**Prof. Peter Schmidt**

**Fall 2015, TTh 9:55 – 11:10 am, LPAC 201**

email: pschmid1

office hours: LPAC 206 TTh 11:15am - noon; and by appointment

office phone and voicemail: 8156

**English 009H: “Portraits of the Artist”**

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**Course Description**

We will study a variety of works portraying artists in different cultures and contexts and media, seeking a critical understanding of the different ways in which artists in many different cultures have interacted with their societies. Here are some of the materials we’ll discuss in fall 2015: Scheherazade as story-teller (*Arabian Nights* selections, in a fine new translation); Shakespeare (selected sonnets); Mozart (the movie *Amadeus*); Frida Kahlo's life and work; and one of the more brilliant and moving novels published in recent years, Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). We’ll end with two witty metaphysical comic plays by Steve Martin, one about a magician’s rebellious female “apprentice” and the other fantasizing what might have happened if Einstein and Picasso had met when they were both in Paris in 1905, a year of important breakthroughs in both modern physics and modernist art. Also to be assigned are selected background and critical materials, including the Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat’s essay “Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work.” Selected other work will be assigned as well.

Considerable time will also be devoted to improving each student’s analytical writing and discussion skills. The class typically a wide variety of students, with potential natural science and social science majors well represented, as well as those leaning towards majoring in the humanities.

*Open only to first-year students.* Writing course. 1 credit. Fall 2015.

**Course Requirements**

• *Please do not eat food in class*; eat beforehand. It’s OK to bring coffee or another drink.

Put your cell phone in silent mode. But always bring a digital device with Internet access (a laptop, pad/tablet, or phone in silent mode) to class, for you’ll need it to access course documents and sometimes to do group Internet searches or other activities. It’s OK also to print out the course materials if you prefer.

• Regular attendance: more than 3 unexcused absences over the course of the semester will definitely hurt your grade. To get an excused absence (sickness, family emergency, etc.) you need to get a note from the Health Center and/or the Dean’s office; please try to let me know ahead of time through yourself or a friend if you know you’ll miss class. Also, this class begins at 9:55am: be in class ready to go on time.

• This is a seminar, not a lecture class. That means everyone should regularly participate in discussion. Come to class having studied the readings and other materials assigned for that day, with particular questions and topics you would like to discuss as well as passages or scenes to focus on. Small teams of students will be expected to lead part of many of our class discussions: more details below.

• Other class events are important as well, including two blog postings on the English 9H Moodle website by 8pm on the night before class (see below); occasional in-class presentations and discussion leadership; one-on-one paper conferences with the professor (times announced later this semester); and other activities.

• Completion of writing assignments on time. Late papers and other writing will be penalized a partial grade for each day they are late (B+ to B to B- , etc.). All students must attend paper conferences with the professor as assigned. Completion of assigned revisions to papers may also part of the course requirements, at the discretion of the instructor.

***Assigned writing*** *for “Portraits of the Artist” will mostly be of three kinds:*

• Please create a “Portraits of the Artist” folder for all your downloaded and/or printed course materials, your paper drafts, and your papers with my comments after they are returned. This folder may be entirely digital or you may make a print folder as well if you prefer to work with printed materials.

• **Two blog posts** on the Moodle website for 9H (“English 9H blog”) before leading discussion, one before fall break and one after. Each student will post a substantive comment from your reading journal and several discussion questions relevant to that day’s syllabus assignment for English 9H. See blog posting guidelines on our Moodle site.

// Follow the 9H blog posting guidelines in composing your blog entry or post.

// All posts should be uploaded no later than **8pm the night before** class. Students who post will then help lead part of the next day’s seminar discussion.

// You will receive feedback on your postings and your discussion leadership.

// Your blog posts (and all those of your classmates) will be automatically archived on our Moodle blog site.

• ***3 papers of medium length* (~4-6pp.),** double-spaced, due on the dates indicated on Moodle syllabus. For the first paper, see the paper #1 guidelines information on our 9H Moodle site. Students will have substantial freedom (read responsibility) to choose their own topic and approach.

**Deadlines for the 3 papers (add to your calendar)**: Friday, Sept. 25; Friday, Oct. 23 (after break); and Tuesday, Nov. 25. See the 9H Moodle page for more information and for the links to use to upload your papers.

• **Final exam essays**. At the end of the semester one of the exam questions will involve discussing a paper of yours that you revised, so please create a “Portraits of the Artist” folder and your papers with comments after they are returned(i.e., either the printed or digital copies with my comments). Your on-line postings will automatically be archived on the 9H Moodle site and will also be considered part of your final portfolio of work for this class.

