ENGL 340: Literature and Society

Specifcations about Literature and Society, TR 12:30-1:45 are as follows:

ENGL 340 Literature in Society: Metafiction
Instructor: Dr. Annie Raskin
Prerequisite: ENGL 250

One of the stories that we will read, “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, begins: “The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren’t only equal before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.” Tim O’Brien’s novel The Things They Carried, which we will read, is dedicated to the list of fictional characters in the novel as if they were actual persons. Italo Calvino opens his novel If on a winter’s night a traveler with these words: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door. The TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, ‘No, I don’t want to hear you watch TV!’ Raise your voice – they won’t hear you otherwise – ‘I’m reading! I don’t want to be disturbed!’

In this course, we will be reading contemporary fiction that breaks the cardinal rule of fiction – that it be seamlessly believable as real, that as readers we will be able to suspend our disbelief in it as a constructed story written by a writer who made it up, and we will be talking about how and why metafiction is a response to our social and cultural climate. All fiction is a lie, a lie readers are meant to believe. Metafiction exposes that lie in deliberate and interesting ways – sometimes absurdly, sometimes confusingly, often amusingly, but always provocatively.

Senior Portfolio

The Senior Portfolio is a graduation requirement for all English majors. Keeping written and other work samples for inclusion is essential for a successful portfolio.

Portfolio instructions are attached.