

# ENGL 491: Innovative Temporal & Spatial Narratives in Poetry and Fiction

Prof. Mark Irwin      [www.markirwinauthor.com](http://www.markirwinauthor.com)

In this course we will specifically engage texts that alter our perceptions of time and space, challenging us to reconceive the possibilities of narration and how they affect memory. We will specifically discuss the different ways in which these genres approach their subject matter and how each is successful. Beginning with several passages from Aristotle's *Poetics*, we will proceed to discuss aspects of memory, the imagination, and the sublime, and how they impact temporal and spatial worlds. This course will address borders and boundaries, the visible and the invisible, with works from Emily Dickinson, John Ashbery, Natalie Diaz, Arthur Sze, and Jorie Graham in poetry, to those of Kafka, Ishiguro, Murakami, and Cormac McCarthy in prose, along with two films, including *Pulp Fiction* by Quentin Tarantino.

"Memory is the belly of the imagination." St. Augustine

## Required Texts:

Natalie Diaz. *Postcolonial Love Song*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2021. paperback

Jorie Graham. *To 2040*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2023. paperback

Arthur Sze. *Sightlines*. Copper Canyon Press, 2019. paperback

T.S. Eliot. *Four Quartets*. New York: Ecco Press, 2023 paperback

Cormac McCarthy. *The Road*. New York: Knopf, 2006 paperback

Kazuo Ishiguro. *Klara and the Sun*. NY: Vintage, 2022 paperback

W.G. Sebald. *The Rings of Saturn*. Trans. Michael Hulse. New York: New Directions, 1999. paperback **(optional /not required)**

**Pdfs: Cambridge Intro to Narrative, Chapters 1 &2.**

**France 2, France 3 Pdfs**

**Kafka/Murakami Stories Pdf.**

(all posted on Blackboard).

# ENGL 491: Innovative Temporal & Spatial Narratives in Poetry and Fiction

Prof. Mark Irwin mirwin@usc.edu

Taper 415

Fall 2023

**Class: Thursday 4:30-6:50 pm THH 107**

**Office Hours:** T: 12:-2:00pm

TH:4-4:30pm

- WEEK 1      What is Narrative? Why are stories important. Cambridge Introduction to Narrative. Read Chapters 1 & 2 (**2 Pdfs**)  
The Shape of time and space. Syllabus: Merwin: "Passage" & Follain "A Life" Carson: "Town ..." Ruefle: "Last Supper" (**Syllabus**)  
Kafka: "Silence of the Sirens" "An Imperial Message" **Pdf**
- WEEK 2      Selected Emily Dickinson's Poems: "I heard a fly buzz..."  
"I felt a funeral in my brain," "There's a certain slant of light"  
Keats' "Ode Upon a Grecian Urn" FRANCE 2: Ashbery:  
"At North Farm" Tate: "Distance from Loved Ones"  
Kafka: "A Country Doctor" "Report to an Academy" **Pdf**  
"un(dead)" Byrdlong (syllabus)**Start Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun***  
Milosz; "Esse" **France3 pdf**
- WEEK 3      Murakami: "The Ice Man" **Pdf**. Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*  
**Short Paper on Crossing Boundaries of Time & Space Due**
- WEEK 4      Finish Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*
- WEEK 5      Start Diaz *Postcolonial Love Song*
- WEEK 6      Finish: *Postcolonial Love Song* Begin: *Four Quartets*
- WEEK 7      *Four Quartets* Begin Ashbery: "At North Farm" FRANCE 2  
Mary Ruefle: "Bunny Gives Us a Lesson..." FRANCE 2
- WEEK 8      Graham Poems: FRANCE 2. Begin *To 2040*  
**Fall Break Film: *Pulp Fiction***

- WEEK 9      Graham: *To 2040*
- WEEK 10     Begin Arthur Sze. *Sightlines*.
- WEEK 11     Arthur Sze. *Sightlines*. Read Selected Merwin    **FRANCE 2**
- WEEK 12     **BEGIN GROUP PRESENTATIONS** Kafka: "The Metamorphosis"
- WEEK 12     Kafka: "The Metamorphosis" & "Report to an Academy" **(Pdf)**  
"The Metamorphosis" **available online.**
- WEEK 13     Begin: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*
- WEEK 14     *The Road*
- WEEK 15     *The Road*
- Final Paper Due**
- WEEK 16     *The Road*    Summary of Themes on Innovative Narratives

