

ENG 241: Fiction in the United States
Winter 2012

Professor: Mollie Godfrey
Email: mgodfrey@bates.edu
Office: Hathorn 308
Mailbox: Hathorn 200

Time & Meeting Place
Section A: 8:00–9:20am, Hathorn 100
Section B: 1:10–2:30pm, Hathorn 100

Office Hours
T/Th 3:00-4:00pm or by appointment

Course Description:

Through an intensive reading of a diverse selection of novels and shorter fictions, ranging from early works by Stowe, Twain and Wharton to recent writing by Alexie, Diaz, and Egan, this course will query the stylistic evolution of American fiction while also querying that fiction's sustained interest in the construction of American identity. Focusing on works in which the struggles and self-reflection involved in forging individual, community, and national identities are paramount, this course asks what the evolution of American fiction says about the evolution of the concept of American identity, and vice versa. How are American identities constructed in relation to or in opposition to national ideology? How are they constructed in relation to or in opposition to other American identities? And how do the stylistic experiments in American fiction—from modernism and postmodernism to graphic novels and hypertext—reflect changing perceptions about what constitutes or what is excluded from the conception of national identity and national literature?

Course Goals:

By the end of this course, students will be able to: 1) analyze, describe, and discuss major stylistic developments in American fiction, 2) consider these developments in relation to a continuing discourse on the construction of American identities and 3) practice and develop their skills in the analysis of textual evidence and argumentation.

Course Requirements:

1) Class Participation:

The main requirement for the class is an intense engagement with the readings, not only in writing but in class discussion as well. Because class discussion is an opportunity to practice the critical skills that we will be developing in the course, attendance and active participation at every class session are expected. Active participation entails doing the reading and being able to refer to the reading in class, as well as both listening and responding to myself and to one another. In grading your participation over the course of the semester, I will be looking for signs of initiative, involvement, collaboration, intellectual growth, and impact on the class. If you do not speak of your own volition **at least once a week**, you can expect to be called on. If **any** member of the class demonstrates that he or she has not done the reading, **pop quizzes** will be instituted and will form a significant portion of **every** class member's participation grade. If you cannot attend a particular class, you must let me know in advance and make arrangements for another student to take notes and collect handouts on your behalf. Missing or being late to more than two classes will negatively affect your participation grade. Finally, because you must be able to support the claims they make about the texts with evidence from those texts, you must

bring the reading to class every day **in printed form**—this means **printing the short stories** on Lyceum and **buying the books** on the syllabus. **No laptops or cell phones in class, please.**

2) Weekly Writing and Discussion Questions:

By midnight each Monday (starting in **Week 3**), you will have the opportunity to post a one-to-three paragraph informal response to Tuesday's reading on the lyceum forum for that week. There will be ten opportunities to submit forum posts throughout the quarter, but you are only **required to submit five**. The key guideline for these posts is that they make a significant and contestable argumentative claim about the text that is supported by evidence from the text. You will receive written feedback on all of your posts, so they are an excellent opportunity to practice the skills required for longer writing assignments. All posts that engage thoughtfully with the reading will receive a check (the equivalent of a "B"), but check-pluses (the equivalent of an "A") will be given to posts that also demonstrate proficiency in the above criteria. Check-minuses (the equivalent of a "C") will be given to underdeveloped posts. Late postings will not be accepted. If you post more than five weekly writing assignments, I will count the top five grades.

In preparation for class on Thursday (starting in **Week 2**), you are also required to prepare one discussion question based on the day's reading. Each question should refer to, and demand responses that refer to, specific moments in the texts (citing page numbers!). You should post your question on the lyceum discussion question forum for that week **by midnight on Wednesday night**. There will be eleven opportunities to submit discussion questions throughout the quarter, but you are only **required to submit ten**. **Before class on Thursday**, you must also select one question from among those posted that you would like to talk about in class that day. Do this by replying to the post of your choice and briefly explaining your reasons for wanting to discuss it in class. Part of our time on Thursdays will be spent in small groups or as a whole discussing one another's questions.

You are **never to consult the internet or other secondary sources** for ideas in devising your weekly writing responses and discussion questions. I am interested in seeing your ideas, not someone else's. Presenting someone else's ideas as if they are your own constitutes **plagiarism**.

3) Group Presentation

In the next couple weeks, groups of around three will be assigned to a particular day during the semester. These groups will be asked to present a 10 minute presentation on the texts that are part of that day's reading, and to lead class discussion on that reading for a further 10-15 minutes. Much like your most polished weekly writing assignments, these presentations should advance a contestable and significant argument about the text that is supported by evidence from the text. However, they should also push further by opening up questions or problems for whole class discussion, questions that follow from your initial claim. To support your questions, it is essential that you have relevant places in the text ready to help direct class discussion. Each group must prepare a clear and visually appealing **handout OR PowerPoint** to go along with their oral presentation (more on this later), and **must email this to me** as an attachment by **9pm** the night before their presentation.

