

English 265: The Road Narrative Course Syllabus/Spring 2008

Instructor: J Edward Mallot

Office Location: 304 Palmer

Office Hours: 9:30-11:30 Monday mornings, and 3:30-4:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays
(also available by appointment)

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Course Concept: This course explores the continuing popularity of the “road narrative” in postwar American culture. We’ll begin by marking the fiftieth anniversary of Kerouac’s seminal On the Road. Kerouac’s text helps pose a number of questions for the term: what does “the road” mean for American life? Why do people take to the road? What distinguishes a road narrative from travel stories? To what extent is the physical space of the road, or vehicles on the road, as important as the theme of travel? How have contemporary fiction and film challenged the white male tradition of the road narrative? Perhaps in keeping with the road theme, our readings will be organized around a series of “posts”: the postwar road narrative (On the Road, Lolita), the postmodern road narrative (Going Native, Tropic of Orange), the post-apocalyptic road narrative (The Road) and the post-road road narrative (Into the Wild). We will supplement primary texts with excerpts from Stephen King’s Christine and Azar Nafisi’s Reading Lolita in Tehran. Our films interrogate the traditional boundaries of nation, gender and sexual identity associated with the genre, including *Thelma and Louise*, *Crash*, *Transamerica* and *In This World*.

Required Texts (all currently available at Rhodes Bookstore):

Kerouac, Jack. On the Road

Krakauer, Jon. Into the Wild

McCarthy, Cormac. The Road

Nabokov, Vladimir. The Annotated Lolita (Alfred Appel, ed)

Wright, Stephen. Going Native

Yamashita, Karen Tei. Tropic of Orange

I should here now that several texts—both written and visual—contain scenes of intense violence and graphic sexuality. My purpose here is not to offend anyone, nor to peddle to prurience. But if you anticipate difficulties, you may want to find another option now.

Supplementary readings are available online, in my faculty folder. To access these, go to [\\Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\English\Mallot_J_Edward\Public](http://Fileserver1\acad_dept_pgm\English\Mallot_J_Edward\Public)

As the “road film” has become prominent in American culture, I will ask you to attend four film screenings this term; screenings are indicated on the reading schedule. The library’s Media Reserve Services has ordered copies of these films (once they arrive, the copies will stay on reserve). If you are unable to attend screenings, you must watch the film(s) on your own before the relevant class.

Tentative Reading Schedule

The Postwar Road Narrative

- 15 Jan Jack Kerouac, On the Road (Part One)
17 Jan Kerouac (Part Two)
 Louis Menand, “Drive, He Wrote: What the Beats Were About” (Folder)
- 22 Jan No Class
24 Jan Kerouac (Parts Three, Four and Five)
- 28 Jan (Monday) Film Screening: *Thelma and Louise* (8 pm, 110 Buckman)
29 Jan Discussion of Film
31 Jan Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita (Part One, Chapters 1-15)
- 05 Feb Nabokov (Part One, Chapters 16-32)
07 Feb Nabokov (Part Two, Chapters 1-15) (DQ)
- 12 Feb Nabokov (Part Two, Chapters 16-36 and “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*”)
14 Feb Azar Nafisi, excerpts from Reading Lolita in Tehran (Folder)

The Postmodern Road Narrative

- 19 Feb Stephen Wright, Going Native (Chapters 1-3)
21 Feb Wright (Chapter 4 and Chapter 6) (DQ)
- 25 Feb (Monday) **Paper One Due, 5 pm**
 Film Screening: *Transamerica* (8 pm, 110 Buckman)
26 Feb Discussion of Film
28 Feb Wright (Chapters 7 and 8)
- 11 Mar Karen Tei Yamashita, Tropic of Orange (“Monday” and “Tuesday”)
13 Mar Yamashita (“Wednesday” and “Thursday”) (DQ)
- 18 Mar Yamashita (“Friday,” “Saturday” and “Sunday”)
20 Mar Easter Recess

