

EngL 3020-002 Studies in Narrative
Literary Enigmas: Mystiques, Recluses & Frauds

May Term 2009

Ford Hall 170

MTWR 9:05 am – 1:10 pm

Instructor Adam Schrag	Email atschrag@umn.edu	Office Lind Hall 110	Office Hours MW, 2-4pm & by appt
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Required Texts & Materials

- *Laura*, Vera Caspary.
- *Pale Fire*, Vladimir Nabokov
- *The Translation of Dr. Apelles*, David Treuer
- Online Readings

Course Description

“Never trust the teller, trust the tale”

-D.H. Lawrence

Welcome to May Session 2009! We have the enviable task over the next three weeks of reading & discussing some great literature and some of its great mysteries. Over the next 11 class sessions we will become literary detectives in a world where the genuine and the authentic are overcast by the shadows of invented personas, unreliable narrators, lies, imposters, scandals & hoaxes.

From James Frey, the fraudulent memoirist of Oprah fame, to Vladimir Nabokov, one of the heavyweights of the literary world, the literary world is full of enigmas—hoaxes & frauds, pseudonymous guises, and romanticized fantasies of eccentric, reclusive geniuses. In this class we will read enigmatic works from enigmatic writers that challenge conventional ideas of authorship, literary voice, and authenticity. Through our reading we will encounter some of the “giants” of the literary world; along the way we will also study its hustlers and hacks. Where the two converge opens upon fundamental and enduring questions about literary truth, genre, and the author-text-reader relationship—questions around art versus commerce, novel versus memoir, truth versus fiction, and reality versus imagination. We will attempt to unravel when these enigmas represent a form of creative license, and even genius, and when they represent a betrayal of the reader’s trust. When is a text a form of literary art and when is it literary fraud? When we, as readers, are duped—when we feel betrayed—is it because we’re outraged at the lies, or upset with ourselves for falling for them? What makes these sham books so wildly popular? What cultural currents do they tap into? How do they manipulate the desires and sentiments of the reading public? What is our attraction to the enigma? And to the scandal?

The main goal for this course is to use the time afforded by May Session as a unique opportunity to delve intensely into literature—to enjoy reading, and enjoy the mysteries that attend our reading. From the hard-boiled, proto-feminist noir of *Laura*, through the labyrinthian corridors of *Pale Fire*, into *Dr. Apelles’* fairy tale, which isn’t quite what it seems on the surface, we will confront some of the most fascinating issues circling around the production of literary truth & meaning. Along the way we’ll also theorize the nature of the scandal. We’ll look at what literary scandals—what the liars and cheaters—say about us, as readers, and about our desires.

The literature we’ll encounter in this class is, at times, difficult and challenging, but also rewarding, transformative & often funny. You should not expect to read these texts and know completely every thing there is to know about them, or even know what you want to say or write about them. Even if you don’t quite grasp everything you are reading at every moment (and you won’t), and even if you don’t remember everything you’ve read (no reader does—at least not in long, complex pieces), you will begin to identify and engage the patterns, rhythms, themes

& ideas lurking in these texts. This will entail pushing and shoving against the texts we read and the texts we write, balancing humility and authority, and engaging the ideas we encounter generously yet critically through our own writings and discussions.

In this course we will develop strong, active, and critical reading practices. What do we mean when we say “active reading”? To be an “active reader” basically means understanding reading as a social interaction—a conversation—and not simply a matter of hanging back and waiting for a piece, or its author, to tell you what the writing has to say. In other words, the text is not simply a *place* to find information, but an *event* where you join the text, the author, your peers, and the broader intellectual community in a discourse of ideas. You play a key role in this event!

Expectations for you & me

In addition to meeting the course requirements, I expect you to challenge yourselves, to take risks, to write and think boldly, and to allow yourself to grow intellectually as readers, writers, and thinkers, not just for this class, but for use as equipment for living. Most of all, I hope that you can enhance your enjoyment of reading & discussing literature.

As your instructor, I play two distinct roles. For the most part I am a coach. That is, my job is to foster discussion and creative thinking, to answer questions and respond to concerns, to assist you through course mechanics and course materials, and to be a point of contact with the ideas presented in the course. My other role is that of judge. In other words, I will be your evaluator and grader. I strive to be as transparent as possible about grading. You are always welcome to come talk with me, the coach, or with me, the judge, about anything regarding the course, or anything else for that matter. I’m here to help you negotiate the vast intellectual terrain before us.

