

English 238: Introduction to Fiction
Summer 2016
Purdue University

Instructor:

Dr. Harry Denny

Associate Professor, English

Director, Writing Lab

hdenny@purdue.edu

office hours: By appointment — just drop me a line, and we'll meet virtually or on campus.

Course description

This course takes up "Introduction to Fiction" with a bit of a twist: We'll be spending the summer thinking about and considering a set of popular genres in fiction -- zombie and post-apocalyptic fiction - in relation to common, conventional ways of approaching more "high brow" fiction. What that means is we'll approach some fun, sometimes disturbing, and widely consumed fiction and ask whether and what makes it art. We'll think about the craft that the writer's are deploying, and we'll consider this genre tells us about the sociocultural moments in which they appear.

This whole course will take place online through our Blackboard platform, so you'll need to ensure you have regular access to upload and post to the Internet. That means you'll need to figure out a plan A, B and C to get online access. Rumor has it that Google Chrome and Internet Explorer don't work as well with Blackboard as Firefox or Safari.

Course Texts

Max Brooks. *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*. Three Rivers Press, 2007.

Terry Brooks. *Armageddon's Children*. Del Rey, 2007.

Jim Butcher. *White Night*. Roc, 2008. Digital.

Cormac McCarthy. *The Road*. Vintage Books, 2006. Digital.

Brian Vaughan. *Y: The Last Man, Vol. 1: Unmanned*. Vertigo, 2011. Digital comic.

- With the exception the Y: The Last Man, all these books are cheaper as digital texts. The comic is a bit hard to read on a smaller screen, though I haven't tried it on anything other than my Kindle.
- Additional reading on Blackboard.

Course Policies

Attendance & Deadlines

- All of class will take place through through Blackboard. However, life intrudes from time to time, and I understand that reality. If something is going on, just shoot me a message (hdenny@purdue.edu) and we'll figure it all out.
- Please be aware that postings need to be done no later that the deadlines outlined above or in the schedule, so also factor access to technology into your schedule. Assume, as I always do, that when you most need technology, it will fail you. In other words, have a back-up plan to your laptop and internet access. I would encourage you to purchase a key-drive that will allow you to upload/download files from any computer. Also, be careful about writing your journals only in Blackboard -- often the platform will timeout, and you'll lose all your work. My advice, write in work or pages or something like that, and then copy and paste into Blackboard.

Conduct

- I've opted to have us mainly interact with me through the journal feature in Blackboard, so I doubt there'll be many occasions for group dialogue through discussion threads. That said, if we do decide to have them, no one person ought to dominate conversation, and everyone must be willing to engage in a thoughtful, courteous, and critical discussion. From time to time, people will make comments that strike you wrong on a whole host of fronts. Our obligation as students and citizens is to respond to these moments in ways that mirror the appropriate and professional decorum that academics attempt to

cultivate. If you take objection to anything anyone says or does, it's your obligation to create a space and opportunity for learning to happen; likewise, you ought to couch thoughts in ways that foster conversation instead of inhibiting it. While many of us may mark our identities and beliefs through our talk and bodies, assumptions should never be made, and membership in this discourse community should be respectful of all diversity, regardless of the form it takes.

Support

- The other hat I wear, besides being an English professor, is serving as the Director of the Writing Lab. So I'd be remiss not to plug my own support unit. If you need help thinking through, developing, revising or editing your writing this term, remember, the Writing Lab is open over the summer and available online. Give it a try. Login with your career account via owl.english.purdue.edu.

Disability and Special Circumstances

- If you have a learning disability, you are under no obligation to inform me, but knowing that information can help me make your learning experience better. If you suspect you may have undiagnosed issues and want help, I can provide appropriate, confidential contact information.

Plagiarism

- Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If I suspect plagiarism is happening, I'll run your paper through turnitin.com or "google" selections from your essay. However, you'll be doing quite a bit of writing in class and individual enough in nature that such cheating will be really difficult—I'll get really familiar with your voice and natural means of expression. Also, be aware that your prose needs to be in your voice—if someone else edits your work, in certain cases your writing no longer is "yours." Passing it off as yours is still plagiarism. In most cases, plagiarism is unintentional or happens because of anxiety. Rather than get yourself in trouble, talk to me, a college advisor, or a counselor in CAPS. We can help you. Worse comes to worse, I'll need to report a violation to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities to adjudicate the matter.

Essay style and conventions

- Please number your pages and follow MLA citation and format guidelines as detailed in any writer's reference or handbook. Remember, you'll never get into trouble if you acknowledge sources that you quote or paraphrase — it actually grants you more cred.

Conduct

- Students are expected to adhere to the university's code of conduct. Though some courses on campus don't enable students to have much agency, this course will prize everyone's engagement. Students should not expect me to just transmit what I want you to know and do or to impart knowledge; I'm here to get you to express and hone your thoughts in writing.

Grading

- Weekly Journals and Dialogue (70 points)
- Writing Assignments
 - Reading autobiography (10 points)
 - Comparison essay (25 points)
 - Final Project (40 points)

Assignments in Detail

- Weekly Journal
 - Due each Friday by 6 p.m., West Lafayette campus time (your classmates are all over the world). Don't over think it. After reading for the week, take up concepts and traits from the theory background in week one, and/or respond with what it leaves you thinking about. I don't want a summary/response; rather, I want you to imagine we're at the Greyhouse or some such place just talking about what you're reading and what it spurs in you (even if you want to say, I hated this, that was gross, this make me scream. If I wrote this book, I'd do this).
- Reading autobiography (2-3 pages, pages numbered, double spaced, 1-inch margins, etc)

