

Brescia University College

English 4471 F

Tuesday 2:30-3:30; Thursday 2:30-4:30 (UH 26)

Brian Diemert

519-432-8353 ext.28387

bdiemert@uwo.ca Office hours: tba, and by appointment

American “Metafiction”: the Sixties, Seventies, and Beyond

In the post-World War II years, one of the directions American fiction moved was towards an explicit exploration of the structures of narrative and of storytelling itself. Largely subsumed into broader discussions of the postmodern, the concepts of the metafictional and of metafiction were developed in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s by William Gass, Robert Scholes, and others. As Patricia Waugh tells us in her 1984 treatment, “the *practice* [of metafiction] is as old (if not older) than the novel itself”, and precursors to some of the most innovative fiction of post-war American fiction can be found in works by Cervantes, Sterne, Fielding, and others. Nonetheless, in the sixties and seventies, the playful work of Barth, Barthelme, Coover, and others created the sense that literature had left the reality of the world behind as it became preoccupied with itself and the ontological status of fictional worlds and characters. The question becomes: can overtly metafictional narrative deal with the “real”—the perception of a shared environment that surrounds us-- and social and political experience? Can the techniques of metafictional storytelling offer more than a Brechtian challenge to the reality we inhabit? This seminar will explore the work of authors whose innovations have been absorbed into contemporary American storytelling even as the critical reputations of those authors find a narrower audience.

Suggested Texts:

John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse” and selected stories

Donald Barthelme, selected stories

Robert Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants* (selected stories)

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

Amy Hempel, “The Harvest”

Susan Choi, *Trust Exercise*

David Foster Wallace, “Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way” from *The Girl With Curious Hair*

Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Selected work and essays by Nabokov, Beattie, Gass, and others may be included.

Assignments:

--a major presentation (including a self-assessment) (35%)

--a major term essay due in the last class Dec. 6 (35%)

--four short (no more than 500 words), reflective commentaries (some of which will be the basis of class discussion). Each one is to be submitted every two or three weeks. (20% in total)

--participation (10%)

Expectations and Assignments:

Because this is a seminar course, our first obligation is to each other; consequently, regular attendance, preparation, and participation are important for us to have a successful class. I am sure you've all experienced the horrifyingly sinking feeling that results from asking questions during a presentation (and, perhaps, you'd planned for a discussion!) only to meet with awkward silence (I know I have!). Not a pleasant feeling, is it? So, to help us along, 10% of the course mark will be allocated to participation and attendance.

Of course, because this is a seminar course, you will have to perform. The presentation will be on a topic or text(s) selected by you and held on the scheduled date. You are responsible for fifty minutes to an hour of class time. You are free to do what you want with the time so long as you deal with the topic or text and the academic nature of the course. You can talk, read, ask questions, lead discussion, use electronic resources, puppets or partners, etc. A week after the presentation, you will submit a self-assessment of your presentation. The seminar presentation is a heap of work and, consequently worth 35% of your grade. Another 35% of your grade will be awarded for your final essay. This paper will be a substantial piece of work of between 16 and 20 pages on a topic of your choosing (I will provide suggestions). You can make passing use of the material you did your presentation on, but it cannot be a main part of the essay. On the other hand, any framing, criticism, or theory you may have used in your presentation can be used in your essay. The essay is due by the end of the last class in April. It goes without saying that clear and grammatically correct composition is expected by you and me. Improvement in this area is never ending. There are also the shorter reflections for you to submit.

Objectives:

Students will utilize and develop their critical thinking. They will deepen their understanding of the period's literature, and become familiar with less familiar texts. Oral and written communication will be practiced and improved through presentations, class discussions, reflective pieces, and a research essay.

The Brescia competencies addressed are communication, critical thinking, inquiry and analysis, problem solving, self awareness and development—all at levels 3-4.

Successful students will be able to

- Read closely complex and challenging texts from different literary periods.
-
- Understand the scholarly and critical debate on a specific literary topic.
-
- Use effectively a range of research and reference tools relative to the subject.
-
- Write clear and persuasive essays on complex topics.
-
- Deliver oral presentations in a persuasive and organized fashion.
-
- Respond critically and intelligently to the ideas of others.
-
- Develop skills in collaboration and group interaction.
-
- Reflect upon their reading and learning experience.

