Twentieth-Century American Fictions:
Form, Race, and Apocalyptic Transformation
Spring 2011

English 4313-001
Instructor: Dr. Roemer
T/TH 2-3:20 pm; 100 Preston

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Nature and Goals (outcomes) of the Course

Although we will make side references to 20th-century American poetry, non-fiction prose, short stories, and drama, the focus of the course will be a select group of significant book-length works of fiction. We begin with three early 20th-century "classics" and conclude with well-known late 20th-century novels. Thus besides a genre focus (fiction), a chronological progression helps to structure the course. Just as or more important to the course's organization and goals are three issues central to the development of modern American fiction: the creation of an "American" form of book-length fiction, the importance of race and region in defining representation of identity in the fictions, and hopes and fear about the modern world that invite visions of utopia, dystopia, and apocalypse. In our discussions of Anderson, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, we will focus on form, though dystopian and utopian elements are evident in Hemingway and Fitzgerald's works. For Hurston, Faulkner, and Morrison we focus on race (and region and historical period) in representations of identity. Visions of late 20th-century and future-time utopia, dystopia, and apocalypse dominate Pynchon's and Piercy's fictions. We conclude with two fictions -- Anaya's Bless Me Ultima and Silko's Ceremony -- that reflect all three issues expressed in narratives of sickness and healing.

By the end of the course, students who have done the readings and participated in class and group discussions and successfully completed the exams and the paper should: (1) have a meaningful familiarity with ten of the most significant modern American book-length fictions; (2) have a good introduction of several forms of fiction (e.g., Gatsby's beautifully unified mythos; Anderson's, Hemingway's, and Faulkner's combinations of short-story and novel forms; Hurston's, Faulkner's, Morrison's, Anaya's, and Silko's combinations of oral narratives [folklore and myth] and fiction; Pynchon's apocalyptic mystery tale; Piercy's ambiguous utopia speculation, and Silko combinations of poetry and fiction); (3) have an understanding of how the three issues can be used to interpret these (and other) American fictions; and (4) have the confidence to express their interpretations orally and in the context of published criticism (in the research paper).

Required Readings

Note: Since many of the books assigned are "classics," it is likely that many of you have already read several or even most of them. For you this will be a re-reading course. If, however, you have not read any of the books, this will be a fairly "heavy" reading course. If you are in the latter category, I advise you to "read ahead." The first three books are short. Getting ahead of the schedule will give you more time for the longer books.
Lecture/Discussion Topics, Assignments, Tentative Dates
(Brackets [ ] indicate the possibility of discussing two topics on that day.)

Introduction to the Course 1/18

In Search of an [Anglo?] American Form for American Fiction

Readings: Handouts relating to form (e.g., modernism)
Winesburgh, Ohio 1/[18], 20, [25]
In Our Time 1/ [25], 27
The Great Gatsby 2/ 1, 3

First Examination 2/8

The Power of Blackness / Whiteness; Place and Time

Readings: Their Eyes Were Watching God 2/10, 15
Go Down, Moses (selections) 2/17, 22, 24
Beloved 3/ 1, 3, 8

Second Examination 3/10

Spring Break (Work on Paper Prospectus) 3/14-18

American Visions of Apocalypse, Utopia, and Dystopia

Readings: The Crying of Lot 49 3/22, 24
Woman on the Edge of Time 3/29, 31; 4/ 5

Paper Prospectus Due 4/6 (Wed.)
Individual Conferences on Prospectus 4/7, 12

Sickness Unto Healing: Form, Race, and Transformation

Readings: Bless Me, Ultima 4/14, 19, 21
Ceremony 4/26, 28; 5/3

Research Paper Due 5/5, by 5 PM
Review for Final Exam 5/5
Final Exam Thurs., 5/10, 2-4:30 PM
Examinations

All examinations will include two parts: short answer questions and identifications (taken from the readings and class lectures and discussions); and essay questions. During the class before each exam, I will distribute detailed study sheets. The essay part of the exam will be "open book." I encourage you to bring relevant outlines to the exam. Grading criteria for the essays relate to the focus and strength of your arguments, i.e., how well do you address the question posed and how well do you support your claims with specific and relevant examples. Although evidence of your "mechanical / editorial" writing abilities will be taken into account, they will be examined more closely in the paper than in the exams.

