

CROSSING BORDERS AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES:
AMERICAN AND BRITISH FICTION IN THE
20TH CENTURY AND BEYOND

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Liberal Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

May, 2012

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2012

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INTRODUCTION

I sometimes wonder how I would be studied if I were a text. I live in the United States, specifically in Texas, and have lived here for the last 12 years of my life. I'm a white male and I speak English with a vaguely American accent, although it is distinctly not Texan. But I'm a British citizen, born in the UK to British parents, and my first step on American soil came when I was 13 years old. I do not consider myself British or American. I am a hybrid text; an outsider to both categories. I hold a deep anxiety about my identity that has provided the fuel for this project, which explores the complications of national identity in the context of literature. I began with a desire to explore texts in the categories of "British" and "American" literature that complicate the boundaries of these definitions, much as I do. I discovered along the way two central research questions that helped me focus my reading:

1. How do writers of fiction portray and explore identity conflicts and anxieties, especially at the intersection of different cultures?

2. How do the categories of "American Literature" and "British Literature" reflect and shape scholars' and students' understanding of what it means to be "American" and "British?"

So the impetus of my project is deeply personal and reflects my own anxieties of identity. I feel much the same as Junior does in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, when he expresses that "I always feel like a stranger. I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other" (118). At the intersection of cultures a new identity forms that crosses both borders and breaks conventional boundaries. Both

in form and in content, this project seeks to join in the tradition of re-thinking convention and establishing new identities that grow out of the old. I present both a thesis and an exam project that delves into both British and American Literature, thriving on the tension between the categories.

The Non-Traditional Thesis

Early on in my research it became clear that a traditional thesis, which requires deep research into a focused research topic, would not ideally suit my research questions. I began to explore other options and proposed the idea of an exam-based thesis project, centered on exam questions that engage macro issues of American and British literature in the broad time frame of “the 20th century and beyond.” In short I desired breadth, not depth, in my research. This led to a reading-focused project with a written product that reflects a broad understanding of a diverse array of texts, both primary and secondary. I wrote each of the three essays that form the body of this thesis in a four-hour exam after reading and annotating the texts on my reading lists over a span of nine months. This introduction serves not only to explain the process and the form of my thesis, but to reflect on some of my takeaways from this project that I did not address in the scope of my exam questions. The annotated bibliography that follows the exams helps me contextualize my readings and also gives me some reminders of content should I revisit these texts in the future in a teaching context. The appendix contains a revision of my third essay as well as the complete readings lists (organized by category) and copy of the exam questions.

In her President’s Column in the Spring 2010 Newsletter, MLA President Sidonie Smith calls for academics to re-think the purpose of the Dissertation requirement for PhD

candidates and re-form its scope. She asks, “Do we disadvantage our doctoral students and our profession if we do not begin to expand the forms the dissertation might take, and do so now, in this time of unrelenting turmoil?” (2) While her focus is on doctoral students and the concept of a dissertation leading to a monograph, her words also apply to the written thesis product on the Master’s level, and have greatly influenced the creation of this project. While answers to her question are necessarily varied (and at times oppositional), the English department at Texas Christian University has allowed me to answer it in the affirmative, at least on the Master’s level. I do not seek a Master’s degree that is overspecialized, but rather to understand the broad strokes of recent literary history in both the United States and Britain. Since my goal is to teach a Literature survey course at the high school or community college level (as opposed to an upper-level literature course at a research university), comprehensive exams better prepare me for this task. In short, my choice to base my thesis on sit-down exams reflects my individual goals as a scholar and a potential teacher.

The Rationale for the Lists

In a broad sense, the goal of my reading lists is to engage national identity issues on two levels: first, through exploring primary texts that inhabit the space of border crossing in American Literature and British Literature, and second, through studying secondary materials that interrogate the very definitions of ‘American’ and ‘British’ and the various ways that literature engages these disputed terms. With literally thousands of potential texts to choose from (especially for the primary lists), the internal categories within the broad “American” and “British” lists provide some guidance for locating individual texts.

The *Global American Literature* category aims for texts that deal with the United States in a global context. This ranges from writers who comment directly on an exceptional American identity, such as Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, to American writers who imagine a space outside the United States, such as William Styron, and immigrants who write texts that cross borders, such as Lan Cao. This also includes a specifically *Transatlantic* element, recognizing the importance of putting American and British literature in dialogue. The *Hemispheric American Literature* category includes texts that challenge the conception of “America” as synonymous with “The United States.” The land mass of the Americas has contained shifting and contested boundaries ever since Europeans hit the shores in the 15th and 16th centuries (and most likely earlier), and the literary tradition of the United States does not exist as an isolated entity. By including the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, the Dominican-American Junot Díaz writing in the United States, and the Canadian Margaret Atwood, I aim to contextualize “American” Literature in its historically hemispheric formation. Maryse Condé represents how traditional historical narratives are being questioned in contemporary literature while also serving as a geographically hybrid text as Tituba crosses borders between the United States and the Caribbean. My final category, *Multicultural American Literature*, admittedly falls short of fully representing the multiplicity of voices in the contemporary United States (an impossible task). But within my limitations, the African American writer Toni Morrison, the American Indian writer Sherman Alexie, and the Chinese American writer Gene Luen Yang provide a sample of literature that represents the cultural diversity within 21st-century America. Each book, in its own way, directly takes up issues of complex identities that form at the center of

cultural tension. These books highlight the strength and distinctness of individual voices in America, arguing against the clichéd metaphor of the “American melting pot” that suggests all voices melt into one.

The breakdowns in my British list follow established (but contested) critical designations that have guided scholars in understanding and categorizing British Literature. The *Modernism* list takes up three authors who represent Modernism in unique ways. Joyce’s formal innovations, Woolf’s re-thinking of gender roles and narrative perspective, and Forster’s challenge of colonial attitudes each challenge established literary convention and point to rethinking and reforming traditional power structures. They also capture the various aspects of a shifting British consciousness during and following World War I. The *Postmodernism* list builds directly off Modernism to show how authors respond to the Modernist movement and push forward to create new forms of literature. Samuel Beckett exemplifies the postmodern skepticism of individual perspective and cohesive plot lines, while Kingsley Amis presents an anti-hero in Jim Dixon and Salman Rushdie metafictionally comments on the role that the telling of stories plays in our development as children. While these authors obviously accomplish more than these brief sentences suggest, they each were chosen for how they engage the postmodern literary tradition. The *Postcolonial* primary texts directly engage the national identity tensions that ground my project. Much like the texts that form the *Multicultural* section of my American list, these texts unfortunately fall short of wholly representing the many arenas of postcolonial studies (also impossible), but the four texts serve as a good starting point in understanding how a postcolonial attitude has affected contemporary British literature (including challenging the definition of “British” itself).

Rushdie speaks an Indian voice that speaks through a historical tendency by British colonists to imprint British culture onto its colonies. The Irish J.G. Farrell also critiques the British colonial attitude in India during 19th century. Peter Carey explores the complications of Australian nation-building and Monica Ali delves into the difficulties of adjusting to life in England as a Bangladeshi woman in the 21st century.

Exam Content Clarification and Revision

Since I wrote each of my exam essays in just four hours, they contain flaws of clarity and organization that I aim to acknowledge briefly here. I include a full revision of my third essay that covers both lists in the appendix, but here I would like to amend and clarify some of the content in my first two essays.

In the American Literature essay I was asked to give my definitions for “American” and “Literature” in response to the critical debates surrounding both terms. While I invoked Whitman’s “America” to argue against it, I never gave a solid definition to guide my use of the term “American” in my essay. So when I use “America” or “American” in the context of teaching “American Literature” I use it simply to abbreviate the United States of America. This is admittedly problematical given the use of “America” to define the entire land mass of North and South America, and perhaps we should begin to clarify “U.S. American” in this context. But that is not my immediate focus and within the confines of the essay I opt for the flawed term “American” to categorize the United States. However, this category is highly contested and fluctuating. In terms of land mass and political identity, the United States has been in flux since before its founding. There is no uniform culture in the United States, and with constant communication with other countries and bodies that cross borders every day, the United

States will never have an absolutely fixed identity. However, I argue that identity signifiers must exist in order to provide grounds for meaningful debate, even though such signifiers are fluid. In this case, I use “America” to signify a country in constant flux. The United States is simultaneously a group of people, a land mass, an idea, a political entity, and a symbol. Yet none of these identities are fixed. Studying literature can help scholars and students understand the nature of these complex aspects of American identity. The frameworks for expanding “American Literature” that guide the formation of my American reading list (Global, Transatlantic, Hemispheric, and Multicultural) aim not to replace “American” as a field of study that deals with the United States, but to enhance it and to contextualize it.

I also argue in my American essay that “we” should “reframe history,” an admittedly ambiguous claim on both accounts. By “we” I intend to indicate scholars and teachers of American Literature and American History. For scholars, I argue that research should seek to discover a complex American history that recognizes a multiplicity of voices and values that have contributed to the formation of the United States. As teachers, I suggest that curriculum should not privilege one meta-narrative that tries to encompass the entire lived experience of American History, but rather should recognize the complications and tensions that have grounded the identity of the United States since before its establishment as a political entity. So, “reframing history” should not be read as a suggestion that one narrative should replace another narrative. I simply mean that history and literature should be taught as complex and multifaceted. In his essay *The Historical Text as Literary Artifact*, Hayden White notices “a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of

which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (1537). The *invention* here is inevitable when you must choose which facts to include in a historical narrative that cannot possibly include every moment of every day told from every point of view. I do not encourage throwing away all our old history books and replacing them with narratives, however. How a culture has understood history becomes part of that culture’s history. For example, the concept of “Manifest Destiny” that suggests Europeans had some sort of divine right to inhabit the land of the Americas was a powerful metaphor for many years. As scholarship has revealed the way that such a conception of American History privileges Europeans and marginalizes American Indians and African Americans, for example, the power of the metaphor has diminished. But even though we may no longer agree with it, the concept still played a part in forming the geographical boundaries and cultural values of the United States. Partnering this narrative with narratives from the voices that were once marginalized reveals a more nuanced understanding of American history.

Towards the end of my first essay I suggest replacing the concept of “The American Dream” with “The American Journey.” I make this distinction to emphasize that what constitutes the reality of the United States is not an ideal, but rather the lives that are lived inside the United States (affected, of course, by lives lived outside and between). However, I admit that even “The American Journey” creates problems as a singular entity. Perhaps the better metaphor to replace the American Dream would be “American Journeys,” which acknowledges the distinct nature of each individual journey. This conception functions on two levels: First, this perspective recognizes the multiplicity

of voices that compose any historical narrative. Since multiple “Journeys” have helped to form the United States in various ways, there must be multiple voices to speak from our history. Second, recognizing that the United States contains multiple journeys unfolding alongside each other encourages American individuals (defined by all the messy, fluid definitions above) to listen to one another, especially the stories they each tell. Therefore, a literature course focused on “American Journeys” would aim to reach back through American history to find diverse historical voices and look for contemporary voices that embody and explore the American experience in its myriad forms.

In my British Literature exam I was asked how writers in the different literary categories on my list (modernist, postmodernist, and postcolonial) eschew realism to thematize the concept of a divided society. But my essay does not clearly define these concepts (including realism and magical realism) or explain why the authors are grouped in such a way. While each of these terms is somewhat in contention, I will be clear here about how I use them. *Modernism* points to a time period beginning around 1900 when artists, authors, and thinkers deliberately rebelled against many foundational characteristics of Western thought and tradition. In literature, both poetry and fiction in this time period represent a fractured British society in new literary forms. *Postmodernism* simultaneously extends the modernist rejection of tradition and convention while rebelling against a modernist tendency towards “high art” by incorporating “lower” forms of media such as film and pop culture. In doing so, postmodernist fiction defies traditional literary categories and blurs the boundaries between “high” and “low” culture, challenging notions of “great” and “universal” when applied to art or literature. *Postcolonialism* typically invokes cultures and countries once

colonized by Western nations (such as Britain and the United States) that have since gained independence and are grappling with issues of cultural and national identity in this context. However, *postcolonialism* also includes attitudes of former colonizing countries after they relinquish control, as well as the complicated ways that colonization still occurs in many countries. In literature, *postcolonialism* differs from modernism and postmodernism in its specific focus on exposing the role of imperialism and colonialism in constructing a national exceptionalist attitude (in Britain and the United States, for example) that silences the voices of the colonized. My usage of *realism* in the essay aims to invoke the mode of literature that attempts to portray human life *as it is lived*, so to speak. This mode is not confined to the realist literary movement in the 19th century, although the authors I invoke that complicate the notion of *realism* undoubtedly respond to both the literary movement and the narrative mode. Since modernist and postmodernist authors question the concept of a reality perceived and experienced in a uniform way, their narrative forms naturally resist traditional realism. When I classify Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as *magical realism*, I mean a realistic narrative technique that reads like traditional realism yet incorporates elements of fantasy, magic, miracles, or physical impossibilities without shifting form or style. In reading my British Literature essay, these terms should be read as defined above.

Since my essay focuses on aesthetic choices and content, my written answer falls short of fully analyzing the way each text thematizes Eagleton's "divided society," a shortcoming easily rectified here. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the shifting voices represent the fractured consciousness of post-World War I Britain. Septimus speaks as a veteran of the war, unable to reconcile life at home with the atrocities of his war experience. Peter

speaks as an Anglo-Indian, unsure about the value of “civilized” England in the context of colonialism abroad. Clarissa and her maid speak voices split across class lines, showing how societal standing influences perspective. And Richard and Clarissa’s contrasting views of marriage reveal gendered division, particularly in upper-class marriages. Woolf’s Britain is divided by individual experience, as each character cannot perceive events (and consequently, reality) in the same way. Beckett perhaps furthers Woolf’s troubled Septimus by creating Molloy. Septimus is clearly troubled psychologically (perhaps experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder before it was defined as such), but we at least understand the cause of the mental disorder and see how it plays out. In Molloy’s head, reality is clearly constructed rather than simply observed, and not very cohesively. Beckett’s divided society stems from each individual’s lack of connection with others and the reality of others’ experiences, played out to absurdity in the mind of Molloy. Farrell depicts a divided society by using each character to represent the diversity of values and opinions held in colonial India. Each chapter pits the characters I describe in my essay against each other, involving them in absurd arguments about religion, medicine, nationalism, morality, and much more. In this book connection between characters is less important than contrasts between characters, which bring to light the divisions in the British colony (differences of medical techniques, religious and moral values, importance of etiquette and propriety, etc.). Rushdie depicts a divided India most vividly when the *Midnight’s Children* realize and verbalize their political ideologies and can no longer agree on anything in their conference, causing it to disband. This scene shows how postcolonialism does not provide a uniform narrative for nation building or

establish a monolithic cultural uniformity, which is impossible. Instead, Indians (like the English) must recognize the divisions within society.

I wish to make three other clarifications to guide the reading of my British Literature essay: First, I make an unjustified sweeping statement in the opening paragraph that “courtship and etiquette” novels “became obsolete in favor of more ‘serious’ novels.” Truly, novels prior to the 20th century dealt with more than just courtship and etiquette, including very complex and ‘serious’ subjects. My false generalization blurs my intention, which is to suggest that many men (and women, in different ways) who experienced World War I could not view society in the same way that they could prior to the war. As a result, the significance of social constructs that held up the class system began to weaken, opening doors for economic reform and feminism (among other movements). Literature during and immediately following World War I reflects these shifting values. Second, my depiction of Woolf’s aesthetic style needs justification. I suggest her style is “simple, bare, and honest,” which is an admittedly limited assessment. I should have clarified that while on a sentence by sentence level Clarissa’s voice is spoken directly and honestly, Woolf’s shifting narrative perspective, including non-linearity, and use of stream-of-consciousness makes the text anything but simple and clear. Within this complex text Clarissa’s voice specifically intends to avoid obfuscation as it only speaks for one perspective. Third, I wish to clarify the distinction I make between Forster’s *A Passage to India* and Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur*. While both novels depict colonial India, I suggest Farrell’s novel should be read as a postcolonial text, whereas Forster’s novel should be read as modernism. I admit the overlap between categories and concede that Forster’s novel does point towards a

postcolonial attitude, but my distinction remains: Forster tries to speak the voice of the Indians in *Dr. Aziz* (and others), whereas Farrell leaves the Indians mostly silent. The effect is ironically reversed. Since Farrell leaves Indians silent, they can contribute their own voice (through postcolonial Indian authors such as Rushdie), whereas Forster's speaking for the Indians leaves no room for truly Indian voice. In this way, Farrell's novel represents the postcolonial recognition of the limitations inherent to colonialism. Forster's novel does challenge colonial attitudes, but does not fully drop the colonial tendency to try to speak for the colonized.

Other Takeaways

While I made implicit connections between American and British literature, both in the content of my reading list and in my third (hybrid) essay, I must expand on some conclusions I have reached regarding these connections. My project has allowed me to generate a truly "transatlantic" perspective that does not simply view "British" through the eyes of an American or 'America' through the eyes of the British. The connections are multi-faceted and multidirectional, working on the meta- and conceptual levels as well as between specific texts on an intertextual level.

I use the *modernist*, *postmodernist*, and *postcolonial* definitions to categorize my British reading list, but the same terms and movements echo across the Atlantic in American literary innovations. For example, Virginia Woolf's modernist feminism that speaks for female agency parallels with Ernest Hemingway's usage of androgynous characters that blur the distinctive lines between the two sexes (further complicated by Hemingway's troubled classification as an American considering works that he wrote in France under the auspices of the "American" Gertrude Stein). Additionally, Samuel

Beckett's postmodernist Molloy stands alongside William Faulkner's Benjy as both characters speak into existence an unstructured reality formed by psychological instability. Postcolonialism, meanwhile, applies as much to the United States as it does to Britain, considering the U.S. imperialism and colonialism elsewhere in the Americas at the turn of the century and its economic complicity with Europe's colonialism. So voices that speak from Haiti (such as Edwidge Danticat), for example, can be placed alongside Rushdie (Indian) or Ngugi (Kenyan) in their postcolonial struggle for cultural identity following political independence.

The essay questions that I answer for my American and British Literature lists could easily have been switched. While the British question asks how British literature in the 20th century represents and thematizes a "divided society," the same can be said about American literature. Sherman Alexie draws on a divided society by placing his narrator on the dividing lines between white America and an Indian reservation, calling attention to the stark differences and conflicts between the two "nations" within the United States. Gene Luen Yang and Lan Cao place their protagonists in a similar cultural clash as Yang's second-generation Chinese immigrant and Cao's first-generation Vietnamese immigrant both struggle to find the balance between assimilation and individualism in contemporary America. Their struggles can be placed alongside Nazneen's in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* as she adapts to life in London as a Bangladeshi woman. Styron's *Sophie's Choice* illustrates how past experiences that brought individuals to the United States, such as Sophie's horrific experiences in the Holocaust, can create division between individuals and established society, making them incompatible. Sophie and Nathan's suicide echoes Septimus' suicide in *Mrs. Dalloway*, especially considering

Septimus' inability to deal with the horrors of the war he experienced. American texts also complicate traditional notions of realism aesthetically, as the British texts do. For example, Junot Diaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* blends lived experience with fantasy, in comparisons between the evil Lord Sauron from *Lord of the Rings* and the Dominican dictator Trujillo. The narrator, Yunion, also blends realism with fantasy in his footnotes when he asks "who [is] more sci-fi than us?" (21) and, "You really want to know what being an X-Man feel like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto. Mamma mia!" (22). Meanwhile, Marquez employs magic realist techniques in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, much like Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, to infuse a Colombian mysticism into the history of the town of Macondo.

Similarly, the question I answered for the American list could easily be asked about the British list. The concept of "Literature" has been challenged worldwide and should also be analyzed in how it defines "British Literature." Meanwhile, the concept of "British" creates as much ground for debate (or more) as the term "American." With the global proliferation of the English language, a postcolonial recognition of the ways that the British tried to imprint their culture on the rest of the world through colonialism, and the various hybrid nationalities formed by immigrants to and from Britain, Canada, Australia, and other Commonwealth nations (including my own travel), "British" is difficult to define. Many of the texts chosen for my primary list have either won or been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, awarded for the best work of fiction "written by a citizen of the Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland and published in the United Kingdom for the first time in the year of the prize," according to the Man Booker Prize website. The novel chosen must also "be an original work in English (not a translation)

and must not be self-published.” While the Man Booker Prize does not claim to define “British,” these distinctions are important given the prestige of the award and the cultural significance of previous Booker Prize winners, such as Salman Rushdie for *Midnight’s Children*. I use “British” in a similar way to the way I use “American.” Just as I use “American” to represent the complicated web of individuals and communities that live in the United States of America, constantly shifting and changing, I use “British” to represent life lived within and connected to the United Kingdom. The ways that individuals complicate the notion of “British” provide grounds for meaningful debate about national and individual identity.

Where Does Literature Go From Here?

Since my project bears the time frame of “20th century and beyond” and contextualizes contemporary literature, a fair looking-ahead question is “where does the novel go from here?” Since Modernism it seems that writers of fiction have continued to find new forms and new stories to tell that readily engage contemporary issues and conflicts. Despite rising popularity in other media, such as film and online writing, novels continue to be published (and read) at an astounding rate. I believe that the proliferation of novels allows specialization in content, leading to authentic voices that recognize a limited perspective and speak it more clearly. Since identity markers are increasingly complex, writers will seek less to encompass and speak for entire societies and will instead write about individual experiences; real, historical, and imagined. Most critics and readers have let go of the concept of “the definitive British novel” or “the American voice,” which allows authors not to strive to attain those labels. Though many Modernist and Postmodernist texts, such as *Ulysses* and *Molloy*, prove extremely difficult to read

(without the help of study guides and secondary scholarship), the work that these authors have accomplished has paved the way for contemporary fiction that now assumes an awareness of individuals who see society, and speak experience, differently.

Concluding Remarks

In any venture that sets out to break new ground, it is important to evaluate its merit when considering future options. If this non-traditional thesis turned out to be less productive, less challenging, or less meaningful than a traditional thesis, then the goals for pursuing this option have not been met. However, I believe this project has been an absolute success on every level. On the topics that I set out to explore (national identity in the United States and United Kingdom as explored through literature, the changing forms and modes of contemporary works of fiction, and connections between the categories of “American” and “British”), I feel the diverse reading assignments and broad spectrum of scholarship has given me even more of a foundation of knowledge than I expected to attain. With so many texts to draw from, I find myself making connections that otherwise would have been beyond my reach, even in classes that run outside my project’s boundaries (or lack thereof). I also have been introduced to a variety of strands of contemporary literary scholarship, such as Dimock and Buell’s global contextualization of American Literature and Gregory S. Jay’s take on what he calls the “Cultural Wars” in a multicultural United States. The more that I read, the more qualified I become to comment on content and method in a literature classroom, and hopefully to participate in teaching Literature. To any student seeking a Master’s degree who wants a broad knowledge base from which to draw in both future scholarship and future teaching, I highly recommend an exam-based alternative thesis like my own, provided the student is

passionate about the subject and willing to spend countless hours wrestling with the seemingly endless questions and topics that such a broad project naturally touches upon. Like with a traditional written thesis, this project would not have been possible if I was not intellectually, emotionally, and even spiritually connected to the material. As it stands, it was absolutely worth it. My final hope is that despite my flaws in communication, someone may find my project here worthwhile. I know I did.

