

**LAST UPDATED 4/4/12 (See [changes in the calendar](#))**

**ENGL 347-A, Roadside Oddities: American Novels of the 1950s**

M/W 1:00-2:20 pm, Olin E-110

**Professor:** Juan Martinez

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**Office hours:** Olin 237, 2:30-3:30 M/W

**Required Texts**

- *The Annotated Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov. (Alfred Appel, ed.)
- *Seize the Day*, Saul Bellow
- *Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor
- *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac
- *Groves of Academe*, Mary McCarthy
- *Giovanni's Room*, James Baldwin
- *The Moviegoer*, Walker Percy

**Suggested Supplementary Texts**

- *The Fifties*, David Halberstam
- *Rabbit, Run*, John Updike

**A note on the texts**

Multiple editions of all these books are available, many available cheaply online and some in electronic editions. Go for whatever editions you'd prefer -- they all have their strengths -- but for *Lolita* be sure to get the Alfred-Appel annotated edition (ISBN 0679727299).

**Sites**

- <http://cleo.whitman.edu> (We'll be using CLEO for our Wiki)
- <http://www.fulmerford.com/search/label/ENGL347> (Nearly everything else other than the Wiki will be available through here)

**What We're Doing**

How odd was *Lolita*? How odd was the world that produced it? To answer these questions, we will look at salient figures from postwar American fiction and their relationship to some of the stranger, most pervasive myths and narratives of the 1950s: the rise of the teenager, the contested space of middlebrow culture, the encroachment of suburbia, and the celebration of the outsider and its concomitant critique of the conformist. The reading list will range from the well-known and the celebrated to works that are just as intriguing but a bit more obscure, so we'll range from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, but also his less well-known *Invitation to a Beheading*, as well as James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*, Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer*, and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. We will also look at media that reflect, contest, or complicate these narratives: movies by Nicholas Ray, Douglas Sirk, and others, exploitation and health films, rockabilly and country songs, sitcoms, and *Mad Men*.

We'll each be working on a research paper that synthesizes the ongoing work of the class into a tentative answer to these questions: *How do we define the relationship between a particular place and time and the fiction produced during that period? How does one serve as context for the other? How does one shape the other?*

### **Why We're Doing It**

This course is designed to give you the vocabulary, background, and confidence to articulate your feelings and thoughts about fiction. The goal is to expand your cultural arsenal of literary history, terminology, theory, and overall knowledge while also providing you with access to works of art that are representative of the genre, the place, and the period. Ideally, after this class, you'll be able to (a) discuss/analyze/contextualize pretty much *any work of art* that comes your way (but particularly the novel) and (b) demonstrate a deep and considered knowledge of the novels and historical period discussed in this course. If doing so strikes you as important in its own right, more power to you. However, this stuff seems to resonate well beyond the immediate, localized purview of literary studies: we are drawn to fiction -- drawn to narrative, drawn to stories -- because the genre gives us access to a range of critical thinking and writing skills useful elsewhere in our lives. So we're doing this because it makes us better people -- or at least better-equipped people.

### **How We're Doing It**

This course requires a great deal of reading, writing, and discussion. See below.

### **Reading**

We'll be reading eight novels, and we'll be reading them carefully, thoroughly, and critically. You need to allot a good deal of time to the novels, so be sure to do so. Plan ahead. Consult the syllabus and the calendar.

### **Writing**

The bulk of your writing will take the form of

1. A short research proposal
2. An annotated bibliography
3. An 8-12 page paper researched, developed, written, and revised over the course of the semester. We will talk about this paper at length later, but please be aware that a finished version is expected by mid-semester, after which a better, more interesting, more complicated variant will be developed with the help of all of us.
4. You will also collaborate on a Wiki that explores a particular topic refracted through the particular assigned reading for that week (there will be six groups rotating through particular, assigned topics).
5. In-class writing responses

### **On the Wiki**

We'll be focusing on six particular lenses through which we can talk about literature. Your group will be responsible for providing the text for one of the six on the Wiki, and to lead the discussion focusing on

that particular topic. As a group, you'll be responsible for updating your page with material relevant to the assigned readings (your group must provide a minimum of an additional 700 words per week on the page). Keep in mind that material is due by Tuesday at midnight of the week, so it's important to keep a good handle on the readings. Here are the topics:

1. Gender and Other Identity Issues
2. Geography
3. Historical Context
4. The Teenager, the Outsider
5. Middle class, Midcult, and Other Issues of Taste
6. Popular Culture Connections

I'll be providing a bit of guidance on finding and organizing outside material, but it'll be your group's responsibility to figure out how best to present, update, and add to the material as we go along: the goal is to find fresh angles on the material (and a working bibliography) that will help your peers develop their individual research.