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Students successfully completing this course should understand how transformational works of poetry and fiction are attained through crossing new boundaries. How do they prevent “regions of unlikeness” from becoming common grounds? How does a poem, short story, or novel become transformational? How texts, altering our perceptions of time and space, challenge us to reconceive the possibilities of narration and how they affect memory. How innovative and unconventional the ways in which these works approach their subject matter and how each is successful. How the technological revolution, portrayed in some of these works, affects our notions of nature, memory and the imagination?

“If you find that you no longer believe,  
try enlarging the temple.”

--W.S. Merwin

**ATTENDANCE:** Any student missing more than two classes, without an excuse, may be asked to leave the class.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** Due on given date, unless you are ill, then due on *next* class. Any assignment turned in later than the next class after it is due will be given a zero, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Your grade for ENGL will be determined in the following manner:

<b>Class assignments, participation, midterm</b>	30% (exam ½)
<b>Group project</b>	30%
<b>Final paper</b>	40%

**My job is to ensure that you achieve the highest possible grade.**

Strong attendance and or class participation may raise a grade up to ½ letter.

## The Last Supper

It made a dazzling display:  
the table set with the meat  
from half a walnut, a fly  
on a purple grape  
lit from within and the fly  
bearing small black eggs.  
We gathered round the oval table  
with our knives, starved  
for some inner feast.  
We were not allowed to eat,  
as we had been hired as models  
by the man at our head.  
Days passed  
in which we grew faint with hunger.  
Later we were told  
that although we did not appear  
on the canvas  
our eyes devouring these things  
provided the infinite light.

Mary Ruefle

**Passage**

In autumn in this same life  
I was leaving a capital  
where an old animal  
captured in its youth  
one that in the wild  
would never have reached such an age  
was watching the sun set  
over nameless  
unapproachable trees  
and it is spring

--W.S. Merwin

**Town of Finding Out About the Love of God**

I had made a mistake.  
Before this day.  
Now my suitcase is ready.  
Two hardboiled eggs.  
For the journey are stored.  
In places where.  
My eyes were.  
Like a current.  
Carrying a twig.  
The sobbing made me.  
Audible to you.

Anne Carson            from *Plainwater*

## Life

A child is born  
 into a great landscape  
 half a century later  
 he's just a dead soldier  
 and this was the man  
 we saw appear and set down  
 a heavy sack of apples  
 two or three of which rolled  
 making sound among sounds of a world  
 where the bird sang on the door's  
 stone threshold.

Translated from the French by Mark Irwin

## Vie

Il naît un enfant  
 dans un grand paysage  
 un demi-siècle après  
 il n'est qu'un soldat mort  
 et c'était là cet homme  
 que l'on vit apparaître  
 et puis poser par terre  
 tout un lourd sac de pommes  
 dont deux ou trois roulèrent  
 bruit parmi ceux d'un monde  
 où l'oiseau chantait  
 sur la pierre du seuil.

Jean Follain

## (un)dead

Does anyone else, while they're watching  
the video of the cop shooting the black  
man/boy/person on the internet

pause the video right before it ends?  
I do—It doesn't matter if it's the one  
with Tamir or Oscar.

Sometimes, right before it gets to the end  
I'll stop it, then hit rewind—It's always bizarre  
witnessing the body rise and the cop

retreat, climb back into their car  
before fleeing in reverse. Likewise, it is  
strangely beautiful to see the snow

(un)red as the bullet exits the (un)dead  
body and return into the barrel's black,  
the boy/man/person now standing,

walking. Does anyone else laugh  
or manage a mischievous smile  
imagining the look on death's face?

Bryan Byrdlong



## ***Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems***

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call*

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local

crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call*  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

*Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086*

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776*

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411*

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101*

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call*

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

*Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)*

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.