

:: 21st century american fiction ::

[engl 429 / fall 2006]

Professor Mark Sample

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Meeting Time: TR 3 - 4:15 pm

Meeting Place: Robinson B 113

Office Hours: T 4:30 - 5:30 pm, R 11 am -12:00 pm

And by appointment

What innovative directions is American fiction taking in the new millennium? How have novelists and other writers reacted to the dominant events of the past few years: the dot-com bust and ensuing recession; the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the War on Terror; the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its impact at home and abroad; and the ascendancy of the virtual world? In this advanced literature course we will examine the trends, assumptions, and anxieties reflected in an assortment of recent fiction, published by both rising stars and well established writers.

TEXTS

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (2000)

Walter Mosley, *The Man in My Basement* (2004)

Jessica Hagedorn, *Dream Jungle* (2002)

Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (2004)

Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005)

Assorted handouts, online texts, and e-reserve articles

WORK

- **Participation** in the day's discussion is essential. And of course, to get the most out of the discussion, you must have read the day's assigned reading, thoroughly and critically. We will have occasional **quizzes** in class, as well as short **impromptu writing** tasks. The quizzes and in-class writing cannot be made up if you are tardy or absent.
- For each novel we read you will post at least two responses to the **class blog**. These posts should run approximately 250 words and should tackle some critical aspect of the novel. Strive to be thoughtful and nuanced, offering interpretations of the reading rather than summaries. You might begin with an aspect of the reading that you don't quite understand, and work out a tentative answer in your post. You may also want to respond to another student's post by building upon it, disagreeing with it, or re-thinking it. These posts will be due the day before our first discussion of each novel and the day before our final discussion of each novel.
- Throughout the semester we will have several **investigative papers**. These are not full-blown analyses so much as they are structured engagements with very particular aspects of a text. For example, one assignment in the class will require you to create or revise a Wikipedia entry and then track that entry throughout the semester. Another assignment

requires you to attend one Fall for the Book event and write a review of the event.

- We will have a **midterm essay**, based upon questions that I provide related to themes that arise from our readings and class discussions.
- The **final project** for the class will be a 10-page analytical paper, which offers a critical interpretation of one work of contemporary literature. This paper will require outside research, using sources from established literary journals or academic press books.

GRADING

The final grade will be weighted and calculated in the following manner:

Participation	5%
Quizzes and In-Class Writings.....	5%
Blog Posts	20%
Investigative Papers	25%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Research Paper.....	25%

I give every assignment a letter grade (except for quizzes and in-class writings). In order to calculate your final grade, I convert the letter grades into a percentage. I weight the grades, and then convert the average back into a letter grade. I use the following standard grading scale:

A+ = 100%	C+ = 78%
A = 95%	C = 75%
A- = 90%	C- = 70%
B+ = 88%	D = 65%
B = 85%	F = below 60%
B- = 80%	

Attendance is mandatory (excepting medical *emergencies* or observation of religious holidays). From the 2005-2006 University Catalog:

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation.

Late assignments will be lowered one letter grade for every weekday they are overdue, unless prior arrangements are made. Even if you are not in class the day an assignment is due, it is still due for you that day. Assignments more than a week late for any reason will simply not be accepted. Therefore, failure to hand in every assignment on time will make it extremely difficult to pass the course.

HONOR CODE

Students of George Mason University pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. The English Department has issued a statement further clarifying what is meant by “plagiarize”:

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.

Remember, it is perfectly acceptable to refer to and build upon others’ ideas, but you must always identify the source, even when paraphrasing. The university uses turnitin.com to detect plagiarized papers, and I may occasionally require students to submit their written work to turnitin.com’s database. If I suspect plagiarism or any other violation of the Honor Code, I will report the offender to the university Honor Committee, whose penalties range from an F for the course to expulsion from the university.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

21st century american fiction [fall 2006 reading calendar]

Week 1

Tuesday, August 29

“A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” by Jonathan Safran Foer (handout in class)

Thursday, August 31

“Adams” and “Jon” by George Saunders (WebCT)

Week 2

Tuesday, September 5

House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski,
Foreword, Introduction, and pp. 1-79

“The Uncanny” by Sigmund Freud (e-reserve)

Thursday, September 7

House of Leaves, pp. 584-644, 80-106

Week 3

Tuesday, September 12

House of Leaves, pp. 107-274

* Investigation #1: Wikipedia and *House of Leaves*

Thursday, September 14

House of Leaves, pp. 275-346

Week 4

Tuesday, September 19

House of Leaves, pp. 347-490

Thursday, September 21

House of Leaves, pp. 491-535, plus miscellaneous Appendices

Week 5

Tuesday, September 26

“Adina, Astrid, Chipewee, Jasmine” by Matthew Klam and
“Twilight of the Superheroes” by Deborah Eisenberg (e-reserve)

* Fall for the Book begins tomorrow; A review of one event is due
on the blog by October 7 for Investigation #3

Thursday, September 28

The Man in My Basement by Walter Mosley, pp. 1-97

Week 6

Tuesday, October 3

The Man in My Basement, pp. 99-160

Thursday, October 5

The Man in My Basement, pp. 161-249

* Investigation #2: *Man in My Basement* Reading Guide Evaluation

Week 7

Tuesday, October 10

No Class: Monday/Tuesday Switch Day

* Midterm Essay Due

Thursday, October 12

Postmodernism, Style and Thought

Week 8

Tuesday, October 17

Dream Jungle by Jessica Hagedorn, pp. 1-87

Thursday, October 19

Dream Jungle, pp. 88-125

Week 9

Tuesday, October 24

Dream Jungle, pp. 126-185

Screening: *Apocalypse Now* (JC Reserve)

Thursday, October 26

Dream Jungle, pp. 186-246

In class screening: *Hearts of Darkness*

Week 10

Tuesday, October 31

Dream Jungle, pp. 247-325

* Investigation #4: Search Inside This Book (*Dream Jungle*)

Thursday, November 2

“The Specialist’s Hat” and “Travels with the Snow Queen” by
Kelly Link (from *Stranger Things Happen*)

Week 11 Tuesday, November 7

The Dew Breaker by Edwidge Danticat, pp. 1-86

Thursday, November 9

The Dew Breaker, pp. 87-164

Week 12 Tuesday, November 14

The Dew Breaker, pp. 165-242

Thursday, November 16

Digital Texts of the New Millennium

Week 13 Tuesday, November 21

* Investigation #5: What’s New about New Media?

Thursday, November 23

No Class: Thanksgiving

Week 14 Tuesday, November 28

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer,
pp. 1-173

Thursday, November 30

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, pp. 174-233

Week 15 Tuesday, December 5

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, pp. 234-326

Thursday, December 7

Considering the Future of the Novel...

FINAL PAPER Due Tuesday, December 12