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AMERICAN LITERATURE EXAM
Taken February 14th, 2012

Essay Prompt:

Each of the terms in the field represented by this list—“American” and “literature”—has come under critical pressure in recent years. Prepare an essay that reviews and illustrates the points of contention that have arisen around each of the two terms. In addition, provide an explanation and justification for the definition or principles that will guide your own future work around both terms—in your study and/or your teaching. Be sure to make specific references to individual texts from your reading list to support the various dimensions of your argument. You should reference at least two secondary texts that have influenced your thinking and at least three primary texts that help illustrate your argument. A substantial element in your essay should involve engagement with the two key terms of “American” and “literature.”

Response:

Much of the 20th century world was defined by national borders. The invasion across national borders provoked the two World Wars. Cultural groups in Europe and Latin America and Africa (and elsewhere) set up borders and celebrated “national” independence to give their cultures a place in the world. The United Nations and other pacts strengthened these identities. But by the onset of the 21st century, technology had enabled the transgressing of these borders more easily and frequently. Paul Giles points to the attacks on September 11th, 2001, as a representation of transgressed borders in this era. Central to the conception of the world composed of national borders is the United States, a dominant world power since the end of World War II, and this attack shattered

the perception of the American nation as exceptional. Giles argues that American exceptionalism strongly influenced American writing and culture from around 1860 to 1986, but that the world now represents more closely the unsettled and inchoate borders of pre-Civil War America. Giles suggests that re-imagining our history through today's lens leads to the flaw of imposing today's national borders on a land lacking such demarcations for much of history. The concept of "American" as strictly "from the United States," then, is extremely problematic. Since a country cannot extricate itself from its history, but rather grows out of it, we must not transform our history to fit the present conception. Per Giles' challenge, America must incorporate the variety of voices and traditions that ground our country, and indeed, the American continent (North and South, since the distinction is relatively recent also). Extending this challenge, Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell edit a volume that furthers this boundary crossing to include the way that America has interacted with the rest of the world. In her introduction to the volume, Dimock portrays "American" as a subset of the category "World" and argues that our understanding of "American" is stunted without contextualizing it in its broader context. In these ways and others, the borders of "American" have been transgressed not only physically, but academically.

The place of "Literature" has drawn attention amidst these movements. Academics rarely claim now that certain texts are simply "great" and "universal" and worthy of study on these merits. One such example of this demystification occurred when a PhD candidate traveled to Africa to listen to their stories. When asked to tell a story of her own, she turned to the "universal" tale of *Hamlet* but was met with a confused audience. They could not understand why Hamlet was so upset about his Uncle Claudius

marrying his mother, Gertrude, as it was custom in their tribe for a man to marry his brother's wife should the brother die. With Hamlet's chief motivation tempered culturally, it becomes hard to justify that *Hamlet* is universally meaningful and powerful. Ralph Bauer points out that the American literary tradition should not be normative and the critical ideology cannot encompass all texts. This has led to what some call the "explosion" of the canon in recent years, leading to reform of curriculum at every level of literary education. As expected, this has caused a backlash from some traditional scholars and law makers who worry that the texts being replaced in the curriculum should not be removed. Gregory S. Jay situates himself in this political struggle by advocating strongly for a continual opening up of the canon, making the questions that shape our understanding of "Literature" central to class discussion. Jay argues that bringing the students into a discussion of defining "Literature" while "traditional" and "non-traditional" texts are placed side-by-side gives the students the voice to place themselves in the conflict with their own opinion. Jay admits that in a multicultural classroom (not only multi-ethnic but in gender difference and sexual preference among other distinctions), such debates may lead to conflict. But he argues that such conflict is central to American identity. I agree with Jay. I argue that "America" and "Literature" intersect in such an important way that teaching and studying "American Literature" is essential to creating a nation of individuals who can both speak in a meaningful way of their experiences and views, and listen to the voices of others who inevitably have a different story and a different point of view. This does not mean ignoring history, but rather embracing and re-interpreting it.

Walt Whitman's America was paradise. In the America that he depicts in "I Hear America Singing," every man has a voice. Each voice is singing through the day, celebrating the work of its owner's hands. Each voice composes its own song to create a harmony of difference and individualism. Notably though, in the words of his poem, certain voices are left silent. The indentured servant does not sing an ode to his master. The dutiful wife, scrubbing away at the dishes and taking care of the children, is unable to sing about her individualism because she lacks autonomy. In his more extended poem, "Song of Myself," Whitman attempts to rectify this silence by encompassing all of the voices of America inside his own. This reads less like a harmony of distinct voices and more like Whitman losing himself in his own idealism. I don't doubt his motives, but in reality, he does not give the silent a voice by speaking for them. He does the opposite: he silences them. It seems these two poems represent an inherent contradiction at the heart of American identity. Whitman even recognizes the contradiction and casually dismisses it when he writes, "Do I contradict myself?/Very well, I contradict myself." In this poem the voice speaks for the identity of America, and the identity is in contradiction. Contradictions cannot exist in reality, and that is why Whitman's America can only exist idealistically. In his idealistic America, every individual has a unique voice, yet this voice is united and distinctly American. Such impossible contradictions ground early American discourse that perpetuates today, such as freedom and equality or liberty and justice. Equality is impossible to achieve with absolute individual freedom, just as justice gets in the way of absolute individual liberty. Yet sometimes the political and nationalist rhetoric of the United States seems to be grounded in these ideas, even though the reality has never lived up to the dream.

While not explicitly invoking Walt Whitman, Jonathan Arac nevertheless engages Whitman's central national identity contradiction in his essay, providing new critical terms for Whitman's extremes in situating American Literature in a more global context. Arac uses the label *Global* to describe how American Literature can be used to connect diverse people through commonalities and shared values or experiences. On the other hand, *Babel* represents ultimate diversity, focusing only on the differences that make us unique. Arac notes that each extreme has cast a shadow. A strictly *Global* approach squashes individualism and marginalizes minority experience, whereas *Babel*, when taken to its extreme, leads to a world of individuals unable to connect and share experiences. In the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, all men spoke their own language and no men listened, because they didn't understand the voices they heard. For the most part, scholars and writers have now recognized that America contains a litany of voices and experiences that sometimes overlap and sometimes do not. But this awareness is not as old as America, and the culturally diverse beginning of America has been lost in discourse that centers on those who held the central power, namely the white European males. Toni Morrison's extended essay, "Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination," engages this issue by recognizing that the assumed audience of much early American Literature was the white male. But this cannot erase the African presence, not only in literature, but in colonial life. This concept can be extended to American Indians and other marginalized groups.

One strand of contemporary American Literature attempts to reimagine colonial America with current understanding of multiculturalism and recognition of the evils of slavery and other injustices. Not surprisingly, Morrison herself wrote one such book that

Gordon Hutner and Sandra Gustafson use as exemplary to this task. In *A Mercy*, an American Indian girl and multiple African American slaves are literally given a voice to tell their story, and the America they inhabit is not the paradise of Whitman's imagination. Hutner and Gustafson label Morrison's vision of colonial America as "dystopic," recognizing that the identity contradictions of America have been present since before the founding of the United States. Arac's concepts of *Global* and *Babel* have survived American history and continue today.

That is why I suggest that America, ironically, *is* the space of Whitman's contradiction. America is somewhere between a united, cohesive entity and a land of absolutely isolated individuals. Further, I suggest that both ideals must continue to exist in order for us to be able to talk about American identity. We must continue to group together experiences and label them, so that individual decisions to conform to or deviate from the pattern have meaning. As Wai Chee Dimock notes in her introduction, "American" is simultaneously arbitrary and meaningful. The tendency towards specialization in academic institutions has forced scholars to categorize works into areas. These divisions have then been placed on texts that previously had no such label. Not many authors sit down to write "a 21st century American Literature novel," or at least not in those words. Yet that is exactly how academic institutions have framed literary scholarship and the canon of texts. The original organization may be somewhat arbitrary, but since scholarship has been entrenched in this understanding, it has become meaningful. With the recent expansion (and perhaps even elimination) of the traditional literary canon, Dimock hopes that we can move towards a global understanding of American literature, not only through recovering non-canonical texts and including

contemporary literature, but by opening up our interpretations of canonical texts. In this way, the borders of American identity can be exposed as fluid and changing; not fixed and rigid.

If America, then, is a land of contradiction and fluctuation between the extremes of unification and individualism, or *Global* and *Babel*, then American Literature is the expression of this complex identity. The importance of studying an open-ended American Literature is that it precludes our falling into a state of extreme *Global* or *Babel* that Arac warns about in his essay. It resists the erasure of individual difference and allows all voices to speak. As Ralph Bauer argues, the literary traditions and critical ideologies of the United States are not absolute and should not be copied onto all texts written in the Americas or elsewhere. The inclusion of non-canonical texts in American Literature studies does not simply give credence to newly discovered texts that meet a certain standard of greatness in our estimation, but actively breaks down our standards by exposing them as culturally specific. On the other hand, studying American literature from a variety of cultural voices also teaches us how to listen to voices that seem strange to our own ears. The problem in the Tower of Babel is that the men do not understand each other. If today's America is to be more than a Tower of Babel, we must learn how to listen. Studying American Literature can give us the ears to understand the cultural languages of America. Three of the texts on my reading list embody the struggle of American identity in distinct but meaningful ways and exemplify how literature can speak through cultural borders: Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Alexie's protagonist, Arnold Spirit, or "Junior," feels trapped by cultural destiny on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington. Junior has faced the death of friends and family at the hands of alcohol and inescapable poverty, and feels the one thing that unites the Reservation is a lack of hope. When Junior leaves the Rez and his best friend Rowdy for Rearden High School, full of hope and white people, he cuts ties with the nation of Spokane Indians who now label him a traitor. He begins the novel as part of the pattern of Indian experience, as part of a cohesive group, united in a hopeless destiny. He gains individualism and hope at the expense of this community. This creates a complicated set of emotions, especially when he beats his best friend Rowdy in a basketball game and embarrasses the underdog Spokane high school as part of the "white" team. Junior gains a sense of peace in the resolution when he recognizes that he is a member of an endless set of tribes, including the Tribe of Basketball players and the Tribe of Masturbating Teenagers. This echoes Emerson's "Circles" which recognizes that the categories we fit into are endless and overlapping. Reading and studying Junior's "Diary" as literature accomplishes the two goals stated above: On one hand, it speaks from the perspective of a Reservation Indian trying to find hope and identity as an American without sacrificing his culture. Without experiencing this struggle the reader cannot understand it, but literature like this at least paints a picture of it. On the other hand, it does not essentialize "American Indian" experience, especially when Junior notes how different Montana Indians are from Spokane Indians. This small detail reminds the reader that he or she is only reading one story, or listening to one voice, in a nation of voices that can all speak.

In Yang's graphic novel Jin has a hard time fitting in to his American school. He is both American (born and raised solely in the United States) and Chinese (both his parents are Chinese immigrants), yet cannot identify with either. He is considered ineligible to date the girl that he likes and literally sacrifices his identity to become white overnight. He takes on the persona of Danny, the all-American basketball player, pestered by his distant cousin Chin-Kee each year, the epitome of every negative Chinese stereotype. When they eventually fight over Chin-Kee's behavior, they each return to their original form. It turns out Chin-Kee is a Monkey King who mastered the twelve arts of Kung-Fu and transformed into a deity more powerful than any other. When the Creator of the world buried the Monkey King under a pile of rocks, it took five hundred years and the help of a humble disciple for him to accept his original form as a monkey and climb out of his trap. When the Monkey King shares his story with Jin, he finally accepts his Chinese identity and seeks to make amends for his wrongs. Jin's journey reverses Junior's, in that Jin sacrifices his individualism to gain community. However, a community where Jin must be someone he is not cannot solve his problems. Anyone who has experienced culture clash surely finds something to relate to in this story. Jin's struggle is not absolutely unique. Yet this particular book is. Yang uses a non-traditional form, the graphic novel, and a Chinese fable of the Monkey King, to set the stage for this 'commonplace' American struggle. Diverse readers can relate on a personal level to Jin's struggle while simultaneously opening their ears to a foreign voice and method of storytelling. As Jin accepts his Chinese American nature, non-Chinese Americans must reciprocate and accept the new forms and particular struggles that he brings.

Toni Morrison's novel, *Song of Solomon*, engages African American identity in a variety of subtle ways, but focusing on Milkman Dead allows us to parallel somewhat with the protagonists of the previous two books, also young (read: immature) men. Milkman begins the book surrounded by characters who have embraced their "blackness" in a variety of ways, but he seems to lack an identity of his own. He contrasts most readily with Guitar, his militant best friend who joins the secret Seven Days group, committed to retaliating in kind for every murder of a black person by a white person. While Guitar's morality is questionable, it often seems preferable to Milkman's lackadaisical and "non-serious" attitude about life as he abuses the romantic love of Hagar and the familial love of his aunt, Pilate. When Milkman goes on a journey to find his father's lost inheritance, he uncovers a lost family history that includes his great-grandfather Solomon growing wings and flying away, like the mythical Africans who flew back to Africa to escape slavery in America. As he travels he realizes how his family, and a black presence in general, has been central to the formation of towns such as Shalimar (supposedly named after Solomon) in the South. His acceptance of identity comes in uncovering his family history, culminating in the final scene when he feels that he grows wings and flies at Guitar. Milkman's voice speaks for an African presence in the formation of America that has been lost. Since his father Macon Dead received his name from a drunken white man who filled in the wrong boxes during Macon's Freedman's Bureau registration, Milkman evokes Solomon and in doing so reaches behind the history that has been symbolically covered over by white men to touch his true African roots. Milkman's voice speaks on one level for African Americans as a cultural group, yet is met immediately with conflict by another African American who has a

different take on how to handle race relations. Guitar shows how Milkman's discovery cannot and does not embody African American identity. As with American identity discussed earlier, African American identity inhabits the space between a generalization and an individual experience. Being aware of these conflicts situates the reader more deeply in American identity, both historically and culturally.

Gregory S. Jay shows how the Declaration of Independence has been appropriated by a variety of groups to mean a variety of things in American history. Its original intention was to include land-owning white males, but the same words have echoed through our history in the struggles for civil rights for women and blacks, as well as other groups. This constant revision of American ideals does not stop there. "The American Dream" must be re-thought, but not abandoned. In Emerson and Whitman's rhetoric, "The American Dream" gives opportunity where no options remain. The words on the Statue of Liberty, embracing the tired and the poor, represent the ideals that have brought so many immigrants to America in the search for freedom from past oppression. This journey continues today and shows up in much of American Literature, allowing us to re-think the ideals of this concept. The concept of America as the land of opportunity and freedom from the past is problematic because individuals bring their baggage with them. Since America never achieved this ideal, it continued to take on more baggage as the country grew. In rebellion of a glorified "American Dream," much of American literature focuses on the failed expectations of freedom achieved in America in a direct way.

In Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, the past takes the form of *karma*. Mai evacuates Vietnam as a teenager but her mother fears that the sins of Mai's grandfather, Baba Quan, will come back to haunt their family, even in America. The fear of such karma becomes a

reality when Mai's mother commits suicide. In Junot Diaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the cultural baggage takes on the form of the dreaded *fuku*, unleashed on the family when Oscar's grandfather Abelard crosses the all-powerful Dominican dictator, Trujillo. Oscar's mother Beli barely escapes the Dominican Republic and seeks freedom in New York, but the *fuku* echoes down the generations and kills Oscar (back in the D.R.) as a relatively young man. William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* evokes Sophie's guilt at being partly complicit in the crimes of the Nazis during the Holocaust in Europe. She cannot escape the guilt she brings with her to America, ending her life in a suicide pact with her bi-polar boyfriend, Nathan. Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* shows how the haunting of the past not only resides on the soil of the United States. Jose Arcadio Buendia moves with his wife Ursula and founds the town of Macondo as a fresh start and a way to get away from the ghost of the man he killed. But the family curse invoked by either the murder or possible inbreeding (the two feared they were related) catches up to every descendant in the family, mashing up all their fates together—not one of them with a happy ending. The family is finally finished off with unmistakable inbreeding and a child with horns immediately eaten by ants. Alexie's Junior deals with the baggage of alcoholism that began when Europeans first introduced “fire-whisky” to the American Indians. His wonderful grandmother dies by a drunk driver and his courageous sister burns alive while passed out drunk. Milkman Dead also confronts bondage of the past, including the ramifications of his mother's incestuous relationship with her father.

I suggest re-working the “American Dream,” and I believe literature plays a significant role in this process. Perhaps the American Dream has become the “American

Journey.” The distinction is important because dreams are not real, but a journey is. This journey is our attempt to place ourselves as individuals in America. To accomplish this we must be able to communicate—both to speak and to listen. Literature can help give us the language. We must try to recognize our own baggage and accept that of others. This is, in some ways, a return to an ideal that can never fully be achieved. But that is exactly what America is: an ideal that will never be achieved. But we must keep trying. We must keep our ears open.

Dr. Robbins' Comments:

“Very thoughtful and thought-provoking work here.

Here are some of the strengths I saw in the essay:

1) You grapple energetically with debates around the key terms of “American” and “literature,” and you make a strong case for

- how significant literary texts are engaging important questions about identity in American culture (including what it means to be an American and how some are excluded from positions of agency and social power);
- how the study of American literatures can play an important role in individuals’ lives;
- why some of the familiar metaphors, such as “American dream” need to be re-thought;
- how some recent scholarship is raising striking issues about the field of American literature and its significance to the larger society.

2) You demonstrate sound knowledge of the primary texts you chose to write about.

3) You do thoughtful work connecting those texts to each other and to your essay’s central questions.

Here are some questions for further discussion:

1) In the first part of your essay, you present a critique of ideal visions of “America” and, implicitly, of inadequate approaches to studying American literature. What is YOUR definition of “America” now, and why? What literatures (or body of texts or types of texts) are particularly important to include in the field of study called “American lit” and

why? In other words, how does your collection of texts, presented here, represent your own overarching view of the field today and its possibilities? (for readers? For students/scholars? For writers? For any/all of those?)

2) You close with the argument of replacing the “dream” with the journey, but you also suggest that the ideal/dream serves an important function. Might we want to discuss how these terms/concepts are connected, and how they shape or define the work of scholarship and teaching in the field, in the end?”

Dr. Steele’s Comments:

“Good grappling with the questions in this exam.

I’d like to see you be more specific about genre and sub-genre. When you’re discussing a novel, say that rather than “text”. But with Alexie, you’re working with, I suspect, a hybrid form – bildungsroman and graphic novel. With ea.

I’d also like to see you work to be more explicit about the tools you use for interpretation in this exam. First, what critics and interpretative frameworks are essential for you in unpacking these novels? And, what readings have you done (both for this list and before preparing for these exams) that shape your understanding of a) American; b) literature; c) the novel?”

BRITISH LITERATURE EXAM
Taken February 15th, 2012

Essay Prompt:

Terry Eagleton has commented that because the “realist novel is the very model of liberal impartiality, such an Olympian standpoint is hard to come by in a divided society” such as Great Britain after World War I. If British Modernist, Postmodernist, and Postcolonial authors have mostly eschewed realism, what have they written instead? Drawing on at least FOUR novels from your list, classify the fiction in terms of narrative type and aesthetic style and the extent to which each author eschews realism. Be sure, as well, to consider how the problem of a “divided society” is both a thematized topic and an aesthetic aspect of the narrative.

Response:

Several different critical narratives frame British literature in the 20th century. Paul Fussler delineates the ways that Britain’s participation in World War I affected the way fiction writers responded to the world. Words that once celebrated the best ideals of man, such as ‘honor’ and ‘valor,’ became empty and ironic in the face of trench warfare that mercilessly took the lives of millions of soldiers. Fiction that focused on courtships and etiquette became obsolete in favor of more ‘serious’ novels. Following Freud’s psychological breakthroughs and the demystification of the singular greatness of Britain, authors looked for new ways to depict their country that situated their characters as individuals in a diverse society, not only within England, but globally. Dominic Head points to around 1950 as the time when authors recognize that “depicting England” in a novel is an impossible task. Each writer can only offer a piece of the puzzle. But this

began much earlier than 1950. In rejecting the psychology of the traditional realist novel that details events from one authoritative perspective, modernist and postmodernist authors beginning around the turn of the century began to seek new forms and aesthetic modes to present their views of the world. However, rarely did an author outright deny realism. Instead, each author found a unique way to reappropriate realism to not only tell a story or compose a vision, but to challenge the concept of realism itself.

The four authors discussed here exemplify reappropriation of realism in nuanced ways. Virginia Woolf's realism sticks to the events of a single, relatively uneventful day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway, but her shifting perspectives question the singular authority of a central narrator. Samuel Beckett questions the reliability of any perspective by blending the outside world with the troubled mind of a mentally unstable character, shifting realism from how things are seen and felt to how things are spoken and thought. J. G. Farrell returns to Victorian realist style to lampoon it in satire, exposing not only colonialist thought but the form of the foreign romance novel and how it lacks the ability to express reality. Salman Rushdie writes magical realism to try to overcome the boundaries in strict realism that preclude the portrayal of the Indian country. Just as modernism did not "disappear" with the emergence of postmodernism, realism has not lost its place in British literature, but has rather given way to a sort of "post-realism," that constantly reinvents itself in new ways to portray reality.

Virginia Woolf eschews traditional realist style in *Mrs. Dalloway* by shifting the narrative voice from the external world to the internal mind. We know Clarissa Dalloway by the way she thinks, not by the way she looks or seems on the outside. Woolf's aesthetic style in the novel is simple, bare, and honest. Since Clarissa is only responsible

for portraying her own voice and not encompassing an entire society, the clarity and simplicity of the style works effectively. Woolf's style makes the novel difficult to classify, especially when the speaking voice shifts away from Clarissa to other characters, such as Septimus. Not only does she escape the traditional realist label, but she denies categories altogether. Clarissa verbalizes this explicitly when she lets go of naming things, claiming she will no longer say of anyone "they are this" or "they are that," or even of herself, "I am this" or "I am that." To allow this statement to speak for the novel's identity, *Mrs. Dalloway* identifies itself as breaking new ground in reforming the concept of literary realism (just as the character Mrs. Dalloway breaks new ground in reforming the concept of a woman and a wife).

Andrew Roberts and Randall Stevenson provide context for Woolf's decision to narrate internally by noting the ways that modernist fiction responds to the cultural changes occurring in the early 20th century. Roberts claims that two British immigrants, Henry James from America and Joseph Conrad from Poland, experienced culture clash in England which exposed them to the difficulties of cultural and individual difference. This caused them both to question the authority of a single narrator and this skepticism of narrative tradition reveals itself in their writing. Roberts credits Conrad for introducing the difference between "narrator" and "narrative voice" in *Heart of Darkness*, which leads to a variety of new narrative forms, such as Woolf's interior-focused narrative and the thought-stream techniques employed by James Joyce and others. Stevenson credits Freud's discoveries concerning the way the human mind works and individual subjectivity for providing the intellectual ground for Woolf's perspective shift. Stevenson also points to Picasso's revolution in artistic techniques to parallel Woolf's literary

reforms. Notably, Picasso's paintings show, for the first time in Western art, multiple perspectives inside the same picture, just as Woolf's novel speaks from multiple perspectives in the same novel. Since *Mrs. Dalloway* contains no marked chapter breaks and narrates the events of only one day, the novel in one sense reads like a cohesive unit, not unlike a picture or painting. Yet, most notably in the final scene at the party, the narrative perspective shifts unpredictably and disorients the reader, just as Picasso's paintings disorient the viewer.

