

ENGL250T: Experimental American Literature

Fall, 2014

Prof. Steven Church

Monday, 6-9:50 PB101

Office Hours - Tuesday, 9-12, and by appointment

Office PB 449

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Course Description: This course will examine experimental American literature, focusing on form and writing technique. We'll spend some time discussing the impact of post-modern literary theory on the development of alternative forms of nonfiction and consider specific forms such as the collage and lyric essay. We'll also discuss the blurring of genre boundaries and the incorporation of forms, techniques and tropes traditionally associated with poetry, fiction, visual art, drama, and/or other subgenres of literature. We'll look at texts that change the way we think about form and about the world, texts that resist easy classification and hopefully force us away from genre provincialism.

Required Reading:

CROSSING BOUNDARIES, ed. by BJ Hollars

REALITY HUNGER: A MANIFESTO, by David Shields

HALLS OF FAME, by John D'Agata

BLUE GUIDE TO INDIANA, by Michael Martone

DISPATCHES FROM THE DROWNINGS, by BJ Hollars

THE GANGSTER WE ARE ALL LOOKING FOR, by Le Thi Diem Thuy

LYING: A METAPHORICAL MEMOIR, by Lauren Slater

VANISHING POINT, by Ander Monson

PREPARING THE GHOST, by Matthew Gavin Frank

BLUETS, by Maggie Nelson

THE MOST OF IT, by Mary Ruefle

THE MEADOW, by James Galvin

SPEEDBOAT, by Renata Adler

SEXING THE CHERRY, by Jeanette Winterson

Course Goals and Expectations (total points: 500): Because this is a course on experimental writing, we will be experimenting some with the content of the course and with the writing assignments you will be asked to complete. You will be asked to complete 1 Collaborative Writing Project, 10 1-2 page (single spaced) Craft Annotations, a Discussion Group Presentation and a final piece of experimental writing. The Collaborative Project will require you to work as a group in a creative context and to share your experiments with the public.

Attendance and Participation: 100 points:

Because this is a collaborative course that meets once a week, it is extremely important that you make a committed effort to attend every single class. It is equally important that you not simply show up but also come prepared to discuss the text in both small-group and class-wide discussions. You will be allowed one absence, no questions asked. Each absence beyond that has the potential to seriously affect your final grade in the course. There will not be opportunities for make-up work. I do not accept late work. If you have compelling reasons why you are unable to participate in the course, I urge you to contact me and set up a time to talk. If you cannot make it to my office hours, I will make every effort to meet at time that is convenient for you.

Assignments: 400 Points

Craft Annotations: 100 Points: You will be expected to submit 10 short Craft Annotations that micro-focus on a specific element of creative writing form and technique, craft, and/or theory—roughly one for each week/book. You are not required to complete a CA for *Reality Hunger*, *The Blue Guide*, *Blurring the Boundaries*, or for one of the last five books (the one you're doing your group presentation on). These CA's are short, focused 1-2 page (single spaced) analyses of writing craft; they are not summaries of the book, workshop critiques, or reviews of what you've read. Every week you will be expected to turn in your CA at the end of the class period. I do not accept late work or work submitted via email. You **MUST** bring a hard copy to class. It must be typed. No exceptions.

The Blue Guide Project: 100 points: Using Michael Martone's *Blue Guide to Indiana* as our model, we will be working together to create a *Blue Guide to Fresno and the Central Valley*. This means we will discuss how Martone's book is written and we will be imitating the form and style of the book. Each member of the class will be required to contribute at least 2 entries to the project (approx. 750 words each). Once completed the project will be "published" either in print (if we can figure out how to afford it) or online and shared with the public.

Discussion Group Presentation: 100 points: The last five books of the semester will be taught by students in groups of three. Your group will be responsible for teaching one book to the rest of the class. Your group should be prepared to discuss the writer (bio, other works, interviews, etc.) and the work itself, as well as other works by the author. Your discussion should focus on specific elements of writing craft and any other topics that seem relevant to the course themes and ideas; and you will be graded on your ability to engage the class in a meaningful discussion of the text. All teaching strategies are your choice (i.e. lecture, small-group discussions, writing activities, etc.).

Final Experimental Writing Project: 100 points: For your final creative project, you will be expected to submit an essay/memoir that demonstrates your internalization of styles, forms, techniques, themes, and/or ideas that we have discussed this semester.

Email and Online Policies: You must provide the class with a working, easy to use email account that you check regularly. You should pay attention to any emails from me (stchurch@csufresno.edu or swchurch@gmail.com) or your classmates. Since this class meets only once a week, you should expect me to send homework updates and clarifications via email. It is your responsibility to be sure that you have a working email address and to check that address regularly. I do not, however, accept required assignments via email. You must bring a paper copy to class or drop it off in my mailbox in the English Department. You may email me to communicate concerns with the class or to explain absences or tardiness, but such communication does not constitute an excused absence. You should not expect me to post notes, grades, homework, or other course materials online. It is your responsibility to attend class and practice effective communication skills with regard to course materials.

