

LITT 3316 Fall 2014

Contemporary American Women Writers

MWF 11:20am-12:35pm, C103

Instructor: Dr. Kristin Jacobson (a.k.a. Dr. J)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course explores recent fiction by American women writers. All the novels assigned in the course were published in the past five years, and five of the seven novels we are reading were published within the past year. The primary goal of this course is to determine what connects and separates these contemporary novels written by American women. To accomplish this goal we will compare the novels' structures, themes, characters, and plots. We will also examine their historical and cultural context by conducting research, examining book reviews, and contrasting the novels' settings. We will practice all these critical reading and analysis skills in class discussion. The writing assignments and class presentation offer opportunities to demonstrate strengths in the skills required to accomplish our course goal to outline what defines contemporary American novels by women. The novels' recent publication allows us to engage in cutting edge analysis that breaks new ground and tests the status quo understanding of contemporary writing by American women. Students should come ready to read and re-read, write and re-write, think and re-think intensively.

NOTA BENE: readings covered in this course may be considered challenging due to topics that some may find offensive and/or traumatizing. Our classroom provides an open space for the critical and civil exchange of ideas. The instructor always tries to forewarn students about potentially disturbing subjects and requests all students aim to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sensitivity.

This course has three essential goals. Students should:

- **Learn fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories** (e.g., sharpen your close reading and critical literary analysis methods and theories, particularly in regard to contemporary American women's novels; understand approaches to reading and trends in contemporary American women's fiction)
- **Learn to apply course material** (e.g., produce writing, discussion, and a presentation that demonstrates your ability to close read fiction and appropriately incorporate secondary sources)
- **Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas** (e.g., enhance your ability to evaluate critically a range of contemporary novels, literary criticism, and book reviews)

Other important goals for this course include:

- **Developing skill in expressing yourself in writing** (e.g., sharpening your critical writing and analysis skills, particularly in regard to your writing about women's literature)
 - **Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of literature** (e.g., the aim of this course is to learn to appreciate a range of contemporary novels by American women)
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ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Stockton College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations should contact the Learning Access Program located in J204 or by calling 652-4988. Additional information on the program may be obtained from Stockton web site <http://www2.stockton.edu/wellness/lap.html>.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and risk failing the course. Other sanctions may also apply and all cases will be reported to Academic Affairs. You are responsible for knowing this college policy: <http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=14&pageID=62>. Contact your instructor if you have questions.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt (2013)
- *Flight Behavior*, Barbara Kingsolver (2012)
- *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth Ozeki (2013)
- *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich (2012)
- *Oleander Girl*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2012)
- *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison (2008)
- *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Helena María Viramontes (1995)
- **Blackboard:** If you have questions about using Blackboard, consult a computer lab assistant or your instructor.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

- *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Murfin)
 - *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition*
 - **Additional Resources on the Web:** See "Web Links" in Blackboard
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EMAIL POLICY: Please keep the following in mind when communicating with me outside of class:

- (1) Use Blackboard email for all course-related correspondence.
- (2) I usually check my email each day in the morning (before 9am). Please plan your email questions accordingly and, while I often respond immediately, allow a twenty-four hour time frame for my reply.
- (3) Check your Blackboard email before asking me if I have responded to your note.
- (4) Always try to visit my office hours with specific questions about course material. If you were absent, contact a classmate with questions about missed material and then visit office hours if you still have questions.
- (5) Visit instructor office hours to discuss grades. This includes final grades. Grades should be discussed in person during office hours or other arranged meetings. I will not discuss grades via email.

OFFICE HOURS: Think of my office as an extension of the classroom and use my office hours to discuss any aspect of the reading and material covered during class: come chat with me about your writing, the portfolio process, questions about the reading, lecture, or discussion, ideas you wish to develop, reading and interpretive strategies you'd like to try, and so on. Students who visit office hours tend to perform better.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: You will be expected to:

