

**English 139: Visiting Authors Seminar**  
**Spring 2014**  
**T/Th 3-4:15, BBC 120**

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Students will study literature (poetry, fiction and non-fiction) by writers who are visiting campus (Cristina Garcia, D.A. Powell, Rabih Alameddine, Joy Harjo and Andrew Sean Greer) as well as interact with these authors through our Center for Literary Arts (and other campus literary events). In addition to critical discussion of their work, we will also explore their biographies and creative processes to see what it might mean to live life as a writer. See [www.litart.org](http://www.litart.org).

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric; 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to American Literature; 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject; 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

**Required Readings**

Alameddine, Rabih. *The Hakawati* (novel)

Harjo, Joy. *Map to the Next World*. (poetry)

Harjo, Joy. *Crazy Brave* (memoir)

Garcia, Cristina. *King of Cuba*. (novel)

Greer, Andrew Sean. *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells*. (novel)

Powell, D.A.. *Chronic* (poetry)

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Students will demonstrate the ability to 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.) 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature. (Objective met via reading assignments and discussion.) 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject. (Objective met via writing assignments and critical reflection.) 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively. (Objective met via Literary Event Research Paper.) 5) articulate the

relations among culture, history, and texts. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.)

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

**Author Group Presentations** (SLO 2, 4 and 5): In a creative, interesting format using visuals, present to the class (appx. 30 minutes) the following information in any order. Include a one-page handout with copies for the class that a) outlines the key points, and b) includes an MLA Works Cited list of your sources. Begin NOW researching the author and sharing information you're finding with your group by email and/or in person.

**WORKS:** A list of all the authors' books, in chronological order, with a short annotation that briefly describes each book's plot and central themes/issues. You can get this information from the author's website, Goodreads, Amazon, etc.

**BIO:** Important biographical information - NOT everything; just significant highlights. Offer relevant information. For example, if you talk about where the author went to school, see if you can find which writer/s s/he studied with or other writers who attended the same school. If you mention the author's hometown, see if you can find any information about how that place has influenced her/his writing. Important information about the author's literary achievement - NOT everything; just significant highlights. If you talk about prizes, explain the significance of the prizes (e.g., look them up to see what the prizes are for, who are past recipients, etc.).

**ONLINE PRESENCE:** An introduction to the author's website, showing us what it includes and highlighting key portions. Also check to see if the author has any other online presence, such as being the developer of or contributor to another literary site, a Facebook page, Twitter account, etc.

**VIDEO:** A clip of a video or audio interview with the author and/or video of a reading. Share with us one or two significant moments—followed by your insights/analysis. In other words, you will have seen/heard the whole thing; choose a “juicy” piece to share, and then analyze it in light of having seen/heard the whole piece. Use a librarian to help you find an interview if you can't find one on your own. If you can't find a video/audio, read print interviews and share with us some juicy quotes, again with analysis/insights.

**INTERVIEW:** After you have done some research and have read at least some of the author's work (and therefore developed some good questions to ask, preferably with your group-mates), I will help you request an interview with the author. These will most likely be through e-mail. Share with us what you learned, focusing on specific quotes (things the author has said or written that you find intriguing about her/his work, the creative process and about writing in general) and say why they are intriguing and how they seem to connect to the writer's themes/obsessions.

**CRITICAL RECEPTION:** Explore the critical reception to some of the author's work. Share with us what critics have said about their major works, including the book/s we read. (Search for book reviews and scholarly articles from professional sources - e.g. not Joe's blog or Amazon reader comments, etc. Use the library databases and librarian help if needed.

## **Short Response and Analysis Papers** (SLO 1, 2, 3 and 5)

For each author, you will write a short (approximately 2-3 pages, double-spaced) “Response and Analysis” paper. As the title indicates, you will include:

- your *personal response* to the book, with a focus on *one or two* key aspects (possibilities include: what your experience was like reading it, what connections you made to life experiences/other readings, etc., what resonated for you, what you liked/didn't and why.)
- an *analysis* of *one or two elements* of any of the following: a) themes/motifs b) writing style/craft c) literary devices. Possibilities include: one or two patterns of images [motif] or ideas [theme] and their possible meanings/effects, foreshadowing, characterization, key conflicts, alliteration, personification, metaphor/simile, allusion, irony, parallel structure, hyperbole, lineation, etc.

