

Institutions of American Literature

English 40683: Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature | Fall 2018

Tuesday, Thursday 5:00–6:20 p.m. | Reed 223

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Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday 2:00–3:30 p.m.

Course Overview

No novelist is an island. All works of literature emerge not just from the minds of their authors but also from the institutions that fund, edit, publish, promote, and value them. This course will invite you to read twentieth- and twenty-first-century American writing as a creative, collaborative, and sometimes bureaucratic act. Through criticism, institutional histories, and fiction and memoir by such authors as Flannery O'Connor, Raymond Carver, Toni Morrison, and Dave Eggers, we will consider the genre of “literary fiction” as an institutional invention—an invention to which even this course contributes. How do universities and publishers determine what gets written, who writes what, and how a book gets read? How have book critics and awards committees defined what we value as capital-L literature?

Moving through four units focused on the creative writing program, editing, the book award, and the independent press, we will ask, How did the Iowa Writers' Workshop mold O'Connor's writing? What influence did Carver's editor, Gordon Lish, have on his? How did winning the Pulitzer Prize (and not winning the National Book Award) change Morrison's career? How did independent publishing facilitate Eggers's? This course is about how literature gets made, and why it gets made the way it does.

Learning Objectives

Establish a working knowledge of the field of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature.

Locate some of the influences that creative writing programs, editors, book awards, and independent presses have had on how we write and read American literature.

Cultivate a transferable set of methodological tools for investigating how literature and other cultural forms are made, circulated, and valued.

Use the methods of institutional criticism to research and write about twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature.

Required Texts

Carver, Raymond. *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*. 1981. Vintage, 1989.

Eggers, Dave. *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. 2000. Vintage, 2001.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Vintage, 2004.

O'Connor, Flannery. *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*. 1955. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Readings on Course Website

- Als, Hilton. "Ghosts in the House." *New Yorker*, 27 Oct. 2003, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/27/ghosts-in-the-house>.
- Armitage, Simon. "Rough Crossings." *New Yorker*, 24 Dec. 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/24/rough-crossings>.
- "Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison." *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1988, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/24/books/1-black-writers-in-praise-of-toni-morrison-293988.html>.
- Carver, Raymond. "Beginners." *New Yorker*, 24 Dec. 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/24/beginners>.
- . "Cathedral." 1983. *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*, Library of America, 2009, pp. 514–29.
- . "On Writing." 1983. *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*, Library of America, 2009, pp. 728–33.
- Díaz, Junot. "MFA vs. POC." *New Yorker*, 30 Apr. 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/mfa-vs-poc>.
- English, James. "Introduction: Prizes and the Study of Culture." *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Literary Value*, Harvard UP, 2005, pp. 1–14.
- . "Prize Frenzy." *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Literary Value*, Harvard UP, 2005, pp. 17–27.
- Gessen, Keith. "The Book on Publishing." *Vanity Fair*, Oct. 2011, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/10/how-to-publish-fielding-keith-gessen>.
- Hitchens, Christopher. "These Glittering Prizes." *Vanity Fair*, Dec. 1992, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/1992/12/glittering-prizes-199212>.
- Hungerford, Amy. "McSweeney's and the School of Life." *Making Literature Now*, Stanford UP, 2016, pp. 41–69.
- Lish, Gordon. "The Art of Editing No. 2." Interview by Christian Lorentzen. *Paris Review*, Winter 2015, 195–217.
- Max, D. T. "The Carver Chronicles." *New York Times Magazine*, 9 Aug. 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/09/magazine/the-carver-chronicles.html>.
- McGurl, Mark. Preface. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, Harvard UP, 2009, pp. ix–xii.
- . "Understanding Iowa: The Religion of Institutionalization." *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, Harvard UP, 2009, pp. 127–79.
- Wall, Cheryl A. "Toni Morrison, Editor and Teacher." *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, edited by Justine Tally, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 139–48.
- Warren, Kenneth W. "You Tell Me It's the Institution: Creative Writing and Literary History." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 13 Sept. 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/you-tell-me-its-the-institution-creative-writing-and-literary-history/>.

Assignments and Course Expectations

Assignments:

Daily Reading Quizzes

15%

Participation and Preparedness	15%
Multimedia Presentation	20%
Midterm Paper	25%
Final Paper	25%

Grading Scale:

A	93–100%	C	73–76%
A-	90–92%	C-	70–72%
B+	87–89%	D+	67–69%
B	83–86%	D	63–66%
B-	80–82%	D-	60–62%
C+	77–79%	F	0–59%

Course Expectations: This is a reading- and writing-intensive course. To succeed, you will need to devote a significant amount of time to actively reading the course material. Your final grade will be based on a combination of factors, including your scores on daily reading quizzes, your preparation for and participation in class discussions, your multimedia presentation, and your midterm and final papers. The latter account for half of your grade, so achieving an A or B in this course will depend in large part on your ability to produce thoughtful, original, well-organized, and argument-driven writing about the material we read and discuss. I cannot emphasize enough, however, that investing time in the smaller assignments will feed your success on these larger projects.