Interlude: Sex, Death and Cars

- 25 Mar Stephen King, excerpts from Christine (Folder—Two Files)
27 Mar Milan Kundera, “The Hitchhiking Game” (Folder)
 Road Kill Poetry (Folder)
28 Mar (Friday) **Paper Two Due, 5 pm**
- 31 Mar (Monday) Film Screening: *Crash* (8 pm, 110 Buckman)
01 Apr Discussion of Film

The Post-Apocalyptic Road Narrative

03 Apr Cormac McCarthy, The Road (Pages 1-77)

08 Apr McCarthy (Pages 77-198) (DQ)

10 Apr McCarthy (Pages 199-287)

Interlude: Human Traffic

14 Apr (Monday) Film Screening: *In This World* (8 pm, 110 Buckman)

15 Apr Discussion of Film

The Post-Road Road Narrative

17 Apr Jon Krakauer, Into the Wild (Chapters 1-7)

22 Apr Krakauer (Chapters 8-13) (DQ)

24 Apr Krakauer (Chapter 14-Epilogue)

Final Examination 1:00-3:00 pm, Monday 28 April

Course Requirements

Participation: After three absences your grade will be dropped. As I don't differentiate between excused and unexcused absences you'll need to contact me if you have an emergency that affects your ability to come to class. As a general rule, however, don't skip class just to skip class. Good attendance, however, does nothing itself to build a good participation grade. When I grade "Participation," I look for the following: does the student offer multiple meaningful, relevant contributions to our discussion every class? Is this really "meaningful" participation in terms of the quality of commentary and/or questions, or just empty words? Are the student's contributions unsolicited, or do I have to "drag" them into discussion? Is it clear that the student is listening to others' comments, and contributing to this group discussion in an appropriate manner? Discussion is *the* essential element to a successful, enjoyable literature course; I expect (and, in terms of your grade, demand) genuinely active participation. Participation (not attendance) is worth 100 of the 500 total points for the course.

Reading Quizzes: As participation is such a crucial element to this course, and as I really want you to come to class familiar with the material and ready to discuss it, thirteen of our sessions will begin with a brief quiz over factual matters in the text under discussion for that day. These quizzes will be unannounced, but if you are reading attentively this should cause no reason for alarm. Twelve of these quizzes will count toward your final grade, for a total of 120 points. This is in case you miss a quiz (as I will not do "make ups") or to compensate for a poor performance.

Discussion Questions: From time to time, you will be asked to “take the lead” in class discussion by preparing and bringing questions and commentary to serve as discussion prompts. Details about how to fulfill these tasks will be made available. Each set of questions/commentary will be worth 10 points, for a total of 50 for the term.

Papers/Final Examination: You will be required to compose two essays (the first worth 70 points, the second worth 100) that are analytical and/or argumentative in nature. Due dates are indicated on the reading schedule, and further details about specific requirements will be made available as deadlines approach. I offer late paper policies, but the penalties for late work tend to be severe; be aware of due dates now and begin to plan your semester accordingly. The final exam will ask you to compose 2-3 essays, and will be worth 60 points. According to English Department policy, failure to complete any major assignment will result in an F for the course.

Other Important Information

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at extension 3994 as soon as possible. Arrangements need to take place well in advance, and this process can take time. I am more than willing to try to accommodate reasonable requests, but you’ll need to get underway with the process of documentation now.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is literary theft. It occurs when you use someone else’s ideas as your own, without proper citation. Plagiarism is committed if you copy someone’s words without documentation—whether the original source was published or not (this includes “borrowing” someone’s paper, or using something from the Internet). Plagiarism is committed when you closely paraphrase a source without proper acknowledgement. Students who commit plagiarism at Rhodes College are referred to the Honor Council for disciplinary action. If convicted, the student will receive a grade of F in the course, in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you have any questions about plagiarism, or want to speak to me about how to avoid plagiarism in your own papers, please come to me before handing in an assignment.

According to English Department policy, all work is assumed to be the student’s own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Finally, all work for this course will be subject to the Rhodes College Honor Code. For each paper and the final exam, you will be asked to copy this code *in full* and sign your pledge.