The classroom is largely an analog environment. Your phone, computer or tablet should be kept out of sight in your bag unless you have a compelling (documented) reason for using it. We may, from time to time, consult devices to answer research questions that come up in class discussion, but your device should otherwise remain out of sight. If your digital device rings, buzzes, chirps, tweets, hums, vibrates, howls, or makes any noise, you will be asked to answer the phone and carry on a conversation for everyone to hear. If it is a text message, you will be asked to give a reading of the message to the entire class.

***Note on Seating:** This semester I strongly encourage you to sit next to a different person each week. The goal is both for you to get to know other members of the class but also to nudge you out of your comfort zone a bit and discourage some of the unproductive alliances and cliques that can develop in the seminar environment.*

Subject to Change: This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. If you are absent from class, it is your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent.

Course and University Policies:

Students with Disabilities: Upon identifying themselves to me and to the university, students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for learning and evaluation. For more information, contact Services to Students with Disabilities in Madden Library 1049 (278-2811).

Honor Code: "Members of the CSU Fresno academic community adhere to principles of academic integrity and mutual respect while engaged in university work and related activities." You should:

- a) understand or seek clarification about expectations for academic integrity in this course (including no cheating, plagiarism and inappropriate collaboration)
- b) neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on examinations or other course work that is used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
- c) take responsibility to monitor academic dishonesty in any form and to report it to the instructor or other appropriate official for action.

Cheating and Plagiarism: "Cheating is the actual or attempted practice of fraudulent or deceptive acts for the purpose of improving one's grade or obtaining course credit; such acts also include assisting another student to do so. Typically, such acts occur in relation to examinations. However, it is the intent of this definition that the term 'cheating' not be limited to examination situations only, but that it include any and all actions by a student that are intended to gain an unearned academic advantage by fraudulent or deceptive means. Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating which consists of the misuse of the published and/or unpublished works of others by misrepresenting the material (i.e., their intellectual property) so used as one's own work." Penalties for cheating and plagiarism range from a 0 or F on a particular assignment, through an F for the course, to expulsion from the university.

Computers: "At California State University, Fresno, computers and communications links to remote resources are recognized as being integral to the education and research experience. Every student is required to have his/her own computer or have other personal access to a workstation (including a modem and a printer) with all the recommended software. The minimum and recommended standards for the workstations and software, which may vary by academic major, are updated periodically and are available from Information Technology Services (<http://www.csufresno.edu/ITS/>) or the University Bookstore. In the curriculum and class assignments, students are presumed to have 24-hour access to a computer workstation and the necessary communication links to the University's information resources."

Disruptive Classroom Behavior: "The classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. ... Differences of viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in terms which are supportive of the learning process, creating an environment in which students and faculty may learn to reason with clarity and compassion, to share of themselves without losing their identities, and to develop and understanding of the community in which they live . . . Student conduct which disrupts the learning process shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class."

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Weekly Schedule

E250T

Fall 2014

Week:

Book:

1-8/25 Introductions, Syllabus, etc.
Reading from BtheB: "Time and Distance Overcome," by Eula Biss and
"On Time and Distance Overcome"

LABOR DAY: NO CLASS ON SEPT. 1

2-9/8 REALITY HUNGER: A MANIFESTO, by David Shields

3-9/15 HALLS OF FAME, by John D'Agata

4-9/22 BLUE GUIDE TO INDIANA, by Michael Martone
Reading from BtheB: "Asymmetry," and "On Asymmetry," by Martone

5-9/29 DISPATCHES FROM THE DROWNINGS, by BJ Hollars

6-10/6 THE GANGSTER WE ARE ALL LOOKING FOR, by Le Thi
Diem Thuy

7-10/13 LYING: A METAPHORICAL MEMOIR, by Lauren Slater

8-10/20 VANISHING POINT, by Ander Monson
Reading from BtheB: "'Outline Toward a Theory of the Mine,'" and
"Outline toward a reflection"

9-10/27 BLUEETS, by Maggie Nelson

BLUE GUIDE ENTRIES DUE

10-11/3 PREPARING THE GHOST, by Matthew Gavin Frank - Group Led

NOV. 6 REQUIRED READING ATTENDANCE: Matthew Gavin Frank and
Justin Hocking

11-11/10 THE MOST OF IT, by Mary Ruefle - Group Led

12-11/17 THE MEADOW, by James Galvin - Group Led

THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS ON NOV. 24

13-12/1 SPEEDBOAT, by Renata Adler – Group Led

14-12/8 SEXING THE CHERRY, by Jeanette Winterson – Group Led

15-12/15 FINAL EXPERIMENTAL PROJECTS DUE