

ENG 468/568 Contemporary Black Fiction, Spring 2014, CRN 38845/38846

1-1:50pm MWF, HEDCO 144

Professor Thorsson (thorsson@uoregon.edu)

Office Hours: 11:30am-12:30pm MWF and by appointment, 521 PLC

Course Description

In this course, we will study a selection of contemporary fiction by authors of African descent. As we read these works, we will consider their relationship to political movements like Civil Rights, Feminism, and Black Power as well as the usefulness of the many "post" terms that scholars use to describe contemporary black cultural production (post-Civil Rights, post-racial, postmodern, and post-soul, to offer just a few examples). We'll also work to understand the function of genre in this contemporary period as we read texts we might classify as satire, science fiction, realism, magical realism, and/or jazz novels. This course requires vigorous participation and substantial reading and writing.

Goals:

The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process. To that end, you will:

1. read literary and cultural texts with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary and other cultural texts;
4. write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Required Readings

Books on the schedule below are at the UO Bookstore and on reserve at Knight Library. Items with an asterisk are posted on Blackboard.

Course Requirements and Policies

Reading, participation, and attendance are mandatory. Bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Your participation grade is based on class discussion, in-class writing and reading, and group work.

Assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below and formatted according to current MLA guidelines (1 inch margins, 12-pt font, single-side printed, stapled, with correct citation and quotation including a works cited page). Consult the *MLA Handbook* if you are uncertain of correct format. Late assignments will be marked down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late. No assignments may be turned in more than one week after the due date.

Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction

between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day from a classmate and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed.

If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Please request that the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu/>) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code (conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students' obligation to clarify the question with the professor.

Please print and consult the assignment sheet posted on Blackboard. We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches.

Grading

Participation	10%
Close Reading (4-5 pages)	15%
Film Response (2 pages)	10%
Paper Proposal (3-4 pages)	15%
Final Paper (10-15 pages)	50%

Week One

M 3/31	Introduction
W 4/2	Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> (1952) (pages vii-70: introduction, prologue and chapters 1-2)
F 4/4	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> (pages 71-195: chapters 3-9)

Week Two

M 4/7	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> (pages 196-408: chapters 10-18) Assignment Sheet*
W 4/9	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> (pages 409-512: chapters 19-23)
F 4/11	Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i> (pages 513-581: chapters 24-epilogue) Close Reading Handout*

Week Three

M 4/14	Gayl Jones, <i>Corregidora</i> (1975) (pages 1-68)
W 4/16	Jones, <i>Corregidora</i> (pages 68-132)

F 4/18 Jones, *Corregidora* (pages 133-185)
Close Reading Due (4-5 pages)

Week Four

M 4/21 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976) (pages 1-120)

W 4/23 Walker, *Meridian* (pages 121-198)

Th 4/24 4-6:30pm Knight Library Browsing Room
Screening of *Reflections Unheard: Black Women in Civil Rights* and
discussion with filmmaker Nevline Nnaji

F 4/25 Walker, *Meridian* (pages 199-242)

Week Five

M 4/28 Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977) (pages xi-55: foreword, chapters
1-2)

Film Response Due (2 pages)

W 4/30 Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (pages 56-112: chapters 3-4)

F 5/2 Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (pages 113-171: chapters 5-7)

Week Six

M 5/5 Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (pages 172-258: chapters 8-10)

W 5/7 Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (pages 259-304: chapters 11-12)

F 5/9 Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (pages 305-337: chapters 13-15)

Week Seven

M 5/12 Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (1999) (pages 1-65)

W 5/14 Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (pages 66-116)

F 5/16 Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (pages 117-166)

Week Eight

M 5/19 Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (pages 167-217)

W 5/21 Whitehead, *The Intuitionist* (pages 218-255)

F 5/23 Paper Proposal Workshop
Paper proposal due (3-4 pages). Bring 2 copies to class.

Week Nine

M 4/26 No class, Memorial Day

W 5/28 Mat Johnson, *Pym* (2011) (pages 1-96)

F 5/30 Johnson, *Pym* (pages 97-189)

Week Ten

M 6/2 Johnson, *Pym* (pages 190-284)

W 6/4 Johnson, *Pym* (pages 285-363)

F 6/6 Conclusion
Final paper due (10-15 pages)

Recommended Reading and Viewing

Items with an asterisk are on the Blackboard site for our class.

Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994) – Knight Library PS153.N5 D32 1994

Madhu Dubey, "Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition" *Signs* (1995)*

Mari Evans, *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)* – Knight Library PS153.N5B558 1984

Farah Jasmine Griffin, "That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names: A Retrospective of Black Feminist Literary Criticism" *Signs* (2007)*

Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (1991) – Knight Library PS153.N5 J66 1991

Arlene Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (2004) – Knight Library PS374.S58 K45 2004

Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984)*

Toni Morrison Uncensored (2003) – Knight Library VIDEOTAPE 04483 c.2

Imani Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (2011) – Knight Library E184.A1 P42 2010

Howard Rambsy, “The Rise of Colson Whitehead: Hi-Tech Narratives and Literary Ascent” from *New Essays on the African American Novel* (2008)*

Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (interviews) (1983) – Knight Library PS153.N5B56 1983

Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974)*

Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth (2014). PBS film in the *American Masters* series*
<http://video.pbs.org/video/2365171000/>