Being involved in discussion and taking notes will help you in writing these papers. Because these papers are short, they must be narrow in scope and focused. While they may be written in an informal style (e.g., using first person), they must be organized, thoughtful, and well-edited.

### **Practical Applications** (SLO 2, 3, 4 and 5)

**CLA FACEBOOK & TWITTER POST:** You will write one post for the CLA's Facebook page on your assigned author. Use the material and information you collect from the author presentation. For example, maybe you discover an interesting interview. Write a short and compelling introduction to post along with the interview.

**CLA WEBPAGE:** You will find one short blurb about your assigned author or one of their specific pieces. This blurb will be included on the CLA's webpage.

**AUTHOR QUESTIONS:** For each author we read, you will turn in one or two questions that you'd like to ask the author in person.

### **Author Event Paper** (SLO 1, 2, 3 and 5)

Write a paper (approximately 3-5 pages) in which you briefly describe what happened and give your thoughtful reaction to one of the literary events you attended. The more you can include specific things the author said, questions that were asked, etc. the better—especially if you link what was said to an analysis (e.g., what meaning you make from what the author said). What new insights did you get into the writer and the writer's work? What did you think of the way the author presented her/his work, and why? What connections did you make between what the author read/had to say, and why we discussed in class?

### **Final Project** (SLO 1, 2 and 3)

*Choice #1: Editorial Analysis of One Book*

- Choose one of the books you'd like to write about. (Stolen from Kurt Vonneget, and slightly altered): "You are a minor but useful editor on a good literary magazine. ... Take three stories [or poems] that please you most and three that please you least, six in all [or refer to the whole novel/memoir manuscript], and pretend that they have been offered for publication. Write a report on each of the six stories/poems [or on the novel/memoir manuscript] to be submitted to a wise, respected, witty and world-weary superior. Do not do so as an academic critic, nor as a person drunk on art, nor as a barbarian in the literary market place. Do so as a sensitive person who has a few practical hunches about how stories [poems/novels/memoirs] can succeed or fail. Praise or damn as you please, but do so rather flatly, pragmatically, with cunning attention to annoying or gratifying details. Be yourself. Be unique. Be a good editor. The Universe needs more good editors, God knows." (Approximately 7-10 pages, double-spaced.)
- Include a cover sheet that reflects on the following: a) What did you learn/discover/struggle with writing this paper and studying author's work? b) What do you feel you got out of this

course this semester? c) Which book(s), author(s) and/or literary event(s) had the most impact on you, and why? d) What questions and/or insights about reading, writing, authors and/or the literary life have developed for you as a result of this course? e) What would you like to see changed and/or kept the same in this course?

#### *Choice #2: Creative Project*

- Write a creative project that is “springboarded” off one of the writers explored in this course. The poems can be any length. The prose should be approximately 7-10 pages double-spaced. Your choices are:
  - 5-8 poems in the style of D.A. Powell or Joy Harjo
  - A first chapter of a novel in the style Rabih Alameddine, Andrew Sean Greer, or Cristina Garcia
  - A portion of your memoir in the style of Joy Harjo
  - An alternate last chapter of one of the novels
  - A first chapter of an imagined sequel to one of the course books
- Include a cover sheet that reflects on the following: a) Explain how you engaged with the style of one of the writers: What did you learn/discover/struggle with writing this project? b) What do you feel you got out of this course this semester? c) Which book(s), author(s) and/or literary event(s) had the most impact on you, and why? d) What questions and/or insights about reading, writing, authors and/or the literary life have developed for you as a result of this course? e) What would you like to see changed and/or kept the same in this course?