- (1) **ATTEND CLASS:** you are allotted 6 absences for fatigue, illness, cocktail flu, personal reasons, malfunctioning alarm clocks, doctor's appointments, etc. (Note: I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you miss six days and then get the flu and miss another day, you will lose 50 points for the seventh absence. Any exception to this policy requires documentation for all absences and approval for special accommodations with the Wellness Center.) **Students entering class after the instructor records attendance, who leave before class ends, or who disappear for a substantial part of any class will be considered absent.** For each absence after your first six, your final grade **will be reduced 50 points per additional absence**, down to and including "F." Regular, spirited class attendance is a crucial component to passing this course. I will not give incompletes at the end of the semester unless arrangements are made well in advance and you have appropriate reasons and qualify according to College policy;
- (2) **ATTEND CLASS MEETINGS PREPARED:** this means bring the appropriate text(s) and DO THE READING WITH GUSTO; this is a discussion-based class and if you haven't done the reading, thought a little about it, and have ready access to it, you will not be able to contribute and the class (as well as your grade) suffers accordingly;
- (3) **PARTICIPATE IN LARGE AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS:** this course is what you make of it and will work *only* if everyone actively contributes;
- (4) **COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS:** passing the course requires timely completion of ALL assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class. You risk failing the course if you do not complete all assignments. *It is not my responsibility to make sure that you have handed in all assignments; it is yours.* No late/incomplete assignments will be accepted after the last day of class;
- (5) **UNPLUG:** silence cell phones before entering class, cease text messaging, and do not surf the web or check email during class. An inability to use technology responsibly will negatively impact your final grade: **You will lose five points every time your phone disrupts class, I tell you to cease text messaging, and/or am required to ask you to cease other inappropriate uses of technology during class.** All disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping in class, inappropriate language directed at students/instructor, perpetual lateness, leaving class frequently, etc.) constitutes grounds for grade reduction and/or dismissal from class.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS:

CLASS PARTICIPATION (100 points): Class participation—both *verbal* contributions and silent *active listening* to your peers and instructor—is a required element of the course. You may also post messages to our Blackboard discussion board and/or visit instructor office hours as part of your class participation. *Students who miss a class are strongly encouraged to post a response to the missed day's reading prior to the next class period.* Frequently leaving class, the inability to take part in discussion, tardiness, leaving class early, sleeping, text messaging, and other disruptive behavior lowers your class participation grade and, when not corrected, may be grounds for dismissal from the class. **Coming to class with questions, comments about the reading, and/or passages to discuss raises your class participation.**

PRESENTATION (15-20 minutes, 100 points): This individual or small group presentation will inform the class about book reviews and/or scholarship published about or related to one of the novels we are reading this term and make a claim about the overall reception of novel based on the scholarship and/or book reviews. The presentation will introduce the sources consulted and state a claim about the overall reception of the novel based on the reviews/scholarship. All presentations must discuss the following:

- **Research Process:** How did you conduct your research? Where and how did you search for information about your topic? What sources are you discussing today and why? How were they selected from all the information that you found?
- **Research Findings and Support:** What did you learn about the novel's reception from your sources?
 Sample claim: After reviewing four book reviews of Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, I determined that there are two schools of thought about the novel's plot and structure: School A argues Y and School B argues Z.
 Sample claim: After reviewing four articles about Kingsolver's environmental fiction, I determined that *Flight Behavior* is very different from/similar to in X way in comparison to her other works of environmental fiction.
 The reviews and/or scholarship may agree—they may not agree. Your job is to organize (clump and group) the information in the individual reviews/articles to make a claim about what the authors overall are saying about the novel or how what they are saying could be applied to the novel.
 Support your thesis/claim about what the book reviews/scholarship collectively say about the novel: include selective quotations/paraphrase from the reviews to support your claim. Be sure to cite all quotations/paraphrase according to MLA guidelines—both on the visual aide as well as in your bibliography.
 Your presentation's conclusion might engage the larger implications of your claim and/or the claims made by the reviewers/scholars. For example, if you happen to agree/disagree with all/some of the reviewers, you may briefly state why in the conclusion.
- **Visual Aide:** each presentation must use some type of visual aide (for example, a PowerPoint presentation and/or handout). Include a typed bibliography of the outside research quoted or consulted. The best presenters will not just lecture, but elicit discussion and activity from the class. Be creative! Have fun! Don't be afraid to ask us to do innovative activities to make the ideas come alive. Students are responsible for signing up for a presentation by the second week of classes.
- **Bibliography:** Include a full bibliography in perfect MLA format of all book reviews consulted.

FINAL DAY QUIZZES (7 quizzes total, 100 points each, lowest score dropped = 600 points total): These quizzes will be taken in class or as take home essay exams. When administered as in class quizzes, the quiz will take place during the first 45 minutes of class. Students coming to class late on those days will not be given more time. Take home essay exams will be distributed the Wednesday before the Friday due date. Take home exams must be typed, should be at least two typed pages and no more than three typed pages, and are due when the instructor takes attendance. **NO LATE QUIZZES WILL BE ACCEPTED.** The best in class and take home essays will begin with a clear, arguable thesis and use concrete textual evidence to support the thesis.