In this final scene at the party Woolf represents Eagleton's "divided society" most explicitly. Each voice must speak for itself. Whereas a realist novel with an omniscient (or even limited) narrator would depict the events and dialogue in a structured sequence, Woolf opts for a disruptive glimpse-by-glimpse scene that not only represents the divided reality of the party, but symbolically, the divided reality of English society. Woolf's decision to speak from multiple perspectives gives *Mrs. Dalloway* layers of meaning, not only textually, but culturally. As Marianne Dekoven points out, early feminist authors such as Woolf and Gertrude Stein were pivotal in providing modernism with the attitude of breaking down traditional power structures and definitions of authority. The multiple perspectives reveal the various motives and purposes of individuals that represent England. Clarissa's voice questions the big decisions that affect the lives of women in British society. She marries Richard and not Peter because it was the safe choice, and while Richard is not a bad man, she feels unable to connect to him on an intimate level, which forces her to question whether it's possible to connect with men at all on that level. Clarissa's voice gives marriage multiple dimensions, extending beyond the way the man perceives it. Septimus speaks for the World War I veterans who fell from poetic idealism

to depression following the horrors of trench warfare. These voices do not criticize or try to encompass other views. They simply speak. It is the voices in *Mrs. Dalloway* that break barriers and deny uniformity in both literature and culture.

In *Molloy*, Samuel Beckett shares Virginia Woolf's distrust of a reliable and authoritative narrative voice, but takes this distrust in an aesthetically new direction. Where *Mrs. Dalloway* uses simple, straightforward observations and descriptions, *Molloy* deliberately complicates language to represent the psychological turmoil of the narrator and the complexity of thought produced. As *Mrs. Dalloway* shifts from one perspective to another, *Molloy* digs deeper into the perspective of the individual. Though Beckett did not introduce the thought-stream style when he wrote *Molloy*, he takes it one step further than his predecessors by speaking from the mind of a psychologically unstable character (to put it delicately). Beckett, like the modernist authors before him, questions the mind/body dichotomy, and his character Molloy has difficulty distinguishing himself from his surroundings. The second part opens with "All is sleeping, I am calm," misplacing the "all" and the "I" from "I am sleeping, all is calm." When the narrator is insane (or at least troubled), the breakdown of the difference between the self and the surroundings creates major problems.

Steven Connor's distinction between the postmodernist and modernist narrative style is useful in showing how Beckett's novel breaks aesthetic ground. Connor suggests that the primary question of modernist fiction is "who sees?" whereas postmodernist fiction, such as Beckett's, asks "who speaks?" In this way, modernist fiction (like Woolf's) questions the singular authority of a dominant perspective by revealing the existence of other perspectives, whereas postmodernist fiction questions the authority of

each individual perspective by revealing its inherent flaws. Georg Lukacs partners Molloy with Faulkner's "idiot" Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, who narrates his chapter in the book through his troubled voice. Through speaking from Molloy's perspective, Beckett doesn't create a new form to replace realism, but rather questions whether realism is still possible. If what's real to Molloy is that he is actually the detective Jacques Moran seeking information on this "Molloy" character, then *Molloy* can be read as a form of realism. Yet this form of realism paradoxically breaks down realism as a useful category given the ridiculousness of the consequences of Molloy as narrator.

Molloy cannot evoke the divided society of Britain as overtly as *Mrs. Dalloway*, but in a philosophical way it takes the concept of a divided society even further. When Molloy, as the detective Moran in the second half of the book, identifies multiple "Molloys" he calls into question the singularity of the self. The proliferation of "Molloys" represents the different characters that individuals can play in life. Events and conversations change people, sometimes even dramatically and quickly. People also act differently in different situations, sometimes acting contrary to established character. If individuals are not even static or uniform, then a divided society becomes even more so. Beckett argues that society is not only divided, but that the individuals that divide a society are divided themselves. Therefore, it is not only a flaw in the form of the novel that precludes the depiction of a divided society, but a flaw in the concept itself. *Molloy* suggests that society will *always* be divided due to the nature of individuals.

In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, J. G. Farrell ostensibly returns to the form of realism to satirize the Victorian foreign romance novel. Equipped with a postcolonial attitude that

recognizes the absurdity of the predominant British attitude during colonialism, Farrell reinvents the classic Victorian characters in colonial India. In his narrative these characters perform more like caricatures, each embodying to its absurd conclusion a philosophical position or viewpoint. Characters don't really grow. No, they are too busy talking. The adversity of being under siege does not cause character growth because the characters don't act like they are in any danger. They seem assured that the British will be victorious and they will be saved in a matter of time. Farrell's aesthetic choice of using one-dimensional caricatures makes satirizing them easy and natural. Never in the book does Farrell use an outside narrator to criticize the characters directly, but rather pits them against each other to expose their own flaws. Each chapter seems to contain a central argument or issue that exposes the attitudes of the characters. We read the book as satire given the publication date, but had the book been written a hundred years earlier we might label it imperialist (and racist) realist fiction. Such is the authenticity and craftsmanship of Farrell's work.

One significant contribution that Postcolonial Studies has provided in literature is the recognition that once-colonized countries must speak for themselves. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* attempts to give India its own voice through Dr. Aziz, but fails on account of the author. The book very much depicts Forster's conception of India, which seems shallow given the complexity of the country. This makes Farrell's decision to omit an Indian voice (for the most part) deliberate and meaningful. On one level, Farrell eschews speaking for the Indians due to recognition that he cannot speak for them, as Forster attempted. Perhaps he admits that it would be better not to try. On another level Farrell desires to stay true to the colonial realist style, which also predominantly failed to

recognize the Indians as having their own voice. But perhaps the most significant result of this decision is that it allows Farrell's characters to treat the Indians as members of a group, not as individuals. This comes up a few times in the novel, including when the Collector is forced to decide who they can protect and keep "safe" in the compound. Do "Native Christians" make the cut? The Collector opts for a one-size-fits-all solution and gives them all a certificate of loyalty. There is no question here of whether or not the individuals even want the certificate because they have no voice.

This gives significant import to the few times that Farrell breaks this silence through the Indian character Hari, who the British assume remains loyal to them throughout the siege (but he certainly appears not to). When Hari meets George Fleury he is shocked that Fleury is not a religious man and cannot understand his lack of spirituality. This brief scene reverses the British tendency to categorize Indians as homogenous by showing how it looks from the object's point of view in cultural standardization. Hari's conception of the white man is religious, probably due to his interaction with missionaries and preachers that he has spoken with. So he wrongly assumes the same about Fleury. This book shows the absurdity of the concept of a uniform "British colonist" that Hari's assumption suggests. Within the pages of this book we meet the Collector, bound by duty and a feeling of importance to organize the British as effectively as possible, the Magistrate, with crude poetic taste and a near-worship of logic and rationalism, the Padre, unable to see anything as unrelated to religion, Fleury, naïvely aesthetic and idealistic, Dr. Dunstaple, stubbornly championing the advances of 'proven' science in medical techniques despite overwhelming evidence in favor of his rival, Dr. McNab's, less orthodox techniques, Louise, trying to find the balance between

her desires and British etiquette, Miriam, the strong-willed and socially liberated widow, and Lucy, the seduced (and therefore outcast) beauty, among others. Given this litany of characters, the idea of a uniform “British” person is absurd. But as Hari, the Indian, evokes this absurdity in classifying the British, the novel also silently questions the false perception of India’s uniformity.

Salman Rushdie responds to this silence by speaking the fractured voice of India in *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie stretches the boundaries of realism that would make his project impossible by breaking from strict logic and employing magical realist techniques. In such a style, the novel reads like realism but departs seamlessly into imagined space in order to depict what is “real” in a new way. Specifically, Rushdie uses his protagonist, Saleem Sinai, to represent the multitude of Indian voices by allowing him the power to telepathically hear the voices inside others’ heads like a radio. The magical realism comes out in a variety of other ways, such as when the hardworking Indian businessman becomes white (and is proud of it), but the central fantasy surrounds the thousand children born between midnight and 1am on the day of India’s independence from England. These children each possess a supernatural gift, the power of which is determined by how close to midnight they were born. Saleem is born at the stroke of midnight with his rival Shiva (and switched at birth), so these two children possess the most powerful gifts. Saleem’s gift allows him to communicate at night with all of “Midnight’s Children,” which is how Saleem comes to represent the country. Indeed, Saleem claims this about himself, declaring that he *is* the country of India, and to understand him, one must swallow a world.

Rushdie also departs from realism in the same way that Conrad does in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's narrator tells his own story with decades of reflection time between the events of the novel and the time of telling. Time distorts memory, and if a narrator present at the events he narrates is deemed unreliable, then a narrator decades later presents even more reason to doubt the strictness of "realism." Similarly, Saleem Sinai tells his story as a dying man years later. The scenes that step out of the narrative and into Saleem's later life show the effects that his life has had on him and allows the reader to reinterpret the central narrative as he or she reads, given new details. This reveals the tendency that Steven Connor points out in postmodernist fiction to break down the strict barriers between the past and the present to show how the two are related. The present directly grows out of the past and cannot break from it, yet we only can understand the past through the mindset of the present. As Saleem narrates he reveals that his body is literally drying out and cracking because he cannot contain all the voices of India, which frames his narrative about his past in such a way that the reader expects to hear these voices, the voices of the *Midnight Children*. The reader also never truly fears for Saleem's life or sanity, even in the life-threatening wilderness when he appears crazy or as Shiva hunts him down. The reader knows he survives to tell the tale. But the voices that cannot be contained inside Saleem's body provide Eagleton's "divided society" with a vivid picture of the danger of attempting to represent the division within a single entity. The implication is that the voices will eventually escape. Rushdie uses the date of India's independence not only in an obvious sense to celebrate the break from British subjugation and control but to subtly warn against the impossibility of absolute uniformity and the lack of peace in India. Rushdie echoes Forster's Dr. Aziz, when he

notes that “there is no such thing as the general Indian.” No scene strikes quite so close to reality as when the *Midnight’s Children* reach the age when they begin to develop political and social ideologies and they can no longer agree on anything, causing the group to fall apart. The implication is that only children can ignore the differences until they become serious enough to recognize how the differences force division. Rushdie demystifies the notion of a fully “united” India. Through magical realism, he certainly touches the reality of the Indian condition.

When T.S. Eliot proclaimed that the novel had ended with Flaubert and James, he must not have envisioned the way that the novel can reinvent itself through the creativity and effort of these novelists and others. His vision was limited by the forms and aesthetic modes of realism, which probably did peak in his estimation with the works of Flaubert and James. Instead, the opposite of Eliot’s prophecy has come true. The novel proliferates in England more now than ever, representing the myriad values and views held by the British population. In fact, the form and content of these novels embody the diverse society of Britain and former British colonies by rarely offering a distinct conclusion or singular message. Each book holds a complex array of characters and viewpoints which helps the novel to live on in a way that represents how life is lived, that is, with complexity. I share Andrew Roberts’ enthusiasm that the novel will live on, due to the contributions of these authors (and others) in breaking boundaries of form.

Dr. Steele's Comments:

“Great selection of novels to support your response here. They were complicated, textually-indeterminate and stylistically and thematically diverse; each of these qualities considerably notches up the difficulty in writing about them collectively. Kudos on tackling a hard question and selecting superb if hard novels to support your thesis.

I had some difficulty understanding how you differentiated between the different aesthetic modes – Modernism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, realism, magical realism. What are the key qualities that differentiate a Modernist and postcolonial novel, for example (like Mrs Dalloway to Midnight's Children)? And what critics, essays, books have been instrumental in your understanding of these distinctions?

I thought you were a bit inconsistent in answering one half of the BIG QUESTION of this exam: how is the problem of a “divided society” thematized topic in each narrative? So, what are the divisions in Mrs Dalloway? In Molloy? Etc.”

Dr. Robbins' Comments:

“A very engaging essay! I learned a lot from reading this piece and, in that regard, appreciated revisiting some texts I hadn't read in a very long time and learning about some “new to me” ones, such as Farrell's work.

For me, here were some notable strengths of the essay:

Very strong interweaving of the primary and secondary reading you did

Clear organizational structure; clear statement of argument; strong marshalling of evidence from the primary materials

Very effective closing paragraph

My main questions/suggestions for further thinking are around terms:

- What do we mean by “British” these days? As an outsider to the field, I would love to talk about the choice of “British” lit (with Rushdie included) versus Anglophone, say. I realize my question probably arises from the constant obsessing in “American” Studies about what we (should) mean by “American.” But I would still like to talk about this point.
- Also, I think that here and there throughout the essay, some insertions of your own definitions or descriptions of key terms (with often, just a phrase in parentheses needed to do the trick) would be helpful. See, for example, the spot where you drop in “magical realism,” which may or may not mean the same thing for Rushdie as for Marquez or other writers from the Americas like Allende.
- And just for fun: where do you see the British (or Anglophone) novel going next, and why?”

HYBRID EXAM
Taken February 17th, 2012

Essay Prompt:

Surprisingly, in many elite high schools throughout the country, the old curriculum model of “Beowulf to Virginia Woolf” still persists. Imagine that you were to be hired to teach 10th grade English at one such school, such as Fort Worth Country Day or Episcopal School of Dallas, and you wished to considerably broaden and update this curriculum. Given that both administrative staff and parents are deeply committed to the ideas of “literary tradition” and “literary merit,” compose a letter that makes a case for adding FIVE new novels, selected from both of your lists, that you think best exemplify the importance of 20th-century prose fiction. In your letter, explain how these novels continue or challenge the idea of “tradition” and provide concrete literary details of what makes each work significant to you, whether in terms of theme, artistry, or intertextuality.

Response:

Greetings,

First of all, I cannot overstate my gratitude for this opportunity to teach 10th grade English at your school. My 12th grade English teacher was one of the most influential people in my life, and I hope to emulate his passion for teaching and for watching students grow. Since the curriculum for this course has traditionally contained books under the heading of “Beowulf to Virginia Woolf,” I must, however, urge for a revision of content considering the great works of the 20th century and beyond. I do not wish to replace every work, but to extend our options by including some more recent novels that I think will provide a greater learning environment for our students. My ultimate goal here

is to justify my decision to include five novels in the curriculum, each written after 1950, which have traditionally been excluded from this course. But let me begin by recognizing the importance of our literary tradition and our conception of “literary merit.” I do not wish to abandon these deeply entrenched notions, but rather to explore them, and to bring the students into the discussion.

In recent decades, the notion that certain books contain “inherent” greatness has been called into question by many academics. Historical factors that have contributed to the reputation of books have been exposed, and the various ways that books have been used have become just as important as the books themselves. I believe that we should not ignore this challenge in the literature classroom. Without “picking a side,” I want to recognize this debate as central to understanding the work we do in studying literature, including which texts we read and how to interpret them. Rather than authoritatively tell students which books are “great” and then have them memorize the meaning of certain symbols or characters, I would rather encourage students to evaluate *why* certain books might be considered great, allowing them to agree or disagree. The classroom, however, will not become an anything-goes free-for-all discussion in which every opinion is equally valid. My goal is for students to support their opinion with contextualized facts and textual details. Meaning and significance are points of contention in novels, and placing students inside these tensions allows them to engage the texts, and the history of literature, in a critical and thoughtful way.

Many of the books traditionally taught for this course have gained their significance from being central to debates of meaning and evaluations of merit. For example, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* was considered inconsequential for over thirty

years and now ranks on just about every list of “best American novels.” In a similar way, more recent texts have undergone scrutiny when compared to traditionally great novels, but that does not make them unworthy of study. Through opening up the course to these new texts, I aim to give the students a voice in this debate, contextualized by literary history and substantiated by a nuanced understanding of these complex novels. Additionally, many books that have been studied for decades have become singularized in meaning, including widely accessible notes online that allow students to not read and not think critically. By inserting fresh voices into the curriculum, I aim to open up the students’ minds about literature and literary tradition. The five books I recommend adding to the curriculum are Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim*, Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Maryse Conde’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*.

Prior to teaching *Lucky Jim*, I would ask students what expectations they have in reading a novel. For example, I would ask what they expect from a “protagonist.” With such an open question I’m bound to receive a variety of answers, and while my teaching will accommodate the focus of the students, the book will no doubt raise a few central questions. For example, is Jim Dixon a likeable protagonist? He is not courageous, kind, or heroic in a traditional sense, so if he is likeable, how does he accomplish this? To support this view, students might point to the way that he rebels against the institution in his final speech, finally being refreshingly honest about his disdain for Professor Welch and the academy. If he is not likeable, how does this affect the novel? Did you become uninterested as a reader? Students may find his constant reliance on alcohol or his

selfishness and single-mindedness in pursuing only his own needs off-putting. These students may point out that even in his final speech, where he “sticks it to the Man,” he is laughably drunk and only gets the desired job in the end because he is lucky. I would also ask the students to consider how the institution of the university is depicted by the characterization of Professor Welch and the seeming arbitrariness of Jim’s academic direction. Since most 10th grade students in this school are beginning to consider college options, I would ask them how this book colors their vision of college, or if the book affects it at all given that it’s over 50 years old and set in England. Lastly I would ask the students to consider if the book contains a “moral” or a “message” in any distinct way. Similar to how the questions about Jim as a protagonist provoke critical thinking about character, questions of meaning provide students with a means to critically assess the book’s merit and significance. In Jim’s conversation about “sweetness” with Margaret, he seemingly denounces the possibility of an unselfish act. Does this book, then, ‘teach’ anything, morally speaking? By partnering *Lucky Jim* with a traditional text that contains a more obvious moral (perhaps a Dickens novel), I could show the students that in the 19th century and beyond many writers have shifted away from unilaterally focused novels to the more complex messages that, in their view, represent more accurately the reality of life. Since students can find evidence to support a variety of viewpoints on the questions I raised above, their discussion of the book will engage their critical thinking skills and improve their ability to reason cognitively and argue persuasively. In the ideal classroom students would disagree about how to view Jim, allowing them to recognize how a book can be read in different ways. Beginning with a work like this demystifies the notion that students can only pass the class by having the “correct” interpretation or evaluation of a

novel. The stakes are bigger than that. I aim to teach these novels in a way that allows students to freely work their mind while listening and considering the points of view held by other students in the classroom.

To contextualize Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, I would partner it with a traditional children's story, such as *Peter Pan*. Again, I would ask students to consider expectations prior to reading the novel and evaluate these expectations as the students read. Helping students to understand how these expectations are formed and where they come from allows students to understand more deeply their process of reading. I would ask students to evaluate what details in the novel connect them, as readers, to the protagonist, Haroun, and which details alienate them. Does Haroun represent the "universal" child in his desire for a united family and a successful father, or is he uniquely Indian? As the book does read like a children's fantasy, I would encourage students to argue what values the book supports and how. Here the complexity of the novel allows for a variety of answers. When Blabbermouth saves the day, she does so as a lowly page girl, ironically reversing the trope of the "Knight in shining armor." This could either be used to suggest that the book argues against the idea of a "hero" or just that anyone can be a hero, regardless of class or gender. *Haroun* also contains an 'ocean' of symbolism (literal and figural) to explore with the students. The book also raises questions of national identity. Does Salman Rushdie represent Indian literature or English literature? Why (or why not) is this distinction important? Does this tension exist in the pages of the book? I would also give more information on Salman Rushdie to see if students read the novel differently given Rushdie's other accomplishments. Does it change *Haroun* to know that the author also wrote *Midnight's Children*, one of the most

highly acclaimed books of the last fifty years of British Literature, or *The Satanic Verses*, one of the most controversial? If so, how? As a children's book, *Haroun* brings in the wrinkle of genre to a discussion of literary merit. Since not every novel has the same scope, does this preclude children's books (or science fiction, or romance novels, or horror, etc.) from being considered "great literature?" In Rushdie's imagined world, the "good guys" are the ones who tell stories and the "bad guys" are the ones who reject imagination and story-telling. To evaluate how this book draws on the broader topic of literature, I would ask students to comment on whether or not they agree that stories and imagination are important, as the book suggests. This book provokes questions about the purpose of literature and the role it plays in our life. What are the consequences if we stop reading and telling stories? Are these consequences real or only imaginary? In this way, just as *Lucky Jim* helps to ground the environment of the classroom for the course by opening up literature, *Haroun* provides us with this underlying question that can be held up to each item on the reading list.

Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, would fit nicely in a comparative framework with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, most obviously given Tituba's meeting in the jail cell with Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. But the significance of this novel runs deeper than this meeting. The novel calls into question our notion of history and the significance of how events are depicted and from whose point of view. If one goal of literature is to help students to understand our history, then the question of who we read in literature becomes extremely significant. I argue that there is danger in providing a singular narrative of history. For example, if American history is taught only as the inevitability of European "manifest destiny" that led to the United

States as a land of freedom from oppression, many voices crucial to the formation of our country are left silent, such as the American Indians who gave up their land and the African Americans who were not included in early notions of freedom. Conde's narrative forces students to think about the complications of our history. Tituba, a slave from the Caribbean islands who is transported to Salem, claims in this novel to have been central to the initiation of the Salem Witch Hunt, one of the most famous events in early American history. Yet her role has been silenced in traditional historical accounts. Whether or not Conde's account should be read as "true history" is much less significant than the questions it raises about our concept of history and of the voices that have helped shape the United States. Simultaneously, given the form of the novel, *Tituba* raises another significant question in studying literature concerning the importance of a contextualized history. Does our view of the past affect our view of today? If so, how? If not, what is the purpose of studying history? Historical literature? The book also provides intersections between feminism and racial struggles, most poignantly in how Tituba bonds with Goodwife Parris as they are both beaten by Samuel. This shows how the various Civil Rights movements have overlapped since early in our history and continue today. Providing the historical context for the struggles of women and blacks (and other marginalized groups) prevents students from taking for granted the positive changes that have occurred in our history. This novel embodies these struggles in a way that might impact the students more directly than a simple listing of historical facts and figures. Such is the power of literature.

I believe most students would really enjoy reading Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Given that Alexie's protagonist, Junior, is a

fourteen-year old struggling with an identity crisis, I believe the students would relate easily to the character and appreciate Alexie's sense of humor. While I do not believe the goal of teaching literature is to simply find books that the students love to read, I do think it helps them engage the text when they enjoy it. Alexie's book is easily accessible, aimed at a teenage audience, including short chapters and hilarious cartoons to illustrate Junior's psyche. But the book also deftly engages questions of personal identity and communal responsibility. The book works on multiple levels, and I would encourage students to consider each of these levels of meaning. Most obviously, Junior undergoes the struggle of finding a place and a voice in an all-white school as a racial minority (or, more accurately, singularity). He leaves his Indian Reservation and his best friend Rowdy and becomes a "traitor" to Indian solidarity. As Alexie voices his semi-autobiographical experience through the voice of Junior, students can hear first-hand this conflict from the perspective of the outsider looking in. How Roger the Giant and Penelope, two white students that Junior encounters, treat Junior can cause students to evaluate how they treat marginalized individuals and the effects that such treatment can have. But Junior also undergoes the personal conflict of sacrificing community and friendship for the sake of hope in the future. This is a more universal struggle that Junior undergoes in his specific way. He also deals with the embarrassment of having less money than his peers, which is not a uniquely Indian struggle, and deals with an unreliable father. In some ways, then, Junior is a very relatable character, even though aspects of his struggle are singular to his experience. In the classroom, one goal of teaching this novel would be to have students recognize the ways that they feel like they are in the same tribe as Junior, and ways that they feel they are members of a different tribe (to use Junior's own metaphor). Since

multicultural America involves complicated identities, composed of differences in race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and other categories that intersect and contradict, I would emphasize the importance of being able to listen to the voices of others that hold a different perspective. Differences and similarities are both significant to identity, and this book provides a rich ground for students to enter this discussion. As this novel also provides formal and generic innovations, I would again give students the opportunity to evaluate and assess the merit of the novel in the context of a literature course. Why is this book worth reading (or why not)? In the end, Junior feels somewhat accepted in his new school, but reconnects with his friend Rowdy through a friendly game of basketball. This suggests that even when treated well in a new environment, it can be healthy to reconnect with your roots.

