

University of Washington, Autumn 2014
ENGL 242 A: Reading Prose Fiction
Playing Genre: Music and Memory in American Fiction

Instructor: Alissa S. Bourbonnais
Office & Hours: PDL B5D // Wednesdays 9:30 – 11:30am, and by appointment
E-mail: abourbon@u.washington.edu
Location & Time: CDH 105 // MTWTh 8:30 – 9:20am
Class Website: <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/915309>

“Everything we encounter involves an act of interpretation on our part. And this doesn’t just apply to what we encounter in books, but to what we respond to in life. Oh, we live comfortably because we create these sacred domains in our head where we believe that we have a specific history, a certain set of experiences. We believe that our memories keep us in direct touch with what has happened. But memory never puts us in touch with anything directly; it’s always interpretive, reductive, a complicated compression of information.”

~Mark Danielewski, interview

“If you’re expecting to get the answer in a few notes, you’re mistaken.”

~“Bailey” in Gloria Naylor’s *Bailey’s Café*

Course Overview:

Think of one of your favorite songs. Along with the tune, beat, rhythm, instrumentation, or lyrics, what else comes to mind? We form visceral ties to the music that moves us the most, and more often than not these ties are bound up with specific memories that extend far beyond the several minutes of the song. Associations like these exist in the realms of the personal, political, cultural, and historical moments in which they are experienced. This course will explore the relationship between music, memory, and storytelling in twentieth and twenty-first century American fiction.

The course title, *Playing Genre*, highlights an element of *play* that will be central to several lines of inquiry: how are particular genres of music represented in fiction; or, how does fiction “play” music? When authors take music as a major theme, how does music influence the composition of the narrative, from overall structure and organization, to sentence-level phrasing, pacing, or word choice? Musicality in prose may occur in more abstract or figurative ways, or it can be quite literal and direct, as in *House of Leaves*, for which the author’s sister, a popular singer songwriter in her own right, composed a companion album in tandem with the novel. How does the fiction in this course play with, through, and/or against music? When we consider the memory of particular time periods, how does the music of a temporal location play a role in shaping perceptions, and misconceptions, of the time? Many of the stories in these novels are set decades before they were published. Doctorow writes about the time leading up to WWI from the standpoint of the 1970s; Naylor about the time just after WWII from the 1990s; Egan about the 1960s from our present in the 2010s. How do ragtime, jazz, the blues, punk, post-punk, alternative rock, or electronic—as genres of music, and as components of larger cultural and artistic movements—inform the composition of these narratives and our reception of them?

Course Objectives:

This course will develop students' critical reading, thinking, and writing skills through class discussions; low-stakes writing in weekly blogging and in-class writing assignments; and formal writing in a creative multimodal project, and a final essay that will expand on and revise material generated in previous assignments. Students will also learn to articulate an understanding of their own reading and writing processes, and how these processes shape the original lines of inquiry students choose to explore in their essays.

Successful completion of this course means that:

- Students are able to contextualize and analyze the materials or topics covered, historically, politically, or culturally.
- Students are able to perform competent close readings of course texts and similar texts.
- Students have an appreciation for and knowledge of literature's relationship to related areas or disciplines.
- Students improve their writing skills generally, and with regard to writing about literature and culture.

This course fulfills the University's W (writing) requirement, as well as the VLPA (visual, literary, and performing arts) requirement.

Required Materials:

E.L. Doctorow, <i>Ragtime</i> (1975)	ISBN-13: 978-0812978186
Gloria Naylor, <i>Bailey's Café</i> (1992)	ISBN-13: 978-0679748212
Sherman Alexie, <i>Reservation Blues</i> (1995)	ISBN-13: 978-0802141903
Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> (2000)	ISBN-13: 978-0375703768
Jennifer Egan, <i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> (2011)	ISBN-13: 978-0307477477

Assessment:

Participation	30%
Weekly Blogging	20%
Midterm Project	25%
Final Paper	25%

Participation:

Please note that this course requires a heavy reading load and meets at **8:30am four days a week. Participation in every single class period is crucial to your success in this course.** If you fall behind in the reading, just come talk to me. Do not miss class. If you think making it to every session at 8:30am will be a problem for you, you may want to consider finding another course.

Active participation means:

- Coming to EVERY class on time and prepared
- Listening actively to your classmates' ideas
- Volunteering comments regularly in discussions
- Making a sincere contribution to the success of this course

Late Work Policy:

All writing assignments are graded on the university's four-point scale. For each day an assignment is late, one-tenth of a point will be deducted (for example, if your midterm earned a 3.5, but was submitted two days late, the grade will be reduced to 3.3). No assignment will be accepted more than one week late, unless you have extenuating circumstances.

If you experience extenuating circumstances at any point in the term, please contact me immediately to arrange for extensions and any extra help.

Writing Resources:

I encourage you to take advantage of the following writing resources available to you at no charge. If you attend a writing conference, write a one-page, double-spaced summary of who you worked with, what paper you focused on, and what you learned and I will add a point to your participation grade.

