



Jasper Johns, *Three Flags* (1958)

ENGL 1201W | SPRING 2019  
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE  
T/TH 1:00-2:15 Fraser Hall 102  
Website: [canvas.umn.edu](http://canvas.umn.edu)  
Instructor: Dr. John Pistelli  
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Office Hours: T 2:30-4:30 Lind Hall 254

## Teaching Assistants

### Description

From the Cold War and the social movements of the 1960s to the rise of social media and the political instability of today, American life since World War II has been characterized by tumult and upheaval. How have American writers responded to the vast social and political challenges of this chaotic period? How have authors handled the emergence of rivals to literature's cultural primacy in the form of new media such as cinema, television, and the Internet? What are the major movements, trends, and genres in American literature from the postwar period to the present? To answer these questions, our course will provide a historical survey of American fiction from the mid-twentieth century to the current decade. We will situate short stories, novellas, and novels in their social and historical contexts even as we analyze their artistic qualities to learn how literature remains relevant to our ever-changing society. Finally, as this is a writing-intensive course, we will focus on responding to literature in written argument.

### Required Books<sup>1</sup>

- Custom Course Packet
- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (Harper Perennial, ISBN: 978-0062334411)
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (Vintage, ISBN: 978-1400033430)
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Viking, ISBN: 978-0140274981)
- Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (Vintage, ISBN: 978-0679744399)
- Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (Harper Perennial, ISBN: 978-0060515133)
- Jenny Offill, *Dept. of Speculation* (Vintage, ISBN: 978-0345806871)

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<sup>1</sup> The six novels are available in the campus bookstore in Coffmann Union; the course packet is available at Paradigm Copies (720 Washington Ave SE). Ebooks may be used instead of print books, but please bring them to your discussion sections as you would a print book. The course packet is required.

**ENGL 1201W satisfies the Literature Core requirement.**

ENGL 1201W focuses on analysis of written works of literature, chiefly fiction and drama, and it consistently and specifically addresses issues of language and meaning in the works studied. Moreover, the design provides for the continuing study of the formal dimensions of literature, with recurring attention to genre, style, characterization, vocabulary, and symbolism and their capacity to evoke a powerful response from readers. Furthermore, at every turn the course examines the social and historical contexts of the literary works as well as their content.

**ENGL 1201W satisfies the General Core guidelines.**

ENGL 1201W involves reading, study, analysis, and critical interpretation of several literary texts written by American authors. Through a systematic arrangement of lectures, small-group discussions, writing assignments, and oral discussion, this course improves the ability of students to read, write, think, and speak as liberally educated adults. Furthermore, ENGL 1201W supplies a dimension to liberal education best provided by the arts: it teaches students to discriminate, with precision and nuance, among shades of emotion while likewise sharpening the critical judgment they need to recognize appeals to fraudulent as well as genuine, excessive as well as appropriate, shallow as well as deep emotion and feelings.

**ENGL 1201W fulfills Student Learning Outcomes.**

Students in this course will master a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry. The central question of this course is how the contemporary American novel has responded to the influence of new and mass media in popular culture. We will look at the ways in which novelists formulate the problem of mass media, how they re-articulate the role and function of the novel in response to it, and whether or not their novels succeed in establishing a new aesthetic for twenty-first century fiction.

**ENGL 1201W is a Writing Intensive course.**

This course meets the Council on Liberal Education guidelines for a Writing Intensive course. This means that the course:

- integrates writing into course content, through writing assignments that work toward specific course objectives and writing activities that take place throughout the semester
- provides explicit instruction in writing
- requires a cumulative minimum of 2,500 words of formal writing apart from any informal writing activities and assignments
- includes at least one formal assignment that requires students to revise and resubmit drafts after receiving feedback from the course instructor
- requires that at least one-third of each student's final course grade must be tied to the written work done in the course and that a student cannot pass the course and fail the writing component

## Course Policies

### Grades

- *Grading Policy.* A (90-100): Outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements; B (80-90): Significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements; C (70-80): Meets the course requirements in every respect; D (60-70): Worthy of credit, even though it fails to meet course requirements fully; F (0-60): Work was not completed. The University uses plus and minus grading within the above range.
- *Incompletes.* A grade of incomplete ("I") is given only in a genuine and documented emergency, and *only* for work which is due during the last 2 weeks of the course. You must make arrangements for an incomplete before the last day of class.