Schedule (I anticipate us continuing one week's topics into the next week)

Sept. 8—Introduction and context for discussion

Sept. 13—Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion”; stories by Borges

Sept. 20—Nabokov, “The Vane Sisters”, “Signs and Symbols”; Moore, “Referential”

Sept. 27—Barthlemae, two stories (distributed); Hempel, “The Harvest”

Oct. 4— Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse”; Coover, “The Babysitter”, “The Hat Act”

Oct. 11—Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Oct. 18—Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

Oct. 25—Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction”

https://jsomers.net/DFW_TV.pdf

“Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way” from *The Girl With Curious Hair*

Nov. 1 Fall Reading Week—no classes

Nov. 8—Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Nov. 15—Morrison, *Beloved*

Nov. 22—Choi, *Trust Exercise*

Nov. 29—Catch-up

Dec. 6—Essay due

The following are short stories available online:

“The Vane Sisters” –Vladimir Nabokov

https://www.jstor.org/stable/3848264?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

“Signs and Symbols” —Vladimir Nabokov

<https://genius.com/Vladimir-nabokov-signs-and-symbols-annotated>

“Referential” –Lorrie Moore

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/28/referential>

“Lost in the Funhouse” —John Barth

https://pnl2027.gov.pt/np4/file/430/Lost_in_the_funhouse_Barth.pdf

“The Literature of Exhaustion” —John Barth (distributed)

“E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” —David Foster Wallace

https://jsomers.net/DFW_TV.pdf

“The Harvest” —Amy Hempel

<https://www.pifmagazine.com/1998/09/the-harvest/>

“The Garden of Forking Paths” —Jorge Luis Borges

<https://genius.com/Jorge-luis-borges-the-garden-of-forking-paths-annotated>

“The Library of Babel” —Borges

<https://www2.math.upenn.edu/~deturck/isp/the-library-of-babel-by-jorge-luis-borges.pdf>

2022-23 BRESCIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

1. POLICY REGARDING ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

The complete policy regarding Accommodation for Illness - Undergraduate Students can be found

at https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_135

Students who have long-term or chronic medical conditions which may impede their ability to complete academic responsibilities should seek Academic Accommodation through Student Accessibility Services

(https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_10).

Personal commitments (e.g., vacation flight bookings, work schedule) which conflict with a scheduled test, exam or course requirement are **not** grounds for academic accommodation.

Students who experience an illness or extenuating circumstance sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements may submit a request for academic consideration through the following routes:

1. For medical absences, submitting a **Student Medical Certificate (SMC)** signed by a licensed medical or mental health practitioner;
2. For non-medical absences, submitting **appropriate documentation** (e.g., obituary, police report, accident report, court order, etc.) to their Academic Advisor. Students are encouraged to contact their Academic Advisor to clarify what documentation is acceptable.

Request for Academic Consideration for a Medical Absence

When a student requests academic accommodation (e.g., extension of a deadline, a makeup exam) for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course, it is the responsibility of the student to provide acceptable documentation to support a medical or compassionate claim. All such requests for academic accommodation **must** be made through an Academic Advisor and include supporting documentation.

Academic accommodation for illness will be granted only if the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete their academic responsibilities. Minor ailments typically treated by over-the-counter medications will not normally be accommodated.

The following conditions apply for students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds:

1. Students must submit their Student Medical Certificate (SMC) along with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested no later than two business days after the date specified for resuming responsibilities. An SMC can be downloaded from https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf;

2. In cases where there might be an extended absence or serious issue, students should submit their documentation promptly and consult their Academic Advisor for advice during their recovery period;
3. Whenever possible, students who require academic accommodation should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, scheduled tests or examinations, and other academic requirements;
4. Students **must** communicate with their instructors **no later than 24 hours** after the end of the period covered by the SMC to clarify how they will fulfil the academic expectations they may have missed during the absence;
5. Appropriate academic accommodation will be determined by the Dean's Office/Academic Advisor in consultation with the course instructor(s). Academic accommodation may include extension of deadlines, waiver of attendance requirements, arranging Special Exams (make-ups), re-weighting course requirements, or granting late withdrawal without academic penalty.