I might end my course with Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*, which breaks the mold of the traditional novel entirely as a graphic novel. Hopefully, by this point in the year, students will have formed some solid and substantiated opinions on the qualities that make a novel worth reading and studying. Ideally they will frame this graphic novel in the context of literature that they have formed throughout the course. The overt "message" of this story does appear obscure. The central character, Jin, has difficulty fitting in as a Chinese American and magically becomes white and popular overnight. Only when he returns to his original form and character can he truly be happy and content. But the story is told with three converging narratives that merge reality with a Chinese fable about a Monkey King and the farcical Chin Kee, who ridiculously embodies shallow Chinese stereotypes. Yang's choice to write a graphic novel to portray Jin's struggle for acceptance in America comments in a metafictional way on the struggle

itself. Yang tells the story in his own way, rather than conforming to Western novelistic traditions (although the graphic novel is not a uniquely Chinese tradition, the fable of the Monkey King is identifiably Chinese). On one level, this book extends the discussion that begins with Alexie's *Diary*, concerning the voices of multicultural America and our ability to listen and understand. But on another level, Yang's graphic novel broadens the students' understanding of what makes a 'text' powerful. A possible assignment for this book would be to ask students to consider something that is not a novel that fulfills their stated goals of great literature. Since, by this point in the semester, they will have established some formal categories for defining literature, such an assignment would draw off their previous work. For example, if one student suggests that literature aims to entertain the reader, challenge the reader's notions of how he or she views the world, and comment on society as a whole, then that student would find a song, film, piece of art, oral fable, or any other cultural object that accomplishes these tasks in a unique way. The choices the students make would stem from their own definitions of what makes great literature, based on the understanding they have gained throughout the semester. Yang's novel can open this door and encourage students to look past the classroom to identify opportunities to learn and listen as they continue to grow as individuals.

Since I do not aim to throw out all the traditional texts, but just to replace some of them with the novels mentioned here, students may hold a view that privileges the traditional texts and considers these newer texts to fall short of 'greatness.' Such a student still would have found value in this course if he or she can express what creates this distinction. It's obviously impossible to study every book and every voice, so the purpose of such a class is not to have a comprehensive understanding of literary history (I

have a Master's degree in literature and I am not even close to accomplishing such a task). Instead, the goal is to empower students by equipping them with the tools to understand the consequential debates about literature and the language to participate in the discussion. The consequences of the discussion are significant. I did not choose these texts arbitrarily. I believe each text will help students think more critically, listen to others more receptively, and voice themselves more effectively. Such skills are important no matter what career path the students choose.

Dr. Robbins' Comments:

“What a fun essay to read! I’m very glad you tackled this “different” kind of question and genre. Karen and I really wanted the exam experience to move you forward in your thinking about upcoming work, and since teaching appears to be a place you’ll be going soon, it was smart of you to take advantage of the opportunity to address the kind of curricular questions that come up in school settings—not only in secondary school, but other sites as well.

Here are some strengths I saw in this essay:

Solid command of the texts you chose to write about: your references to their content show that you know your material well and have thought about the readings deeply and productively. Bravo!

An interesting ‘collection’ of primary texts; that is, you clearly gave some thought to how they might work as a group, as well as individually, in the classroom. That is, these were generative choices individually, because each is a complex and engaging text, and there are some explicit and implicit connections across the “set”: Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim*, Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Maryse Conde’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*.

Strong, distinctive writing voice and polished style throughout, especially considering that you were doing a “timed” essay.

Some questions to think about further:

1) goal of imagined course: Early on, you say: “By inserting fresh voices into the curriculum, I aim to open up the students’ minds about literature and literary tradition.”

What do you mean or have in mind by “open up the students’ minds”? What kinds of issues do you want them to learn to address, and how? I think you wrote your way to a statement of the overarching aim—acquiring tools for examining the most consequential debates about lit. But for a reader, it would help to lay that goal out early on in the essay. How and where do you think you could do that now, in a brief addition to the opening sections and perhaps also through some transitions at the beginning of each section?

2) I’d love to have a bit more rationale on how the texts fit together in support of your unifying vision for your classroom and the course. I saw lots of implicit connections, and in a spot of two you are more explicit—as when you link Alexie’s and Yang’s books. I would have liked some statement early on about what the texts have in common that make them work together well. In other words, I think the “textual” level of analysis here is very strong, but would have liked to see a bit more “intertextual” work.

3) On the “intertextual” point: I think the brief mentions of Dickens and Hawthorne worked well. It wouldn’t have hurt to weave in a few more connections here and there to the “traditional” pieces you would plan to keep.”

Dr. Steele’s Comments:

“Interesting, albeit only implicitly defended, choices of texts for an expanded canon of fiction for high school students. Could have better explained the logic of your choices and what canonical novel would serve to pair effectively with the new one. Your claim is clearly stated (and it’s a great one) on page 5. Revision for organization would considerably enhance your letter.

Still fairly opaque, overall, in clarifying what you mean by “literary tradition” and “traditional” (we’d say, canonical) texts. Overall, I’d like to see you provide a better sense of how you’re defining key terms and how your definitions accord with critical conversations in the field. When using critics’ vocab, we need you to be more explicit about whether you’re adapting or depending on the original citational use of these words.

Rhetorically, this letter would not appease tradition-bound parents/colleagues, in part because you don’t fully convey your understanding of what “literary tradition” means (or what texts do and do not belong in the canon) or what literary tools you hope to teach to your students to value or understand literary qualities, such as characterization, theme, symbolism, irony, etc.”

FULL REVISION OF HYBRID EXAM

Greetings,

First of all, I cannot overstate my gratitude for this opportunity to teach 10th-grade English at your school. My 12th-grade English teacher was one of the most influential people in my life, and I hope to emulate his passion for teaching and for watching students grow. Since the curriculum for this course has traditionally contained books under the heading of “Beowulf to Virginia Woolf,” I suggest considering an expansion of course content to include great works written beyond the turn of the 20th-century. I do not wish to replace every work, but to bolster a curriculum focused on ‘classic’ texts with more contemporary novels that show how literature has evolved and continues to evolve. My ultimate goal here is to justify my proposal to include five novels in the curriculum, each written after 1950, which have traditionally been excluded from this course. But let me begin by recognizing the importance of our literary tradition and our conception of literary merit. I do not wish to abandon these established and valuable notions, but rather to explore them, and to bring the students into the discussion.

In recent decades many scholars have questioned whether certain books contain “inherent” greatness, suggesting that the way books are used contributes to their meaning. Also, traditional values in evaluating literature encourage circularity that affirms texts that conform to previously held standards. Scholars are looking for new ways to evaluate literature that tries to recognize our historical limitations and biases. This has led to an opening up of the traditional canon, asking scholars to truly evaluate what makes books worthy of study in the classroom. Every teacher must face the challenges that arise when he or she chooses certain texts to teach. Further, I believe that we should not ignore this

challenge in the literature classroom. Without “picking a side,” I want to recognize these debates as central to understanding the work we do in studying literature, including which texts we read and how to interpret them. Rather than authoritatively tell students which books are “great” and then have them memorize the meaning of certain symbols or characters, I would rather encourage students to evaluate *why* certain books might be considered great, and equip them with the tools to participate in the discussion. The classroom will not become an anything-goes free-for-all discussion in which every opinion is equally valid. My goal is for students to support their opinion with contextualized facts and textual details. Meaning and significance are points of contention in novels, and placing students inside these tensions allows them to engage the texts, and the history of literature, in a critical and thoughtful way. One major factor in my decision to recommend these texts is a desire to see students understand the different ways that literature has been used, and the different frameworks through which literature can be evaluated.

Many of the books traditionally taught for this course have gained their significance from being central to debates of meaning and evaluations of merit. For example, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* was considered inconsequential for thirty years after its original publication by critics and now ranks on just about every list of “best American novels.” In a similar way, more recent texts have undergone scrutiny when compared to traditionally great novels, but that does not make them unworthy of study. Through opening up the course to these new texts, I aim to give the students a voice in this debate, contextualized by literary history and substantiated by a nuanced understanding of these complex novels. Additionally, many books that have been studied

for decades have widely accepted and known meaning, purveyed extensively by widely accessible notes online that allow students to avoid thinking critically about the texts. By inserting fresh voices into the curriculum, I aim to avoid standardized meaning that students can memorize to allow room for students to engage critically about literature and literary tradition. In this way, the course would focus on equipping students with tools to analyze and interpret, contextualizing each novel in critical frameworks and history. The five books I recommend adding to the curriculum are Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim*, Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and Gene Luen Yang's graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*.

I would teach *Lucky Jim* early in the course to establish my expectations for discussing literature throughout the year. In *Lucky Jim*, Kingsley Amis depicts Jim Dixon, a history lecturer at a university trying to become a full-time professor. However, Jim finds the hoops he must jump through to impress Professor Welch too much and ends up rejecting this path in favor of being honest and openly ridiculing the academic institution. Jim is anything but a hero, and even though he ends up with a better job, his good fortune comes more from luck than any personal character growth. While each book offers many aspects for study, I would begin a discussion of *Lucky Jim* by focusing on the character of Jim Dixon. I would ask what the students expect from a typical "protagonist." With such an open question I'm bound to receive a variety of answers, and while my teaching will accommodate the responses of the students, the book will no doubt raise a few central questions. For example, is Jim Dixon a likeable protagonist? He is not courageous, kind, or heroic in a traditional sense, so if he is likeable, how does

Amis accomplish this? To support this view, students might point to the way that he rebels against the institution in his final speech, finally being refreshingly honest about his disdain for Professor Welch and the academy. If he is not likeable, how does this affect the novel? Did you become uninterested as a reader? Students may find his weakness (through reliance on alcohol) or his selfishness and single-mindedness in pursuing only his own needs off-putting. These students may point out that even in his final speech, where he “sticks it to the Man,” he is laughably drunk and only gets the desired job in the end because he is lucky.

I would also ask the students to consider how the institution of the university is depicted by the characterization of Professor Welch and the seeming arbitrariness of Jim’s academic direction. Since most 10th-grade students in this school are beginning to consider college options, I would ask them how this book colors their vision of college, or if the book affects it at all given that it’s over 50 years old and set in England. Lastly I would ask the students to consider if the book contains a “moral” or a “message” in any distinct way. Similar to how the questions about Jim as a protagonist provoke critical thinking about character, questions of meaning (What is the book about? What does it say?) provide students with a means to critically assess the book’s merit and significance. In Jim’s conversation about “sweetness” with Margaret, he seemingly denounces the possibility of an unselfish act. Does this book, then, “teach” anything, morally speaking? I could partner *Lucky Jim* with Charles Dickens’ classic novella *A Christmas Carol*, as both texts focus on a flawed central character. However, Scrooge has a more obvious and morally clear conflict to resolve, which he does, and his character growth leads to a happy ending. Jim Dixon experiences a happy ending of sorts, but lacks the moral growth

of Scrooge. This creates a nice contrast for students to discuss. Since students can find evidence to support a variety of viewpoints on the questions I raised above, their discussion of the book will engage their critical thinking skills and improve their ability to reason cognitively and argue persuasively. More importantly, in the context of the literature classroom, *Lucky Jim* will establish the concept that meaning in literature is not a unilateral assessment of a book, but rather the product of discussion between readers. In the ideal classroom students would disagree about how to view Jim, allowing them to recognize that reading and interpreting is not about memorizing the ‘correct’ interpretation but rather discussing implications and meaning. Beginning with a work like this demystifies the notion that students can only pass the class by having the “correct” interpretation or evaluation of a novel. The stakes are bigger than that. I aim to teach novels in a way that shifts students away from the mindset of “how can I get an A?” to “what can I learn from reading this novel that reaches beyond the classroom?” *Lucky Jim* helps to establish this principle in the classroom.

Moving to Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* allows us to ask more questions about the role of literature and stories. Rushdie’s fanciful tale follows Haroun on his quest to help his father retain the ability to tell great stories, a quest that leads him into a land of fantasy that pits story-tellers against those who wish to stop imagination and story-telling. The novel is rich with symbolism and provokes questions about the role that stories play in our lives. To contextualize *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, I would partner it with another children’s story, such as J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Both deal with imagination and youth, but were written in vastly different contexts. I would ask students to consider expectations prior to reading the novel and evaluate these expectations as the

students read. Helping students to understand how these expectations are formed and where they come from allows students to understand more deeply their process of reading. I would ask students to evaluate what details in the novel connect them, as readers, to the protagonist, Haroun, and which details alienate them. Does Haroun represent the “universal” child in his desire for a united family and a successful father, or is he uniquely Indian? As the book does read like a children’s fantasy, I would encourage students to argue what values the book supports and how. Here the complexity of the novel allows for a variety of answers. When Blabbermouth saves the day, she does so as a lowly page girl, ironically reversing the trope of the “Knight in shining armor.” This could either be used to suggest that the book argues against the idea of a “hero” or just that anyone can be a hero, regardless of class or gender.

Haroun also contains an “ocean” of symbolism (literal and figural) to explore with the students. Some strong allegorical motifs in the book are light/dark, silence/speaking, and rain/drought, and Rushdie uses them in significant ways to draw contrasts and question ideals. The book also raises questions of national identity. Does Salman Rushdie represent Indian literature or English literature? Why (or why not) is this distinction important? Does this tension exist in the pages of the book? I would also give more information on Salman Rushdie to see if students read the novel differently given Rushdie’s other accomplishments. Does it change *Haroun* to know that the author also wrote *Midnight’s Children*, one of the most highly acclaimed books of the last fifty years of British Literature, or *The Satanic Verses*, one of the most controversial. In fact, Rushdie wrote *Haroun* while he was in hiding due to the fatwa issued by Iran. How does this affect the book’s impact? As a children’s book, *Haroun* expands the boundaries of a

discussion of literary merit. The book contains symbolic richness and sophisticated writing but is not a “difficult” read in terms of complexity. Since not every novel has the same scope, does this preclude children’s books (or science fiction, or romance novels, or horror, etc.) from being considered “great literature?” Students would be asked to take a side on this issue and support it with convincing evidence.

In Rushdie’s imagined world, the “good guys” are the ones who tell stories and the “bad guys” are the ones who censor imagination and story-telling. To evaluate how this book draws on the broader topic of literature, I would ask students to comment on whether or not they agree that stories and imagination are important, as the book suggests. What are the consequences if we stop reading and telling stories? Are these consequences real or only imaginary? While *Lucky Jim* helps to establish my expectations for student discussion and the values of my teaching literature, *Haroun* presents this underlying question that must affect our reading of all the novels on our reading list. If the only reason that students can give for studying literature is that it’s a course requirement for graduation, then I believe they have missed the point. This question (and this novel) forces students to provide a meaningful answer to the underlying question of this subject: Why do we study literature? Throughout the course, we will return to this central question.

To provide one possible answer to this central question, I propose teaching Maryse Conde’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, which provokes questions about the relationship between history and literature. Though written relatively recently, the events in the novel occur in early U.S. history, at the time of the Salem witch hunt. Tituba travels as a slave from Barbados to Salem, where her unorthodox spiritual practices that

she was taught as a child provoke judgment from the leaders of the strict Puritan society. The troubles she encounters help instigate the witch hunts and expose problems with slavery and religious intolerance. The novel would fit nicely in a comparative framework with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, most obviously given Tituba's meeting in the jail cell with Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. But the significance of this novel runs deeper than this meeting. The novel calls into question our notion of history and the significance of how events are depicted and from whose point of view. If one goal of literature is to help students understand our history, then the question of who we read in literature becomes extremely significant. I argue that there is danger in providing a single narrative of history. For example, if American history is taught only as the inevitability of European "manifest destiny" that led to the United States as a land of freedom from oppression, many voices crucial to the formation of our country are left silent, such as the American Indians who gave up their land and the African Americans who were not included in early notions of freedom. Conde's narrative forces students to think about the complications of our history. Tituba, a slave from the Caribbean islands who is transported to Salem, claims in this novel to have been central to the initiation of the Salem Witch Hunt, one of the most infamous events in early American history. Yet her role has been silenced in traditional historical accounts. Whether or not Conde's account should be read as "true history" is much less significant than the questions it raises about our concept of history and of the voices that have helped shape the United States.

Given the form of the novel, *Tituba* raises another significant question in studying literature concerning the importance of a contextualized history. Does our view of the past affect our view of today? If so, how? If not, what is the purpose of studying history?

Historical literature? The book also provides intersections between feminism and racial struggles, most poignantly in how Tituba bonds with Goodwife Parris as they are both beaten by Samuel (but also poignantly in the scene with Tituba and Prynne, especially meaningful in the context of reading *The Scarlet Letter*). Even though Civil Rights movements in the United States really took shape in the late 20th century, the struggles of women and blacks in the U.S. that led to these movements have a historical connectedness embodied in this scene. Providing the historical context for the struggles of women and blacks (and other marginalized groups) prevents students from taking for granted the positive changes that have occurred in our history. This novel embodies these struggles in a way that might impact the students more directly than a simple listing of historical facts and figures. Such is the power of literature, giving more meaning to other subjects such as history.

Moving from historical literature to literature set in contemporary America, I believe most students would really enjoy reading Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Given that Alexie's protagonist, Junior, is a fourteen-year old struggling with an identity crisis, I believe the students would relate easily to the character and appreciate Alexie's sense of humor. Junior undergoes his struggle when he leaves the Spokane Indian reservation he grew up on to attend the all-white (and, by comparison, rich) high school in Washington. While I do not believe the goal of teaching literature is to simply find books that the students love to read, I do think it helps them engage the text when they enjoy it. Alexie's book is easily accessible, aimed at a teenage audience (like *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*), including short chapters and hilarious cartoons to illustrate Junior's psyche. But the book also deftly engages questions of

personal identity and communal responsibility, and won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2007.

The book works on multiple levels, and I would encourage students to consider each of these levels of meaning. Most obviously, Junior undergoes the struggle of finding a place and a voice in an all-white school as a racial minority (or, more accurately, singularity). He leaves his Indian Reservation and his best friend Rowdy and becomes a "traitor" to Indian solidarity. As Alexie voices his semi-autobiographical experience through the voice of Junior, students can hear first-hand this conflict from the perspective of the outsider looking in. How Roger the Giant and Penelope, two white students that Junior encounters, treat Junior can cause students to evaluate how they treat marginalized individuals and the effects that such treatment can have. But Junior also undergoes the personal conflict of sacrificing community and friendship for the sake of hope in the future. This is a more universal struggle that Junior undergoes in his specific way. He also deals with the embarrassment of having less money than his peers, which is not a uniquely Indian struggle, and deals with an unreliable father. Junior's character and story provide multiple avenues for students to relate. In the classroom, one goal of teaching this novel would be to have students recognize the ways that they feel like they are in the same tribe as Junior, and ways that they feel they are members of a different tribe (to use Junior's own metaphor). Since multicultural America involves complicated identities, composed of differences in race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and other categories that intersect and interact, I would emphasize the importance of being able to listen to the voices of others that hold a different perspective. Differences and similarities are both significant to identity, and this book provides a rich ground for students to enter this

discussion. As this novel also provides formal and generic innovations (each chapter reads like a diary entry, complete with cartoon drawings to illustrate humorous and telling points), I would again give students the opportunity to evaluate and assess the merit of the novel in the context of a literature course. Why is this book worth reading (or why not)? In the end, Junior feels somewhat accepted in his new school, but reconnects with his friend Rowdy through a friendly game of basketball. This suggests that even when treated well in a new environment, it can be healthy to reconnect with your roots.

I might end my course with Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*, another text that engages cultural difference at the high school level in the United States. A graphic novel, *American Born Chinese* breaks the mold of the traditional novel as a hybrid text. This hybridity represents the cultural hybridity of the protagonist, a great starting point for discussion. Three stories merge in the book: A Chinese fairy tale about a Monkey King, a second-generation Chinese immigrant adjusting to white America, and an all-American high school basketball player ashamed of his embarrassing Chinese cousin. As the stories merge, readers are confronted with the importance of accepting one's identity. Hopefully, by this point in the year, students will have formed some solid and substantiated opinions on the qualities that make a novel worth reading and studying. Ideally they will frame this graphic novel in the context of literature that they have formed throughout the course. The overt "message" of this story does not appear obscure. The central character, Jin, has difficulty fitting in as a Chinese American and magically becomes white and popular overnight. Only when he returns to his original form and character can he truly be happy and content. Yang's choice to write a graphic novel to portray Jin's struggle for acceptance in America comments in a metafictional way on the

struggle itself. Yang tells the story in his own way, rather than conforming to Western novelistic traditions (although the graphic novel is not a uniquely Chinese tradition, the fable of the Monkey King is identifiably Chinese).

On one level, this book extends the discussion that begins with Alexie's *Diary*, concerning the voices of multicultural America and our ability to listen and understand. But on another level, Yang's graphic novel broadens the students' understanding of what makes a 'text' powerful. A possible assignment for this book would be to ask students to consider something that is not a novel that fulfills their stated goals of great literature. Since, by this point in the semester, they will have established some formal categories for defining literature, such an assignment would draw off their previous work. A possible assignment would be for the student to find a song, film, piece of art, oral fable, or any other cultural object that accomplishes the functions and purpose of literature, according to their observations and definitions. Some possible outcomes for student definitions of literature, for example, could be that it aims to entertain the reader, challenge the reader's notions of the world, and comment on society as a whole. But these categories are not limited to the novel. The choices the students make would stem from their own definitions of what makes great literature, based on the understanding they have gained throughout the semester. Yang's novel can open this door and encourage students to look past the classroom to identify opportunities to learn and listen as they continue to grow as individuals.

Comparing these newer texts with traditional texts could lead to a student holding a view that privileges the traditional texts and considers these newer texts to fall short of "greatness." Such a student still would have found value in this course if he or she can

express what creates this distinction. It's obviously impossible to study every book and every voice, so the purpose of such a class is not to have a comprehensive understanding of literary history (I have a Master's degree in literature and I am not even close to accomplishing such a task). Instead, a major goal would be to empower students by equipping them with the tools to understand the consequential debates about literature and the language to participate in the discussion. The consequences of the discussion are significant. I did not choose these texts arbitrarily. I believe each text will help students think more critically, listen to others more receptively, and voice themselves more effectively. Such skills are important no matter what career path the students choose.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007. Print.