- **The CLUE Writing Center** in Mary Gates Hall is open Sunday to Thursday from 7pm to midnight. The graduate tutors can help you with your claims, organization, and grammar. You do not need to make an appointment, so arrive early and be prepared to wait.
- **The Odegaard Writing and Research Center** is open Sunday to Thursday from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm and 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. This writing center provides a research-integrated approach to writing instruction. Make an appointment on the website: www.depts.washington.edu/owrc.

Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. As a matter of policy, any student found to have plagiarized any piece of writing in this class will be immediately reported to the College of Arts and Sciences for review.

Concerns:

If you have any concerns about the course or your instructor, please see the instructor about these concerns as soon as possible. If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the Director of Undergraduate Programs: Colette Moore, (206) 543-2634, cvmoore@uw.edu.

Accommodations:

If you need accommodation of any sort, please let me know so that I can work with the UW Disability Resources for Students Office (DRS) to provide what you require. This syllabus is available in large print, as are other class materials. More information about accommodation may be found at <http://www.washington.edu/students/drs/>.

Zero Tolerance Policy:

Racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination and bias are hurtful and unacceptable. There is no tolerance for words, speech, behavior, actions, or clothing/possessions that insult, diminish, demean, or belittle any individual or group of persons based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, ability, economic class, national origin, language, or age. Academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of discourse DO NOT protect racism or other acts of harassment and hate. Violations of this Zero Tolerance Policy may result in removal from the classroom and actions governed by the student code of conduct will be taken.

Campus Safety:

Preventing violence is everyone's responsibility. If you're concerned, tell someone.

- Always call 911 if you or others may be in danger.
- Call 206-685-SAFE (7233) to report non-urgent threats of violence and for referrals to UW counseling and/or safety resources. TTY or VP callers, please call through your preferred relay service.
- Don't walk alone. Campus safety guards can walk with you on campus after dark. Call Husky NightWalk 206-685-WALK (9255).
- Stay connected in an emergency with UW Alert. Register your mobile number to receive instant notification of campus emergencies via text and voice messaging. Sign up online at www.washington.edu/alert

For more information visit the SafeCampus website: www.washington.edu/safecampus

Course Calendar:

All readings and assignments are due on the day they are listed. If you miss class, you are responsible for contacting a classmate for notes. This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Any updates will be announced in class and made available on the course website.

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WEEK 0	READING / IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES	WRITING
Wed 9/24	Introductions & syllabus	
Thurs 9/25	Writing music and memory Beginning the blog	
WEEK 1		
Mon 9/29	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 1-7	First Readers
Tue 9/30	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 8-13	Respondents
Wed 10/1	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 14-21	Synthesizers
Thu 10/2	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 22-28	

WEEK 2		
Mon 10/6	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 29-37	First Readers
Tue 10/7	<i>Ragtime</i> ch. 38-40	Respondents
Wed 10/8	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "Maestro, If You Please" "The Vamp"	Synthesizers
Thu 10/9	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "The Jam – Mood Indigo"	
WEEK 3		
Mon 10/13	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "Eve's Song" "Sweet Esther" "Mary – Take One"	First Readers
Tue 10/14	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "Jesse Bell" "Mary – Take Two"	Respondents
Wed 10/15	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "Miss Maple's Blues"	Synthesizers
Thu 10/16	<i>Bailey's Café</i> , "The Wrap"	
WEEK 4		
Mon 10/20	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 1-2	First Readers
Tue 10/21	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 3-4	Respondents
Wed 10/22	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 5-6	Synthesizers
Thu 10/23	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 7-8	
WEEK 5		
Mon 10/27	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 9	First Readers
Tue 10/28	<i>Reservation Blues</i> ch. 10	Respondents Rough Draft: Parts 1-2
Wed 10/29	<i>House of Leaves</i> Introduction	Synthesizers
Thu 10/30	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 1-4	
WEEK 6		
Mon 11/3	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 5-6	First Readers
Tue 11/4	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 7-8	Respondents Rough Draft: Parts 3-4
Wed 11/5	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 9-10	Synthesizers
Thu 11/6	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 11-12	Midterm Project Due Friday, Nov. 7

WEEK 7		
Mon 11/10	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 13-14	First Readers
Tue 11/11	VETERANS DAY – NO CLASS	
Wed 11/12	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 15-16	Respondents
Thu 11/13	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 17-18	Synthesizers
WEEK 8		
Mon 11/17	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 19-20	First Readers
Tue 11/18	<i>House of Leaves</i> ch. 21-23	Respondents
Wed 11/19	<i>House of Leaves</i> – “Whalestoe Letters”	Synthesizers
Thu 11/20	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 1-2	
WEEK 9		
Mon 11/24	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 3	First Readers
Tue 11/25	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 4	Respondents
Wed 11/26	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 5-6	Synthesizers Rough Draft Final Paper
Thu 11/27	THANKSGIVING DAY – NO CLASS	
WEEK 10		
Mon 12/1	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 7-8	
Tue 12/2	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 9-10	
Wed 12/3	<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i> ch. 11-13	
Thu 12/4	Reread your writing from the term, and come prepared with questions on the final	Blog Reflection
Finals Week		
12/8-12/12		Final Paper Due Tuesday, Dec. 9