FINAL COMPARISON PAPER (6-8 typed pages, 200 points): This paper will compare two novels we read this term. You may, for example, focus on comparing and contrasting how the novels treat a shared theme. Or, you may analyze how the novels employ their settings for similar or different ends. You might also consider comparing and contrasting characters from two novels or evaluating the novels' reception in book reviews and then analyzing what accounts for the similar/different reviews.

Grading Scale

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 100-95: A | 89.9-87: B+ | 79.9-77: C+ | 69.9-67: D+ |
| 94.9-90: A- | 86.9-83: B | 76.9-73: C | 66.9-63: D |
| | 82.9-80: B- | 72.9-70: C- | 62.9-60: D- |
| | | | 59.9 & below: F |

Grades

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Class Participation | 100 |
| Presentation | 100 |
| Midterm Book Review Paper | 200 |
| Final Day Quizzes | 300 |
| Final Comparison Paper | 300 |
| Total | 1000 |

Late Assignment Policy:

I understand that life is full of surprises and sometimes those surprises influence your coursework and your ability to complete assignments. As a community of learners, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to the group, to our instructor, and to ourselves. We understand that every action has a consequence—even when circumstance may limit our power to act. To balance individual and community needs, we have the following guidelines for late assignments.

Written Assignments: *Papers are due at the beginning of class.* Late papers will be docked 5 percentage points per day late. So, if a B (85%) paper due on Tuesday were passed in on Wednesday, the recorded grade would be B- (80%). If it were passed in on Thursday, the paper would earn a 75%. And so on and so forth. **NO FINAL DAY IN CLASS OR TAKE HOME QUIZZES WILL BE ACCEPTED LATE.** To receive credit for the Quizzes they must be passed in on time.

Paper Extensions: Any student who asks the instructor **prior to** the due date may receive a 2-day extension from the due date listed on the syllabus. After 2 days the late paper penalty will go into effect. No exceptions. *Due to the College's grade submission deadline, no student may receive an extension for the final paper.* **No extensions will be granted for the Final Day Quizzes.**

Of course, the extension policy will only help students who have drafted a paper and follow the expected practice of backing up documents. Back up all your files and you will be a much happier and successful individual. You may not be happy when your computer explodes or your flash drive crashes, but at least you will not be despondent. I also strongly encourage all students to keep a personal copy of every assignment and to keep all returned assignments with my feedback until the end of the term. Reminder, no assignments will be accepted after the last class meeting.

Paper Revision Policy:

This course is based on the principle that revisions take place *before* a paper is evaluated by the instructor for a grade. To this end, consider dropping in during office hours or other arranged meetings to discuss your papers in advance of due dates. Drop in at any stage of the writing process: from your initial brainstorming to nailing down those final brass tacks. The instructor will happily read and comment on thesis statements (usually between 1-3 sentences) via Blackboard email. If you wish the instructor to read longer drafts, drop by her office hours. Additionally, Dr. J encourages you to use your peer resources during the draft and revision process, including Stockton's Writing Center, located in J105:
<http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=70&pageID=2>.

Extra Credit (30 points total possible): Students may earn extra credit for attending one or more Visiting Writer's Events or for attending a play at the PAC. To document your attendance, sign in with Dr. J at the event or give her your PAC ticket stub. These are the **ONLY** extra credit opportunities that will be offered. Failure to attend the entire event will result in zero points. Ten points per event: a maximum of 30 extra credit points total possible.

Syllabus—LITT 3316—Fall 2014¹

Week 1: Introductions

Sept 3: **Introductions:** to course, Blackboard, assignments, students and instructor.

Sept 5: **Goldfinch:** I, chapters 1-2 (1-70)

Week 2: *Goldfinch*

Sept 8: **Goldfinch:** I, chapters 3-4 (71-206)

Sept 10: **Goldfinch:** II, chapters 5-6 (207-370) **Presentation 1: Book Reviews of *Goldfinch***

Sept 12: **Goldfinch:** III, chapter 7 (371-405)

Week 3: *Goldfinch*

Sept 15: **Goldfinch:** III, chapter 8- IV, chapter 9 (406-501)

Sept 17: **Goldfinch:** IV, chapter 10 (502-638) **Presentation 2: Scholarship on Post 9/11 Novel**

Sept 19: **Goldfinch:** V, chapters 11-12 (639-771) **Final Day Quiz 1**

Week 4: *Flight Behavior*

Sept 22: **Flight Behavior:** Chapters 1-4 (1-103)

Sept 24: **Flight Behavior:** Chapters 5-6 (104-154) **Presentation 3: Book Reviews of *Flight Behavior***

Sept 26: **Flight Behavior:** Chapters 7-8 (155-214)