Arnold Spirit, or “Junior” as he is called on the Reservation, is an awkward 14-year old Spokane Indian who decides to leave the Reservation school to attend the all-white Rearden High School. This act of freedom invokes the hatred of most of the Indians on the “Rez,” who view him as a traitor for breaking the solidarity of the hopelessness of the Indian life. Nobody hates him more than his violent best friend, Rowdy, who becomes his rival in a bitter basketball game between the two schools. While Junior lives on the Rez, he doesn’t feel like he fits in because they all view him as a traitor, even beating him up on Halloween as he dresses up like a homeless Indian and asks for money instead of candy to give to the homeless. But he also does not fit in at the white (and racist) high school, at least until he stands up to the bully, Roger the Giant, and pseudo-dates the beautiful Penelope. Even then, his financial disadvantage and his struggles with his Indian-ness cause identity problems for Junior—most poignantly on page 118 where he admits that he doesn’t belong in either culture. To Junior, the reservation is a place of unending poverty and inevitable death at the hands of alcohol. No matter how much he desires to retain the hope felt by the white kids at Rearden, deaths to his grandmother (at the hands of a drunk driver) and his sister (burned alive with her husband while passed out due to alcohol consumption) remind him of the hopelessness of being Indian. In the climax of the book Junior recognizes that we are all members of multiple “tribes,” a seemingly endless list of factors that make up our overall

identity. He reconciles his friendship with Rowdy after Rowdy seems to forgive him, but does not return to the Rez.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 33- Illustration of the isolation felt by Junior on the Reservation as a tiny island in the ocean.
- p. 47- Conflicting pressures between the hope and possibilities of joining the rich white school and being seen as a traitor by his fellow tribal members.
- p. 90- Invokes the difference between Montana Indians and Spokane Indians to show that you can't normalize the "American Indian" experience as homogenous.
- p. 162-163- Ted the billionaire loves Indians, but Junior and the Indians revile him. He gets all his information from "experts" who have no idea what they are actually talking about.
- p. 217- The different 'tribes' that we belong to. Echoing Emerson's *Circles*, Junior recognizes the endless ways we can categorize ourselves and how this constitutes identity.

Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. New York: Scribner, 2003. Print.

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen constantly struggles against the power of fate. Near-fatal complications during her birth nearly left her for dead and her mother refused to take her to a hospital, instead trusting in fate to take its course. This image symbolizes her submission to fate throughout the novel—to Islam, to her father, and to her arranged husband Chanu, including being uprooted from Bangladesh to London to be his wife. Her life is contrasted to her younger sister Hasina's life through letters that Nazneen receives from her periodically. Hasina runs away at 16 to elope and marry a man who turns out to be abusive. From there, Hasina is constantly on the run, trying to find work and a place to live, experiencing degradation and hopelessness along the way. Chanu, by contrast, treats Nazneen with respect and deeply values her as a wife, even though he is oblivious to her

intimate needs. After over a decade of playing the dutiful wife, Nazneen has an affair with young Karim, the leader of a radical Muslim group called the Bengal Tigers. When the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 cause heightened antagonism towards the Muslim community in London, Chanu and Karim return to Bangladesh while Nazneen essentially breaks up with both of them, remaining in London with her two daughters. This final act of agency completes her journey of taking control of her own fate.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 10- Nazneen struggles with the question of responsibility if lives are dictated by fate.
- p. 24- When Nazneen sees the ice skating girl on TV dolled up in make-up and sequins, she feels sorry for her because she knows she has to work at keeping the beauty and will eventually lose it.
- p. 43- The beginning of Nazneen's independence comes when she gets lost in London and asks for help from a stranger.
- p. 128- In the sin of fornication, Hasina (female) is shamed and outcast, while Abdul (male) is joked around with. Unequal punishments.
- p. 238- Even though Chanu has spent half his life in London, he is still a foreigner and tourist.
- p. 271- Chanu and Dr. Azad's friendship explained: Chanu has family but lacks respect and position, whereas Dr. Azad has respect and position but lacks a family.
- p. 305- The September 11th attacks from the perspective of a Bangladeshi Muslim woman in London.
- p. 339- Nazneen's children smother their onion bhajis with tomato ketchup, symbolizing the way that western culture (ketchup) erases their Bangladeshi heritage (bhaji).

- p. 389- A rebellion attempt that is based only on negative (overthrow the white man) fails to recognize the individual differences in immigrants (religious, national, etc.) so it is bound to fail.
- p. 415- Final sentence: “This is England. You can do whatever you like.”

Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953. Print.

The bulk of this story pits two strong desires within the protagonist, Jim Dixon, against each other. On one hand, he has a professional goal as a history lecturer to become a professor, and to do so he must impress his superior, Professor Welch. On the other hand, he has a personal desire to be honest with himself and with others. In order to impress Welch, he must feign interest in his daughter, Margaret, an insufferable drama queen, and deny his true feelings for Christine, the beautiful young lady that Welch’s son, Bernard, wishes to marry. In the end, Jim can no longer put on an act, as he openly pursues Christine, fist fights Bernard, and ridicules Professor Welch and the whole academic institution in a hilarious final speech. Although he is fired by the school, he is offered a much better job by Christine’s rich uncle in London. In the end, being true to himself pays off and he has the last laugh. One of the repeated themes expressed by multiple characters is the idea that everybody acts out of self-interest. The book attempts to demystify this notion of selfless behavior by revealing all motives as ultimately selfish. When Jim embraces this he is rewarded. The book also resists making a hero out of the protagonist, as Jim’s repeated blunders and drunkenness give the reader no reason to admire him.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 33- Jim tells how he became a “medievalist” academic quite arbitrarily—he took the easy courses then used it as a specialty to get the job over another boy

who talked more in theories. He isn't even really that interested but from the time he got his job all he got was medievalist assignments.

- p. 61- Jim's hilarious description of a hangover.
- p. 76- Jim equates Margaret's life with a movie by assessing her as an actress and writer in her own life, exposing how life can be a performance.
- p. 111- Jim detailing how it's impossible for him to be truly "sweet" since it's self-motivated.
- p. 209- Jim's fight is very un-cinematic and not the eventful, victorious climax of a traditional hero.

Arac, Jonathan. "Chapter 1: Global and Babel: Language and Planet in American Literature." Dimock and Buell 19-38.

Jonathan Arac points out a tension that exists between two extremes that arise when dealing with American Literature in a global context. On one hand, a desire for planetary unification can lead to celebrating commonalities between diverse cultures and recognizing the shared experience of humanness, wherever it occurs. This view focuses through a comparative lens to bring cultures together. On the other hand, cultural diversity can be celebrated as what makes us unique individuals and cultures. Without difference, we cannot truly have identity. The tension between these two values, what Arac labels *Global* (unification) and *Babel* (difference), creates the ground for a discussion of American Literature as world literature. Arac's major concern when dealing with America is that the United States is vastly monolingual, and translation from various languages into English far supersedes the reciprocal on a global scale. To counter this, Arac offers in his coda two proposals for how education should change in America: First, that every undergraduate should mandatorily learn a new language through study with a group, focusing on common dialect of individuals as opposed to canonized literature.

And second, that every PhD should be fluent in at least three languages. Arac claims that these two measures would go a long way toward opening America up to a stronger two-way dialogue with the world.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970. Print.

In her *Afterword*, Margaret Atwood admits to employing Susanna Moodie as an embodiment of “paranoid schizophren[ic]” Canada, “divided down the middle” (62). This is nowhere clearer than in “The Double Voice,” where Moodie is characterized by having two voices: one of the mannerly British colonial lady and the other of a rough, earthy product of the harsh wilderness of Canada. It seems she is trying to hold onto the comforts of ‘high’ civilization while facing the practicality of living off the earth. Atwood claims this contradiction persists today, as Canadians are “all immigrants to this place even if we were born here: the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely” (62). Since Canada is so easy to leave, she claims, everybody inhabiting the land lives there by choice. But if every Canadian is an immigrant of sorts, the poem “The Immigrants” perhaps attempts to illustrate a national phenomenon in the struggle of poor immigrants trying to find the elusive “better life.” This collection of poems serves to illustrate Canada’s history through the embodiment of Susanna Moodie, one of the few Canadian literary ‘giants’ whose stories of early colonialism persist today. In this way, it serves as a tribute to both Moodie and to Canada, building a national identity that is more than just not-Britain or not-America (or not-France).

Bauer, Ralph. “Early American Literature and American Literary History at the ‘Hemispheric Turn.’” *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 217-233. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.

Ralph Bauer analyzes the scholarship of the “hemispheric turn” in American studies, with a specific view of whether or not a hemispheric focus facilitates more relevant interaction between early Americanists and scholars of later periods of American study. Bauer argues that for the most part, such dialogue has been stilted by a tendency to view colonial literature and early American literature through a backwards-looking lens that begins with the United States as a national entity. For example, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* includes colonial Spanish writers in an attempt to represent a culturally diverse America, but includes only the works that engage the geographical land that is today’s United States, leaving out the authors’ contemporary works about Peru and Mexico. Bauer claims that another limitation of many scholars who have attempted hemispheric studies is the unspoken assumption that the progression of United States from colony to country is somehow normative, and that ‘postcolonialism’ is a limited term. Since there is not one moment when colonialism ended (indeed, as Bauer points out, many Native American nations would still consider themselves to be under the rule of a conquering nation), such terms and paradigms are nationally specific, rendering them irrelevant to a pre-national America. Additionally, Bauer challenges race as the dominant paradigm in Latin American studies, citing Ruth Hill to suggest that the concept of ‘caste’ is more relevant, and that racial identity in Latin America has grown out of that concept. Bauer concludes his analysis by suggesting that hemispheric American studies would be greatly abetted not only by new texts, but by new critical traditions that originated outside of U.S. American studies.

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1954. Print.

Waiting for Godot is a two-act “tragicomedy” where, ostensibly, nothing really happens. Vladimir and Estragon are two men waiting for a man named Godot, outside by a tree. We do not know how many days that have been waiting, or how long they will wait, but we know that each day they remain by the tree and that Godot does not show up. Instead, a Boy shows up each night to tell them that Godot will not make it today, but certainly will tomorrow. It is unclear if this Boy is the same boy each day. Vladimir and Estragon’s inability to act is so strong that they cannot even kill themselves, despite a repeated desire to do so. The only other characters that show up are Pozzo, a cruel slave-driver, and Lucky, his slave. Lucky does whatever Pozzo tells him to, literally, including rattling off a hilarious and partly nonsensical monologue when Pozzo tells him to “think.” Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. New York: Grove Press, 1955. Print.

The first part of *Molloy* is the interior monologue of a man named Molloy who is probably crazy. The thought-stream style is disjointed and unclear, but the main goal for Molloy seems to be to find his mother, although he has a physical defect that has put him on crutches. He kills an old lady’s dog by riding into it on his bicycle, and then she takes Molloy in and cares for him. The second part is also an interior monologue, this time by Jacques Moran, who appears to be a detective or agent or psychiatrist who is preparing a report about Molloy for his superior. Throughout the second part there are clues that lead to the inevitable conclusion: Jacques Moran is, in fact, Molloy himself. Deeply philosophical moments punctuate the book, like when Molloy discusses how all the advances of science have not got us any closer to finalizing the ultimate “Truth.” The second part opens with “I am calm. All is sleeping,” which indicates an internal confusion between the identity of the self and its surroundings. At one point the

seemingly endless list of Molloys shows how each perspective can create entirely new characters. And finally, at the end, before Jacques Moran can finally rest, he unloads a series of serious theological questions that remain unanswered. The shifting and unreliable point of view disorients the reader while simultaneously questioning the nature of reality if it can be perceived like this by an individual. *Molloy* exemplifies the concept of mind over body in understanding the world to a degree further than previous thought-stream novels, given Molloy's apparent insanity.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 17- Molloy's memory gets mixed up and facts become unreliable.
- p. 46- Existential wanderings—Molloy claims death is less painful than his life.
- p. 52- Molloy discusses how our various branches of science have gotten us no closer to knowing the "Truth."
- p. 125- Confusion of the self with the surroundings. Where does context end and identity begin?
- p. 157- The passage with all the different Molloys.
- p. 229- The series of random theological questions.

Bost, Suzanne. "Doing the Hemisphere Differently: A Response to Ralph Bauer." *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 235-239. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.

Suzanne Bost responds directly to Ralph Bauer's article (annotated above) that takes as its focus a comparative lens for studying early American literature. Bost agrees with the objections and concerns that Bauer posits concerning a United States-dominant critical paradigm, but proposes a different method for countering it. Rather than engaging in comparative studies that attempt to "accurately" depict the pre-national, pre-postmodern world of colonial America, Bost embraces the incompatibility of our

language with the reality of that time. She suggests that if we free ourselves from our need to organize into spatial demarcations and critical frameworks, which leads to genealogy and a temptation to assert a dominant paradigm for progress, we would begin to teach and write about “American” literature differently. Bost’s argument is mostly theoretical, and while her conclusion emits hope in a new way of teaching and writing, she does not detail the practical application of her theory and it is not clear. While Bauer uses the inclusion and exclusion of authors and texts in anthologies to illustrate his theories, Bost remains strictly theoretical in her approach. Without application, her quibble with Bauer’s methodology seems insignificant compared to her recognition that Bauer’s article improves our understanding of hemispheric American studies.

Cao, Lan. *Monkey Bridge*. New York: Penguin, 1997. Print.

Cao’s debut novel charts the life of a Vietnamese teenager who left Vietnam in 1975 for America, where she struggles to adapt and wrestles with the ghosts of a difficult past that her mother has brought with them. While the narrator, Mai, applies for college in an attempt to become a successful American, her mother fears that her daughter is slipping away, a fear that is compounded by a dread of familial karma that began with the hidden sins of Mai’s grandfather, Baba Quan. The culture clash Mai experiences punctuates the novel from the opening paragraph, when she calls white “the color of mourning” (1), a reversal of normative white American symbolism. For most of the book, Mai is caught between living a full American life and her Vietnamese family history, as related through a series of hidden notes written to her by her mother that glorify Baba Quan and paint him as a lost hero. However, before ending her own life, Mai’s mother writes one final letter that reveals her previous stories as fabricated, relating the truth of

Baba Quan's sordid life as a Vietcong soldier and murderer, hoping that Mai can free herself from the cycle of karma that this created for them. At times funny and other times deathly serious, Cao's novel evokes intense sympathy for those who struggle to accept a dark past on the road to becoming an American, complicating the clichéd narrative of achieving spiritual freedom upon immigrating to the United States. While the United States does symbolize, in this novel, a road to freedom from the past, this freedom is not automatic or easy to achieve. The horror of the acts committed during the war, on both sides of the fighting, carry back to the United States through the soldiers and the evacuees, giving them a shared bond that differentiates them from most Americans. In *Monkey Bridge*, this idea is embodied by Cao's scenes of American veterans fitting in so easily with the Vietnamese women, more easily than with their old friends and family. Cao ends the book with an image of hope, as Mai begins her life at university with endless possibilities before her, suggesting freedom from the past is ultimately possible.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 21- Mai 'translates' her mother's superstitious fear of the pointed shadow to the baseball-cap wearing landlord, linguistically and culturally, saying she saw a snake in the bathtub since he wouldn't understand the fear of symbols.
- p. 76- Mai's father quotes Walt Whitman about self-contradiction and relishing complexities.
- p. 238- Symbol of good willed Americans handing out free modern stoves in Vietnamese village, but the lack of smoke allows pests to eat away at the foundation. American solutions don't necessarily work for Vietnamese but the Americans don't understand that.
- p. 252- The verbs in Vietnamese are not conjugated, representing understanding of past, present, and future as absolutely connected. Karma overrides these boundaries.

Carey, Peter. *Oscar and Lucinda*. 1988. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.

Carey's richly layered novel focuses on a romance of sorts between two unlikely characters, Oscar and Lucinda, in 19th century colonial Australia. Oscar joins the Anglican Church through interpreting chance as divine guidance; picking up a gambling addiction along the way that he believes is inspired by God. On a trip to be a missionary to New South Wales, Oscar encounters Lucinda, an heiress of immense wealth and owner of a Glass Works, who has a gambling addiction of her own. These two misfits find comfort with each other after essentially being outcast by the rest of society. However, instead of settling down and starting a family with Lucinda, Oscar decides to build and transport an entire church made of glass through the wilderness of Australia as an act of love and sacrifice to her. To show her support, Lucinda bets her entire inheritance that he will fail, hoping that he will succeed and they can share the inheritance together. In a wicked twist of irony, Oscar is seduced by a Miriam Chadwick upon reaching his destination and marries her before he dies due to exhaustion and sickness. Lucinda's inheritance is passed to Miriam, who is revealed as the true great-grandmother to the narrator of the story. Among the layers of interesting aspects worthy of study in the novel, two stand out as relevant to my project. First is the question of who owns the story of British colonization? The narrator's mother and father have two entirely different ways of depicting Oscar's story, representing the different ways that British colonization can be depicted, not just in Australia but in all the colonies. The second aspect that stands out comes from the lips of an antagonist, the explorer Mr. Jeffris, who leads the expedition to transport the glass church. He ironically tells Oscar that the "empire was not built by choirboys" as he helps carry the church across the wilderness. This evokes the

complicated relationship between Christian evangelism and British colonialism that undergirds this novel.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 34- Oscar casts lots on a hopscotch type diagram to determine which religion is correct. It lands on the Greek alpha for “Anglican.”
- p. 66- Lucinda gives her doll black hair in the wilderness, but simultaneously feels scared and botches the job. She just wanted the doll to be “neat.”
- p. 157- Oscar relies on the flip of a coin to send him to Australia, revealing the arbitrary or God-inspired way that he went about his life (depending on point of view).
- p. 310-311- The boys at Lucinda’s glass works finally let her visit when she is accompanied by a man (Oscar), but they show respect only to Oscar and ignore Lucinda completely.
- p. 396- The Aboriginal Narcoo see white men for the first time (Jeffris and Oscar and the expedition) and this chapter is told from their perspective—what it was like to hear about Jesus. Violence ensues, starting with the white men.

Conde, Maryse. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992. Print.

Conde’s narrative troubles the boundaries of history and fiction in her novel that places itself in the context of historical events. Tituba is the daughter of an African slave who was raped by a white sailor on her way to Barbados. Her mother is brutally murdered when she defends herself against another such incident and Tituba is raised by a lady who uses herbs and potions to heal others. She falls in love with a slave named John Indian, whom she follows to Boston with a cruel failed businessman-turned-minister. In the strict Puritan society she is mistreated and labeled a witch and the Salem witch trials result when she must denounce others to save herself. Eventually she returns to her “home” of Barbados, where she is killed. However, much like her mother and the

healer that raised her, she lives on after death as a ghost, to communicate to others from beyond the grave. Throughout the book, Tituba laments that she did not know about the devil or about evil until she heard the labels thrown at her by the white Christians. At one point she even suggests that perhaps the Puritan obsession with sin and judgment stems from a latent guilt for partaking in slavery. But her story is not about portraying white people as evil, as she also recognizes the complicit guilt of the greedy African kings who sold their people to the whites in the first place. To her, the evil stems not from skin color but from a desire for dominion. Ownership and the power to label are strongly explored themes in her narrative. Tituba also shows a strong feeling of displacement, constantly referring to Barbados as her “home” and, as she never goes there, recognizing that Africa means nothing to her. Her life also crosses the line between free and slave, as at points she is not technically a slave to a white owner, but seems enslaved by her love for certain men.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 17- Tituba is called “witch” for the first time and she wonders why it is a negative thing.
- p. 36- Names of the ships are all Biblical/Christian, such as “*Blessing*,” which reveals the hypocrisy that Tituba sees in some of the Christian men.
- p. 41- Tituba becomes allied with Goodwife Parris because they are both struck to bleeding by Samuel. Despite skin color difference, they are connected by blood.
- p. 96- Tituba claims that Africa has no meaning any more since she has never been there. This symbolizes the immigrant transition and the generational forgetting of origin.
- p. 149- Tituba recognizes that her voice has been drowned out of history.

Connor, Steven. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Steven Connor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.

Connor, Steven. "Introduction." Connor 1-19.

In his introduction, Connor ruminates on the way postmodernism and postmodern studies have evolved over the last few decades of the twentieth century. He delineates four stages of development that postmodernism has undergone, beginning with its accumulation in the 1970s and ending with its dissipation, which continues today. Within this final stage, however, Connor notes the remarkable tendency for postmodernism to continue on. Just as postmodernism challenged the concept of isolated fields of study with strict beginnings and ends, it now acts upon itself to perpetuate its ever-changing nature and place in academic discourse. While postmodernism has been notoriously difficult to define, Connor points to a number of specific ways that postmodernism has changed the way we think about history and the present. Primarily, we no longer view the two as distinct entities. With the proliferation of materials that help us understand the complexity of history, we have begun to incorporate history into our understanding of the present, so the two are inextricably related. We have also challenged the authority of certain historical narratives that privilege the "centers" over the "margins" as we simultaneously question any meta-narrative that attempts to fully define the entire human experience. Postmodernism has emerged in art, film, literature, culture, music, philosophy, and many other areas, affecting just about every academic discipline in some way. Over the decades postmodernism has taken on many roles, both in the academic world and popular culture. Connor admits that the companion can be only that: a companion for investigating postmodernism, since encapsulating such a diversely defined field completely in a book of essays would be impossible.

Connor, Steven. "Postmodernism and Literature." Connor 62-81.

This chapter focuses on modernist literature about as much as it does on postmodernism, reinforcing the conception of postmodernism as growing out of modernism, linked to it in myriad ways. Connor's understanding of postmodernism, therefore, grows from an understanding of modernism. He even argues that our conception of modernism has shifted from a focus on the poem to the novel in the wake of postmodernism's focus on narrative fiction. The shift has involved a variety of changes. In modernist fiction, novelists tried to encapsulate a complete scene, investigating a variety of perspectives and even engaging material that was previously considered unsuitable for art (*Ulysses* for example). Postmodern fiction focuses on voice, rather than perspective, shifting the question from "Who sees?" to "Who speaks?" Looking back at the modernist period through a postmodern lens also gives us new vocabulary to describe the same phenomena. Whereas modernists felt threatened by the influx of new voices and called it "disorder," postmodernists look with pride upon this time as "'multiplicity,' 'proliferation,' 'openness', and 'hybridity' (71)." These hopeful terms began to be applied to modernist works, such as *Ulysses*, essentially turning them into postmodern works. Postmodern literature has also sought new ways to combat what Connor calls "the culture of interruptions" (77). Instead of trying to create a world to retreat into, postmodern fiction must embed itself into our world, finding new forms such as the assemble-as-you-read *The Unfortunates* by B.S. Johnson or the "proliferating, imbricated times" of Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (78). Since postmodernism resists modernism in some ways but furthers it in others, postmodernism

should be described not simply as a reaction to, but also as an extension of modernism in literature.

Dekoven, Marianne. "Modernism and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 174-93. Print.

In very persuasive but not overbearing prose, Dekoven proudly claims a place in the center of modernism for female writers. Beginning by pointing out the simultaneity of first wave feminism with modernism in art and literature, Dekoven goes on to illustrate how the two concepts are mutually constitutive. As modernism challenged conventional hierarchies and dominant power systems, many men began to fear the possible (and eventual) retaliation of women against patriarchal dominance. Simultaneously, these men respected and encouraged the ideology of modernism that embraced these kinds of changes. This tension caused modernist writers such as Henry James to oscillate between nascent misogyny and awe-struck respect for the new kind of woman that emerged. Meanwhile, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf led by example in claiming modernism as their own, prime examples of a litany of female modernist writers whom Dekoven lists as (at least) the equal of their male counterparts. This gendered opening-up of modernism exemplifies how modernism crossed boundaries of not only gender, but race, nation, and class. Through modernism, representation was finally extended to both sides of the traditional dualisms in western culture, creating a much more disruptive, open-ended, or you could say, feminine space.

Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007. Print.

Junot Diaz' tale of an overweight, nerdy Dominican boy named Oscar who grows up in New Jersey is exceptionally well-written and powerful, as the narrator fluidly combines four dialects: urban American English, Dominican or "street" Spanish, academic English, and science fiction/fantasy references. The central character in Diaz' tale is perhaps not a person but a curse, the *fukú*, that afflicts Oscar, but originates two generations earlier when his grandfather, Abelard, crosses the supernaturally powerful Dominican dictator, Trujillo (El Jéfé). The terrible things that happen to Abelard, Beli (his daughter), and Oscar and Lola (Beli's children), including an inability to adapt to surroundings and a fatal tendency to fall in love with the wrong person, could be attributed to this *fukú*. The central narrator, Yunió (a couple of sections are narrated by Lola), writes this tale as a tribute to Oscar, ten years after his death, as he cannot escape thinking about how Oscar's life (and death) affected him. To Yunió, to be a Dominican man means to get women, and in college Oscar begins to worry that he may die a virgin. As an adult, Oscar finally shakes this fate by having a relationship with a former prostitute, but is murdered shortly after by her boyfriend, the capitán of the Dominican police. Oscar's final words are celebratory, and after a depressed life of loneliness it appears he dies happy.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 66- Hilarious culture clash between Dominicans and white Americans—claiming white people put up bulletins for a lost cat while a Dominican daughter disappears and nothing changes.
- p. 74 & p. 158- Interestingly, Lola's rivals call her "gringa" (white girl) but Yunió calls her "darker than your darkest grandma." This illustrates the way color is used symbolically, and how color is relative—especially when you are not "white" or "black."

- p. 81- Beli plays the role of the family's last hope in the "New World."
- p. 141- Miami (America) represents freedom for Beli, an ideal. This echoes from the earliest immigrants to America throughout its history.
- p. 180- How Oscar became "Oscar Wao" through comparison to Oscar Wilde.
- p. 235- Who gets to write history? The "truth" of Abelard's case is irrelevant because what was written down is what becomes "fact." Even if Abelard didn't make a comment about Trujillo, history played out as if he did.

Dimock, Wai Chee, and Lawrence Buell, eds. *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007. Print.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Introduction: Planet and America, Set and Subset." Dimock and Buell 1-16.

Wai Chee Dimock begins with a question: "What exactly is 'American Literature'" (1), which happens to be the central question of my American literature project. In investigating the principles that define the category, Dimock recognizes that while the adjective "American" is necessary and helpful in categorization, it also sets nationalist limits on entities that are not limited by national borders, such as literature and culture. Instead of demarcating lines between fields of study that present fixed borders, Dimock suggests recognizing American Literature as a *subset* of World Literature, with boundaries not natural but imposed. Dimock fears that increased specialization among literature scholars leads to less common ground and a decreased understanding of the overall context that produces an individual text or author. The goal of this collection of essays is to engage and question the boundaries of American Literature as problematic and variable in an effort to reinterpret the texts and the field in a global context.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The American Scholar" and "Circles." *American Transcendentalism Web*. VCU, n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

In “The American Scholar,” Emerson addresses a group of American scholars with a hopeful and encouraging message that proudly proclaims the strength of embracing the individual scholar as part of society. Emerson suggests that the most effective society, as a unit, is made up of individuals who stubbornly maintain their individualism in the face of mass conformity. For the scholar, this means observing nature, reading books, and trusting one’s own instincts and experiences, not taking sides in banal public debates. What interests a scholar should be what strikes his sense of beauty and of truth, in daily life, rather than lofty ideas that European scholars might be discussing. In this way, Emerson encourages embracing America as a country of diverse action, with scholars representing this diversity in their reflections. “Circles” is a philosophically lofty essay that asserts the lack of boundaries on anything in nature—truth, understanding, existence. In Emerson’s view, no virtue or vice is absolute, but should be taken as its own entity with its own circumstance. Every circle in life, beginning with the eye, moving to vision, all the way to the universe and God, leads to a bigger circle that contains the first. Due to this philosophy, Emerson encourages continual change, as nature is unpredictable and we are always surprised. This change includes our thoughts, actions, and morals. This essay links Transcendentalism with Enlightenment in recognition of our spiritual individualism and limited perspective.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Concord Hymn,” “The Rhodora,” and “The Snow Storm.”
American Transcendentalism Web. VCU, n.d. Web 30 Jan. 2012.

“The Concord Hymn” celebrates the completion of the Battle Monument in Concord, raised to celebrate the heroes of the Revolutionary War decades earlier. The poem celebrates patriotism and hope while honoring the sacrifices made by America’s

forefathers. “The Rhodora” draws on the beautiful Rhodora flower to illustrate how beauty speaks for itself. While the rose is famous for its classic beauty, Emerson claims the rhodora as an evident rival, not in reputation but in true beauty. “The Snow Storm” celebrates another facet of nature, passing over the destructive side effects of a snow storm to focus on the beauty that it creates and the artistic painting over of diverse scenery with a blanket of pure white. Each of these poems optimistically celebrates American nature and American people, giving voice to an increasingly patriotic movement in early 19th century New England.

Farrell, J. G. *The Siege of Krishnapur*. 1973. New York: NYRB, 2004. Print.

In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, plot takes a backseat to the central focus of character conflict in a hilarious reinvention of the 19th century British colonial romance novel. The plot is simple: the native Indians rebel against the British colonialists and hole them up in their compound for months while the British debate everything from war strategy to medical techniques to philosophy and religion. The characters serve as caricatures, embodiments of various philosophies carried out to the extreme. Their naivety and blindness to their own biases cause the humor for a modern audience that sees the reality of these views in literature written in the 19th century. The Collector, Mr. Hopkins, runs the compound with an unflagging sense of duty, always trying to protect and care for his people, all the while judging each of them for their various weaknesses. The Magistrate embodies extreme British rationalist thought, devoid of emotion or sympathy, treating the native Indians as elements in a mathematical equation. George Fleury, the protagonist of sorts, new to India, is researching for a book he wants to write about the British empire in India. He advocates an emotional, heart-felt Christianity but his idealism is ridiculed by

the older and more practical men. George falls in love with Louise, who slowly loses touch with civilized British conduct as they run out of such necessities as tea. Two doctors on the compound, Dr. McNab and Dr. Dunstaple, argue back and forth about practical, natural remedies and scientifically advocated clinical medicines, an argument that Dr. Dunstaple literally carries to his death. Farrell deliberately omits any real Indian characters as the content of the book is British nation building, which only heightens the indictment of British colonialist attitudes during this time. Even after the siege ends and they are rescued, philosophical debates continue. It seems in this novel that talk defines British identity, perhaps even more strongly than action.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 48- Debate about the importance of colonization: is it more importantly economic/practical or religious/spiritual?
- p. 50- The Padre wonders why the Bible wasn't originally written in English since that would be the obvious choice, seeing as it is spoken throughout the world (revealing hilarious ethnocentrism).
- p. 70- Harry warns George that you can't beat an Indian too thoroughly or you might kill him, but there is absolutely no mercy or sympathy or empathy in his voice. Strict logic, as if Indians are objects, not people.
- p. 114- The Collector is forced to choose who he can "save" from the Indians—do Native Christians make the cut? This betrays a refusal to admit the possibility that they are on the losing side and also shows the overly structured and logical way of handling war for the British.
- p. 142- Scientific/mathematical approach to killing—if the sepoy approaches from an angle greater than 45 degrees, they can fire at will. If not, they review his case.
- p. 186- The Collector proudly celebrates statistics, waxing poetical and showing how statistics triumph over death.
- p. 199- Fleury hilariously calculates the linguistic attributes of an effective war cry.

- p. 343- The Collector admits that “a nation does not create itself according to its own best ideas, but is shaped by other forces, of which it has little knowledge.”

Flint, Kate. *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.

Kate Flint focuses on the place of the American Indian in the British cultural imagination during the long 19th century. Beginning with an image of the Albert Memorial in London, which depicts the Americas as a band of Indians, Flint ruminates on and explores the complicated relationship between the imagined Indian in Victorian England and the real Indians who lived, and traveled transatlantically, during that time. Flint’s book-length study increases our understanding of the complicated figuration of the American Indian in England, including the difference between Indians in Canada, the United States, and South America. Early on in the colonization process, European peoples tried to adopt the Indians into their culture, playing out European conflicts on American soil, such as the Catholic/Protestant rift central to the Spanish/British conflict in the area of the Southern United States. This began the process of silencing the Indian voice, which Flint tries to recover in a few of her chapters. Indians also took on a symbolically significant role for imperialist Britain in how they rebelled against the British colonizers, arousing fear that a similar rebellion could take place in Britain’s other colonies in Australia and New Zealand, for example. Most of Flint’s book exposes the unique role that Indians played in the formation of both the British and American cultural identities that currently exist. For example, Flint explores the role of Indians in forming gendered identity, including how the tale of Pocahontas opens up ideas for a new type of American heroine. Flint also explores transatlantic missionaries, not only the obvious British missionaries in attempts to convert Indians to Christianity, but those brought up in

the Indian traditions who came to England as missionaries. Much like McGill's collection of essays, Flint's book deals with a time period and content that falls outside the loose boundaries of my project's focus, yet her book nonetheless illuminates some important factors that contribute to national identity in both England and the United States today.

Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. 1924. Orlando: Harcourt, 1984. Print.

Forster's novel focuses on navigating the differences between British and native cultures on Indian soil for a possible friendly coexistence. After Dr. Aziz, a Muslim Indian, runs into Mrs. Moore, the visiting mother of the imperialist Ronny, in a mosque, he spends the rest of the novel trying to bridge the culture gap and become intimate friends with the English in India. One attempt after another fails for various reasons. His mixed bridge party fails when each group keeps to themselves and no real intercultural mingling occurs. When he initiates a conversation with Adela, Ronny's pseudo-fiancée, Ronny is outraged. Dr. Aziz does achieve a level of success with Fielding, a man who has spent time in India and honestly views Indians as people worthy of knowing, despite his whiteness and Englishness. Using Fielding as a link to the two women, Dr. Aziz organizes an outing to the famous Marabar caves, but Fielding fails to show up. In the wilderness, Aziz is accused of attempted rape of Adela and is consequently arrested. The trial intensifies the racial tension in colonial India, with every English person convinced that Aziz is guilty except Mrs. Moore and Fielding. However, rather than oppose her son and most of the English, Mrs. Moore ships back to England and dies at sea. Fielding is cast out by the British when he stands up for Aziz. Ultimately, Adela remembers the innocence of Dr. Aziz while under oath and Aziz is set free, but in his mistreatment he has gained an antagonism towards the British that interferes even with his friendship with

Fielding. While everything gets cleared up two years later when Fielding returns to India, the characters admit that the world is not ready for true Indian-British friendship. While the book does look forward in some senses to a postcolonial attitude, such as exposing the British nationalism and racism, Forster's novel clearly represents the English view of India rather than truly expressing the variety of native voices.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 7- Ali and Hamidullah argue about whether or not it's possible to be friends with an Englishman, and basically agree that it is not.
- p. 13- The roads named for victories British generals intersecting at right angles used as a symbol of the "net Great Britain had thrown over India."
- p. 43- At the bridge party, neither "East" nor "West" can provide a formula for how to interact. A new set of formalities must be created (but hasn't yet).
- p. 98- Mr. Harris is an Englishman when with English and an Indian with Indians but when he is in mixed company he doesn't know who he is (mixed blood). This points to generations of confusion in all colonies when cultures begin to mix.
- p. 114- A committee of various Indian religions can only agree on one thing: hating the English.
- p. 160- Dr. Aziz claims that nothing, no religion, no organization, can try to contain the whole of India and that it's better to embrace differences and leave it that way.
- p. 296- "There is no such thing as the general Indian." Dr. Aziz resists (again) the concept of India as uniform and united.

Fussel, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. 1984. Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

As the oldest element of my British secondary reading, Fussel's book not surprisingly carries significant import. While difficult to summarize in an annotation, perhaps the book's most significant contribution is in bringing to consciousness the variety of ways that World War I has altered both literature and how we view the world

(the relation between these two was a central focus of Fussel as well, noted in his *Preface*). Most significantly, Fussel points to the four years of the war as a turning point in British (and Western by association) consciousness, from innocent imagination to facing harsh reality. Prior to the war, honor and valor represented absolute values, sought after above all else; but in the wake of the brutal mass casualties and squalid conditions in Europe, they became ironic misrepresentations of the seemingly mindless trench warfare. This shift in consciousness trickled down into all aspects of life, including literature and imagination, paving the way not only for books engaging war, such as Heller's *Catch-22*, but all that follows. Among the specific shifts that Fussel investigates is our current preoccupation with the "versus" mentality that grew from a national mindset that turned the enemy into absolute evil rhetorically. Fussel claims this affects present-day life, such as the arena of politics, which appears especially accurate in an election year in the 'United' States. Fussel also investigates the myths and stories that flourished during the war as the official printed "truth" was, at best, censored, and at worst, false. These soldiers were mostly educated men, merging their literary understanding with real life experience too terrible to be portrayed explicitly. After reading this book, it's obvious that any attempt to understand the British literary mindset following World War I without considering the impact of the "Great War" falls significantly short.

Giles, Paul. "Introduction: The Deterritorialization of American Literature." *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Giles. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011. 1-25. Print.

Paul Giles brings to focus "the relationship between American literature and global space and how this equation has fluctuated and evolved over time" (1). His central hypothesis isolates a limited time period, between 1865 and 1981, as a period of time in

America that focused on singular national identity and American exceptionalism. Since we have a tendency to impose patterns on the past based on our current conceptions of the world, Giles claims that we are now in a position to open up all of American literature to a broader, worldly understanding, which recognizes the fluidity of boundaries and borders. Giles points out that this phase, what he calls transnationalism in light of transgressed borders (such as the 9/11 attacks), more closely resembles the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in America, when boundaries were “inchoate and unsettled” (21). By imposing a transnational lens onto American literature, Giles does not aim to simply merge American literature into global literature, but rather to identify the historical factors that led to certain themes and goals in American writing. For example, many authors in the late 19th century, such as Emerson, simultaneously attempted to express a universal enlightenment while being validated for being distinctly American. The goal of this collection of essays is to “offer symptomatic readings that shed a kind of refractive light on anomalies, inconsistencies, and blind spots within canonical national narratives” (24).

Guterl, Matthew Pratt. “Chapter 5: An American Mediterranean: Haiti, Cuba, and the American South.” Levander and Levine 96-115.

Guterl steps back into the antebellum South in an attempt to reimagine the conception of Cuba and Haiti held by the elite landowners of the South. By reading personal letters published by Madame Le Vert and others, as well as political speeches and writing, Guterl reveals the tension underlying the attitude towards Cuba in this time. Cuba was viewed, by many Southern landowners, as an inevitable future addition to the United States, immensely valuable from an economic point of view, with its fertile land

and copious slave population. Some believed Cuba would give the South a much needed edge over the North. However, simultaneously, Cuba represented the “lower” cultural status of the Spanish character. As the Southern elite viewed themselves as commensurate to the European elite in culture and class, the beckoning economic profit of annexing Cuba became a complicated desire. Meanwhile, the slave insurrection in Haiti simultaneously represented a warning against slavery for the abolitionists and a reminder to the slaveholders of how important it is to be able to control the slave population. Not to be forgotten, though, are the voices that spoke out from Haiti in favor of the rebellions beginning to take place in the United States. All this brings to mind a few interesting questions about how the history of the United States is depicted. One that Guterl explicitly states is, with the South’s individual trade, politics, and institutionalized nation-building, “are we, then, illuminating a historic South that was, at one point, politically independent?” Another I add to the discussion is, how different would our history books look had the South successfully annexed Cuba prior to the Civil War? By exploring these mostly unexplored questions, we can illuminate our complicated, hybridized history with multiple conflicted perspectives.

Head, Dominic, ed. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.

The potential danger that Dominic Head faces in analyzing over a hundred British post-war authors and two hundred fictional works in this survey is that of oversimplification and streamlining complex issues. Head fully overcomes this danger and absolutely does justice to the complexity of issues explored by English literature from 1950 to 2000. His breadth of reading seems overwhelming at first, as he jumps from

author to author to illustrate these issues, but due to excellent organization and insightful connections between the chapters, the book comes off as a cohesive unit and not a random scattering of thoughts. While one book cannot possibly illuminate this field fully, it does serve to bring a surface level awareness to just about every strand of focus in English literature at this time. He moves past the simple dichotomy of realism vs. experimentalism to talk about form, national identity (including Scottish, Irish, and Welsh), gender and sexuality issues, politics, social change, class structure, landscapes, religion, philosophy, and more. Head shows how after 1950 novelists recognize the impossibility of containing the whole of England in a single novel, turning to focus on individual experiences and their uniqueness instead, providing one piece of the puzzle at a time. He also details the dissolution of “official” class structure in England and the rise of the new lower-class that is defined economically rather than politically, expressed in the various authors employing realist techniques. Head complicates the simplified narrative of feminism that crowds the movement into a few causal waves, showing how, in literature, the seeds of second-wave feminism began prior to the 1970s and were not always intimately connected to the sexual liberation movement. In dealing with national identity, Head illustrates the rethinking of British colonialism through novels like Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur*, which adopts the style of a Victorian realist novel in a postmodern lens, and also engages Scottish, Welsh, and Irish literature in their individual struggles for a unique identity. Since those cultures are simultaneously constructing British identity and resisting British essentialism, literature that engages identity issues proliferates. In perhaps the most controversial chapter, Head discusses multiculturalism in England and the British colonies, with literature that varies from supporting integration

(though not assimilation) to stubbornly maintaining individualism. This book provides me with the abundant political and historical context for understanding the works on my list that were written after 1950 in Britain and former British colonies.

The Hours. Dir. Stephen Daldry. Perf. Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, and Julianne Moore. Paramount. 2003. Film.

The Hours is part biography, part creative adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, performing transatlantically on multiple levels. Not only does an English director team up with American and English writers to create a Hollywood adaptation of a modernist British novel, but the movie itself depicts American characters dealing with the issues in Woolf's imagination as she writes. In the film, Nicole Kidman plays Virginia Woolf, struggling with suicidal thoughts and the desire to portray a woman's life in the span of a day in her book, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Meanwhile, Meryl Streep plays Clarissa Vaughn in the year 2001, planning a party for her ex-lover and friend, a famous poet dying of AIDS. Julianne Moore, the third primary character, lives in 1950's California in a picture-perfect house with the all-American husband and child, but finds her life as housewife desperately empty and unfulfilling. As Woolf toys with the idea of having her heroine, Mrs. Dalloway, commit suicide, Laura Brown (Moore's character) intends to do just that. However, as Woolf decides the heroine must live on, Laura opts to live, and Woolf decides somebody else must die instead, so that "we all may value life more." In Clarissa's world, her friend Richard, whom she is planning the party for, throws himself out of his window, just as the character Septimus did in the original *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the closing scenes of the movie, Richard's mother comes to Clarissa's home, revealing that she is Laura Brown, and that Richard was her son, whom she abandoned after giving

birth to a second child. She claims that she had no choice and that she had to choose “life over death.” This film certainly embodies how British literature can be embedded into, or at least absorbed by, an American subconscious. The emphasis is predominantly on connections and similarities between the struggles of these three women, depicting complications of self-worth and feminism to span the gaps, both physical and temporal, between their worlds.

Hutner, Gordon, and Sandra Gustafson. “Projecting Early American Literary Studies: Introduction.” *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 211-216. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.

Gustafson and Hutner introduce this special joint issue of *Early American Literature* with *American Literary History* that takes as its focus the lack of attention given to early American literature by many American literature and history scholars. Gustafson and Hutner use Toni Morrison’s recent novel *A Mercy* to illustrate how contemporary authors are re-imagining the early colonial life of America in a more dystopic vision than writers in earlier generations, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald. They argue that many texts considered part of the British or European canon, such as *Paradise Lost*, actually point towards American colonization and exploration, making them a relevant starting point in understanding early American literature, and by extension, contemporary American literature. Gustafson and Hutner also credit the Society of Early Americanists for helping to instigate new avenues of scholarship through new research methodologies and stimulating archival work. This work has brought new foci to the field of American studies, including a look at colonial America’s lingual, racial, and cultural imbrication and the recognition that slavery, while fundamental to early African American culture,

was not the only aspect of their lives to consider. This collection serves as a starting point for further study into these areas.

James, Henry. "The Jolly Corner." *The New York Stories of Henry James*. Ed. Colm Tóibín. New York: New York Review of Books, 2006. 463-500. Print.

In this short story, written in classic Henry James multi-clause sentence style to create suspense and engagement, Spencer Brydon returns to New York as an older man after spending thirty years in Europe to pursue his passion for art. His family has all died and he returns to check on his properties that he has inherited. As he rekindles a relationship with his friend Alice, he is faced with the troubling question of what could have been if he had remained in New York for his life instead of going to Europe. This manifests itself in the form of a specter that he believes haunts his empty apartment, representing the man he would have become. When he finally is faced with this specter, he appears vastly different, black and disfigured, which leads Spencer to believe it is not really a manifestation of himself. He passes out due to fear, and when Alice revives him she tells him that she has seen the man too, and while she pities him, she prefers the "real" Spencer Brydon, kissing him to show her affection. The story directly engages the complicated psychological and emotional troubles faced by expatriates upon returning to their native land. Alice serves to bring Spencer peace, by accepting him for who he is, symbolizing Spencer's acceptance of his choices in life.

Jay, Gregory S. *American Literature and the Culture Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997. Print.

Gregory S. Jay gives a serious and convincing argument in this book about where to take American Literary Studies in the 21st century. In taking up the issues of content, purpose, and method in the field of American Literature, Jay writes a manifesto of sorts

that encourages teachers and curriculum makers to expand the borders and recognize the variety of voices that can be found in the huge reservoir of “American Writing.” After laying out the major questions in contention in his introduction, Jay points out how the contest surrounding American studies embodies a struggle for representation by a multitude of voices and cultures. Further, through studying the various ways that historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence have been used, Jay reveals how our American identity has always been in contention, that multiculturalism undergirds our entire history, even if self-conscious debates about it in academic circles are a relatively recent phenomenon. As the book proceeds, Jay’s argument becomes more practical and experiential. In Chapter 3 he navigates the tension between two versions of multiculturalism, one that advocates a harmonious merging of cultures that focuses on shared experience and one that celebrates differences by highlighting individual experiences, revealing the power structures inherent to cultural difference. In the final two chapters Jay asserts how we can practically teach this discipline to combat any tendencies towards minimizing the importance of studying American Literature in the wake of endless debates of literary “greatness” or cultural “relevance.” Jay suggests we bring the tension and the conflict in academic circles into the classroom for our students to join in. The proliferation of critical theories and voices represents our student population, and by giving them the vocabulary and cultural artifacts that give weight to these debates allows them to participate, contributing their own voice in a more contextualized manner. As a result, teachers will act less as purveyors of truth and more as providers of context and sources of guidance for students. It would be ignorant to suggest that teachers check their biases at the door, so Jay encourages recognizing where

we stand and allowing our students to do the same. American Literary Studies, as a result, has an overwhelmingly exciting future in how it will help our diverse student populations gain a cultural voice. Scholars and teachers may disagree fundamentally about how this looks, but teaching is done (and will continue to be done) within the context of these disagreements.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. 1914. New York: Random House, 1933. Print.