The exam will have 3 parts. In the first, you will revise one of your three “Portraits of the Artist” essays from earlier this semester and submit it along with a short accompanying essay meditating on what you learned from doing the revision and evaluating how your writing has evolved in our course.

A second final exam question will be a short essay on either Ozeki’s novel or a Steve Martin play, or any other course material on which you’ve not yet written.

A third short exam question will ask you to reflect more generally on your learning in English 9H and to draw some general conclusions about the value of Humanities courses in a liberal arts curriculum.

The final exam will be an open-book and open-notes exam. For more details on this exam and its questions and due date, see announcements later this semester.

**Grading**: Quality of class participation (both participating in discussion and leading discussions, plus other assignments like online blog posts) counts 25%; Final Exam 25%; Papers 50% (the later papers, including the revision assignment, will “count” slightly more heavily than the first paper). Poor attendance or class participation and/or late papers will negatively affect your grade, just as poor written work will. Clear *improvement* in your writing over the course of the semester will help your final grade, as will thoughtful class participation throughout the semester.

*Because this seminar meets in the fall semester, Swarthmore policy is that first-year students receive either credit or no credit for their classes on their transcript. But you’ll receive “shadow grades” and regular feedback for all assignments*, so you should have a good sense of how you’re doing and why you’re receiving the shadow grades that you are. Your final shadow grade for the class is not recorded on your transcript, but is sent to you and your advisor.

**A note about honesty and coursework**: All writing that you turn in for this English class, from online posts to formal papers and exam essays, should be yours alone and done solely for this course.

When you borrow ideas and language from others it is your responsibility to acknowledge these sources accurately; anything less constitutes plagiarism and severe penalties may be involved (including flunking the course and suspension for a semester)—regardless of whether you “intended” to plagiarize or not.

For more information, see the Swarthmore English Literature Department’s Web Page: (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/english-literature/plagiarism-and-citation.xml>). Students should also consult the Swarthmore College Student Handbook’s section on Academic Freedom, Responsibility, and Misconduct, relevant for all your classes at Swarthmore.

*Plagiarism penalties do not mean you should be afraid of consulting with others (a Writing Center person, fellow students, me) or of borrowing good ideas from others: just about all good writing borrows a little from others and is inspired by them!* It is very simple to acknowledge this with a “thank you” at the end of a paper, or a footnote and a bibliography. I will be happy to confer with you about any issues involving citing sources or plagiarism if you have questions—but it’s always best to do this while your paper is in progress, not afterwards.

English introductory courses at Swarthmore do not emphasize or require extensive research and citing of secondary sources. Our main focus will be on quoting and citing effectively materials on the syllabus and making effective interpretations and arguments based on these materials.

**Accommodations for a disability.** If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113) or email [lhempli1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:lhempli1@swarthmore.edu) to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible.  For details about the accommodations process, [visit the Student Disability Service Website](http://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service) at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service>.  You are also welcome to contact me [the faculty member] privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Student Disability Services.

**A Summary of Skills to Be Improved in English First-Year Seminars:**

*Discussion skills:*

• how to ask better questions for interpreting cultural (especially literary) works

• arguing with others fairly: making distinctions and supporting your claims

• supporting others: making connections and finding common ground in a discussion

• leading discussion: how to use your own ideas to help others discover theirs

• how to give criticism of others’ writing, and receive criticism of yours

*Writing skills:*

• how to move from a set of observations to a thesis sentence, and what differentiates a weak thesis from a strong one

• how to use quoted evidence better (being more thorough and more skeptical and more detailed in your arguments; learning how to use quoted evidence most effectively, especially guiding a reader *through* a key quotation)

• counter-arguments and other rhetorical skills

• the value of illustrations and digressions (including embedded in parentheses or dashes)

• improving grammar, punctuation, syntax, vocabulary, paragraph structure, and organization. With punctuation we’ll focus on correctly using commas, colons, semi-colons, and dashes to bring liveliness, clarity, and variety to your sentences

• revision skills

• how to do basic page and bibliographic citations for written work in the Humanities

Note: FURTHER HELP WITH WRITING ASSIGNMENTS FOR ALL YOUR CLASSES MAY BE AVAILABLE AT THE **SWARTHMORE COLLEGE WRITING CENTER** IN THE FIRST FLOOR OF TROTTER. IT IS STAFFED BY TRAINED STUDENTS. THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ENCOURAGES ALL STUDENTS TO USE THE WRITING CENTER FOR HELP WITH WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS. BE SURE TO PLAN AHEAD, HOWEVER. (THAT IS, HAVE A DRAFT FOR OTHERS TO READ SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE THE PAPER IS DUE, NOT THE NIGHT BEFORE).