



**ENG 525.001—Contemporary Literature
“What *Was* Contemporary Literature?”**

**Fall 2013
T—7:20 pm-10:00 pm
Room: HL 305**

Instructor: (Christopher Gonzalez, PhD – Assistant Professor)
Office Location: Hall of Languages (HL) 225
Office Hours: MF 11:00 am-1:00 pm and by appointment
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NOTE: I reserve the right to revise the contents of this syllabus as I deem necessary.

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Textbooks Required:

Gilead by Marilynne Robinson
The Marriage Plot by Jeffrey Eugenides
The Middlesteins by Jami Attenberg
Super Sad True Love Story by Gary Shteyngart
How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe by Charles Yu
Lost City Radio by Daniel Alarcón
Salvage the Bones by Jesmyn Ward
The Round House by Louise Erdrich
The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers
A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki
A Visit from the Good Squad by Jennifer Egan
I Am Not Sidney Poitier by Percival Everett

(ENG 525 catalogue description): A study of post-1945 and recent literature in the United States and/or the United Kingdom and Ireland. Special emphasis will be placed on the ways in which national and international phenomena, both social as well as aesthetic, have informed an increasingly diverse understanding of literary texts. Topics for analysis could include late Modernism and its links to postmodern thought, Cold War writing, literatures of nationhood, post colonialism, the institutionalization of theory, multiculturalism and its literary impact, and the ever-growing emphasis placed on generic hybridity, especially as it concerns visual and electronic media. Note May be repeated for credit when the emphasis changes.

Course Description

ENG 525 is designed to provide graduate students with an opportunity to critically examine a specific swath of “contemporary” literature. In this particular iteration of ENG 525, the emphasis is on very recent offerings of significant literature. This is more complex than it sounds because contemporary literature seems to bleed into all sorts of categories. It is American; it is multiethnic; it is transnational; it is cross-genre; and so forth. Indeed, the very designation of “contemporary” is something of a problem. An area of literature that begins post-1945 to the present is already *sixty-eight years long*. The issue forces us to ask whether we can still think of literature from 30+ years ago as contemporary.

Of course, it is generally understood that 1945 marks the inception of the Contemporary American literary period. But has that period met the end of the line? Did 9/11 mark the end of the Contemporary period, as some have suggested? Or did the events of that clear September day in 2001 serve as a point of retraction for the “anything goes” mentality of postmodernist literature to a *post-millennial* literature? Can recent post-9/11 literature help us answer what Contemporary American literature *was*? This course seeks to answer these intriguing questions by excavating the deep fissures of the legacy of 9/11 that may undergird the foundations of novels that don’t directly engage with the 9/11 event itself but whose aesthetic sensibility is informed by it. Unlike Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* or Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, novels whose storyworlds are shaped by traumatic historical event, the novels under consideration in ENG 525 may resonate with 9/11 without necessarily being *about* 9/11 itself. By considering very recent examples of American literature, we ask how something such as the 9/11 event—a paradigm shift, according to many—or even the turn of the new millennium itself, has perhaps resulted in a similar shift in the American novel at the level of form and content. Our readings range across a host of American authors of varied cultural, racial, ethnic, and national heritages. Students with specific thematic or scholarly interests are encouraged to integrate them into the coursework whenever possible. Students will attend to the formal elements, thematic contents, historical meaningfulness, philosophical contributions, and cultural identities of these texts. Students should plan to engage in and at times lead productive discussions; develop ideas via written responses to the readings; hone the skills of writing conference abstracts, continue to develop writing conference papers, and write a final seminar paper aimed at publication in a peer-reviewed journal or section of a dissertation.

Course Objectives:

- Students will further develop their ability to compose conference abstracts.
- Students will demonstrate their engagement with the scholarly community.
- Students will practice their ability to teach a lesson in a graduate-level course.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students will further develop their compose conference abstracts as measured by the composition of two conference abstracts.
- Students will demonstrate their engagement with the scholarly community as measured by the academic conference process that takes their idea from abstract to written delivery of their ideas to an audience.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments

This course consists of a series of activities and assessments to assist you in achieving the outcomes and objectives of this course and instructional units/modules. By the end of this course the class will read and discuss many book-length texts as well as secondary materials.

During the semester you will complete several major assignments designed to build on each other intellectually and conceptually. These assignments are:

Weekly Reading Responses/Class Participation 20%

Active class participation is vital in graduate classes, but it is at times difficult to measure. Beyond engaging in critical discussions on the day's readings, you will produce a one-page, single space formal response to the readings and submit your response at the end of a given class. The response should engage with the material in specific ways, and should serve as your "set piece" or contribution to the day's discussion. You will respond to six novels of your choosing.

Two Conference Abstracts 10%

One of the first types of scholarly contributions a graduate student makes is via the conference presentation. In order to present at a conference, abstracts must be submitted and accepted. You will target two actual conferences on the horizon and compose two abstracts on two different books from class. Each abstract must range between 350-500 words in length, and each will undergo significant revision and peer-review.

Class Teaching 20%

On a class meeting and text of your choosing, you must provide a lecture on the day's readings. Think of it as teaching for the first half of class. Your role is to lecture as well as to stimulate and foster class discussion. This is your opportunity to "teach" a portion of a graduate class. Create a fully realized lesson complete with handouts and other useful media.