Even though the events in the novel span only one day, trying to annotate this rich and complex novel in one paragraph is nearly impossible. Joyce breaks boundaries throughout the novel, and as this aspect of the novel has stuck with me, it shall serve as the focus of my annotation. The central character, Leopold Bloom, a Jew in anti-Semitic Ireland, is not the classic hero alluded to in the title. He is an Everyman, or perhaps even lower than an Everyman, marginalized by his culture and disregarded by his own wife. Every aspect of his day, internal and external, is laid bare on these pages. He defecates, he fantasizes, and he masturbates. These elements caused the novel to be banned in the United States until 1933, when a monumental court ruling finally allowed its publication due to its nature as art, not pornography, blazing a new trail of free expression in literature. Joyce also breaks boundaries of form, playing with narrative styles throughout the eighteen chapters, ending with a forty-five page stream of consciousness that reveals the inner thoughts of Molly, Leopold's wife. Joyce even breaks typographical convention in certain ways, such as avoiding quotation marks for speech and chapter headings. In terms of plot, Bloom discovers that his wife has been cheating on him, then leaves and crosses paths with a character from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, whom Bloom invites over to sing with Molly after a series of

conversations about life, truth, and values. As the first three chapters focus on Stephen before Bloom is introduced, Joyce actually portrays a variety of visions of Ireland, including Molly's final chapter. These visions are best described as Joyce's attempt at a realist depiction of his Ireland, with all elements of daily life, and a variety of forms of expression, no matter how sordid or unflattering. The result is a classic novel that has served as the paragon of British modernism for decades.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 80- Catholic Church scene from Bloom's internal perspective.
- p. 173- Bloom's sexual fantasy.
- p. 236- Conception of America as the "sweeping of every country including our own."
- p. 299- Merging discourses, scientific explanation of the postmortem erection.
- p. 422-593- Chapter that reads like a play, but everything (even inanimate objects, imaginary characters, and concepts) play speaking parts.
- p. 625- Encouragement for Irish to stay in Ireland: "Ireland could not spare a single one of her sons."
- p. 686- In the question/answer chapter, woman is compared to the moon.
- p. 727- Depiction of sex from Molly's internal thought-stream perspective.

Lazarus, Neil, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.

Engaging a theoretical perspective more readily than any of my other readings, this volume grounds the field of Postcolonial Literary Studies in its historical, political, and academic context. The twelve authors in this edition (Lazarus writes two chapters) detail the processes of colonization (including decolonization and recolonization) and

raise questions about the struggle for representation, language, and cultural power in Asia, Africa and Latin America following the relatively recent political independence of nations in those areas from European and American control. The term 'postcolonial' does not necessarily indicate a time *after* colonization because of the complicated ways that forms of colonization still exist, such as the economic situations formed by nations in Africa and elsewhere that are reliant on foreign financial institutions. Rather, Postcolonial Studies breaks down binary oppositions of master/slave and colonizer/colonized to investigate the ways that nationalism and national identity function in our world of increasingly independent states. The theorists invoked (Homi K. Bhaba, Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Salman Rushdie, and others) represent a variety of views and perspectives on the amorphous and interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies, which perhaps is better defined by these differences and tensions than any overarching statement of purpose or definition. For example, Spivak focuses on the concept of the "subaltern," the object fixed in the position of an object, unable to become a subject due to lack of language or opportunity. This comes up in both feminist and postcolonial discourse, as the two inevitably interact and intersect. Yet Fanon, who argues for a reversal of the West-over-East or white-over-black narrative of colonization in favor of claiming that much of white culture gains its stature only from those it colonizes and controls, also has writing that seems misogynistic. The breadth and depth of this field, despite only existing in any formal sense for a few decades, reveals what is at stake: how we place ourselves in the world and how we view others affects political decisions that have real and serious consequences for entire nations and cultures. While it may be impossible to truly place ourselves in the shoes of others, postcolonial literary

studies enhances our understanding of the literature that represents the complexities and tensions of nation building in a “postcolonial” world.

Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine, eds. *Hemispheric American Studies*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008. Print.

Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine. “Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nation.” Levander and Levine 1-17.

As stated in the introduction, a major goal of Levander and Levine’s collection of essays is “to chart new literary and cultural geographies by decentering the U.S. nation and excavating the intricate and complex politics, histories, and discourses of spatial encounter that occur throughout the hemisphere but tend to be obscured in U.S. nation-based inquiries” (3). They argue that in many ways the end of European colonialism brought about by individual nations declaring independence in the Americas gave way for a kind of internal American imperialism that quelled diverse cultures through slavery and repression. Only relatively recently have we begun to demystify the notion that the nation is a natural and original concept, realizing the relational, contested nature of nation building. Their attempts should not be misread as a desire to move beyond the use of the United States as a focus of American studies, but rather to reinterpret the United States from multiple perspectives, beyond “the terms of its own exceptionalist self-imaginings” (7). While it is true that the idea of a nation (or even a continent or hemisphere) is a social construct, it still functions as a reality on the social and cultural level, and these identities live in constant interaction. Levander and Levine take up the textual and cultural products that result from actual bodies and people who live in the spaces of these complex interactions. In their view, the United States is not the privileged nation, with all else seen from a nationalist perspective, but rather, one of the many types of borders that make up

the American continent(s). Within this complex array of borders, identity issues on multiple levels (individually, nationally, culturally, racially, etc.) surface and that is the focus of this volume.

Lukács, Georg. "The Ideology of Modernism." *Literature in the Modern World*, 2nd edition. Ed. Dennis Walder. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 175-80. Print.

Lukács' essay, first published in 1957, speaks of tendencies in modernist literature but points to what we now call a postmodern ideology with his description of the modern psychology. He aims to look past discussions of form into how modernist writers portray man in a philosophical sense. He argues that writers have made a split from viewing man as a "social animal" to identifying man as an isolated individual with only surface-level contact with other isolated individuals. Lukács also attempts to distinguish between "abstract potentialities" and "concrete potentialities" in modernist realism, but argues that a distinction can only be made if one views the outside world as concrete and knowable. At the point of recognition that man can only know the world through his own fallible senses this distinction becomes irrelevant. This leads to stream-of-consciousness to portray reality (Joyce), even in absurd or confusing ways (Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Beckett's *Molloy*). The result is a sort of breakdown of personality that turns every character into an interdependent being—he is both described by and describes himself simultaneously, making 'reality' less important than 'perception' in modernist fiction.

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: HarperCollins, 1970. Print.

Marquez' narrative spans multiple generations in the family of José Arcadio Buendía, an explorer of sorts who helps found a small town in Colombia named Macondo. He marries Ursula, a distant relative whom he is afraid to sleep with at first for fear of inbreeding. This portends a curse of sorts that follows the entire family, ending with an act of true inbreeding between Aureliano and his aunt, Amaranta Ursula four generations later. This union produces a baby with a pig-tail, the original prophecy, who is promptly eaten by ants. Throughout the generations a mysterious gypsy named Melquíades fascinates some of the characters, such as the original patriarch, and his coded text reveals at the end a vision of all the generations of the family coexisting. These generations were afflicted in Macondo throughout the novel by supernatural curses, such as the curse of insomnia and four years of constant rain, and human oppression, brought by the civil war and the imperialistic banana company. The members of the family seem trapped by two things: their own fatal flaws that lead to isolation and a supernatural force that keeps them in Macondo. Even the characters that leave, whether running away with gypsies or travelling to Europe for an education, eventually return, and suffer the inevitable fate of loneliness and death in Macondo. The names of the characters are recycled many times through the generations, making it difficult for the reader to remember individual characters. As a result, the fate of the individuals seems shared by all.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 44- Arcadio & Amaranta speak Guajiro, not Spanish, as children. Since language is such a huge part of identity, this signifies an attempted break from their parents.

- p. 51- When the curse of forgetting hits the town, they must put labels on everything.
- p. 105- Ironically, the first disruption of the peace comes when rules about the election are enforced. In trying to create ‘order,’ order is broken.
- p. 198- Aureliano Segundo & José Arcadio are confused from birth, and we constantly question if they were “appropriately” named. With these two, it seems name carries a definition of character.
- p. 245- The railroad represents invasion on two levels—nationally, Americans show up, and technologically, everything changes. Macondo is never the same.
- p. 332- The banana company performs a massacre and then writes it out of history like it never happened. “Official” history overrides individual memory.

McGill, Meredith, ed. *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008. Print.

While my focus has been primarily on 20th century fiction in the United States and in Britain, it is exactly this kind of specialization that my project resists. To pretend that, for example, postmodern American fiction arose all on its own, with no history and no connection with other countries or forms or movements is ludicrous. McGill’s collection of essays deals specifically with 19th century poetry, but what interests me most is how her methodology breaks ground. McGill laments that most transatlantic scholarship to date reveals a specific perspective and is grounded in either the British or American literary tradition, an inevitable result of the structure of the academy and its limited categories. One of McGill’s aims is to reclaim the Atlantic as its own space, where information and ideas travelled in all directions, including to and from Africa, South America, and Canada. One result common to multiple essays in the volume is the confrontation of the mythologized with the real. For example, Kate Flint’s contribution deals with the complicated dual-role that American Indians played in Longfellow’s

poetry. On one hand, the British used the symbol of the Indian to represent the land of America, primitive and uncivilized, yet simultaneously saw the Indian as an object of American oppression. Meanwhile, Indians were visiting England, at times reinforcing the stereotypes and at times resisting them. McGill also focuses on the role women played in transatlantic exchange, noting the shared struggle for agency and representation that women on both sides of the Atlantic experienced during this time. Since the field is so broad and the scholarship relatively new, McGill's collection serves as an opening invitation to deeper and wider study.

Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Penguin, 1977. Print.

Song of Solomon depicts the physical and spiritual journey of Macon "Milkman" Dead as he discovers the secrets of his family history in Michigan, where he grows up, and Pennsylvania, where he travels in search of his inheritance. He earns his unfortunate nickname when a gardener witnesses him breast-feeding at an advanced age, and is named Macon Dead after his father, who received his name by a drunken white man who made a mistake when registering him. Names play an important thematic role in the novel for every character, including Milkman's aunt, Pilate, and his best friend, Guitar. Pilate's name is arbitrarily chosen from a Bible by her father, who cannot read, and her bad reputation with Milkman's father combined with her lack of navel gives the reader the feeling early on that she is a mysterious or evil character. But through her actions throughout the novel, caring for her daughter and granddaughter, forgiving Milkman and loving him, she proves her name a misnomer and her reputation unfounded. Guitar and Milkman grow apart as Guitar becomes more militant in racial conflict, joining the Seven Days, a secret society that kills innocent white people for every innocent black person

that is killed. Guitar haunts Milkman on his journey to discover his inheritance, which he thinks is a bag of stolen gold. However, Milkman discovers not a bag of gold on his journey, but a whole town that seems to have descended from his great grandfather, Solomon. According to the song the children sing in this town, Solomon flew away, echoing an African folk tale about achieving freedom from slavery in America in the act of flying back across the Atlantic. In the final scene, Guitar and Milkman fly at each other, and we know that one will die, but we do not know who.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 4- The struggle for naming their street—officially called “Main St.” but colloquially known as “Doctor Street.” When the city legislators emphasized it’s not Doctor Street, it became known as “Not Doctor Street” among the local black residents. Who owns this name?
- p. 46- Reba walks into Sears to use a bathroom and wins a prize for being the 500,000th customer. However, as black people are symbolically ignored, the “second place” white man gets in the newspaper, not Reba.
- p. 139- Passage that contrasts Pilate with Ruth.
- p. 179- The white peacock as symbol of white decadence, which also prevents flight. Guitar suggests that you can only fly if you don’t have jewelry to hold you down.
- p. 208- Pilate picks up the bones and carries them around with her because human life is precious.
- p. 222- Guitar lectures Milkman on self-ownership as the ideal.
- p. 273- On the hunt you must look away from the light to adjust your eyes to the dark. This can be read metaphorically in light of Morrison’s focus on black and white presence in American history and literature.
- p. 306- Guitar’s advice for Hagar on the difference between “loving” and “owning,” which precludes love.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1992. Print.

In this hybrid text Morrison explores the central question of how the “assumption of a ‘universal’ white readership [has] affected the history of American Literature” (xii-xiii). As she humorously points out, in most American literature, especially early American literature, if a character is not described ethnically then he or she is assumed to be white. This represents the readership also, as most texts assumed a white readership. Morrison argues that we can respond falsely to this phenomenon in two main ways and that these false responses significantly limit our understanding of, and the richness of, American Literature. The first false response is to assume no black presence in literature or American consciousness. Morrison argues that explicit or not, a black presence has coursed through American writing since day one, as a black presence has existed in American life since day one. As America was founded literature revealed an obsession with freedom and authority, which, without crediting the black presence, can be attributed to the motives of colonists in the first place: to be free from government or religion that tried to control them. However, as Morrison suggests, the primary working out of this expressed freedom came from the power of owning slaves. Freedom existed as a direct contrast to slavery. The second mistake we are prone to in assuming a white consciousness, Morrison argues, is that we dismiss all literature that marginalizes or eradicates the black voice as inherently racist and unworthy of study. Morrison prefers to embrace our history as essential to creating America, turning “racist objects” into “racial subjects” (90), encouraging us to “recognize the disrupting darkness” (91) that undergirds our literary criticism. In doing so, we can credit the black presence in a way that white authors did not earlier in our history. We can move past singular labels of certain authors

as “racist” into recognizing them as objects of racial influences themselves, making their lives and works more complex and worthy of study.

Palumbo-Liu, David. “Chapter 8: Atlantic to Pacific: James, Todorov, Blackmur, and Intercontinental Form.” Dimock and Buell 196-226.

For someone familiar with the emerging strain of transatlantic criticism in American Literature studies, Palumbo-Liu’s article asks the question, “Why stop there?” Using Henry James’ *The Jolly Corner* as a starting point, Palumbo-Liu explores how Form, in both literature and physical buildings, helps to mold the space for both spaces—literary and physical—not only across the Atlantic, but across the Pacific as well. Three historical moments show how a preoccupation with Form has influenced the physical space of a city: New York at the turn of the twentieth century, Japan following World War II, and Paris in the 1960s. Palumbo-Liu recognizes that much scholarship on the “foreign” buildings that James’ Brydon encounters upon his return to New York serve as metaphorical depictions of Brydon’s psychological state, but urges readers to not only see them as metaphorical. In a very real sense, the buildings shape physical life, and James himself experienced such physical disorientation upon his return to New York after emigrating to England. Through French Formalist philosophers and American lecturers in Japan, this preoccupation literally crosses both the Atlantic and the Pacific in a worldly exchange of ideas, recognizing that Form is *always* an issue—in buildings and literature, across the globe. In this way, James’ text becomes a globally relevant text in dealing with decisions around Form.

Posnock, Ross. “Chapter 5: Planetary Circles: Philip Roth, Emerson, Kundera.” Dimock and Buell 141-167.

Posnock's self-stated goal in this essay is to liberate authors like Philip Roth and Ralph Waldo Emerson from the limited labels that get placed on them and to open up their works for a larger level of understanding. Drawing off Emerson's concept of *Circles* (from the essay with that name), Posnock recognizes that we, as humans, are constantly within an infinite number of circles that can never fully and exclusively contain an individual or a group. By pointing out that every experience that makes up human life is a unique, first-time experience, Posnock suggests that all humans are essentially immature. It is this immaturity that Philip Roth taps into in books like *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Human Stain*, in an attempt to free himself up from a closed definition as a "Jewish-American" author. While it is true that he is Jewish and American, he also owns an infinite number of other labels (gender, age, location, name, desires, experiences, etc.) that identify him as a unique individual. Posnock connects Roth to Kundera not only in the shared immaturity of experiencing life for the first time, but in their shared conception that life should be lived with a certain attitude, being "game" for whatever life brings, as showcased by Melville's Pip. Making these connections allows us to see authors in a broader context, or perhaps better stated, in a plurality of contexts, which enhances the meaning of their works.

Roberts, Andrew. "Culture and Consciousness in the Twentieth-Century English Novel." *The Twentieth Century: A Guide to Literature from 1900 to the Present Day*. Ed. Linda R. Williams. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1992. 31-52. Print.

Roberts begins his brief but informative survey of English literature from 1900 to the present by recognizing the transatlantic beginnings of modernism. Henry James, born American, and Joseph Conrad, a Pole, brought a conscious sense of culture clash to their writing, which is held by many as emblematic of early modernism. This culture clash

introduced unreliable narrators and the distinction between ‘narrator’ and ‘narrative voice,’ most notably in *Heart of Darkness* when both are spoken by the same character, though at different points of his life. Authors such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce took this further, creating entire novels from the interior of the head rather than the exterior of the body. While these innovations caused stirs among critics, other authors such as George Orwell directly took up political issues in their novels, combating the sense of getting lost inside one’s own head that some felt upon reading *Ulysses*. As the World Wars closed, some writing took up satire as a chief mode in the face of the darker elements of mankind that were so vividly on display. Meanwhile, the 1940s and 50s saw a boom in feminist writing, represented by two major types of feminists: those who championed the individuality and equality of women and those who sought a breakdown of the gender barrier through androgynous characters and denying gendered essentialism. Roberts also recognizes the emergence of true “Commonwealth” writing, which he recognizes as a politically outdated term but fails to come up with a better one. In the second half of the century, books emerge written in English and other languages by people who are fully part of the countries once colonized by England. Through these books, native voices such as R. K. Narayan can replace the English ‘outsider-looking-in’ voice of an E. M. Forster, for example. Readers during this time begin to turn to authentic voices from the Caribbean, Australia, Africa, and Asia, including translating works into English. Cohesively, this chapter represents the “large and expanding” nature of fiction and the “diversity of the contemporary English novel” (52) that gives Roberts hope for a continued fervor in novel writing.

Rushdie, Salman. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. London: Granta Books, 1990. Print.

This fanciful children's story can be read as an alternative to traditional fairy tales in which the dashing young prince rescues the beautiful princess and they live happily ever after. Haroun is the child of Rashid, the Shah of Blah, master story-teller, who runs out of stories to tell when his wife (and Haroun's mother) leaves him for a boring and sensible clerk. In an attempt to help his father retain the ability to tell great stories, Haroun embarks on an imaginative journey into the land where stories come from, where a great battle is taking place between the Guppies, who wish for stories to flow, and the leader of the Chup, Khattam-Shud, who desires for all stories to be silenced. Haroun helps save the day with his willpower and is rewarded with a true happy ending when he returns to "reality" with his father to find his sad, dry town happy and rainy and his mother returned. In this tale, the evil characters are those who resist stories, fighting the imagination with an emphasis on "reality," as if stories are not part of reality. Traditional stories are also criticized by how ridiculous the Prince and Princess are in the land of stories. Prince Bolo is selfish and idiotic, pursuing his Princess Batcheat (which means "chit-chat") in a blind, single-minded pursuit. Batcheat herself is ugly, although the narrator never says this directly, and her voice is so awful that nobody can stand it. In this way, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* simultaneously encourages imaginative play and fanciful tales while challenging the traditional model of an English children's fairy tale.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 17- Rashid tells Haroun that the source of stories is "Much Too Complicated to Explain" rather than giving him all the details. When things are left unexplained, imagination can play.
- p. 103- Introduction of the ridiculous Prince Bolo.

- p. 113- Haroun yawns sleepily at the idea of another save-the-princess story, but he is actually involved in a much different story.
- p. 182-183- Blabbermouth saves the day and reveals that she is a page girl in disguise, reversing the “male prince” hero role.
- p. 211- Haroun still gets the happy ending the Walrus promised him.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 1981. New York: Random House, 2006. Print.

Rushdie's Booker Prize-winning masterpiece (winner of the 40-year anniversary “Best of the Booker” award in 2008) attempts, through magical realism, to give a voice to India as its own country following independence from British control. Since India has so many often-conflicting voices, Rushdie's central character, Saleem Sinai, can hear the thoughts of other Indians like he can hear the radio. Most notably, at night, Saleem can communicate with the other one thousand children (or at least the ones who survive) who were born between midnight and 1am on August 15th, 1947, in the first hour of India's national independence. All these children received a magical gift at birth and the closer to midnight that they were born, the stronger the gift. One other boy was born at the stroke of midnight, Saleem's nemesis Shiva, who was switched with Saleem at birth by the nurse Mary. By placing these fictional characters in recorded history, Rushdie exemplifies the way that fiction can engage real issues and problems in a serious way without following strict conventions of realism. Specifically, through Saleem, Rushdie engages the problem of trying to speak for a nation of a billion people in one book. The impossibility of such a task is symbolized by the physical problem that Saleem experiences as he grows older. His body cracks, dries out and begins to break at the seams, since he is incapable of holding in all the voices that he contains.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 118- Indian lack of strict time-keeping represented by their language, which uses the same word for “yesterday” and “tomorrow” contrasted to English impeccable time-keeping, represented by an English clock that is never wrong.
- p. 163- When Gandhi is assassinated, they fear the consequences if it turns out a Muslim did it. When the radio announces it was not a Muslim, they are grateful. This shows the volatility of the Muslim-Hindu conflict in India and how serious it is.
- p. 204- Ahmed Sinai literally turns white, and he is proud of it. As a businessman he envies European complexion and strives for it.
- p. 292- Midnight Children’s Conference becomes “a mirror of the nation” in the endless conflict and prejudice and lack of unity as they develop ideologies.
- p. 441- Saleem claims to be India itself, the sum of all its parts and history, and he claims “to understand me, you’ll have to swallow a world.”

Stevenson, Randall. “Modernism and Modernity” and “Chapter 2: Space.” *Modernist Fiction*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992. 1-15, 17-81. Print.

Randall Stevenson begins his analysis of Modernist Fiction by grounding the modernist novel in the wider historical milieu at the turn of the century in England and Europe. Stevenson locates modernism not as a single entity, unique in all aspects, but as a gradually shifting phenomenon with no clear beginning or end. The innovation and desire for new forms of expression, as Virginia Woolf notes, is not unique to modernism. However, specific to the early 20th century is the newfound concept of multiple versions of reality, depending on the point of view. Freud’s psychoanalysis opens the way for new methods in art and literature, expressed also in Picasso’s paintings. In literature, beginning with Henry James and moving towards Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence, modernism paves the way for new writing techniques that express this new fractured, individualized reality, such as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologues. Stevenson also notes that modernism was not heavily supported at the time

and that our current understanding of “modernist” texts was formed years after the texts were produced. Since Modernism was not a self-identified movement, coherence from author to author was not organized. Instead, each author responded to the culture. In “Space,” Stevenson further details the changes in literature that pertain to point of view and writing techniques in novels. Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford revealed skepticism of knowing reality concretely, as evidenced by questionable descriptions of events and disagreements among points of view. Dorothy Richardson and Mary Sinclair first employ a sort of thought-stream writing, paving the way for Joyce and others. Virginia Woolf seeks new forms that move past a male-structured reality, creating female *subjects* as opposed to *objects*. In *Ulysses*, Joyce employs a multitude of writing techniques that form a sort of “encyclopedia” of new literary forms. While these writers were responding to changes in understanding the mind and reality, they simultaneously helped re-shape and give voice to the new perspectives as they emerged. This tension explains their significance in understanding both the modernist mindset and British literature.