Participation and Preparedness: The success of this class depends on your engaged and lively participation in it. Please come to class having read the assigned readings and taken careful notes that you can then draw on in formulating and sharing ideas with your peers. At the end of every meeting, you will complete a self-evaluation sheet in which you will assess your own participation and preparedness for that day's meetings and provide a brief rationale for the score you have assigned yourself, on a scale of 1 to 10. While I will try to honor your self-evaluations, I reserve the right to raise or lower your scores based on my own observations.

Scores of 9 or 10 are reserved for those who arrive on time having read and taken notes on all of the assigned materials, bring those materials and notes to class with them, make thoughtful contributions to class discussion, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and do not become distracted by technology.

Scores of 7 or 8 are recommended for those who arrive on time having read most of the assigned materials but may not have taken reading notes, make contributions to class discussion that may be tangential or not grounded in the readings, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and do not become distracted by technology.

Scores of 5 or 6 are recommended for those who arrive on time or a little late having read some of the assigned materials but have not taken reading notes, do not contribute substantially to class discussion, behave respectfully toward their classmates, and may become distracted by technology.

Scores of 1–5 are recommended for those who arrive late having read little of the assigned materials, do not voluntarily contribute to class discussion, and may become distracted by technology.

Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is critical to your success in this course, not only because you receive a participation grade—and it is difficult to participate when you are not there—but also because the midterm and final papers will draw directly on the conversations we have in class. If you will be absent from class for a medical or family emergency, please contact me ahead of time so that I can send you any materials from that day’s meeting.

Submitting Your Work: Please submit your midterm and final papers as .doc or .docx files through the course website. Papers should be double-spaced in twelve-point font with one-inch margins. Format your references using MLA style. If you are unfamiliar with MLA style, please consult the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Plagiarism: As defined by the university, plagiarism is “the appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another’s work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one’s own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another’s work without giving credit therefore.” To avoid committing plagiarism, acknowledge and document all of your sources in your written work. If you are ever unsure whether something constitutes plagiarism, please check with me first.

University Disabilities Statement: Texas Christian University complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator of Student Disabilities Services in the Center for Academic Services located in Sadler Hall, 1010. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at (817) 257-6567.

Reading Schedule and Deadlines

Date	Readings	Deadlines
Week 1	The Genius of the System	
Tuesday, Aug. 21	Syllabus	
Thursday, Aug. 23	Gessen, “The Book on Publishing” (website)	Multimedia presentation assigned
Week 2	The Creative Writing Program	
Tuesday, Aug. 28	McGurl, Preface and “Understanding Iowa” (website)	
Thursday, Aug. 30	O’Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i> (“A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” “The River”)	
Week 3		
Tuesday, Sept. 4	O’Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i> (“The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “A Stroke of Good Fortune”)	
Thursday, Sept. 6	O’Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i>	

	("A Circle in the Fire," "A Late Encounter with the Enemy")	
Week 4		
Tuesday, Sept. 11	O'Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i> ("Good Country People," "The Displaced Person")	
Thursday, Sept. 13	Díaz, "MFA vs. POC" (website) Warren, "You Tell Me It's the Institution" (website)	
Week 5	The Editor	
Tuesday, Sept. 18	Max, "The Carver Chronicles"	Midterm paper assigned
Thursday, Sept. 20	Armitage, "Rough Crossings" (website) Carver, "Beginners" (website) Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> ("What We Talk about When We Talk about Love")	Midterm paper proposal due Sunday, Sept. 23 at 5 p.m.
Week 6		
Tuesday, Sept. 25	Conferences	
Thursday, Sept. 27	Conferences	
Week 7		
Tuesday, Oct. 2	Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> ("Why Don't You Dance," "Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit")	
Thursday, Oct. 4	Carver, "Cathedral" and "On Writing" (website)	
Week 8		
Tuesday, Oct. 9	Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> ("A Serious Talk," "One More Thing")	
Thursday, Oct. 11	Lish, "The Art of Editing No. 2" (website)	Midterm paper due Friday, Oct. 12 at 5 p.m.
Week 9	The Book Award	
Tuesday, Oct. 16	No class (fall recess)	
Thursday, Oct. 18	English, Introduction and "Prize Frenzy" (website)	
Week 10		
Tuesday, Oct. 23	"Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison" (website) Hitchens, "These Glittering Prizes" (website)	
Thursday, Oct. 25	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (3–67)	
Week 11		
Tuesday, Oct. 30	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (68–156)	
Thursday, Nov. 1	Als, "Ghosts in the House" (website) Wall, "Toni Morrison, Editor and Teacher" (website)	
Week 12		

Tuesday, Nov. 6	Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (157–247)	
Thursday, Nov. 8	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (248–324)	
Week 13	The Independent Press	
Tuesday, Nov. 13	Hungerford, “McSweeney’s and the School of Life” (website)	
Thursday, Nov. 15	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (“Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of This Book,” “Incomplete Guide to Symbols and Metaphors,” Parts I and II)	
Week 14		
Tuesday, Nov. 20	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (Parts III, IV, and V)	Final paper assigned
Thursday, Nov. 22	No class (Thanksgiving break)	
Week 15		
Tuesday, Nov. 27	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (Parts VI, VII, and VIII)	
Thursday, Nov. 29	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (Parts IX, X, and XI) SPOTs (please bring a laptop or tablet to class)	
Week 16		
Tuesday, Dec. 4	Wrap-up conversation	
Thursday, Dec. 6	No class (study day)	Final paper due Sunday, Dec. 9 at 5 p.m.