4) Paper Assignments:

There are two paper assignments: a midterm (4-5 pages) and a final paper (4-5 pages). Although prompts for both papers will be provided, you are welcome to use ideas developed in weekly writing assignments as the basis for these papers provided that those ideas help you address the prompt. All papers must be posted on Lyceum. Late papers will be penalized by up to 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late.

5) Academic Honesty:

Intellectual honesty is fundamental to scholarship. Accordingly, the College views plagiarism or cheating of any kind in academic work as among the most serious offenses that a student can commit. Plagiarism occurs when one presents work—ideas and/or specific language—which is taken from another person who is not given due credit. If you are uncertain in any specific situation as to whether plagiarism may be involved, you should discuss the matter with me. **All students are responsible for reading the College's statement on plagiarism**, found here:

<http://abacus.bates.edu/pubs/Plagiarism/plagiarism.html#0>

For all members of the academic community, citing sources not only protects them and their ideas, but it helps them to know when they do have a new idea, or whether they have achieved a meaningful synthesis of other people's ideas. It also helps their readers, by providing means whereby he or she can verify their account, seek further knowledge on their topic, and understand how they arrived at their conclusions. To cite sources in your own work, please **follow carefully the MLA guidelines**, found here:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

6) Email:

You are required to check your Bates email regularly, as I will be emailing the class with information, updates, and reminders throughout the semester. In the event of an emergency class cancellation, I will also notify students via email.

Course Evaluation:

- 20% Attendance & participation
- 20% 5 weekly writing posts & 10 discussion questions
- 20% Group presentation
- 20% Midterm paper (4-5 pages)
- 20% Final paper (4-5 pages)

Required Texts (available in the Bates College bookstore):

- Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (Scribner)
- Ann Petry, *The Street* (Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
- Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (Vintage)
- Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead)
- Daniel Clowes, *Ghost World* (Fantagraphics)
- Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Anchor/Doubleday)

All additional readings can be found on Lyceum in the "Course Readings" folder, unless otherwise indicated

Recommended Films (on reserve in the Bates College library):

Terry Zwigoff, *Ghost World* (2001)

Reading Schedule:

You are responsible for completing the reading by the date specified.

Week 1

Tues, 1/10: Introduction

Thurs, 1/12: Harriet Beecher Stowe, selection from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

Week 2

Tues, 1/17: Mark Twain, selection from *Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

Thurs, 1/19: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
Edith Wharton, "Souls Belated" (1899)

Week 3

Tues, 1/24: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (1927)
Ernest Hemingway, "The Short Happy Life of Frances Macomber" (1936)

Thurs, 1/26: Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), pg. 11–71

Week 4

Tues, 1/31: Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), pg. 75–173

Thurs, 2/2: Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), pg. 174–251

Week 5

Tues, 2/7: Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), pg. 1–112 (Ch. 1–4)

Thurs, 2/9: Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), pg. 113–210 (Ch. 5–8)

Week 6

Tues, 2/14: Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), pg. 211–326 (Ch. 9–13)

Thurs, 2/16: Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), pg. 327–436 (Ch. 14–18)

Week 7

2/18-2/26: **Winter Recess**

Week 8

Tues, 2/28: Hisaye Yamamoto, "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950)
Philip Roth, "Eli, the Fanatic" (1966)

Thurs, 3/1: Samuel Delaney, “Aye, and Gomorrah” (1967)
Kurt Vonnegut, “Welcome to the Monkey House” (1968)

Fri, 3/2: Midterm Paper Due

Week 9

Tues, 3/6: Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (1991), pg 1–92

Thurs, 3/8: Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (1991), 93–180

Week 10

Tues, 3/13: Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (1991), 181–291

Thurs, 3/15: Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (1991), 291–399
Recommended: Mary Harron, *American Psycho* (2000)

Week 11

Tues, 3/20: Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (1983)
Sherman Alexie, “Captivity” (1993)
Read ahead: Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), pg. 1–50

Thurs, 3/22: Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), pg. 51–165

Week 12

Tues, 3/27: Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), pg. 167–261

Thurs, 3/29: Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), pg. 263–335

Week 13

Tues, 4/3: Scott McCloud, selection from *Understanding Comics* (1994)
Daniel Clowes, *Ghost World* (1997)
Recommended: Terry Zwigoff, *Ghost World* (2001)

Thurs, 4/5: Jennifer Egan, Ch. 1, 12 & 13 from *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2011)
Michael Joyce, “afternoon, a story” (1987) [see link on Lyceum, near but not in
the “Course Readings folder”]

Week 14

Wed, 4/11: **Final Paper Due**