Styron, William. *Sophie's Choice*. 1979. New York: Modern Library Edition, 1999. Print.

Sophie's Choice tells the story of Styron's semi-autobiographical narrator, Stingo, who moves to Brooklyn from the South after World War II, into a pink house owned by a Jewish landlord and housing mostly Jewish tenants. He meets Sophie, a Polish Catholic survivor of the Nazi camps, and her bi-polar Jewish boyfriend, Nathan. As Sophie and Nathan's violently up-and-down relationship unfolds before Stingo, Sophie confides her true story from her time in Europe to Stingo, revealing her psychological and physical trauma, including being forced to make a decision between which of her children she

wanted to have killed by the SS. Among the major issues raised by Styron's book, the American imagination of the holocaust takes center stage. Through Sophie, Styron illustrates how Jews were not the only victims in Europe during the holocaust, especially through the guilt that nags at her throughout her relationship with Nathan, ending in their double suicide. Further, Stingo brings an unavoidable complicity with American slavery to his life, not only because his family owned slaves in the South, but because the money he uses to live comes from a lost payment made for a slave his family once sold. This unavoidable family inheritance brings comparisons between American slavery and concentration camp internment, especially in one scene where Sophie (through Stingo) paints Auschwitz as its own nation, complete with social order, including slavery. The atrocities of the holocaust have become embedded in the American psyche through immigrants from Europe who experienced it firsthand, which creates a tension between actual survivors and sympathizers, as imagination could never do justice to the tragedy of the holocaust. Styron places his narrator in the center of this tension, adding to it Stingo's personal hang-ups, including an (almost) insatiable sexual desire for Sophie. In the end, Stingo seems incapable of fully internalizing the impact of all he has heard and seen from Sophie, but concludes by offering the maxim that all we can do is try to love one another.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 45- To Stingo, Brooklyn is more Jewish than Tel Aviv. Jewish diaspora has created a displaced nation.
- p. 149- Stingo has to interpret Faulkner for Sophie, not just the dialect but how to interpret it. The difference between the South and Brooklyn is not just linguistic but cultural.
- p. 164- The American understanding of the Holocaust is made up of empty catch words and facts, which don't lead to actual comprehension of what happened.

- p. 284- Controversial comparison of Poland with the American South.
- p. 412- Through Sophie's story, Stingo's consciousness is embedded with residual guilt about what he was doing during the holocaust in America, innocently. This symbolizes America's ignorance (or denial) of the holocaust for years.
- p. 550- Wanda talks about the suffering of everyone, not just Jews, in the holocaust, even though Jews are "the victims of victims."

Sundquist, Eric J. "Chapter 4: Mr. Styron's Planet." Dimock and Buell 103-140.

Considering the controversy that Styron garnered for his earlier book, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, for inserting himself into the history of the slave rebellion from the perspective of a black man, he undoubtedly expected a similar backlash for writing about the Holocaust. Sundquist takes a critical approach to the problems that are raised by Styron's choice of narrator (a semi-autobiographical Southerner living in Jewish New York), content (the unraveling and self-destruction of a traumatized Polish Catholic girl post-WWII), and certain elements of style (such as a Christianized autoeroticism that conflates guilt and ecstasy in sexual fantasy). Sundquist contends Styron's decision to conflate the Jewish suffering with the suffering of other Europeans under the Nazi regime, which seems to force a conflict between Jewish exceptionalism and latent anti-Semitism. On one hand, it seems wrong to discount the suffering of the millions of non-Jews who were forced into slave labor and death by the Nazis, as if in a tragedy of this magnitude you can differentiate levels of suffering. However, as Sundquist argues, the Nazis truly did have a unique plan for what they called the "Jewish problem," which involved systematic and deliberate genocide. Styron further engages this dilemma with repeated analogies between the concentration camps in Europe and slavery in America. Such analogies certainly have some legitimacy, especially considering that

the concentration camps were essentially full of slaves, but Sundquist questions whether such analogies subtly downplay the uniqueness of the Jewish experience in WWII Germany. He points out that the Germans invading Poland certainly had different motives than the North in the American Civil War. Sundquist also problematizes Stryon's decision to leave Jews mostly out of his narrative, except for Nathan Landau, who exhibits the psychopathic schizophrenia of some of the SS officers during Sophie's experience in concentration camps, sometimes reversing the role of the Jew in his relationship with Sophie. Although Sundquist does criticize many of Stryon's choices, he obviously sees *Sophie's Choice* as a rich bed for discussion of these important critical topics that must be engaged.

Trotter, David. "The Modernist Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 70-99. Print.

Trotter's chapter represents transatlantic scholarship that exists outside of a self-identified "transatlantic" framework by weaving Modernist techniques and forms between authors on both sides of the Atlantic. Trotter exposes the complications and tensions that authors explored in the early 20th century, showing that even though these texts share the label "modernism," they represent diverse and even opposing ideas. For example, while modernist texts tend to privilege the perspective of the individual, some authors focus on the experience of the body while others hone in on the experience of the mind. When T.S. Eliot argued that "the novel had effectively 'ended' with Flaubert and James" (70), authors responded in a variety of ways in an effort to keep literature alive. Trotter partners Joyce and D.H. Lawrence to exemplify a reaction focused on stricter form as a response to the loosening conception of the novel. He then groups Lawrence

with F. Scott Fitzgerald and Virginia Woolf to represent the modernist desire for absolute overthrow of form, representing the collapsing and renewing of civilization. Faulkner and Joyce embody a phenomenon not recognized until poststructuralist criticism in the 1960s, creating not a “novel” or a “poem” but a “text.” Ernest Hemingway and Dorothy Richardson use vastly different styles to focus on gender difference in unique ways. While Hemingway focuses on differences within, including androgynous characters, Richardson focuses on differences *between* male and female to give women the role of subject, echoing Virginia Woolf’s feminism. In the last section, Trotter returns to Joyce, Woolf, and Ford to illustrate the ongoing complications of writing novels following the World Wars that are more than self-parody. Throughout the chapter, Trotter’s groupings show the diversity within authors under the label “modernism,” showing it to be a process of contention and struggle, rather than an overarching and solidified identity. Authors can be paired in a variety of ways, including transatlantically.

Watts, Edward. “Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy.” *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 447-458. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.

In this article, Watts suggests that while the term is a relatively recent construct, the essence of *postcolonialism* has been present in some form since colonization itself. In America, as in New Zealand and other English settlements, Watts positions the Europeans as “settler,” which makes them both colonizers and colonized. Watts argues that a counter-culture postcolonial attitude is embedded in some early literature, but that the forming of the literary canon ignored such texts in favor of more nationalist authors, leading to the republication of a relatively homogenous sample of writing from the colonial period. Watts also points out that much criticism of American Literature in the

mid-19th century points to the best American authors as simply imitating the style of the British. As a result, authors who toyed with new forms were marginalized as American and inferior. However, Watts suggests that a nationalist reading of these texts, as well as early colonial texts, has more to do with the attitude of the reader and critic of the texts than with the writing of them. Therefore, the postcolonial shift is not just about recovering lost texts that were written by the “minority,” but re-interpreting canonical texts in a postcolonial context, for what they have to offer to complicate our notion of American identity. Watts also imagines the colonial period as merging with the postcolonial with no real boundary in time, so American authors all the way through to the present day struggle with how to depict an essentialized American identity, struggling between the bounds of colonized and colonizing. Of course, this is impossible to do with any finality, which creates the room for critical debates.

Whitman, Walt. “I Hear America Singing” and “Song of Myself.” *Leaves of Grass*. 1892. New York: Bantam Books, 1983. Print.

These two poems pair nicely together as *Song of Myself* can be read as an example of the songs Whitman hears in *I Hear America Singing*. In *I Hear America Singing*, Whitman navigates the tension between a conceptually homogenous “melting-pot” version of America and a celebration of individual diversity within America. As a champion of rugged individualism, it is no surprise he stakes a firm claim on celebrating diversity, as each representative character in the poem has his or her own song, as evidenced by the final line, “Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs” (9). But in *Song of Myself*, Whitman employs the first person personal pronoun throughout the 52 sections, claiming for himself a part of every aspect of American life. Explicitly, in

section 16, he claims “Of every hue and caste am I, of every rank and religion” (36), putting himself in the middle of the diversity of America and embodying it all simultaneously. Here is the inherent contradiction that he self-identifies in the penultimate section: he is both absolutely individual and the representation of individualism that America is built on. His individualism causes him to place himself above God in his own estimation, encouraging others to do the same. Given our historical distance, his vision can be exposed as problematic, as the groups most marginalized in 19th century America (women, blacks, American Indians, etc.) are still marginalized in this poem, objectified to fit Whitman’s conception of them as individuals. Idealistically, though, shedding a more progressive light on Whitman’s words, the poem can be read as a call for the marginalized to take up their own voice, as Whitman is incapable of providing that for them. Only then can the true ideal of American individualism take its place. Much of contemporary fiction that asserts cultural individualism in America, such as *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *American Born Chinese*, can consequently act as a delayed response to Whitman’s call, a resounding “barbaric yawp” asserting individual identity.

Williams, Linda R. “Introduction: Writing from Modernism to Postmodernism.” *The Twentieth Century: A Guide to Literature from 1900 to the Present Day*. Ed. Linda R. Williams. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1992. 1-14. Print.

Williams details the paradoxical nature of modernist and postmodernist literature as categories, given that one predominant characteristic of both is the breaking down of formal categorical barriers. She argues that, like *Finnegan’s Wake*, the ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ moments have no clear beginning or end. Modernism and postmodernism share characteristics, such as the refusal to conform to traditions and an

interdisciplinary range that creates troubled boundaries between the two. Since modernist writers chiefly concerned themselves with troubling boundaries, it seems the “modernist” project has never really ended. Rather, the opening up of new forms of expression continues today. The categories are not meaningless, however, as a rebel must have something to rebel against. Williams admits that modernist writers may have essentialized (and misconstrued) Victorian literature in order to formally resist it, but that this process was helpful in motivating the literature that has been produced. Categorizing helps us be aware of literary traditions, even if no system of categorizing is absolute. This collection of essays aims to contextualize the works of literature written in 20th century England by noting trends and groups as well as how specific authors broke from these categories. Williams does not claim to have the final word on the narrative of British literary tradition, but desires to contribute one possible way of looking at it all.

Williams, Raymond. “Modernism and the Metropolis.” *Literature in the Modern World*, 2nd edition. Ed. Dennis Walder. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 180-87. Print.

Williams analyzes the major role that the development of cities and metropolises played in grounding what we call ‘modernism’ today. As the cities housed academies and museums that established the dominant hegemony of orthodoxy, it simultaneously became easier for resisters to have a voice, given the solidity of what they argued against. It became possible for individuals in cities to create new forms and attract new audiences in a way that scattered communities could not. With the mass immigration to cities that produced the modernist shift, Williams points out how “many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants” (182). Since these immigrants brought such a variety of views and values, the cities became home to burgeoning points of view and

ideas for new forms. Williams also dismisses the idea that modernism had a fixed beginning and end, suggesting that the clean categorization of authors and artists into this group gave it academic legitimacy that enhanced their texts. Instead, Williams encourages opening the category up for its many contradictions and complications, both in the context of the early 20th century and in how we view it today.

Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt, 1925. Print.

Woolf's novel parallels with Joyce's *Ulysses* in that it, also, details the events of one day from a variety of perspectives. The initial, and focal, perspective comes from Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a party she is to throw in the evening for some of her friends and upper-class British figures. She is revisited by a young lover of hers, Peter Walsh, whom she rejected in favor of her current husband, Richard. Peter spent five years in India but seems not to have gotten over Clarissa, at one point asking if she is currently happily married. Her ruminations indicate that on some level she is content with her situation, but she does lament the lack of absolute intimacy between her and Richard. She seems to have had more passion for Peter, but Richard was the "safe" choice. Another perspective in the novel is that of Septimus, a veteran whose idealism has been replaced by pessimism in the wake of the war. All he sees is negativity, and he refuses to grant his wife children. After being condemned to the insane asylum, Septimus opts to throw himself out of his window. The culmination of the book is a forty-five page scene of Clarissa's party from everybody's shifting perspective, including an appearance by the Prime Minister. The novel is not really driven by plot, but rather serves to express the complicated psyche of an upper-class Britain, skeptical of its own values yet ignorant of the vocabulary to fully express it. Although there are moments of direct feminism and

ironic statements of pseudo-nationalism, the power of the book lies in its overall effect, which cannot be embodied fully by one scene or one statement.

Key Passages/Images:

- p. 11- Clarissa refuses to categorize or label people. She would not say of herself or anyone else that “they are this” or “I am that.”
- p. 47-48- Clarissa thinks of her relationship with Sally Seton as “falling in love” by questioning the difference between relationships with men and with women.
- p. 82- Even Peter, who seems to hate British colonialism, as a third generation Anglo-Indian feels pride in England and its civilization. Self contradiction/conflict created.
- p. 134- Septimus represents the British post-war consciousness by declaring all literature as passing down misery and despair, refusing to have kids.
- p. 229- Efficiency of the ambulance coming to the scene represents British civilization to Peter, but at the same time morbidity.
- p. 259- Clarissa has to play a role she doesn’t want to play as host of the party.

Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2006. Print.

In this graphic novel three stories combine in the climax: The mythological story of a Monkey King who desires to be more powerful than all the gods after being shunned from a party, the early childhood of Jin Wang, born in the United States to Chinese immigrant parents in a white neighborhood, and the farcical story of Chin Kee, an embodiment of every negative Chinese stereotype in America, who comes to America each year and causes his cousin Danny endless embarrassment at school. The Monkey King, despite mastering 12 arts of Kung-Fu, is humbled by Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the creator of everything, and after being buried under rocks for 500 years, finally accepts that he is only a barefoot monkey, and becomes a disciple of humble Wong Lai-Tsao on his journey to the West. Meanwhile, Jin Wang is frustrated in his attempts to date a pretty

white girl at school, and hates being Chinese because he is looked down upon by some of the white kids at school. After an especially frustrating day when he lashes out at his Taiwanese best friend, Wei-Chen, he wakes up white and names himself Danny. His supposed cousin, Chin Kee, turns out to be the Monkey King in disguise, who has been sent to Danny to try to help him to accept his Chinese identity. The Monkey King's son, who was also Jin Wang's Taiwanese friend, has been corrupted by Jin Wang's selfishness and shame, and has abandoned the life of a disciple to pursue earthly pleasures. After Danny accepts his Chinese nature and becomes Jin Wang again, he reaches out to befriend Wei-Chen. Throughout the three stories there is a strong theme of accepting one's own identity, embodied most obviously by a Chinese boy in a practically all-white school who must accept his own nature, even though he has no control over it.

APPENDIX A: CAPSTONE PROPOSAL
Written November 17th, 2011

In opting for an MA exam option for my thesis project, I must ensure that my project is sufficiently rigorous to warrant consideration. Here I will clearly lay out the elements of my project. As for material documents, I will submit a thesis-type document that will consist of four sections: An introduction, the written exam responses, an annotated bibliography, and an appendix. The introduction, 15-20 pages in length, will contain a rationale for why I chose an exam option over a traditional thesis and why I chose the particular exam lists I constructed, as well as my understanding of the field of study addressed through my lists and exams and the implications of my reading on my future teaching. I will take three written exams, one on each list and one hybrid question, for a total of three four-hour sit-down essays. My annotated bibliography will cover the 23 primary texts and over 25 secondary texts that I am studying in preparation for my exams. I will also take an oral component prior to submitting my written document.

In short, my choice of taking exams stems from a desire for breadth of learning, rather than intense focus on one research subject in writing a thesis. I desire to teach right away, not to continue my research in a PhD program. I feel that an analysis of more literature, in the comparative context of national American and English literatures, will serve my goals more effectively than a traditional thesis. I understand my position of setting an example of how this project can work and I relish the opportunity. I am willing to do as much work as is necessary to satisfy the standards of a thesis project.

Thank you for your consideration.

APPENDIX B: READING LISTS

American Reading List

I. American Literature in a Global and Transatlantic Context (Primary)

- Cao, Lan. *Monkey Bridge*. New York: Penguin, 1997. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "The American Scholar" and "Circles." *American Transcendentalism Web*. VCU, n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Concord Hymn," "The Rhodora," and "The Snow Storm." *American Transcendentalism Web*. VCU, n.d. Web 30 Jan. 2012.
- The Hours*. Dir. Stephen Daldry. Perf. Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, and Julianne Moore. Paramount. 2003. Film.
- James, Henry. "The Jolly Corner." *The New York Stories of Henry James*. Ed. Colm Tóibín. New York: New York Review of Books, 2006. 463-500. Print.
- Styron, William. *Sophie's Choice*. 1979. New York: Modern Library Edition, 1999. Print.
- Whitman, Walt. "I Hear America Singing" and "Song of Myself." *Leaves of Grass*. 1892. New York: Bantam Books, 1983. Print.

II. Hemispheric American Studies (Primary)

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970. Print.
- Conde, Maryse. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992. Print.
- Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007. Print.
- Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. New York: HarperCollins, 1970. Print.

III. American Multiculturalism (Primary)

- Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Penguin, 1977. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1992. Print.
- Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2006. Print.

IV. Secondary Materials for American Lists

- Arac, Jonathan. "Chapter 1: Global and Babel: Language and Planet in American Literature." Dimock and Buell 19-38.
- Bauer, Ralph. "Early American Literature and American Literary History at the 'Hemispheric Turn.'" *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 217-233. Web. 18

- Jan. 2012.
- Bost, Suzanne. "Doing the Hemisphere Differently: A Response to Ralph Bauer." *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 235-239. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.
- Dimock, Wai Chee, and Lawrence Buell, eds. *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007. Print.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. "Introduction: Planet and America, Set and Subset." Dimock and Buell 1-16.
- Flint, Kate. *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.
- Giles, Paul. "Introduction: The Deterritorialization of American Literature." *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Ed. Paul Giles. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011. 1-25. Print.
- Guterl, Matthew Pratt. "Chapter 5: An American Mediterranean: Haiti, Cuba, and the American South." Levander and Levine 96-115.
- Hutner, Gordon, and Sandra Gustafson. "Projecting Early American Literary Studies: Introduction." *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 211-216. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.
- Jay, Gregory S. *American Literature and the Culture Wars*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. Print.
- Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine, eds. *Hemispheric American Studies*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008. Print.
- Levander, Caroline F. and Robert S. Levine. "Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nation." Levander and Levine 1-17.
- McGill, Meredith, ed. *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008. Print.
- Palumbo-Liu, David. "Chapter 8: Atlantic to Pacific: James, Todorov, Blackmur, and Intercontinental Form." Dimock and Buell 196-226.
- Posnock, Ross. "Chapter 5: Planetary Circles: Philip Roth, Emerson, Kundera." Dimock and Buell 141-167.
- Sundquist, Eric J. "Chapter 4: Mr. Styron's Planet." Dimock and Buell 103-140.
- Watts, Edward. "Settler Postcolonialism as a Reading Strategy." *Early American Literature* 45.2 (2010): 447-458. Web. 18 Jan. 2012.

British Reading List

I. Modernist British Literature

- Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. 1924. Orlando: Harcourt, 1984. Print.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. 1914. New York: Random House, 1933. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt, 1925. Print.

II. Postmodernist British Literature

- Amis, Kingsley. *Lucky Jim*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953. Print.
- Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1954. Print.

Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. New York: Grove Press, 1955. Print.
 Rushdie, Salman. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. London: Granta Books, 1990. Print.

III. Postcolonial British Literature

Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. New York: Scribner, 2003. Print.
 Carey, Peter. *Oscar and Lucinda*. 1988. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.
 Farrell, J. G. *The Siege of Krishnapur*. 1973. New York: NYRB, 2004. Print.
 Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. 1981. New York: Random House, 2006. Print.

IV. British Secondary Materials

Connor, Steven. "Introduction" and "Postmodernism and Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Steven Conner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 1-19, 62-81. Print.
 Dekoven, Marianne. "Modernism and Gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 174-93. Print.
 Fussel, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. 1984. Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
 Head, Dominic, ed. *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.
 Lazarus, Neil, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
 Lukács, Georg. "The Ideology of Modernism." *Literature in the Modern World*, 2nd edition. Ed. Dennis Walder. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 175-80. Print.
 Roberts, Andrew. "Culture and Consciousness in the Twentieth-Century English Novel." *The Twentieth Century: A Guide to Literature from 1900 to the Present Day*. Ed. Linda R. Williams. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1992. 31-52. Print.
 Stevenson, Randall. "Modernism and Modernity." *Modernist Fiction*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992. 1-15. Print.
 Trotter, David. "The Modernist Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 70-99. Print.
 Williams, Linda R. "Introduction: Writing from Modernism to Postmodernism." *The Twentieth Century: A Guide to Literature from 1900 to the Present Day*. Ed. Linda R. Williams. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1992. 1-14. Print.
 Williams, Raymond. "Modernism and the Metropolis." *Literature in the Modern World*, 2nd edition. Ed. Dennis Walder. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 180-87. Print.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores questions of national identity in American and British fiction in the 20th- and early 21st-century. To allow for a project focused on reading a vast array of texts, I implemented a non-traditional thesis format that focused on taking exams. My final product contains an introduction that details the parameters for the project and offers conclusions on my findings and corrections of my essays, the exam essays themselves including a revision, a detailed annotated bibliography of each primary and secondary work studied, as well as an appendix with the reading lists and the original request to try a non-traditional thesis.

My readings in the American Literature list point to an opening up of our definition of “American Literature” to include historically silenced voices and contemporary minority voices. At the intersections of culture that happen all over the country, literature dealing with identity and journeys into acceptance abound. My British Literature list leads to a similar yet historically more complicated solution. Writers have expressed the increasingly divided British society (in the United Kingdom and all over the globe) by employing new aesthetic modes that both respond to the past and point to the future.

By engaging both American and British perspectives, this project also serves as an example of transatlantic scholarship, not simply looking at one through the eyes of the other, but recognizing the interrelatedness historically and culturally of the two identities. The boundaries between the two identities, as well as shifting aesthetic and literary traditions, provide the context for this project.

VITA

Personal Information

Josiah John Clarke
Born: January 20th, 1986 in Salisbury, UK
Citizenship: British
Marital Status: Married to Erin Clarke

Education

B.A. in English, 2008. University of Texas at Austin.
M.A. in English, 2012. Texas Christian University.

Professional Experience

Four semesters as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for the following classes:
London Through a Child's Eyes (British Children's Literature)
Great American Authors
Science Fiction
Literary Critical Theory
Contemporary American Short Story
Duties included grading essays, conducting one-on-one and class writing workshops, and hosting study sessions.

Private Tutor for SAT English and Math at the high school level. Created a curriculum focused on improving reading comprehension, writing clarity and organization, and problem solving techniques and taught the curriculum on a one-on-one level.

Research Interests

My broad interest is American Literature, most importantly the 20th- and 21st-century novel. However, my focus has been on literature that engages issues of national and cultural identity, which has led to a focus on immigrant literature and to partner my studies with British Literature, Latin American Literature, and World Literature in the same time period.