

ENGLISH 373: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE
Hum 213 TTh 2:45-4:15
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This course looks at some trends, accomplishments and inventions in US and Canadian literature over the last half-century. It offers some exemplary works, and tries to give you time, space and resources with which to like them. We will be reading, together, **fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography and comics**, and seeing how each genre draws on the strengths of the others. We'll also be looking at what each work says about its moment and place in North American culture, and at how some works try to help alter that culture.

You'll be writing **three papers**, taking a **final exam**, conducting a short **class presentation**, and **participating vigorously** in class. Two of the papers will be relatively short (about 5 pages) and focus on one work—a novel, a chapter, a story, a scene, a poem. Another longer paper (8-10 pages) will look at how the works we've read speak to one another, to history, or to the culture at large. This **longer, more ambitious paper** may be the **first**, the **second** or the **third** of the three papers you'll write for this course. There may be in-class assignments, but there won't be many. Each of the two shorter papers counts for **15%** of your grade. The longer paper counts for **30%**. Class participation (including your presentation!) counts for **20%**, and the final exam yields the remaining **20%**. Late papers go down by as much as *one grade per day* unless you have spoken to me *beforehand*. I'm willing to accommodate special circumstances and conflicts which affect deadlines, *but only if I know about them in advance*.

I very much encourage you to stop by my office with questions or suggestions. I also encourage you to discuss your papers with me, and to *show me your rough drafts*, which I will comment on if you give me enough lead time. You should feel free to email or call my office whenever you want; you can call me at home with urgent questions at 698 1238.

REQUIRED BOOKS (all available at Mac Textbook, on Snelling at Grand):

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
Grace Paley, *The Collected Stories*
John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*
James Merrill, *Selected Poems*
Alice Munro, *The Beggar Maid*
John Guare, *Six Degrees of Separation*
Lorrie Moore, *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?*
David Henry Hwang, *Trying to Find Chinatown: Selected Plays*
Jonathan Lethem, *Motherless Brooklyn*
Dan Clowes, *Ghost World*
Rae Armantrout, *Veil: New and Selected Poems*
Rae Armantrout, *True*
Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*

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spring 2005
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TUES JAN 25 Introduction.

THURS JAN 27 Nabokov, *Lolita*: 1-109

Tu FEB 1 *Lolita* 109-210

Th FEB 3 *Lolita*: 211-end; *presentations I*

Tu Feb 8 Grace Paley, "Goodbye and Good Luck," "A Woman Young and Old," "An Interest in Life," "An Irrevocable Diameter," "In Time Which Made a Monkey of Us All," "Wants," "Faith in the Afternoon"

Th Feb 10 Paley, "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," "A Conversation with My Father," "The Long-Distance Runner," "Mother," "Ruthy and Edie," "The Expensive Moment," "Listening"; *presentations II*

Tu Feb 15 Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire*, 1-94

Th Feb 17 Wideman, 95-end; *presentations III*

Tu Feb 22 Merrill: "Mirror," "Marsyas," "An Urban Convalescence," "A Tenancy," "The Thousand and Second Night," "The Broken Home," "Lorelei," "The Friend of the Fourth Decade"

Th Feb 24 March 1 Merrill: "Kostas Tympaniakis," "Remora," "Matinees," "Log," "Days of 1935," "Willowware Cup," "Strato in Plaster," "Up and Down," "Syrinx," "Chimes for Yahya," "Manos Karastefanis"

Tu March 1 Merrill: "Lost in Translation," "The School Play," "The House Fly," "Days of 1941 and '44," "For Proust," "Voices from the Other World"; Munro, "Royal Beatings," "Privilege"; *presentations IV*

Th Mar 3 Munro, "Half a Grapefruit," "Wild Swans," "The Beggar Maid," "Mischief,"

Tu Mar 8 Munro, "Mischief," "Simon's Luck," "Spelling," "Who Do You Think You Are?"

Th Mar 10 Guare, *Six Degrees of Separation*; *presentations V*

Friday March 11 **First paper due.**

Tu March 15 Guare, *Six Degrees*, cont'd.; *presentations VI*

Th March 17 Moore, *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?*; *presentations VII*

SPRING BREAK

Tu March 29 Hwang, *F.O.B.; Trying to Find Chinatown*

Th March 31 Hwang, *Family Devotion*; *presentations VIII*

Tu April 5 Lethem, *Motherless Brooklyn*: 1-130

Th April 7 *Motherless Brooklyn*: 131-end; Clowes, *Ghost World*: 1-45; *presentations IX*

Mon April 11 **Second paper due**

Tu Apr 12 *Ghost World*: 46-end; *presentations X*

Th Apr 14 Armantrout: *Veil*: "Generation," "Anti-Short Story," "Natural History," "Double," "Postcards," "Necromance," "The Garden," "The Book," "Language of Love," "Disown," "Visibility," "Birthmark: The Pretext"

Tu Apr 19 *Veil*: "Covers," "My Problem," "A Story," "Leaving," "Articulation," "The Plot," "Theories," "Whole," "Our Nature"; Armantrout, *True*; *presentations XI*

Th Apr 21 Stephenson, *Snow Crash*: 1-152

Tu Apr 26 *Snow Crash*: 152-305

Th Apr 28 *Snow Crash* 305-end; *presentations XII*

Tu May 3 Wrap-up; help with papers; exam review.

FRIDAY MAY 6 **Third paper due.**

FINAL EXAM time & date TBA