Course Requirements

The grade for the course will be determined out of 500 possible points divided into FOUR areas of the course:

1. Attendance & Class Participation: 10% (50 pts)

You have a lot of direct impact on the classroom dynamic. Since much of the class will be based on class discussion, it is imperative that you attend class and participate in the daily work of the course. The success of our learning community depends on your presence in class. Class participation includes attendance and your commitment to class discussions, in-class writings, conferences, and other class activities.

Attendance Policy

Given that we have only eleven meetings (thereby each meeting is equal to greater than one week of a standard semester), **you need to be here each and every day.**

Even one absence may affect your grade. If you do need to miss one, do it right—let me know ahead of time, do all of the reading, find a way to watch the film, etc.

More than one absence may be considered grounds for failure of the course.

Respect your classmates and me by arriving to class on time. If you’re consistently tardy it may be considered equivalent to an unexcused absence. Excused absences include illness as verified by a doctor’s note, death in the immediate family, jury duty, military service, religious holidays, and participation in school sports events. Unexcused absences include vacations, transportation problems, or employment (see the CLA policy at <http://www.cla.umn.edu/cgep/3.html>).

2. Reading Journal: 60% (300 pts: 3 x 100 pts each)

THREE 2-3 page response papers that explore the ideas of the text and offer up your own insights, questions, and arguments. (See separate assignment sheet for more details).

3. **In-class Presentation: 20% (100 pts)**

A 10-minute presentation on a literary enigma of your choice. (See separate assignment sheet for more details).

4. **Final Quiz: 10% (50 pts)**

The quiz is intended to keep you honest and on-track with your reading; there will be no tricks and no essay. It's an opportunity to show (through short answers and passage identifications) that you have been diligent in keeping up with ALL the readings.

Deadlines

Assignments that are not turned in during class on the due date will lose TWO letter grades for each class session that they are late. Assignments that are more than two classes late will not be accepted. It is extremely important that you keep up with the scheduled assignments in order to succeed in this course. Late papers forfeit the opportunity for revision. If your paper is turned in late you will not be permitted to revise it for a higher grade.

Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis, but only for extenuating circumstances. Technological difficulty (i.e. faulty printer, faulty disk, or "the dog ate my computer") is NOT a legitimate excuse. Plan ahead and back-up your documents. Again, please keep me informed. Letting me know if there is a problem is the best policy.

Email & Internet

Please be in the habit of checking your U of Minnesota email account regularly as I may relay important course information through email. The best way to contact me (in addition to in-person during class time and office hours) is through email.

Readings and other information will be posted on Moodle (<http://moodle.umn.edu>) and/or the course blog (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/atschrag/mayterm>)

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism—"the false assumption of authorship: the wrongful act of taking the product of another person's mind, and presenting it as one's own"¹—comes from the Latin word *plagarius* ("kidnapper"). Plagiarism is a serious offense and can result in immediate failure of this course. Plagiarism falls under the category of "academic dishonesty." Other aspects of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) cheating on assignments or examinations, submitting the same or substantially similar papers (or creative work) for more than one course without consent of all instructors concerned, depriving another of necessary course materials, and sabotaging another's work. Please conduct your work in good faith and good conscience. If you're not sure how or whether to cite something, please don't hesitate to ask to me. We will discuss academic ethics in more detail throughout the course.

University Resources

- **Disability Services** (<http://ds.umn.edu> or call 612-626-1333): If you need special accommodations please let me know.
- **Center for Writing** (www.writing.umn.edu): The Center for Writing offers helpful support every level of student writer, whether novice or experienced. I encourage you to use this resource.
- **The Library** (www.lib.umn.edu): The library puts countless tools at your fingertips including encyclopedias, dictionaries, citation guides, and assignment calculators.

¹ Lindey, Alexander. *Plagiarism and Originality*. New York: Harper, 1952.

Accessibility

If you are a student who has a physical or learning disability, or one who has concerns about accessibility, please let me know and/or contact Disability Services within the first few days of class. Disability Services, 180 McNamara Alumni Center, (612) 626-1333 TTY/voice, assists in ensuring equal access for students with disabilities by documenting disabilities and providing or arranging reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and services, training, consultation, and technical assistance. Their website is located at <http://ds.umn.edu>.

Please Note

I reserve the right to modify, amend, or change the syllabus (course requirements, grading policy, readings, schedule, etc.)