

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 201C, Methods and Materials of Literary Production
Fall 2012

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	MW 11:00AM – 2:00PM and by appointment.
Class Days/Time:	Mondays 7:00-9:45 PM
Classroom:	Faculty Offices 104

Course Description

This course introduces new MFA students to the resources, traditions, techniques and culture associated with professional creative writing both inside and outside academia. The class will study the role of the individual writer within the literary and academic communities, and explore various forms of literary activity that commonly support “the literary life.” Students will learn to find and evaluate dominant and alternative literary magazines and publishers, book review indexes, academic journals, and online and other electronic resources. By means of this course, they will find ways to apply their knowledge of these resources that are useful in their own writing, in their other courses, and in fulfilling other requirements for the MFA.

Student Learning Objectives

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the MFA in Creative Writing:

SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.

SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.

SLO 5: Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.

The list of all approved SLOs are listed on the English Department's website:
<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/undergraduate/studentlearninggoals.html>

Course Methods and Activities

At the start of this course, each class member will select a contemporary prose writer or poet whose career will become the subject of study. Many of the assignments and activities in the course will be based upon what students can find out about the careers of the writers they have chosen. Students are urged to get in touch with the writer they've chosen through email or snail mail, and to establish a correspondence through which the students can ask the writer questions relevant to the course assignments. You should select someone whose work you know or have a strong interest in reading. The writers whose careers the students will want to study are those who have established a publishing track record in both periodical publication and book publishing. Writers who publish in more than one genre would be most instructive for you to research.

Our class will occasionally host local literary professionals who will make brief presentations and take part in Q & A about matters pertinent to the course material.

Course Requirements

Attendance at all class meetings is essential. Because most of the value of this course is in the class discussions, you are only cheating yourself if you miss class. You are graduate students, and serious writers, and I will treat you as colleagues.

There are five written assignments for the course, listed here with due dates:

Annotated Bibliography (including lesser-known periodical and book publications)

- Sept. 17: List of potential writers for bibliography project.
- Sept. 24: Working draft (for instructor's comments).
- Dec. 10: Completed project (in final portfolio).
- This assignment addresses SLO #3, SLO #4, and SLO #5

Book Review (1,000 to 1,500 words)

- Oct 1: Select book to review. Select periodical or online publication for submission.
- Oct. 8: Workshop drafts.
- Oct. 15: Working draft due (for instructor's comments).
- Dec. 10: Completed project (in final portfolio).
- This assignment addresses SLO #4 and SLO #5

Personal Literary Essay or Conference Paper (2,000 – 3,000 words)

- Oct. 22: Brainstorm ideas.
- Nov. 5: Workshop drafts.
- Nov. 19: Conference papers / literary essays due to instructor.
- Nov. 19 – Dec. 3: Conference paper / personal essay in-class presentations.

- Dec. 10: Completed project (in final portfolio).
- This assignment addresses SLO #3, SLO #4, and SLO #5

MFA Thesis Proposal (length varies, including sample of creative work)

- Nov. 26: Workshop drafts.
- Dec. 3: Draft due to instructor.
- Dec. 10: Completed thesis proposal and writing sample due in final portfolio.
- This assignment addresses SLO #3, SLO #4, and SLO #5

Responses to Two Local Literary Readings (500-1000 words each)

- Dec. 10: Include with Final Portfolio
- This assignment addresses SLO #5

Final Portfolio

In lieu of a final exam, students are to turn in final revisions of all assigned writing in a final portfolio. The material should be prepared in standard manuscript form acceptable for submitting for publication. Final versions of the annotated, book review, personal literary essay, MFA thesis proposal, and responses to literary readings will comprise the final writing portfolio for the course. Portfolios are due on the last day of the semester. (This assignment addresses SLO #3, SLO #4, and SLO #5)

Schedule of Literary Readings

You are required to **attend at least two literary readings** over the course of the semester, and to **wrote 1-2pp responses**. Your response papers can cover the substance of the reading, the author's presentation style, the author's wardrobe—anything that strikes you. You are free to attend readings whenever and wherever you choose—not just those happening on campus. However here is a list, for your convenience, of the readings being offered on campus by the Center for Literary Arts and/or the Center for Steinbeck Studies:

Novelist **Karen Tei Yamashita**

Wed, Sep 12, 7:00pm – Engineering Auditorium

Poet and Memoirist **Nick Flynn**

Tue, Oct 2, 7:00pm (*Being Flynn* film screening) – Engineering Auditorium

Wed, Oct 3, 7:00pm (Reading and Signing) – Engineering Auditorium

Thurs, Oct 4, 1:00pm (in conversation with Tom Barbash) - MLK Library 225/229

Nonfiction Writers **Dan White** and **Amy Ettinger**

Wed, Oct 10, 7:00pm – Schiro Room, MLK Library 5th Floor

Poet and Nonfiction Writer **Michael Ryan**

Wed, Oct 24, 7:00pm – MLK 225/229

Memoirist, Novelist, and Director **Stephen Elliott**

Tue, Nov 13, 7:00pm (Reading and Signing) – MLK 225/229
Wed, Nov 14, 8:00pm (*Cherry* film screening) – Sweeney Hall 100

2012-2013 Steinbeck Fellows **Marian Palaia** and **L. Rebecca Harris**
Wed, Dec 5, 7:00pm – MLK 225/229

Grading

Annotated Bibliography	20%
Book Review	20%
Personal Literary Essay	20%
Book/MFA Thesis Proposal	20%
Response to Literary Readings	10%
Class participation	10%
TOTAL	100%

Late Assignment Policy

In general, I do not accept late assignments. However I realize that life is unpredictable. Talk to me if you think you may need an extension. The sooner you come to me with a request, the more likely I am to grant it.