- Tell me the story of how you've come to reading (or not) and what you like to read. If you're not a big reader, talk to me about what that's about. Where/how do you feed whatever literacies you're into? For example, I grew up in a working-class family that never read high-brow novels, but they were constantly reading popular fiction, so I've always enjoyed being in a park, on the couch, in the backyard with a fun book that gets me thinking and imagining. That said, I knew quite a few guys in my neighborhood whose families and networks made fun of kids, especially guys, for reading and thinking, as if it were suspicious or weird. Even in this last year, my CoRec trainer told me that he's a secret reader — apparently "fun" reading isn't cool among Engineers or athletes.
- Comparison essay (no less than 4 pages)
 - Take 2-3 features that strike you about any of our readings and compare them to another reading inside or outside of class. To make the argument effective, you'll need to think through what makes that features important to you and your audience (imagine other college students like yourself, beyond class).
- Final Project (Propose by week 5 or sooner) — no less than 5 pages
 - Option 1: Literature Review
 - Take up an idea or concept that has resonated with you over the course of the semester in relation our readings. Research what others have to say via blogs, journals or academic presentations. The hard part for this option is to find voices and perspectives, weigh their cred, and figure out how to frame the argument — why's it important, what do you make of it?
 - Option 2: Sociocultural Critique
 - What do you make of this genre? What do you suppose it's telling us about society? How so? How do you bridge the texts we've read to other texts to our geo-social zeitgeist?
 - Option 3: Multimodal
 - We've obviously focused on literary texts. How would you compare these texts and what they're dealing with to other media? How do they take up feature that interest you in different or similar ways? What do visual or other media have to offer that the textual doesn't? How are they more or less effective? As you make the juxtaposition, be sure to integrate thick descriptions to support your argument
 - Option 4: Creative
 - Begin writing your own apocalyptic/zombie fiction. Self-consciously play with the techniques or strategies we've seen in the pieces we've read this semester. Include a coda that addresses how/ why you're creating in the way that you do (a page or two extra).

Grading Scale and Criteria

- A (Excellent)
 - All writing assignments will have been revised and carefully proofread. Generally speaking, and when applicable, "A" writing has clarity and precision; a distrust of generalizations; clear, well-defined ideas; well-developed paragraphs; thoughtful incorporation of outside sources; appropriate usage of quotations; interesting and varied sentence structure; consistently correct grammar and usage. If an argument is being made, it will be have a distinct claim, ample evidence, clarification of terms, and most likely an awareness of counterarguments. In other forms of writing—memoir, anecdotes, interviews, poetry, etc—there will be an attention to detail and specifics, whether writing about physical objects or abstract concepts. All assignments will indicate a careful attention to the complexity and variability of language, and in general indicate a desire to be unique, not imitative; unexpected, not obvious or obligatory; and complex, not two-dimensional. "A" writing pushes the implications of its statements, and always seeks to "unpack" and pursue the ideas and concepts raised therein.
- B (Good to above average)
 - All writing assignments will have been revised and carefully proofread. Arguments might not be as complex or as artfully executed as "A" arguments. In general, work will be close to "A" level work, but sometimes lacking in polish, complexity, or depth. The degree of skill, complexity, and revision reflected in the work will determine whether the grade is a B+, B, or B-.
- C (Average to satisfactory)
 - Simple or weak arguments, generalizations, a lack of precision, awkwardness in incorporating outside information, minimal revision or quick or nonexistent proofreading: these are some of the characteristics of "C" papers. In general, "C" level work requires more revision, more concentration and attention, and more time management. The degree of skill,

complexity, and revision reflected in the work—as well as the student’s attention to deadlines—will determine whether the grade is a C+, C, or C-.

- D (Below average)
 - Writing will probably suffer from grammar and usage errors, generalizations, as well as lack of concentration and precision. Signs of serious revision will be rare or nonexistent. Problematic claims in arguments; lack of originality or willingness to experiment in other forms of writing.
- F (Unacceptable)
 - Writing will have any of the following characteristics: weak, unsupported ideas; unoriginal or unarguable claims; numerous generalizations; an absence of particulars and specifics; carelessness; consistently incorrect grammar and usage. Very little if any serious revision. Writing will often be shorter than the minimum number of pages. Also, evidence of plagiarism is enough to warrant a failing grade.
- Special note about online journals: Don’t sweat your prose, focus more on what you think, your ideas. For this element, I’m wanting to hear you take up concepts, to show you’re thinking critically, imaginatively, to get a sense that you’re actively reading and thinking, not consuming the texts like a, well, zombie. And please, feel free to write back to my comments and dialogue with me.

Schedule

Week 1/June 13

- By the end of day June 14, post an intro to Discussions for everyone in class (maybe share a photo of yourself) and do a dry run post to Journal. Let me know what questions or concerns you have about the syllabus.
- By Friday, 6 p.m. EDT, read Charters/Intro to Fiction excerpt and post a reaction (I know, it’s a little dull) to Journal.
- By Friday, 6 p.m. EDT, post a reading autobiography to Assignments.

Week 2/June 20

- By usual time, post a reaction to World War Z and offer examples of 3 elements or traits of fiction (see Charters).

Week 3/June 27

- By usual time, post a reaction to The Road and offer examples of 3 elements or traits of fiction.

Week 4/July 4

- By usual time, post a reaction to Y: The Last Man
- Post your comparison essay to Assignments — be sure to upload your paper in doc or pdf format.

Week 5/July 11

- By usual time, post a reaction to Armageddon’s Children and offer examples of 3 elements or traits of fiction.
- Post to assignments your plan of action for the final project.

Week 6/July 18

- By usual time, post a reaction to the White Night and offer examples of 3 elements or traits of fiction.

Week 7/July 25

- By Tuesday, 6 p.m. EDT, July 26, check in on your journal about your progress with the final project.
- Post to Assignment by noon, August 2, your final project — remember doc or PDF format.