

# LITERATURE *and* COMPOSITION 302

## Plots and Patterns

by Daniel Davis Wood  
[www.danieldaviswood.com](http://www.danieldaviswood.com)

The aim of this course is to introduce students of Literature and Composition 301 to concepts and varieties of structural experimentation. To achieve this aim, this course will expose students to a range of texts that construct achronological or reverse-chronological narratives, and texts that weave together a range of parallel but causally discrete and non-linear narratives. Beginning with Vladimir Nabokov's famously simple statement of aesthetic principles — “The pattern of the thing precedes the thing” — students will read these texts with an eye towards the arrangement and sequencing of narrative events rather than their content, in order to attend to the aesthetic effects of various structural departures from conventional narrative chronology and causality.

### **Unit 1: Experimenting With Time**

Focusing on texts that radically reject narrative chronology in telling stories that belong to genres with otherwise simple conventions — particularly the romance and mystery genres — this unit develops students' awareness of the aesthetic effects of chronological and causal experimentation.

- Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2003)
- Christopher Nolan (dir.), *Memento* (2000)

### **Unit 2: Experimenting With Place**

Focusing on texts that tell stories of characters who are separated by geographical and sometimes temporal distances, this unit develops students' awareness of the aesthetic resonances that can emerge amongst characters when they connect with each other not in a demonstrable way within the scope of their narratives, but only via the structural interactions of those narratives.

- David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten* (1999)
- Andy and Lana Wachowski and Tom Tykwer, *Cloud Atlas* (2012)

### **Unit 3: Experimenting With Time and Place**

Focusing on texts that combine the qualities of the texts of the previous two units, this unit hones students' awareness of the aesthetic resonances that emerge amongst characters not only via the structural interactions of discrete but parallel narratives, but also via the interactions of discrete narratives that occasionally overlap while also experimenting with chronology and causality.

- Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (2003)
- Paul Thomas Anderson, *Magnolia* (1999)

### **Course Assessment**

Students taking this course must complete three 2,500-word analytical essays comparing and contrasting the structural experimentation of the two texts assigned in each unit.