English 392 : American Novel, 1900 to the Present
Online—Spring 2018

Professor: Mary Wood
Email: mewood@uoregon.edu

Course Description:
We will read five novels that span the time period from the early twentieth century to the present day, interpreting each novel in relation to its historical and cultural contexts. The selected novels cannot possibly “represent” the vast range of ethnically and culturally diverse literature produced within this genre in the U.S. over the last two centuries. However, by reading these five works, we can get a sense of the formal and thematic range of the American novel as well as the cultural and ethnic diversity of American novel writers. Over the course of the term, students will practice close reading selected passages, will engage in online discussion of each novel, and will have an opportunity to do a creative project on one of the novels.

Course Goals:
This course aims to introduce students to the genre of the novel in twentieth- and twenty-first century America. We will examine each work in its historical, social, political, and artistic contexts, thinking about how the novel form in particular engages with modern life. As a way of focusing our exploration and looking at the ways that literary form shapes the meanings of each text, we will ask three interrelated questions of each novel:

1) How does each writer use point of view to evoke particular responses in the reader?
2) How does each novel use space and place to create meaning?
3) How does each novel offer ways for today’s readers to move forward out of the past?

The course will encourage students to ask questions about the text and to return to the text for explorations that may often lead to some answers and even more questions.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Develop close reading and textual analysis skills.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the social construction of race, gender, sexuality, and class as they relate to literary expressions.
3. Learn to analyze the complex ways that writers use point of view to engage the reader, elicit emotion, and move the narrative forward.
4. Develop an understanding of the meanings of space and place in the novel.
5. Learn to appreciate the diverse histories and abilities of American novel writers.
6. Analyze the different ways American writers have transformed and recreated the genre of the novel.
Required Texts (Available at the Duckstore and from online bookstores)

Baldwin, James, *Giovanni’s Room*
William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
Fae Myenne Ng, *Steer Toward Rock*

Requirements

**Read the novels!** The reading for this course is engaging and intensive. Falling behind in the reading will put you at a disadvantage as the class progresses. Feel free to spread the reading of a novel out over the two weeks it’s assigned, but do try to have it finished by Thursday evening of the second week it’s assigned so you don’t fall behind.

Note that because this is an online class, activities that might otherwise happen in class are achieved through discussion posts, scavenger hunt-like quizzes, and live remote discussions. Material that in a classroom be delivered through lecture is here made available on a UOBlogs website for the course. This website is central to the course, so please become familiar with it early on; it will provide you with context, background, author biography and bibliography, and literary critical approaches to the novels we are studying.

**Writing assignments:**

1) **Three** close readings essays (500 words each). You may choose which novels in the course you want to write on but you must write on three different novels. Each essay is due by 2 p.m. on Saturday of the second week the novel is assigned (see schedule below). The essay you turn in on Saturday should be about the novel we just finished discussing. For example, the essay due Saturday, April 14th, will be about *Giovanni’s Room*, which we’ll read April 2nd to April 14th. **You may not turn in an essay on a novel read in a previous unit.** Close reading expectations are explained on the Assignments page of the UOBlogs course site. I’ve provided oral examples of close readings on each novel’s main page on UOBlogs. Essays should be written in a Word document and uploaded to Canvas.

2) **One** of these essays should be a **creative assignment.** You have two choices: either a screencast of one of the two passage options (explained under the Assignments tab of the UOBlogs site) or a rewrite of the passage from a different character’s point of view (also explained under the Assignments tab of the UOBlogs site).

3) **Five** quizzes total, each due on Tuesday (by midnight) of the novel’s second week. Quizzes will cover both the novel itself (the first half) and the contextual and informational material available on the UOBlogs course site. In a way, the quizzes are scavenger hunts; you’ll need to hunt for answers in the various sections of the UOBlogs site for the course. The Quizzes will be available on Canvas. Answers should be typed out in a Word document and uploaded onto the Canvas course site.
4) **Attendance** at three remote live sessions over the course of the term (to be scheduled via the Canvas site—Calendar sections-- by the beginning of Week Two). These will be small-group sessions of 5-8 students in which we will discuss the novels, do some close reading, and address any questions students may have.