### **Discussion**

We'll be discussing the work in class in light of the group research you're doing outside of class, so be ready to talk and participate, both in class and by adding to, correcting, and commenting on the Wiki pages of your group and that of your peers.

### **Evaluation**

You will be evaluated on the following three projects:

1. Research Paper: 45%
2. Group Presentations & Wiki: 45%
3. In-class written responses: 10%

The goal is to have each of these evaluation methods reinforce your learning -- the responses will keep us all on track with the readings, the readings will inform the content of the Wiki as well as the group-directed discussions we'll be having, and all of it will be good fodder for the research and thinking that will go into your individual research papers.

**Attendance:** Each student's presence in the classroom is extremely important. Students are expected to intellectually interact with the class. If you miss class for any reason, you are still responsible for the material. If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the course.

**If You Miss Class:** *Do not ask, e-mail, or phone the professor asking if you missed anything—get class notes and assignments from your fellow students. All I-wasn't-there-what-happened queries will receive a copy of [this Tom Wayman poem](#).*

**Plagiarism:** All material for this class should be your own. If it isn't, you will fail the course. Do not copy and paste outside material -- all ideas not your own should be attributed to their owners. All phrases and sentences not your own should be attributed to their original owners and enclosed in quotation marks.

**Disability Statement:** If you are a student with a disability who will need accommodations in this course, please meet with Julia Dunn, Director of Academic Resources (Mem. 205, X5213, [dunnjl@whitman.edu](mailto:dunnjl@whitman.edu)) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. All information about disabilities is considered private; if I receive notification from Ms. Dunn that you are eligible to receive an accommodation, I will provide it in as discrete a manner as possible.

## **Calendar**

### **Week One**

W 1/18 INTRO

### **Week Two**

M 1/23 *Lolita*, Part One

W 1/25 Wiki discussion

### **Week Three**

M 1/30 *Lolita*, Part Two

W 2/1 Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Four**

M 2/6 *The Moviegoer*

W 2/8 Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Five**

M 2/13 *Bigger Than Life*, Part One (In-class, movie)

W 2/15 *Bigger Than Life*, Part Two (In-class, movie) / Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Six**

M 2/20 NO CLASS

W 2/22 *Seize the Day*, Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Seven**

M 2/27 *On the Road*, Part One

W 2/29 Wiki addition/presentation due; Research proposal: 2-3 pages (E-mail to professor but also post in Wiki in designated area) due by **11:59 pm Friday 4 April 2012**

### **Week Eight**

M 3/5 *On the Road*, Parts Two and Three

W 3/7 Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Nine & Ten**

NO CLASS *Rabbit, Run* (optional)

### **Week Eleven**

M 3/26 *The Groves of Academe*

W 3/28 Wiki addition/presentation due

### **Week Twelve**

M 4/2 *The Groves of Academe*

W 4/4 Wiki addition/presentation due

**Week Thirteen**

M 4/9 *Giovanni's Room*, Part One

W 4/11 Wiki addition/presentation due / Rough version 1 of paper due by **11:59 pm Friday 20 April 2012 (post in Wiki)**

**Week Fourteen**

M 4/16 *Giovanni's Room*, Part Two

W 4/18 Wiki addition/presentation due / Version 1 of paper due by **11:59 pm Friday 20 April 2012 (e-mail attached draft to professor)**

**Week Fifteen**

M 4/23 *Wise Blood*, Chapters 1-7

W 4/25 Sock puppets!

**Week Sixteen**

M 4/30 *Wise Blood*, Chapters 8-14

W 5/2 Sock puppets!

**Week Seventeen**

M 5/7 **Version 2 of paper due by 11:59 Monday May 14 2012**