Conference Paper 15%

Based on one of your abstracts, compose a conference paper (7-9 pages). Your paper should "read" like a script rather than a piece that is to be read.

Final Seminar Paper 20%

At the culmination of the course, you will submit a well-organized, persuasively-argued, well-research seminar paper approximately 15 pages in length. Ideally, this paper will grow from your conference paper or possibly even from your class presentation when you led the class discussion.

"Choose your own adventure!" 15%

Select one of the following assignments:

Option A: A 6-page close reading of a chapter of one of our novels.

Option B: A 6-page review of literature on a class-related topic.

Students' assignment and course grades will be determined by the following:

Weekly Reading Responses/Class Participation	20%
Two Conference Abstracts	10%
Class Teaching	20%
Conference Paper	15%
Final Seminar Paper	20%
"Choose your own adventure!"	15%
Total:	100%

Scale used to compute final letter grades:

Percentage

A: 100-90

B: 89-80

C: 79-70

D: 69-60

F: 59-0

Technology

This course is conducted face to face (f2f). However, some aspects of the course (e.g., grades, dropbox) are accessed via eCollege, the Learning Management System used by TAMUC. Many of your assignments will be submitted through eCollege, so it is essential to your success that you be able to access eCollege in a relatively convenient manner. Because the university provides students access to computers and other technologies, please make use of these items if you do not have a computer of your own. If you have technical questions, please contact Technology Services at 902-468-6000 or at helpdesk@tamuc.edu. Do not allow a technological problem or question keep you from a successful outcome in this course. Technology is designed to facilitate your learning experience in this class, not to hinder it.

There will be no extra credit assignments. As a rule, I do not accept late work.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

Academic Honesty Policy

Texas A&M University-Commerce and the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate **plagiarism** and other forms of **academic dishonesty**. Conduct that violates generally-accepted standards of academic honesty is defined as academic dishonesty. "Academic dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another person and passing them off as one's own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material. Instructors uphold and support the highest

academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension and expulsion (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1, 2, 3]). Cheating, including plagiarizing papers in whole or part, will result in a grade of zero (0) on the assignment for the first offense and failure of the course for any subsequent offenses.

Attendance Policy

Attendance in this graduate class equates to participation in the discussions and is important to the success of this class and to your development as a writer/scholar. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that you notify me of potential conflicts with course expectations. The expectation is that you will do more than simply show up to class. Your active participation, in the form of discussion responses and questions, is vital for success in this course. Deadline extensions and other allowances can often be accommodated before they are required, but this requires advance notice. Related to this, SEE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignment Policy

Student work must be completed and submitted on time. All assignments should be turned in during the class period when they are due. Students who know they will miss class when an assignment is due must contact the instructor as soon as possible in advance of class to arrange for submission of the assignment.

All papers should conform to the MLA style guidelines, with the exception of your weekly responses.

Late Work

I will not accept any assignment after its due date. Assignments submitted after the due date may receive a score of zero (0).

Drop a Course

A student may drop a course by logging into his/her myLEO account and clicking on the hyperlink labeled "Drop a class" from among the choices found under the myLeo section of the Web page.

Incompletes

Incompletes (grade of "X") are granted only under rare and extraordinary circumstances.

Administrative Withdrawal

I reserve the right to drop a student from the course administratively for excessive absences or violations of student conduct codes.

University Specific Procedures:

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services

Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

Student Conduct

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. It is next to impossible to explore ideas in a classroom setting if students and instructors do not feel safe or otherwise supported. I will not tolerate discrimination in all its forms. Likewise, rudeness has no place in any classroom, and I will ensure that my classroom remains a rudeness-free environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

Responsibility

You are responsible for understanding all of the material contained in this syllabus, as well as any announced changes to this syllabus. You are also responsible for understanding instructions and directives related to assignments, exams, and grades. This means visiting your professor during office hours if instructions and/or directives remain unclear. Unless you state otherwise, I will assume that you have understood what is expected of you in this class.

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

The following course schedule is subject to revisions and other modifications as the instructor deems necessary for the course. Any changes to the course schedule will be announced on the course website in advance of the week in which the change will occur.

Fall 2013

Date	Agenda
Week 1 Aug 27	Introduction, syllabus overview, discussion on “contemporary” literature
Week 2 Sept 3	Robinson, <i>Gilead</i>
Week 3 Sept 10	Eugenewies, <i>The Marriage Plot</i>
Week 4 Sept 17	Attenberg, <i>The Middlesteins</i> Abstract #1 Due
Week 5 Sept 24	Shteyngart, <i>Super Sad True Love Story</i>
Week 6 Oct 1	Yu, <i>How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe</i>
Week 7 Oct 8	Alarcón, <i>Lost City Radio</i>
Week 8	Ward, <i>Salvage the Bones</i>

Oct 15	Abstract #2 Due
Week 9 Oct 22	Erdrich, <i>The Round House</i>
Week 10 Oct 29	Powers, <i>The Yellow Birds</i>
Week 11 Nov 5	Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> Conference Paper Due
Week 12 Nov 12	Egan, <i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i>
Week 13 Nov 19	Everett, <i>I Am Not Sidney Poitier</i> “Choose your own adventure!” Due
Week 14 Nov 26	Re-assessing Contemporary Literature
Week 15 Dec 3	Course Wrap-Up
	Final Papers due at Midnight, December 10, 2013