

Institutions of American Literature

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

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Course Overview

In 1946, Flannery O'Connor, twenty-one years old, entered the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the first creative writing program in the United States. "What first stuns the young writer emerging from college is that there is no clear-cut road for him to travel on," she mused at the time. Graduate school was at least better, she concluded, than "the poor house" or "the mad house." In 1967, Raymond Carver, then working for a textbook publisher in Palo Alto, met his future editor Gordon Lish, who would cut his manuscripts down to the bone, revealing the "minimalism" for which Carver later became known. In 1987, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, though hailed as an instant classic, did not win the National Book Award, setting off a fight over race and the institutions that confer cultural distinction (the #OscarsSoWhite of the 1980s). In 1998, Dave Eggers founded *McSweeney's*, launching a new era of "indie" publishing, as well as his own career.

No writer is an island. Authors write their own books, of course, but they write them in and through institutions: the creative writing program, the editor and publishing house, the book award, the independent press. This course is about the creative, collaborative, and sometimes bureaucratic art of making capital-L literature in the United States. How did the Iowa Writers' Workshop change O'Connor's writing? What influence did Carver's editor have on his? How did not winning the National Book Award (and later winning the Pulitzer Prize and Nobel) alter the course of Morrison's career? How did independent publishing facilitate Eggers's? This course asks how literature gets made and read, including in an English department class like this one.

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, Grading, and Policies

Assignments:

Reading Quizzes	15%
Participation and Preparedness	15%
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%

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, August 21	Syllabus	
Thursday, August 23	Gessen, “The Book on Publishing” (website)	Presentation assigned
Week 2	The Creative Writing Program	
Tuesday, August 28	McGurl, Preface and “Understanding Iowa” (website)	
Thursday, August 30	O’Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i> (“A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” “The River”)	
Week 3		
Tuesday, September 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, September 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, September 11	O’Connor, <i>A Good Man Is Hard to Find</i> (“Good Country People,” “The Displaced Person”)	
Thursday, September 13	Díaz, “MFA vs. POC” (website) Warren, “You Tell Me It’s the Institution” (website)	
Week 5	The Editor	
Tuesday, September 18	Max, “The Carver Chronicles”	Midterm paper assigned
Thursday, September 20	Armitage, “Rough Crossings” (website)	Midterm paper proposal due Sunday, September 23 at 5 p.m.

	Carver, “Beginners” (website) Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> (“What We Talk about When We Talk about Love”)	
Week 6		
Tuesday, September 25	Conferences	
Thursday, September 27	Conferences	
Week 7		
Tuesday, October 2	Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> (“Why Don’t You Dance,” “Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit”)	
Thursday, October 4	Carver, “Cathedral” and “On Writing” (website)	
Week 8		
Tuesday, October 9	Carver, <i>What We Talk about When We Talk about Love</i> (“A Serious Talk,” “One More Thing”)	
Thursday, October 11	Lish, “The Art of Editing No. 2” (website)	Midterm paper due Friday, October 12 at 5 p.m.
Week 9	The Book Award	
Tuesday, October 16	No class (fall recess)	
Thursday, October 18	English, Introduction and “Prize Frenzy” (website)	
Week 10		
Tuesday, October 23	“Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison” (website) Hitchens, “These Glittering Prizes” (website)	
Thursday, October 25	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (3–67)	
Week 11		
Tuesday, October 30	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (68–156)	
Thursday, November 1	Als, “Ghosts in the House” (website) Wall, “Toni Morrison, Editor and Teacher” (website)	
Week 12		
Tuesday, November 6	Morrison <i>Beloved</i> (157–247)	
Thursday, November 8	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> (248–324)	
Week 13	The Independent Press	
Tuesday, November 13	Hungerford, “McSweeney’s and the School of Life” (website)	
Thursday, November 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, November 20	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (Parts III, IV, and V)	Final paper assigned
Thursday, November 22	No class (Thanksgiving break)	
Week 15		
Tuesday, November 27	Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> (Parts VI, VII, and VIII)	
Thursday, November 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, December 4	Wrap-up conversation	
Thursday, December 6	No class (study day)	Final paper due Sunday, December 9 at 5 p.m.