

**San José State University**  
**Department of English and Comparative Literature**  
**English 255, Section 1, Spring 2015**  
**Thematic Studies in American Literature: “Dangerous Women”**

<b>Instructor:</b>	Robert Cullen
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	Thursdays 3 - 4 p.m. and by appointment
<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	Thursdays 4 - 6:45 p.m.
<b>Classroom:</b>	Clark Building 205
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	Graduate standing in English MA or MFA program

### **Course Description**

This seminar will examine portrayals of dangerous women in American literature, including witches, farmers’ daughters, shape-shifters, Hollywood starlets, and re-imagined versions of Hedda Gabler, Medea, and Mammy from *Gone With the Wind*. What do these characters suggest about American history, culture, mores, institutions, and gender roles? At the core of the course will be major novels by Henry James (*The Portrait of a Lady*); Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon*); John Updike (*The Witches of Eastwick*); and Jane Smiley (*A Thousand Acres*). We’ll round out the reading with three short and extremely diverse texts: Nathaniel West’s Hollywood novel *The Day of the Locust*; Thomas Perry’s thriller *Vanishing Act*; and Jeff Whitty’s mashup drama *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*. Requirements: weekly participation, reading responses, a seminar paper, and a short presentation.

### **Information Available Online**

You are responsible for reading the following information online at

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/comp/policyforsyllabi.html>

- Academic policies (academic integrity, plagiarism, ADA and DRC policies)
- Adding and dropping classes

## **Required Texts**

### **Any complete edition of these works:**

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*

Nathaniel West, *The Day of the Locust*

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

John Updike, *The Witches of Eastwick*

Thomas Perry, *Vanishing Act*

Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres*

Jeff Whitty, *The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler*

## **Assignments and Grading**

Seminar Paper (50% of course grade): A research paper of 3000+ words, exclusive of Works Cited. The paper must include at least one text from the reading list and be relevant to the course theme of “Dangerous Women.” Due at the last class meeting, May 7. NO late papers!

Oral Presentation (20%): A presentation of approximately 20 minutes related to your seminar paper.

Reading Responses (15%): One informal response of 250+ words for each of our texts, due no later than the final day of discussion for each text. To earn an “A” for responses, turn all of them in on time. Hard copies, please.

Contributions to class discussion (15%).

## English 255, Spring 2015, Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/22	Course Introduction
2	1/29	<i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> (1881), Volume I
3	2/5	<i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> , Volume II
4	2/12	<i>The Day of the Locust</i> (1939)
5	2/19	<i>Song of Solomon</i> (1977), Part I (roughly 2/3 of the novel)
6	2/26	<i>Song of Solomon</i> , Part II
7	3/5	<i>The Witches of Eastwick</i> (1984), Chapters I and II
8	3/12	<i>The Witches of Eastwick</i> , Chapter III
9	3/19	<i>Vanishing Act</i> (1995)
10	3/26	Spring Break
11	4/2	<i>A Thousand Acres</i> (1992), Books One, Two, and Three
12	4/9	<i>A Thousand Acres</i> (finish)
13	4/16	<i>The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler</i> (2006)
14 to 16	4/23 to 5/7	Student Presentations <b>SEMINAR PAPERS ARE DUE 5/7.</b>