Students are responsible for signing up for and attending these three sessions—from three different weeks--via webcam, voice, or chat connection. You may choose the modality based on the technology you have and what works best for you. I will use my video cam. Some evening sessions will be available to accommodate work schedules.

5) **Five Discussion posts (total) on Canvas. These will be due Thursday of each novel’s first week.** Discussion posts should be around 200 words and should quote from the text (with page numbers cited) and comment on the language quoted (or cel described in the case of Bechdel). Also write a 1-2-sentence response to a post by a classmate.

**Grading:**

Two traditional close reading essays—40%
Creative assignment—15%
Quizzes—25%
Discussion posts and real-time discussion participation—20%

**Policies**

- **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance at live sessions is mandatory. You must have the novel under discussion with you during live sessions. Participation includes oral or chat participation, logging on to live sessions prepared (and on time), completing online Discussion posts, AND showing you’ve done the reading and thought about it carefully.
- Written essays must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Font should be no larger than 12 point. Make sure to number your pages. Please include page numbers for any passages quoted. Paper guidelines can be found on Assignments page of the UOBlogs coursesite.
- You are responsible for keeping a backup copy of all of your work. Backups may take the form of computer copies, cloud copies, hard copies, or some combination of these. Make sure that you have a readily accessible copy of ALL of your work.
- My goal is to make this course as accessible as possible. Please contact me if you have trouble accessing any aspect of the course.
Reading Schedule

Unit One: James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*

Week One (April 2\textsuperscript{nd} to April 6\textsuperscript{th})
Read the novel and study the material on UOBlogs site.
Thursday, April 5\textsuperscript{th}—Discussion post due on Canvas \textbf{by midnight}.

Week Two (April 9\textsuperscript{th} to April 13\textsuperscript{th})
Keep reading.
Tuesday, April 10\textsuperscript{th}—Quiz due \textbf{by midnight}.
Saturday, April 14\textsuperscript{th}—Essay (or your one creative piece) due \textbf{by 2 pm}.

Unit Two: William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*

Week Three (April 16\textsuperscript{th} to April 20\textsuperscript{th})
Read the novel and study the material on UOBlogs site.
Thursday, April 19\textsuperscript{th}—Discussion post due on Canvas \textbf{by midnight}.

Week Four (April 23\textsuperscript{rd} to April 27\textsuperscript{th})
Keep reading.
Tuesday, April 24\textsuperscript{th}—Quiz due \textbf{by midnight}.
Saturday, April 28\textsuperscript{th}—Essay (or your one creative piece) due \textbf{by 2 pm}.

Unit Three: Helena Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Week Five (April 30\textsuperscript{th} to May 4\textsuperscript{th})
Read the novel and study the material on UOBlogs site.
Thursday, May 3\textsuperscript{rd}—Discussion post due on Canvas \textbf{by midnight}.

Week Six (May 7\textsuperscript{th} to May 11\textsuperscript{th})
Keep reading.
Tuesday, May 8\textsuperscript{th}—Quiz due \textbf{by midnight}.
Saturday, May 12\textsuperscript{th}—Essay (or your one creative piece) due \textbf{by 2 pm}.

Unit Four: Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Week Seven (May 14\textsuperscript{th} to May 18\textsuperscript{th})
Read the novel and study the material on UOBlogs site.
Thursday, May 17\textsuperscript{th}—Discussion post due on Canvas \textbf{by midnight}.

Week Eight (May 21\textsuperscript{st} to May 25\textsuperscript{th})
Keep reading.
Tuesday, May 22\textsuperscript{nd}—Quiz due \textbf{by midnight}.
Saturday, May 26\textsuperscript{th}—Essay (or your one creative piece) due \textbf{by 2 pm}.

Unit Five: Fae Myenne Ng’s *Steer Toward Rock*

Week Nine (May 28\textsuperscript{th} to June 1\textsuperscript{st})
Read the novel and study the material on UOBlogs site.
Thursday, May 31st—Discussion post due on Canvas by midnight.

**Week Ten (June 4th to June 8th)**
Keep reading.
Tuesday, June 5th—Quiz due by midnight.
Saturday, June 9th—Essay (or your one creative piece) due by 2 pm.

**NO FINAL EXAM**