### Disability Accommodations

The University of Minnesota views disability as an important aspect of diversity, and is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

- If you have, or you think you have, a disability in any area such as mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office on your campus (612-626-1333) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- Students with short-term disabilities, such as a broken arm, can often work with instructors to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, students should contact the DRC as noted above.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.
- If you are registered with the DRC and have questions or concerns about your accommodations please contact your access consultant/disability specialist.

Additional information is available on the DRC website: [diversity.umn.edu/disability](https://diversity.umn.edu/disability) or email [drc@umn.edu](mailto:drc@umn.edu) with questions.

### Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as: plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data,

research procedures, or data analysis. Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### **Student Writing Support**

Student Writing Support (SWS) offers free writing instruction for all University of Minnesota students—graduate and undergraduate—at all stages of the writing process. In face-to-face and online collaborative consultations, SWS consultants from across the disciplines help students develop productive writing habits and revision strategies. Consulting is available by appointment online and in Nicholson Hall, and on a walk-in basis in Appleby Hall. For more information, call 612-625-1893 or go to [writing.umn.edu/sws](http://writing.umn.edu/sws). In addition, SWS offers a number of web-based resources on topics such as avoiding plagiarism, documenting sources, and planning and completing a writing project.

### **Students for Whom English is a Second Language (Department Policy)**

University policy requires that undergraduate students in the same class be held to the same standards of academic performance and accomplishment. Students for whom English is a second language, however, may have difficulty with the readings, lectures, discussions, and writing assignments in a course. The University offers many resources to assist non-native speakers of English, including courses and consultations through the [Minnesota English Language Program](#), the [Center for Writing](#), the [Department of Writing Studies](#), and [International Student and Scholar Services](#).

### **Student Conduct Code**

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community. As a student at the University you are expected to adhere to Board of Regents Policy: Student Conduct Code. Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities." To review the University's Student Conduct Code, please see:

[http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Student\\_Conduct\\_Code.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf)

### **Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom**

Instructors determine if personal electronic devices (such as cell phones and laptops) are allowed in the classroom. Students may be directed to turn off personal electronic devices if the devices are not being used for class purposes. Students are not permitted to record any part of a class/lab/other session unless explicitly granted permission by the instructor. If the

student does not comply, the student may be asked to leave the classroom. For complete information, please reference the policy on Student Responsibilities: <http://policy.umn.edu/education/studentresp>

### **Sexual Misconduct**

I want to let you know that, in my role as a University employee, I am required to share information that I learn about possible sexual misconduct with the campus Title IX office that addresses these concerns. This allows a Title IX staff member to reach out to those who have experienced sexual misconduct to provide information about the personal support resources and options for investigation that they can choose to access. You are welcome to talk with me about concerns related to sexual misconduct. You can also or alternately choose to talk with a confidential resource; the University offers victim-advocacy support professionals, health services professionals and counselors that will not share information that they learn about sexual misconduct. (This applies to teaching assistants as well.)

### **Offensive Material (Department Policy)**

In this course, students will be required to read words or view images that they may consider offensive. The ideas expressed in any given text do not necessarily reflect the views of the instructor, the English Department, or the University of Minnesota. Course materials have been selected for their literary, cultural, and/or historical value, in order to achieve specific learning objectives and course goals. These materials are meant to be examined in the context of intellectual inquiry and critical analysis, as appropriate for a university-level course. If you are easily shocked and/or offended, please contact the instructor to discuss whether this course is suitable for you.