Required Texts

- Baxter, Charles. *Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction*. (Graywolf Press, 2008).

Schedule

Week 1 - Aug. 27 - Introduction

DISCUSSION: Skills and resources creative writers must possess in order to begin writing professionally. Learning literary survival skills. “Professionalism.” Making time for writing.

Sept 3 – No Class – Labor Day

Week 2 - Sept. 10 – Annotated Bibliography

DISCUSSION: The uses and purposes for annotated bibliographies. Selecting an author you will write about during the semester.

READING DUE: Baxter, “Rhyming Action” (pp 107-126)

Week 3 - Sept. 17 – Annotated Bibliography Continued – **Meet in MLK Library Room 213**

GUEST SPEAKER: **Toby Matoush**, SJSU Librarian for the Arts and Humanities.

WRITING DUE: Bring a short list of authors you’re considering for your annotated bibliography.

DISCUSSION: Creating an annotated bibliography of a writer. The importance of tracking down an author’s major publications in periodicals. Finding periodicals and

journals. Making annotations—writing for a particular audience and use. Sample bibliographies.

SMALL GROUPS: Begin bibliographical research. Work in groups to find online and cataloged (in-print) sources and materials.

Week 4 - Sept. 24 – Book Reviews

GUEST SPEAKER: Novelist **Ellen Sussman**, author of *French Lessons* and *On a Night Like This*, and editor of the anthologies *Dirty Words* and *Bad Girls*.

WRITING DUE: Annotated bibliography (working draft—can be revised after receiving instructor response and preliminary grade).

CLASS DISCUSSION: Book Reviews: Styles and purposes of book reviews in various types of small magazines, academic journals, slick magazines, daily and weekly newspapers, and online journals.

Week 5 - Oct 1 – Book Reviews Continued

DISCUSSION: The politics of book reviewing within the literary, academic, and publishing communities. Who writes the reviews? Getting reviews published. Positive reviews, negative reviews, “surveys of the current literature” reviews.

READING DUE: Bring copies to class two reviews of at least one book listed in your bibliography. Select a book to review by the author you’re working on or by another author of interest. Select periodical (print or online) to be your target audience.

Week 6 - Oct. 8 – Book Review Workshop

GUEST SPEAKER: Writer **Isaac Fitzgerald**, managing editor of San Francisco-based web magazine *The Rumpus* (<http://www.therumpus.net>).

DISCUSSION: Time management in the writing life.

WRITING DUE: Write a working draft of the review (1,500 words) to share in small groups.

Week 7 - Oct. 15 – Personal Literary Essays

WRITING DUE: Book review final draft.

DISCUSSION: What is a literary essay? Who publishes them? Who cares?

READING DUE: Meg Wolitzer, “The Second Shelf,” *The New York Times*, March 30, 2012; Taylor Antrim, “The Dirty Street Encounter That Made Me a New Yorker,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2012.

SMALL GROUPS: Brainstorm ideas for personal literary essays.

Week 8 - Oct. 22 – Commercial Publishing

GUEST SPEAKER: **Marina Chappie**, current SJSU MFA student and (as Marina Adair) author of romance novels for several major publishers.

DISCUSSION: Literary markets.

Week 9 - Oct. 29 – Conference Papers

DISCUSSION: Conferences creative writers attend and the kinds of papers they give. Calendar of annual academic and literary conferences attended by creative writers. How

to organize and moderate a conference panel. Online conferences and forums. Examples of recent papers and conference talks.

READING DUE: Baxter, "Sonya's Last Speech, or Double-Voicing" (pp 215-233).

Week 10 - Nov. 5 – Essay Workshop

WRITING DUE: Personal essay or conference paper rough draft.

SMALL GROUPS: Workshop rough drafts.

Nov 12 – No Class – Veterans Day

Week 11 - Nov. 19 – MFA Thesis Proposal

GUEST SPEAKER: Novelist **Anita Amirrezvani**, author of *Equal of the Sun* and *The Blood of Flowers*.

WRITING DUE: Personal essays or conference papers (final draft).

DISCUSSION: The MFA Thesis process: proposal, thesis units, final submission. How your thesis proposal resembles a book proposal.

PRESENTATIONS: In-class presentations of personal essays and/or conference papers.

Week 12 - Nov. 26 – MFA Thesis Proposal Continued

WRITING DUE: Thesis proposal rough draft.

SMALL GROUPS: Workshop rough drafts.

PRESENTATIONS: In-class presentations of personal essays and/or conference papers.

Week 13 - Dec 3 – Other Stuff You Should Know

WRITING DUE: MFA Thesis Proposal final draft.

PRESENTATIONS: In-class presentations of personal essays and/or conference papers.

DISCUSSION: How to give a reading. How to introduce an author at a reading. How to query an agent.

Week 14 - Dec 10 - Final Meeting

FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE

University Policies

In an effort to save paper and photocopying costs, the English Department has listed all applicable University Policies (including add/drop, disabilities, academic integrity, and so forth) on its website. See <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/community/faculty/rqrdsyllabiinfo/>