

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGL 203, Narrative Craft and Theory (“Extremely Contemporary Fiction”),
Spring 2017

Course and Contact Information

Instructor:	Nick Taylor
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Office Hours:	Tues/Thurs 1:30pm – 3:00pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Weds 4:00pm – 6:45pm
Classroom:	Sweeney Hall 411

Course Description

In this graduate literature seminar, we will read a selection of American fiction published in the last three years. I ask that participants in the seminar come prepared to read these books as critics and as writers. As critics, we will explore whether there is a “school” of contemporary American fiction. As writers, we will dissect each work in terms of form, aesthetics, and material, to determine how these authors—who are our contemporaries, if not our peers—are capturing the attention of early twenty-first-century readers. Writing requirements include short weekly response papers (500-1000 words) and a seminar paper or creative project (4000 words minimum).

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

This course addresses the following Program Learning Objectives (PLOs) approved for the MFA in Creative Writing and MA in Literature:

- CLO 1: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing. (MFA PLO #3, MA PLO #1)
- CLO 2: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts. (MFA PLO #4, MA PLO #3)
- CLO 3: 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. (MFA PLO #5, MA PLO #4)

Required Texts/Readings

Textbooks

1. Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *The Sympathizer*. (ISBN 978-0802124944)
2. Vida, Vendela. *The Diver’s Clothes Lie Empty*. (ISBN 978-0062110947)
3. Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad*. (ISBN 978-0385542364)

4. Watkins, Claire Vaye. *Gold Fame Citrus*. (ISBN 978-1594634246)
5. Lalami, Laila. *The Moor's Account*. (ISBN 978-0804170628)
6. Woodson, Jacqueline. *Another Brooklyn*. (ISBN 978-0062359988)
7. Cusk, Rachel. *Outline*. (ISBN 978-1250081544)
8. Diaz, Junot, and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *Best American Short Stories 2016*. (ISBN 978-0544582897)
9. Sharma, Akhil. *Family Life*. (ISBN 978-0393350609)
10. Henriquez, Cristina. *The Book of Unknown Americans*. (ISBN 978-0345806406)
11. Erdrich, Louise. *LaRose*. (ISBN 978-0062277022)
12. Moshfegh, Ottessa. *Eileen*. (ISBN 978-0143128755)

Course Requirements and Assignments

- **Weekly response papers**, 500-1,000 words [40% of final grade, meets CLO #1, #2, #3]
- **Final project**, 4,000 words [30% of final grade, meets CLO #1, #2, #3]
- **Participation in class discussions** [20% of final grade, meets CLO #2]
- **Attendance at least two literary readings and written responses**, 500-1,000 words [10% of final grade, meets CLO #1, #2, #3]

Participation in 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. You must come to class prepared, which means that you have (a) read the assigned material, and (b) written a short reflection on what you've read. I've found that class discussions are more productive when everyone has had a chance to gather their thoughts.

Weekly reflection papers should run between 500 and 1000 words. You will turn in your papers at the end of each class, so that you can refer to them during class discussion. I will return the papers to you the following week, graded check-plus/check/check-minus.

In lieu of a final exam, you will submit a **final project**, which can be either (a) an MLA-formatted seminar paper on some aspect of contemporary fiction (for example a plotting technique that you have observed in several of the novels we've read, or an examination of different authors' use of the same material) or (b) a short story demonstrating techniques or subjects we have determined to be "extremely contemporary." In either case, your draft should be at least 4,000 words.

Finally, you will be required to **attend at least two literary readings** over the course of the semester, and to turn in response papers of 1-2 pages each. Your response papers can cover the substance of the reading, the author's presentation style, the author's wardrobe—anything that strikes you.

Determination of Grades

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Literary Reading Schedule

Here are some of the free readings being offered on campus this semester:

Feb 24 - Bryan Stevenson (nonfiction) – 12:00pm, Hammer Theater

Mar 3 - Kim Addonizio (poetry) – 4:00-5:00pm, Steinbeck Center (MLK 590)

Mar 3 - Reed Magazine presents An Evening of Poetry 'N Film at Cinquest, 7:00pm-9:00 p.m., Uchida Hall 124

Mar 21 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Food and Travel Panel, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Mar 22 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Adventure Travel Panel feat. Susan Orlean, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Mar 23 - CLA Travel Writing Conference, Travel Editors Panel, 7:00pm, Student Union Theater

Apr 5 - Steinbeck Fellows Reading, 7:00pm, Steinbeck Center, MLK 590

May 3 - SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day, 5:00-9:00pm, Hammer Theater

May 4 - Reed Magazine 150th Anniversary Party, 7:00pm, City Hall Rotunda

Also, here are some free events at Kepler's Books in Menlo Park:

Jan 30 - Kevin Wilson (fiction), 7:30pm - Kevin Wilson, the debut genius of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Family Fang*, celebrates the release of his new novel, *Perfect Little World* (a new favorite among the booksellers). In this lively and entertaining new work, Wilson tells the story of a quixotic psychologist, Dr. Preston Grind, as he falls down the rabbit hole of attempting to create a utopian family.

Feb 7 - Pinay Poets and Writers featuring **Arlene Biala** (Poet Laureate of Santa Clara County), **Janice Lobo Sapigao**, **Veronica Montes**, and **Barbara Jane Reyes**, 7:30pm - An evening of poetry presented by four leading Pinay poets who will read from their most recent work and discuss the long tradition of Pinay poetry, its place in the Philippines, the United States, and in the literary canon.

Mar 6 - Yiyun Li (nonfiction), 7:30pm - Yiyun Li, named one of the *New Yorker's* 20 Under 40, battled suicidal depression for over two years as she delved into her past and explored the essential questions of her occupation: Why Write? and Why Live? The book that emerged is a luminous account of both her life experience (as a scientist, author, mother, and daughter) and an homage to some of her most cherished literary influences.

Late Assignment Policy

Some weeks are busier than others. Some novels keep you glued and other don't. I know this. Therefore, I will allow you to turn in up to two of your weekly response papers a week late. If you do so more than twice, or if your response paper is more than a week late, you will receive no credit for that assignment. You may not turn in your final paper late unless you have discussed it with me beforehand.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

ENGL 203, Spring 2017, Course Schedule

This class meets every Wednesday, starting on Feb 1. The last class is May 10. Class will not be held on March 29 (Spring Break). In lieu of a final exam, you will submit your final project on the last day of class.

Reading assignments meet CLO #1 and #2, writing assignments CLO #3.

Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class.

Feb 1

Introduction

Feb 8

Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*.

Feb 15

Vida, *The Diver's Clothes Lie Empty*.

Feb 22

Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*.

Mar 1

Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus*.

Mar 8

Lalami, *The Moor's Account*.

Mar 15

Woodson. *Another Brooklyn*.

Mar 22

Cusk, *Outline*.

Mar 29

NO CLASS – SJSU Spring Recess

Apr 5

Diaz and Pitlor, eds. *Best American Short Stories 2016*.

Apr 12

Sharma, *Family Life*.

Apr 19

Henriquez, *The Book of Unknown Americans*.

Apr 26

Erdrich, *LaRose*.

May 3

Moshfegh, *Eileen*.

May 10

Wrapup – Final Papers Due