for any other purpose.

Schedule of Class Readings and Assignments (*Subject to Change*):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wed., Sept. 5 — Week One : Introduction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Body Politic: Brief Overview</td>
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<td>Biblical Examples: Abraham &amp; Issac; David &amp; Goliath; Judith &amp; Holofernes; Jael &amp; Sisera; Samson &amp; Delilah; Salome &amp; John the Baptist (pp. 1-8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myth: Ovid, <em>Metamorphoses</em>: Orpheus &amp; Eurydice, 10.1-85; 11.1-66 (pp. 2-3)</td>
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<td>Art: Medieval and Renaissance Examples</td>
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<th>Wed., Sept. 12 — Week Two : Fragmentation, Violence, and Fear</th>
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<tr>
<td>Euripides, <em>Bacchae</em> (pp. 126-168)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petrarch, Rime sparse #197 (1p)</td>
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<tr>
<td>De Pizan, “Medusa’s Beauty,” <em>The Book of the City of Ladies</em>, (1p)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Essays:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freud, “Medusa’s Head” (pp 1-2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (pp. 133-35)</td>
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<td><strong>Reading Response #1 Due</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dante, “Inferno,” Cantos 32-34 (pp. 498-540; [22 pages-every other page])</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petrarch, “To the Abbot of St Benigno” (pp. 1-3).</td>
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<th>Wed., Sept. 26 — Week Four : Inviting Decapitation (“Take my good axe / and show me a chop.”)</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em> (pp. 46-126)</td>
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<td><strong>Reading Response #2 Due</strong></td>
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### Wed., Oct. 3 — Week Five : The Heart of the Story

- **Boccaccio**, IV: 5, 9, (pp. 326-29; 349-52)
- Chaucer, “The Physician’s Tale,” “The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale” (pp. 1-6)
- Don Juan Manuel, *Count Lucanor* (pp. 1-11)
- Marguerite de Navarre, “Story 2” (pp. 79-82)

### Wed., Oct. 10 — Week Six : On Marriage and other Bloody Exemplars

- **Herodotus**, *Histories* (pp. 1-2)
- Cervantes, “The Story of the Man who Couldn’t Keep from Prying,” (pp. 3-20)
- María de Zayas, “His Wife’s Executioner”; “Traitor to His Own Blood” (pp. 1-26; 273-302)

**Reading Response #3 Due**

### Wed., Oct. 17 — Week Seven : From Self-Portraits to Severance in Art

The Met Fifth Avenue
- Floor 1, “Medieval Art,” “European Sculpture and Decorative Arts”
- Floor 2, “European paintings, 1250-1800”

**Critical Essay:**


### Wed., Oct. 24 — Week Eight : On Tyranny, Cruelty and Political Power

- **Machiavelli**, *The Prince*.
  - Ch. 8, “Of those who come to power through wicked actions” (pp. 27-31)
  - Ch. 10, “How one should measure the strength of a ruler” (p.34)
  - Ch. 17, “About cruelty and compassion; and about whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the reverse” (pp. 51-52)
  - Ch. 19, How one should avoid hatred and contempt” (pp. 56-62)
- **Hobbes**, *Leviathan*.
  - Ch. 20, “Of Dominion Paternal and Despotical” (pp. 1-9)
  - Ch. 22, “Of Systems Subject Political and Private” (pp.1-5)

**Critical Essay:**

- Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*. (excerpts, pp. 1-5)

**Reading Response #4 Due**

### Wed., Oct 31 — Week Nine : “the best of my bodily qualities”—Montaigne on Cannibalistic Appetites

- **Montaigne**, “Prologue,” “Of Cannibals,” “Of Coaches,” Other Select Essays (pp. 1-52)
- **Columbus**, *Journal*, (pp. 1-2)

**Critical Essays:**

- Hartzog, “How Columbus Created the Cannibals.” (pp.1-4)
- Hulme, “Columbus and the Cannibals: A Study of the Reports of Anthropophagy in the Journal of Christopher Columbus.” *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* (pp. 115-139)

**Midterm Exam Due in Class**
**Week Ten: Political Power and Corporal Fragmentation**


**Week Eleven: Dismembering and Re-membering**

- Critical Essay: Rowe, “Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* (pp. 279-303)
- Reading Response #5 Due

**Week Twelve: Thanksgiving Recess**

- Wed., Nov. 21

**Week Thirteen: Curing the Ailing Body**

- Wed., Nov. 28 — Calderón de la Barca, *The Surgeon of his Honour* (79 pages)
- Reading Response #6 Due

**Week Fourteen: Losing One’s Head Intertextually**

- Wed., Dec. 5 — Poetry Selections: (24 pages)
- Reading Response #7 Due

**Week Fifteen: Conclusion and Review**

- Wed., Dec. 12 — Presentation of Final Projects

**Final Paper Due, Wednesday Dec. 19, 5pm**