



21ST CENTURY LITERATURE ENGL 442 (FALL 2012)

On campus: TR 1:30-2:45p Thompson Hall 1017
Online: <http://www.samplereality.com/gmu/442/>

Professor Mark Sample
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Office Hours: T 3-4:30p, R 11a-12p,
and by appointment in Robinson A 441

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Department of English at Mason reserves the ENGL 442 course number for "American Literary Periods." This designation typically refers to a distinct era of American literature, comprised of works that share certain stylistic and thematic characteristics. Some examples of American literary periods include 19th century naturalism, 20th century modernism, and post-war postmodernism. But what is 21st Century literature? What are its defining narrative modes and concerns?

The glib answer is that 21st century literature is whatever people are writing in the 21st century. A more serious answer is that 21st century literature is whatever people are writing in the 21st century. Beyond looking at publishing dates, it's futile to make any other claims about the distinguishing features of 21st century literature. It's true that the first 12 years of the new millennium have been marked by September 11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and a crippling, never-ending recession. It's also true that the new millennium has seen the rise of YouTube, Justin Bieber, iPhones, and *Minecraft*. Yet whether any or all of these events have distilled into the defining literature of the era is an impossible question to answer. It's simply too soon to know.

However, it is possible to consider 21st century literature within the broader context of literature itself, and to approach contemporary literature as a reaction to and dialogue with existing forms of expressive culture. Thus ENGH 442 focuses on texts that somehow rework or engage with earlier works of literature and film. We will study works that go beyond superficial engagements with older texts (such as adding zombies to *Pride and Prejudice*) or revisiting a well-known story from an existing but minor character's point of view (such as the father in *Little Women*). Instead, we will grapple with literature that is deeply entangled in a web of intertextuality.

COURSE GOALS

Students in ENGH 442 will...

- Understand the role of textual codes and reading protocols in understanding literature;
- Develop a sense of how American literature circulates in a sea of not only literature but also of other media forms;
- Recognize the interconnectedness of American culture, as well as American culture's relationship with global culture;
- Discover the circulation and transformation of thematic concerns and anxieties throughout 21st century literature; and
- Connect contemporary literature with both prevailing and emerging theoretical and interpretative approaches.

READING

- Jessica Hagedorn, [Dream Jungle](#) (2003)
- Alison Bechdel, [Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic](#) (2006)
- Junot Díaz, [The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao](#) (2007)
- Anne Carson, [Nox](#) (2010)
- Mat Johnson, [Pym](#) (2011)
- Colson Whitehead, [Zone One](#) (2011)
- Selected essays and material from online sources and Blackboard

ASSIGNMENTS

The required work for ENGH 442 will take several forms, detailed below: (1) class participation, (2) a weekly reading journal, (3) a mid-semester reading journal audit, (4) one investigation paper, (5) an annotated bibliography, and (6) a final research paper.

- (1) This class places a high premium on **participation**. Most of our class time will be given over to discussion, and it is essential that everyone has carefully considered the week's material, attends class, and participates. If you cannot attend ENGH 442 regularly, please reconsider your decision to enroll. There will be occasional quizzes and in-class writing assignments; these will count toward your class participation. The deciding factor in borderline final grades is often your class participation grade.

Participation is worth 10% of your final grade.

- (2) Every student will write in a **weekly journal** about the week's reading. The goal is to develop ideas for class discussion, puzzle through troubling or difficult aspects of the reading, and become aware of your own reading practices, so that you notice what you notice when you read. The journals will be written on Google Docs, and you will share your journal with me (otherwise, it will be private). Occasionally I will ask you to respond to specific prompts in the journal. Individual entries should be dated and make clear what text or segment of text you're writing about. You should aim for roughly 750 words per week in your journal, either as one entry or spread across several entries during the week.

The weekly journal is worth 20% of your final grade.

- (3) Toward the middle of the semester you will perform a **reading journal audit**, which is a reflective essay about your reading journal and reading practices. You will include a sampling of your journal entries with the audit.

The reading journal audit is worth 20% of your final grade.

- (4) Throughout the semester you will have several opportunities to write an **investigation paper**, which you might think of as the literature equivalent of a lab report. This short paper is not a critical essay so much as it is a structured engagement with very particular aspects of a given text. The investigation will be roughly 3-4 pages long. While there will be several investigation topics to choose from over the course of the semester, you will only select one of these to work on.

The investigation paper is worth 15% of your final grade.

- (5) The **annotated bibliography** is a catalyst for your final research paper, in which you explore some of the recent academic scholarship related to your research agenda. The annotated bibliography is due **Tuesday, November 20**.

The annotated bibliography is worth 15% of your final grade.

- (6) The **final research paper** is a 10-12 page analytical paper, focusing on one of the six novels we have read during the semester. This paper will require outside research, using sources from established academic journals or scholarly books. Note: during the final two weeks of the semester you will re-read the novel you have chosen to write about, and class time will be spent working in groups organized according to the text being studied. The final paper is due **Saturday, December 8**.

The final research paper is worth 20% of your final grade.

GRADING

The final grade will be weighted and calculated in the following manner:

- Participation: 10%
- Reading Journal: 20%
- Journal Audit: 20%
- Investigation: 15%
- Annotated Bibliography: 15%
- Final Research Project: 20%

The reading journal entries will be evaluated on a scale of 0-3, ranging from no credit (0), to a check-minus (1), to a check (2), to a check-plus for extraordinary entries (3). Every other assignment will be given a letter grade that has a percentage equivalent:

A+ = 100% / A = 95% / A- = 90%
B+ = 88% / B = 85% / B- = 80%
C+ = 78% / C = 75% / C- = 70%
D = 65% / F = below 60%

ATTENDANCE

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. The last day to add this course is September 4, 2012. The last day to drop this course without tuition penalty is also September 4, 2012. After September 28, withdrawal from ENGH 442 requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons.

