

## GESM 120G

### Reality Bites: The Short Fiction of Everyday Life

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Spring 2024  
Section TBD  
Time TBD  
Room TBD

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Office Hours: TBD

#### Course Description

This class concerns the representation of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives in the short fiction of Europe, Africa and the Americas. We will immerse ourselves in the day-to-day realities of the urban spaces of modernity. Taking up a variety of perspectives, we will observe characters as they struggle against race, class, and gender divisions in their public lives, and against love, loss, boredom, and secret rage in their private lives. We will study the complex narrative techniques writers use to capture the commonplace, and learn to appreciate the understated art of short fiction.

We will begin with questions such as: What is real? What is fiction? What is the relationship between words and the world? As the semester progresses, we will interrogate the relationship between realistic fiction (and creative nonfiction) and ethics and ask: to what extent do these texts expose and critique socio-political inequalities and to what extent are they conciliatory to social and moral norms?

#### Learning Objectives

This class will increase students' abilities to analyze literature by studying various authors associated with realistic short fiction and learning the appropriate vocabulary to describe specific literary forms and narrative techniques. Students will also situate each primary text within its social and political context, and examine the different ways that each work responds to its particular historical moment. In class discussions, students will develop critical thinking skills, and through homework and paper assignments, they will advance critical reading and writing skills. Finally, students will gain a greater appreciation for literary realism and expand their knowledge of the creative process by writing a short fiction or *creative nonfiction* narrative that immerses the reader in a significant aspect of their everyday reality.

#### Required Texts

James Joyce, *Dubliners*  
Robert Walser, *Berlin Stories*  
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*  
Lucille Clifton, *Generations*  
Georges Perec, *Things / A Man Asleep*  
Patrick Modiano, *Dora Bruder*  
Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*  
Toni Morrison, "Recitatif"  
Joe Brainard (selections from his collected works)  
Annie Ernaux, *Exteriors*  
Alain Mabanckou, *Black Moses*

## **Grading**

10%: preparation and participation

20%: fiction or creative nonfiction narrative (4–5 pages)

20%: paper one (5–6 pages)

30%: paper two (6–7 pages)

20%: final