### **Other Policies**

For extensive information about UMN policy regarding the above topics and others—Student Conduct Code; Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences; Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials; Grading and Transcripts; Sexual Harassment; Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action; Disability Accommodations; Mental Health and Stress Management; and Academic Freedom—I strongly encourage that you visit the following link: <https://cla.umn.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/classroom-policies>

## Course Assignments

*Grade breakdown.*

Participation	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	30%

*Participation.* I do not directly give an attendance grade but roll will be taken both in lecture and in discussion sections. Be advised that there will be in-class exercises, assignments, and activities in this course that you will miss if you are absent. If you cannot be in class for any reason, please ask a classmate rather than the instructor for notes or a summary. If illness or other problems require you to miss more than a small amount of class (1 or 2 meetings), please let me or your section leader know. If you miss more than 2 meetings (including both lecture and discussion) without a documented reason, your course grade may be affected. If you miss more than 4 meetings, you may be in danger of failing the course. Participation includes speaking up in class at least once a week in discussion section, contributing to in-class activities, and/or attending office hours or otherwise getting in touch with your instructors.

*Exams.* A midterm and final exam will be held in lecture. These exams will treat all course materials from the beginning to the half and from the half to the end of the course. Both exams will be divided into two parts: a fact-based first section in which you will answer fill-in-the-blank, true/false, or multiple-choice questions, and a second section in which you will have to identify passages from your reading by author/title and write a brief explanation of their significance. I will provide more detail as the date of the midterm approaches.

*Essays.* You will write two essays for the course. The first will be a 1000-word argumentative essay that will require you to provide a close reading of a passage in a text from the first third of the course and devise a thesis about its significance. The second essay will be a 1500-word argumentative essay that asks you to devise a thesis about the similarities or differences between two texts from the course. For the first essay, you will submit a draft that will be graded as well as a graded final submission. For the final essay, you will submit a proposal before turning in the final draft. I will provide more detail as the due dates approach. Late submissions will be lowered by a letter grade for every day not submitted.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**  
(note: all short stories can be found in the course packet)

**Prologue**

01/22

- Introduction to the course

**Postwar Realism and Existentialism**

01/24

- Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"

01/29

- James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

**The Postmodern Mystery**

01/31

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chapters 1-2

02/05

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chapters 3-4

02/07

- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, chapters 5-6

**The Magical Realist Novel**

02/12

- Toni Morrison, *Sula*, Part One

02/14

- Toni Morrison, *Sula*, Part Two

02/19

- Toni Morrison, *Sula*, concluded
- ESSAY #1 FIRST DRAFT DUE TO YOUR T.A.

**Genre and Minimalist Fictions**

02/21

- Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," "She Unnames Them"

02/26

- Raymond Carver, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love," "Cathedral"

### **The Postmodern Domestic Novel**

02/28

- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, Part I: Waves and Radiation

03/05

- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, Part II: The Airborne Toxic Event

03/07

- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, Part III: Dylarama

### **Interlude**

03/12

- Catch-up day and midterm review
- ESSAY #1 FINAL DRAFT DUE TO YOUR T.A.

03/14

- MIDTERM EXAM

03/19, 03/21

- No class

### **The Western *Bildungsroman***

03/26

- Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, chapter I

03/28

- Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, chapters II-III

04/02

- Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, chapter IV

### **The Polyphonic Novel**

04/04

- Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, pp. 1-86

04/09

- Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, pp. 89-192

04/11

- Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, pp. 195-311

### **Post-Postmodernism and the New Sincerity**

04/16

- David Foster Wallace, "The Depressed Person"

04/18

- Jennifer Egan, "Black Box"

### **Autofiction and the New Authenticity**

04/23

- Jenny Offill, *Dept. of Speculation*, chapters 1-20

04/25

- Jenny Offill, *Dept. of Speculation*, chapters 21-46

### **Epilogue**

04/30

- Conclusion to the course
- Course evaluations

05/02

- FINAL EXAM

05/06

- ESSAY #2 DUE TO YOUR T.A.