Week 5: *Flight Behavior*

Sept 29: **Flight Behavior:** Chapters 9-10 (215-285)

Oct 1: **Flight Behavior:** Chapter 11 (286-329) **Presentation 4: Scholarship on Kingsolver's Environmental Fiction**

Oct 3: **Flight Behavior:** Chapter 12 (330-433) **Final Day Quiz 2**

Week 6: *A Tale for the Time Being*

Oct 6: **A Tale for the Time Being:** Part 1 (1-108)

Oct 8: **A Tale for the Time Being:** Part 2 (109-188) **Presentation 5: Book Reviews of *Tale for the Time Being***

Oct 10: **A Tale for the Time Being:** Part 2 (189-258)

¹ Class Schedule subject to changes with notice. Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.

Week 7: *A Tale for the Time Being*

Oct 13: *A Tale for the Time Being*: Part 3 (259-298)

Oct 15: *A Tale for the Time Being*: Part 3 (299-355) **Presentation 6: Scholarship on Ozeki's Fiction**

Oct 17: *A Tale for the Time Being*: Part 4, Epilogue and Appendices (356-418) **Final Day Quiz 3**

Week 8: *Round House*

Oct 20: *Round House*: Chapters 1-4 (1-83)

Oct 22: *Round House*: Chapters 5-7 (84-148) **Presentation 7: Book Reviews of *Round House***

Oct 24: *Round House*: Chapter 8 (149-199)

Week 9: *Round House*

Oct 27: *Round House*: Chapter 9-10 (200-283) **Presentation 8: Scholarship on Erdrich**

Oct 29: *Round House*: Chapter 11 and Afterward (284-321) **Final Day Quiz 4**

Oct 31: *Oleander Girl*: Chapter 1-4 (1-92) **Presentation 9: Book Reviews of *Oleander Girl***

Week 10: *Oleander Girl*

Nov 3: *Oleander Girl*: Chapters 5-8 (93-162) **Presentation 10: Scholarship on Southeast Asian-American Novel** Final Paper Proposal pairs assigned in class.

Nov 5: **Preceptorial Advising—No Classes.**

Nov 7: **Final Paper Proposal:** Post to Blackboard the two novels you plan to compare and how you plan to compare them. Write at least two complete paragraphs. Include a brief paper outline. **Due Nov 7 by 11:30am. Dr. J will be out of town for a conference.**

Week 11: *Oleander Girl*

Nov 10: *Oleander Girl*: Chapters 9-11 (163-213) **Dr. J will be out of town for a conference.** No formal in-class meeting. **Online class assignment:** Post to Blackboard, Due Nov. 10 at 11:30 am. Respond to another student's final paper proposal: what are its strengths and weaknesses? What questions do you have? What evidence might support the plan outlined? Only 1 response per post.

Nov 12: *Oleander Girl*: Chapters 12-13 (214-239) **Dr. J will be out of town for a conference.** No formal in-class meeting. **Online class assignment:** Post to Blackboard, Due Nov. 12 at 11:30 am. Revise and expand your final paper proposal based on your peer's feedback.

Nov 14: *Oleander Girl*: Chapter 14-17 (240-288) **Dr. J will be out of town for a conference.** No formal in-class meeting. Use class time to begin your take home quiz. **Final Day Quiz 5 (Take Home: Quiz question will be posted on Blackboard at 11:20am)**

Week 12: *Oleander Girl and A Mercy*

Nov 17: ***Oleander Girl***: In-class discussion of novel. **Take Home Quiz 5 Due.**

Nov 19: **Final Paper Draft Workshop**: bring two copies of your draft of your final paper to workshop in class.

Nov 21: ***Under the Feet of Jesus***: chapters 1-2 (1-90) **Presentation 11: Book Reviews of *Under the Feet of Jesus***

Week 13: *A Mercy*

Nov 24: ***Under the Feet of Jesus***: chapters 3-4 (91-156) **Presentation 12: Scholarship on *Under the Feet of Jesus***

Nov 26: **Final Paper Due**: Dr. J will be available in her office during class time for individual meetings with students. **Final Paper Due**

Nov 28: **No classes: Thanksgiving Holiday.**

Week 14: *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Dec 1: ***Under the Feet of Jesus***: chapter 5 (157-176) **Final Day Quiz 6**

Dec 3: ***A Mercy***: (1-100) **Presentation 13: Book Reviews and/or Scholarship about *A Mercy***

No class Friday due to the Extended Class Schedule

Week 15: *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Dec 8: ***A Mercy***: (101-167): Extended Schedule—11:30am-2pm. **Final Day Quiz 7**