2. ACADEMIC CONCERNS

If you feel that you have a medical or personal challenge that is interfering with your work, contact your instructor and Academic Advisor as soon as possible. Problems may then be documented and possible arrangements to assist you can be discussed at the time of occurrence rather than on a retroactive basis. Retroactive requests for academic accommodation on medical or compassionate grounds are not normally considered.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your work load is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor(https://brescia.uwo.ca/enrolment_services/academic_advising/book_an_appointment.php). If you consider reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines; please contact your Academic Advisor or see the list of sessional dates in the Academic Calendar(<https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm?SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=>).

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. *Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP eligibility and/or Entrance Scholarship eligibility.*

3. ABSENCES

Short Absences: If you miss a class due to a minor illness or other problems, check your course outline for information regarding attendance requirements and make sure you are not missing a test or assignment. Cover any readings and arrange to borrow notes from a classmate. Contact the course instructor if you have any questions.

Please note that for asynchronous online courses, attendance or participation requirements maybe different than for synchronous or in-person courses.

Extended Absences: If you have an extended absence, you should contact the course instructor and an Academic Advisor. Your course instructor and Academic Advisor can discuss ways for you to catch up on missed work, and arrange academic accommodations if appropriate and warranted.

It is important to note that the Academic Dean may refuse permission to write the final examination in a course if the student has failed to maintain satisfactory academic standing

throughout the year or for too frequent absence from the class or laboratory (https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=5&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_64).

4. SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence at: https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_20.

Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences. Note that such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. Students are advised to consult the section on Scholastic Discipline for Undergraduate Students in the Academic Calendar.

If you are in doubt about whether what you are doing is inappropriate or not, consult your instructor, the Academic Dean's Office, or the Registrar. A claim that "you didn't know it was wrong" is not accepted as an excuse.

The penalties for a student guilty of a scholastic offence (including plagiarism) include refusal of a passing grade in the assignment, refusal of a passing grade in the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked Tests/exams:

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating. Software currently in use to score computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams performs a similarity review as part of standard exam analysis.

5. PROCEDURES FOR APPEALING ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS

All appeals of a grade must be directed first to the course instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the course instructor, a written appeal is to be sent to the School Chair. If the response of the Chair is considered unsatisfactory to the student, they

may then submit a written appeal to the Office of the Dean. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the Dean, they may appeal to the Senate Review Board Academic (SRBA), if there are sufficient grounds for the appeal and if the matter falls within the jurisdiction of the SRBA. For information on academic appeals consult your Academic Advisor or see the Student Academic Appeals – Undergraduate in the Academic Calendar https://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryID=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#Page_14.

Note that final course marks are not official until the Academic Dean has reviewed and signed the final grade report for the course. If course marks deviate from acceptable and appropriate standards, the Academic Dean may require grades to be adjusted to align them with accepted grading practices.

6. PREREQUISITES

Unless you have either the prerequisites for a course or written Special Permission from the Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisite(s).

7. SUPPORT

Support Services

The Brescia University College Registrar's website, with a link to Academic Advisors, is at <http://brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar-services/>. Students can access supports through Brescia's Student Life Centre (<http://brescia.uwo.ca/life/student-life/>) and Learning Development & Success at Western (<https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>).

Mental Health and Wellness

Students may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to your learning, such as increased anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, feeling down or lost, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. Services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can obtain information about how to obtain help for yourself or others through **Health &**

Wellness at Brescia, https://brescia.uwo.ca/student_life/health_and_wellness/index.php and **Health and Wellness at Western**, http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html.

Sexual Violence

All members of the Brescia University College community have a right to work and study in an environment that is free from any form of sexual violence. Brescia University College recognizes that the prevention of, and response to, Sexual Violence is of particular importance in the university environment. Sexual Violence is strictly prohibited and unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Brescia is committed to preventing Sexual Violence and creating a safe space for anyone in the Brescia community who has experienced Sexual Violence.

If you or someone you know has experienced any form of Sexual Violence, you may access resources at https://brescia.uwo.ca/safe_campus/sexual_violence/index.php.

Portions of this document were taken from the Academic Calendar, the Handbook of Academic and Scholarship Policy, and the Academic Handbook of Senate Regulations. This document is a summary of relevant regulations and does not supersede the academic policies and regulations of the Senate of the University of Western Ontario.
