

**English 190: Borderlands: Contemporary American and Canadian Fiction**

**CRN 15269/15270**

Professor J. Brady  
Palmer 305 (office)  
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Fall, 2014  
Palmer 211  
MWF: 9:00-9:50 a.m. and  
11:00-11:50 a.m.

**Reading List:**

Russell Banks, *Affliction*  
Russell Banks, *The Sweet Hereafter*  
William Gass, *The Pedersen Kid*  
Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*  
Alice Munro, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*

**Office Hours:**

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:00-10:45, Tuesday and Thursday, by appointment.

**Course Description:**

This course is a study of contemporary American and Canadian fiction, much of it written in the realist mode and centered on the topic of trauma – psychological and physical, individual and familial – and on the emotions of shame, rage, and guilt. Many of these texts are autobiographical in form; several are autobiographical in content. The locales are, in the words of Russell Banks, “on both sides of the long, porous border between our two nations,” and, as he observes of the psychic and geographical terrain of most of these works, “darkness comes early and stays late; summer is not a condition, it’s an all-too-brief holiday. Cities are gray, skies are mauve or milky, and there are always wet boots slumped in doorways.” Not all of these novels and short story collections have these locales, but, as a group of texts, they explore similar and interconnected themes.

This course carries both F2 (Writing Intensive) and F4 (Literary Texts) credit. Members of the class will workshop examples of the first two essays, focusing on clarity and persuasiveness of argument and strategic uses of textual evidence in formal essay writing, in addition to more technical

aspects, including punctuation and grammar. Students may rewrite one essay, but *only* after consulting with the instructor and the Writing Center. Students are required to run a spelling and grammar check on every essay before submitting it. Sloppy errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar will count heavily and will result in a far lower grade as well as a forfeiting of the option to rewrite the essay.

### **Attendance Policy:**

Late arrivals to class will be counted as an absence and any student who misses or comes late to class more than **four** times in the semester will be asked to withdraw from the course. Please see the English department policies on attendance, deadlines, intellectual honesty and plagiarism, attached to this document as an appendix, below.

### **Schedule:**

|                              |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| August 27                    | Introductory remarks       |
| August 29                    | <i>Affliction</i>          |
| September 1                  | Labor Day                  |
| September 3, 5, 8, 10, 12    | <i>Affliction</i>          |
| September 15, 17, 19, 22, 24 | <i>The Sweet Hereafter</i> |
| <b>Friday, September 26</b>  | <b>First Essay Due</b>     |
| Sept. 29, October 1, 3       | <i>The Pedersen Kid</i>    |
| October 6, 8, 10             | Workshops of First Essay   |
| October 13, 15, 17           | <i>The Pedersen Kid</i>    |
| October 20-21                | Fall Recess                |
| October 22                   | <i>Alias Grace</i>         |
| <b>Friday, October 24</b>    | <b>Second Essay Due</b>    |
| Oct. 27, 29, 31              | <i>Alias Grace</i>         |

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|-------------------------------|--|
| November 3, 5, 7              | Workshops of Second Essay                      |
| November 10, 12               | <i>Alias Grace</i>                             |
| <b>Friday, November 14</b>    | <b>Short Essay Due</b>                         |
| November 17, 19, 21, 24       | <i>Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You</i> |
| November 26, 28               | Thanksgiving Recess                            |
| Dec. 1, 3, 5, 8               | <i>Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You</i> |
| <b>Wednesday, December 10</b> | <b>Final Essay Due, by 10:00 a.m.</b>          |

**Method of Evaluation:**

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Banks essay (6 pages)           | 30% |
| Gass essay (4 pages)            | 20% |
| In-class question*              | 10% |
| In-class grade                  | 10% |
| Atwood or Munro essay (6 pages) | 30% |
| Short essay (2.5 pages)         | 10% |

\* Each student will pose one formal question to the class during the semester, speaking from notes only. Your question should be focused, given a context, and its potential significance made clear to your classmates. The question should explore a fresh aspect of the text that you think important to our understanding of the work. Having posed your question, you will then guide class discussion.

\*\* All late essays will be penalized by at least a letter grade and excessive lateness may lead to failure in the course.