### **GRADING**

Grading of assignments will be based on:

- **thoroughness** (you “unpack” your claims by digging into them and offering examples; you explain and analyze the significance of your examples)
- **thoughtfulness** (you offer your own personal insights as related to and contrasted with any outside sources used)
- **organization** (ideas move logically from one to the next; you choose examples and quotes that aren’t too long and that are incisive and purposeful)
- **fulfillment of requirements**
- **correctness** (format, editing, MLA citations)

Quizzes 15%

Author Group Presentation 15%

Practical Applications 10%

5 Short Response and Analysis Papers 30%

Literary Event Paper 15%

Final Paper or Creative Project 15%

**Late Assignments:** Late assignments will be reduced a grade for every class session they are late. At the top of Late Assignments write “LATE BY X [number of] CLASS SESSIONS.” This policy helps you to avoid habitual late work and to be prepared to contribute to class discussion. All assignments will be accepted *only in class*, not in my office or mailbox, and not as email attachments. *Please do not ask for exceptions to this policy because you put me in an awkward position.* I know we all have emergencies occasionally. One reduced grade on one assignment will not be the end of the world. Do Extra Credit if you’re concerned about your grade.

QUIZZES CANNOT BE MADE UP.

**Absences:** If you are not in class, contact classmates to get assignments, directions, handouts, notes, etc. Please do not make your absences extra work for me.

**Classroom Protocol**

Being on time, participating in class discussions and listening to and taking notes on class lectures are necessary for the successful completion of this course. Cell phones are shut off and put away.

Protocol for written work requires that all quotations must be enclosed in quotation marks or, when more than three lines, put in an indented block. Full citation of the original author and source must also be included. For all papers, review a writing handbook for help with quote integration, formatting and proper citation (most of you will have purchased one for your Freshman comp. classes).

**Schedule** – subject to change (changes will be announced in class)

Tuesday	Thursday
	1/23 Introductions, syllabus, discuss readings, presentation sign-ups, groups meet
1/28 Introduction to Cristina García, presentation sign-ups, groups meet	1/30 García Practical Application due; <i>King of Cuba</i> , pg. 1-112
2/4 <i>King of Cuba</i> , pg. 113-end	2/6 D.A. Powell Author Presentation
<i>Cristina García Reading Wednesday 2/5 at 7 p.m. and Thursday 2/6 at 1 p.m.</i>	
2/11 García “Response and Analysis” Paper due; <i>Chronic</i> pg. 1-38	2/13 Powell Practical Application due; <i>Chronic</i> pg. 38-end
2/18 Powell “Response and Analysis” Paper due	2/20 Andrew Sean Greer Author Presentation
<i>D.A. Powell Reading Wednesday 2/19 at 7 p.m.</i>	
2/25	2/27
3/4 Greer Practical Application due; <i>The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells</i> pg. TBD	3/6 <i>The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells</i> pg. TBD

3/11 <i>The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells</i> , pg. TBD; Andrew Sean Greer class visit	Mar 13, 2013 Greer “Response and Analysis” Paper due; Rabih Alameddine Author Presentation
<i>Andrew Sean Greer Reading (sometime in March)</i>	
3/18 Alameddine Practical Application due; <i>The Hakawati</i> pg. 1-133	3/20 Alameddine Practical Application due; <i>The Hakawati</i> pg. 134-262
3/25 Spring Break *finish <i>The Hakawati</i> for Tuesday 4/1	3/27 Spring Break
4/1 <i>The Hakawati</i> Discussion; Steinbeck Fellows’ excerpts ( <i>will distribute before this date by e-mail</i> )	4/3 Alameddine “Response and Analysis” Paper due
4/8 Rabih Alameddine class visit, <i>Rabih Alameddine Reading at 7 p.m.</i>	4/10 Joy Harjo Author Presentation
4/15 Harjo Practical Application due; <i>Crazy Brave</i> pg. 1-108	4/17 <i>Crazy Brave</i> pg. 109-end
4/22 <i>Map to the Next World</i> pg. TBD	4/24 <i>Map to the Next World</i> pg. TBD
<i>Joy Harjo Reading Wednesday 4/23 at 7 p.m.</i>	
4/29 Harjo “Response and Analysis” Paper due; Steinbeck Fellows visit class	5/1 Events Papers due - choose a “gem” to share
5/6 Share drafts of final papers	5/8 Share drafts of final papers
5/13 Final Paper due	