Research Paper

2000-3000 words; approximately 8-10 double-spaced pages; MLA format. (See the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Sixth Ed.) Due: 5/5 by 5 p.m., either in my mailbox in 204 Carlisle or in my hand. Except for documented emergencies, I do not accept late or e-mailed papers.

The paper will offer you the opportunity to do intensive independent study about a relatively narrow topic of interest to you and will help you to develop your ability to analyze texts and to use bibliographic and critical studies. The paper is not intended to be a bibliographic essay; I expect you to develop and articulate an argument that will be clarified and supported with textual analyses and well-integrated allusions to relevant critical studies. The prospectus (due Wednesday 4/6 by 5 PM) must include the following sections:

1. Thesis / Significance (one paragraph): indicate the book(s) selected for examination; define the primary argument(s) claim(s), or question(s); indicate the significance of your thesis (i.e., address the “So what?” question).

2. Feasibility (short paragraph): Is it possible to address this thesis adequately in an eight-to-ten-page research paper? Does our library or do other Metroplex libraries have the resources you will need?

3. Method (one paragraph): identify the critical approach(es) to interpretation that you will use (e.g., biographical, feminist, New Critical, ethnic studies). Indicate why these are appropriate for your book(s) and your thesis.

4. Tentative Organization (brief paragraph): In a few sentences justify how you will order the paper.

5. Preliminary Bibliography (list): In addition to your primary source(s), the paper requires at least five critical sources in your Works Cited list that will be well integrated into your discussion (i.e., not just tacked on to reach the five minimum).
Library Support: Rafia Mirza is the Librarian for the English Department (817-272-7428; e-mail: rafia@uta.edu). You can find online databases for English among the Arts and Humanities databases at <http://www.uta.edu/library/ mavinfo/arts.html>. Librarians at the second-floor reference desk can also be extremely helpful. One of the most useful print resources is the annual publication *American Literary Scholarship*. (We have the recent volumes online.) See also the journals *Modern Fiction Studies (MFS)*, *The American Novel*, and *Studies in American Fiction*. There are also journals devoted to several of the authors (e.g., Anderson, Hemingway, Faulkner). Some online sources in our Library are excellent, e.g., Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Project Muse, Library Resource Center, and MLA International Bibliography. Some online sources can be uneven in quality, e.g., Wikapedia.

Criteria: I will expect: (1) a convincing thesis supported by relevant examples from the primary and critical sources; (2) good integration of your ideas and the ideas presented in the critical sources; (3) a coherent, well-organized and engaging paper, relatively free of surface errors (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation).

Approximate Weights: First Exam (15%); Second Exam (25%); Final Exam (25%)
Prospectus/Research Paper (35%).

Constructive Warnings: (1) Plagiarism will be handled according to University disciplinary procedures. Consult chapter 2 of the *MLA Handbook* if you are confused about plagiarism. (2) If you plan to withdraw, you must follow University procedures. Professors cannot drop students; if they disappear without dropping, they receive F semester grades. (3) Under normal circumstances, I do not accept late or e-mailed work. (4) For every FIVE unexcused absences the semester grade will be lowered a half grade. I do not have a specific policy for lateness, but I do have an "attitude." Late arrivals disturb students and teacher. If there is a persistent problem with lateness, I will begin to count the tardiness as unexcused absences.

Encouragement: (1) Class participation (especially in the assigned group presentations) and improvement can be important factors in elevating the semester grade. (2) I am very willing to accommodate students with disabilities. These students should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide me with authorized documentation from the appropriate University office (e.g., the Office for Students with Disabilities, 817-272-3364). (3) Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the Office of University College programs (817-272-6107).