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ENG 5061-001: Contemporary Metafiction

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ENG 5061: Contemporary Metafiction

Class: Tuesdays, 3:30-6:00, Coleman Hall 3159
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DESCRIPTION

The second part of the 20th century has been witness to an extraordinary resurgence of metafiction and experimental fiction. Metafiction is the name traditionally given to works that challenge our notions of what a narrative is and how it should function. These challenges involve formal, stylistic or charactorial experiments and result in the excessive, ludic self-consciousness that we associate with the term “metafiction.” This course, however, will broaden the definition of metafiction to its root sense (meta meaning “about” and metafiction therefore meaning “fiction about fiction”). We will explore what metafiction can tell us about our expectations of narrative, if and how those expectations can be subverted, and what light these subversions shed on fiction in general.

This course will explore the ways in which contemporary metafiction and experimental fiction challenge our understandings of the uses, politics, and structures of narrative.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Leading Discussion: Each of you will be responsible for two class discussions. What that will mean is that you must not only 1) do the reading for that day and; 2) come to class with possible topics for discussion, but also; 3) do a small amount of research on the text (at least three critical articles, in addition to any web research you may do) in order to find out what the critical response to this text has been, the ways scholars have traditionally interpreted it and the arguments that arise out of those interpretations.

Short Essays: On the days in which you lead discussion, you must turn in a 5-page, double-spaced essay that outlines the issues you will raise, the topics you want to discuss, and an overview of your research about the critical discussion that arises around this text. Along with this essay, you must turn in the three critical articles you read and used for your essay and discussion.

Research Essay: You will be responsible for writing a 15-page critical paper (“conference length”) on a topic of your choice regarding one or more of the texts for and issues of this course. These essays will be due at the end of the semester, at which time you will provide a short (15-20 minute) presentation to the rest of the class. Your essay may, if you wish, be drawn from the ideas you raised during one or more of the class discussions you led. Essays are due on our exam day, May 1st.

Participation: The small size of this class affords us a rare opportunity, IF everyone takes responsibility for the quality of the course. For this reason, on days you do NOT lead discussion, you will still be expected to be an active participant in class. In order to do this, you must come to class having read and taken notes on the assignment, you must bring your reading materials with you to class and you must be prepared to discuss them, both in specific and general terms. In a class our size, it will be painfully clear who is and who is not participating. If you do not prepare regularly and participate enthusiastically, your grade will be negatively affected. Participation is worth 20% of your grade. I take this grade seriously: I suggest you do so as well.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

- Discussions/Essays: 40%
- Research Essay: 40%
- Participation: 20%
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Jan. 8    Introduction, John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion”

Jan. 15   Barthes: The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes (photocopy)

Jan. 22   John Fowles, French Lieutenant’s Woman,
Discussion Leader: 

Jan. 29   John Barth, Lost in the Funhouse, Foucault (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

Feb. 5    Paul Auster, New York Trilogy, Saussure (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

Feb. 12   Kathy Acker, Empire of the Senseless, DeLauretis (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

Feb. 19   Tim O’Brien, In the Lake of the Woods, Hayden White (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

Feb. 26   Toni Morrison, Jazz, Brooks (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

March 4   French Lieutenant’s Woman (Film)

SPRING BREAK

March 18  Jonathan Safran Foer, Everything is Illuminated, Adorno (photocopy) 3-page abstracts due
Discussion Leader: 

March 25  Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire
Discussion Leader: 

April 1   Richard Powers, Galatea 2.2, Hayles (photocopy)
Discussion Leader: 

April 8   Kurt Vonnegut, Breakfast of Champions
Discussion Leader: 

April 15  Bret Easton Ellis, Lunar Park

April 22  FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Thursday, May 1, Final Essays Due