Attendance is mandatory (excepting hospitalization or observation of religious holidays). More than four absences will lower your class participation grade by at least one letter grade. More than six absences will result in a zero for your class participation grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mason is an Honor Code university. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

COMMUNICATION

Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Failure to check your MasonLIVE email every day may result in missed messages, which you are responsible for. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

CLASSROOM COURTESY

Laptops and smart phones may be used in class but only for classroom activities such as note-taking. Occasionally I may ask students with laptops or tablet computers to turn them off. Text messaging unrelated to class is not acceptable. The use of MP3 players and portable game systems during class is also unacceptable.

Late arrivals or early departures from class are disruptive and should be avoided.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

George Mason issues emergency warnings affecting the university community through its Mason Alert system. If you have not already signed up to receive email, page, or text message alerts, please do so at alert.gmu.edu.

A NOTE ON CHANGE

While the major requirements and six required texts for ENGH 442 will not change, I may occasionally add or replace other reading material on the syllabus, such as journal articles, book chapters, or online resources.

The most up-to-date version of the syllabus can always be found at samplereality.com/gmu/442/.

ABOUT THE HEADER

The “Katrina New Orleans Hurricane” header image is courtesy of Flickr user Anthony Posey. The image is released with a Creative Commons License and is available at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/60053005@N00/45452772/>.

ENGH 442 CALENDAR (FALL 2012)

PART I: TEXTS, TEXTUALITY, AND INTERTEXTUALITY

core concepts: *text, intertextuality, postmodernism, postcolonialism*

WEEK 1

Tuesday, August 28

- Introduction

Thursday, August 30

- Jeff Todd Titon, "Text" from *The Journal of American Folklore* 108.430 (1995): 432-448. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/541655>>
- Charles Bazerman, "Intertextuality: How Texts Rely on Other Texts" from *What Writing Does and How It Does It* (Blackboard)
- Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote" (Blackboard)

WEEK 2

Tuesday, September 4

- Jessica Hagedorn, *Dream Jungle*, pp. 1-124
- Linda Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism" (Blackboard)

Thursday, September 6

- *Dream Jungle*, pp. 125-185
- Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" (Blackboard)
- Introduction to Investigation #1

WEEK 3

Tuesday, September 11

- *Dream Jungle*, pp. 186-251
- *Apocalypse Now* (on reserve in the JC, also available on Netflix Instant Streaming)
- In class screening: *Hearts of Darkness*

Thursday, September 13

- *Dream Jungle*, pp. 252-325
- Investigation #1 Due

PART II: ENACTED TEXTUALITY

core concepts: *reading protocols, literature and race, double-voiced discourse*

WEEK 4

Tuesday, September 18

- Mat Johnson, *Pym*, pp. 1-154
- Peter Rabinowitz, excerpts from *Before Reading* (Blackboard)
- Introduction to Investigation #2

Thursday, September 20

- *Pym*, pp. 155-223
- Jace Weaver, "Mr. Poe's Indians: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and Edgar Allan Poe as a Southern Writer," from *Native South* (e-journal)

WEEK 5

Tuesday, September 25

- *Pym*, pp. 224-322
- Investigation #2 Due

Thursday, September 27

- Mat Johnson Fall for the Book Reading

WEEK 6

Tuesday, October 2

- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Thursday, October 4

- *Fun Home*
- Ariela Freedman, "Drawing on Modernism in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*," from the *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.4 (2009): 125-140. (e-journal)

WEEK 7

Tuesday, October 9

- No Class

Thursday, October 11

- *Fun Home*
- Valerie Rohy, "In the Queer Archive: *Fun Home*," from *GLC* 16.3 (2010): 341-361. (e-journal)

PART III: DEFENSIVE TEXTUALITY

core concepts: *metafiction, historiography, genres*

WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 16

- Junot Díaz, *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, pp. 1-75
- Introduction to Investigation #3

Thursday, October 18

- *Oscar Wao*, pp. 76-165
- Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" from *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction* (Blackboard)

WEEK 9

Tuesday, October 23

- *Oscar Wao*, pp. 166-261
- Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," from *Against Interpretation* (Blackboard)

Thursday, October 25

- *Oscar Wao*, pp. 262-335
- Investigation #3 due

WEEK 10

Tuesday, October 30

- Anne Carson, *Nox*

Thursday, November 1

- *Nox*

WEEK 11

Tuesday, November 6

- Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*
- Kyle William Bishop, excerpt from *American Zombie Gothic* (Blackboard)

Thursday, November 8

- *Zone One*
- Andrew Baum, "Toxins, Technology, and Natural Disasters," from *Cataclysms, Crises, and Catastrophes: Psychology in Action*. (Blackboard)

WEEK 12

Tuesday, November 13

- *Zone One*
- Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Alexander C McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," from *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*. (Blackboard)

Thursday, November 15

- *Zone One*

WEEK 13

Tuesday, November 20

- Annotated Bibliography Due

Thursday, November 22

- Thanksgiving / No Class

PART IV: INTERRETEXTUALITY

core concepts: *rereading, revision*

WEEK 14

Tuesday, November 27

- Re-reading one of the six major works from the semester
- Special prompts for reading journal

Thursday, November 29

- Re-reading and group discussion

WEEK 15

Tuesday, December 4

- Group discussions

Thursday, December 6

- Peer work on final paper

Saturday, December 8

- Final Research Paper due, submitted via Blackboard as a PDF file.