This course examines contemporary fiction—for our purposes, fiction from the past ten years—and very contemporary fiction—for our purposes, fiction published within the previous calendar year. Together, we will ask what ties narratives by Junot Diaz, John Keene, Anne Garréta, and others to our time. Is their contemporaneity a matter of common style and/or substance? Of their relationship to genre, form, and technique? Is it a question of how these texts are produced, circulated, and received? As we work through these questions, we will also discuss schools of criticism—feminist and queer theory, postcolonial/decolonial theory, and Marxist literary criticism, among others—that will help us place our primary texts in a broader narrative of literary history. Throughout the quarter, we'll learn how to produce rigorous criticism that speaks to audiences inside and outside the academy.

**Required Texts:**

  - ISBN 978-1-941920-09-1
- *Counternarratives: Stories and Novellas*, John Keene (2015, New Directions)

Short stories available on Canvas
Critical essays available on Canvas

A note on secondary sources: Unless they’re assigned, please refrain from reading reviews and critical essays until we finish each primary text. A major goal of this class is to develop your own critical judgment, without relying upon outside opinions.

**Major Assignments:**

- **Contextualizing review (3-5 pgs):** Write a review of 1) a work of fiction you would like to research for your final paper or 2) *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The primary purpose of this review is not to evaluate the novel as good or bad. Instead, your task is to identify and unpack the novel’s distinct characteristics, provide meaningful, argument-driven summary for a scholarly audience that has not yet read the book, and situate the text within one relevant literary-critical context.

- **Research paper (15 pgs):** Write an argumentative essay that focuses on a literary text published within the past five years and seeks to answer a question raised by a related group of critical texts. Primary texts will be chosen in consultation with the instructor, and may be the texts used for the review assignment. Before writing the final draft, you will be asked to:
  - Compile a bibliography of 15 relevant critical sources (these can include journal articles, book chapters, scholarly and popular reviews, and author interviews; the balance should lean towards academic scholarship.)
  - Annotate 3 of these sources.
  - Present a genealogy of your argument to the class (see below).
  - Write a 5-7 page draft, to be workshopped in class.
Research Presentation (20-30 minutes): Deliver a presentation (10-15 mins) that places the primary text of your research paper in conversation with one popular text (a review, a news article, another type of media) and one academic article. Trace the relationship between these three texts, building to an explanation of your preliminary research thesis. This should prompt a short class discussion about your argument (10-15 mins), which you will lead.

Canvas posts (100-400 words): Canvas posts will be assigned throughout the quarter (see syllabus for dates). They are due at 7 pm the night before we discuss them in class.

Grading Policy:
Attendance and participation: 20%
Canvas posts: 10%
Contextualizing Review: 25%
Research Paper: 35%

A+ 97.0-100%  |  A 93.0-96.9%  |  A- 90.0-92.9%
B+ 87.0-89.9%  |  B 83.0-86.9%  |  B- 80.0-82.9%
C+ 77.0-79.9%  |  C 73.0-76.9%  |  C- 70.0-72.9%
D+ 67.0-69.9%  |  D 60.0-66.9%
F 0.0-59.9%

Goals:
This class will help students explore strategies for interpreting and writing about texts without an existing critical tradition. We will acquire many skills:

• Close reading that attends to concerns within and beyond the text at hand.
• Situating non-academic insights in their relevant literary-critical contexts.
• Developing and executing a research project: constructing a scholarly archive, developing of a research-based argument, and drafting/rewriting a long essay.
• Discerning and rigorous incorporation of academic and non-academic source materials in a research project.
• Developing a sense of critical judgment and a personal identity as a scholar/critic.

Students should also be able to participate in scholarly conversations about contemporary fiction and "the contemporary" writ large. This will require:

• An understanding of the literary marketplace from the late 20th-c to the present.
• An understanding of current trends in American literary fiction.
• Fluency in major theories of “the contemporary.”
• Fluency in the research area(s) relevant to the student’s final project.

Honor Code:
The Honor Code is the university’s statement on academic integrity, written by students in 1921. It articulates university expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
1) that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2) that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3) The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4) While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

The fundamental standard is also a key part of fostering a discussion environment built on trust and creativity:

1) Students are expected to respect and uphold the rights and dignity of others regardless of race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic status.
2) Students are expected to uphold the integrity of the university as a community of scholars in which free speech is available to all and intellectual honesty is demanded of all.

Students with Documented Disabilities:
Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

OAE: 563 Salvatierra Walk; 650-723-1066; http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae

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Calendar:
Please note that readings and assignments are *due* on the date that they appear on the calendar. They should be completed before class that day, or earlier if indicated.

Week 1
- Monday, March 28: Course overview | Reading due: Brief Wondrous Life, pgs. 1-7 (will be available on Canvas before the term begins)
- Wednesday, March 30: Reading due: Brief Wondrous Life, pgs. 8-49 | Introduction to research in English literary studies.

Week 2
- Monday, April 4: Reading due: Brief Wondrous Life, pgs. 50-201
- Wednesday, April 6: Reading due: Brief Wondrous Life, pgs. 204-261; book reviews (Canvas) | Introduction of the contextualizing review, due at the end of Week 4.
Week 3
• Monday, April 11: Reading due: *Brief Wondrous Life*, pgs. 263-end
• Wednesday, April 13: Reading due: Aníbal Quijano, “The Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America” (Canvas)

Week 4
• Monday, April 18: Reading due: Lyn Di Iorio, “Laughing Through a Broken Mouth,” Jennifer Harford Vargas, “Dictating a Zafa: The Power of Narrative Form as Ruin-Reading” (Canvas)
• Wednesday, April 20: Reading due: Ramón Saldívar: “Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction” (Canvas) | Starting the research project
• Saturday, April 23: Contextualizing review due by email at 5 pm.

Week 5
• Monday, April 25: Reading due: *Sphinx*, pgs. 1-75
• Wednesday, April 27: Reading due: *Sphinx*, pgs. 76-end | Intro to the research project

Week 6
• Monday, May 2: Reading due: Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble* (Canvas)
• Wednesday, May 4: Assignment due: Writing (Without) Gender

Week 7
• Monday, May 9: Reading due: *Counternarratives* – “Manhatta” through “Gloss, or the Strange History of Our Lady of the Sorrows” (pgs. 3-160)
• Wednesday, May 11: Reading due: *Counternarratives* – “The Aeronauts” (pgs. 161-218); Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping" and selections from *The Antimonies of Realism* (Canvas) | research presentations begin

Week 8
• Monday, May 16: Reading due: *Counternarratives*: “Rivers” through “The Lions” (pgs. 219 – 304)
• Wednesday, May 18: Reading due: selections from Mark McGurl, *The Program Era* | research presentations continue
• Saturday, May 20: 10-12 pg. research paper draft due by email at 5 p.m.

Week 9
• Monday, May 23: Reading due: Short stories TBA; Sianne Ngai, “Our Aesthetic Categories”
• Wednesday, May 25: Workshop research paper drafts | research presentations (may) continue

Week 10
• Monday, May 30: Memorial Day; no class.
• Wednesday, June 1: Reading due: Short stories TBA | Final conversation and class celebration

Thursday, June 2 – Monday, June 6: Final revision meetings available with instructor.
Saturday, June 11: Revision of research paper due by email at 5 p.m.