Course Syllabus

Assignments

English 392: The American Novel, 1900 to the Present

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Course Description:

We will read four 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, they will give students a sense of the formal and thematic range of the American novel as well as the cultural 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 (including live online discussion), 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*

Bechdel, Alison, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Viramontes, Helena Maria, *Under the Feet of Jesus*

Wharton, Edith, *The Age of Innocence*
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 week it's assigned, but do try to have it finished by Thursday evening at the latest so you can begin working on the essay for that week.

Writing assignments (click here for specifics):

1) Three essays: Three close readings essays (500 words each), on each of three novels, each due by 2 p.m. on each Saturday. The essay you turn in on Saturday should be about the novel we read the previous week. For example, on Saturday, June 29th, you'll turn in an essay about The Age of Innocence. Close reading expectations are explained on the Assignments page of the UOBlogs course site. I've provided examples of close readings on each novel's main page, but for the written close reading, please follow the instructions on the Assignments page. You may choose which weeks to do the close reading essays and which week to do the creative assignment (see below).

2) One creative assignment: You have two choices: either a) a screencast of one of the two passage options (explained under the Assignments tab of the UOBlogs site) or b) a rewrite of the passage from a different point of view (also explained under the Assignments tab of the UOBlogs site). You may turn in your creative assignment whichever week you choose.

3) Four quizzes: There will be one quiz per week, each of which will include questions on a) the first two thirds of the novel for that week and b) the “Contexts,” “Literary Form,” and “Way Forward Out of the Past” sections of the UOBlogs website. The quizzes will be available on Canvas and should be uploaded onto the Canvas course site. The questions on these supporting materials will not be on very specific knowledge (such as “What year did Beauford Delaney die?”) but will address concepts and show that you have a good sense of the novels, writers, and their contexts (such as “Why were Beauford Delaney, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and other mid-century African American writers and artists drawn to Paris?”). In a way, the quizzes are like scavenger hunts; you'll need to hunt through the UOBlogs course site (this site) to find the responses. Quizzes will be due Thursday mornings by 11 a.m.

4) Two live online discussion sessions: Students are required to attend two remote real-time sessions over the course of the term (to be scheduled via the Canvas site—Calendar sections—by the second day of class). These will be small-group sessions of 5 students in which we will discuss the novels, do some close reading, and address any questions you may have.

Students are responsible for signing up for (on Canvas Calendar) and attending these two sessions—from two different weeks—via webcam or voice connection. Please note that you MUST participate via voice or webcam, unless you have a documented disability accommodation. Evening sessions
will be available to accommodate work and childcare schedules.

5) **Weekly discussion posts and responses:** A 2-3-sentence entry every week in the Discussions section of Canvas giving your response to the novel of the week and a 1-2-sentence response to one other student’s comment. These are due every Wednesday by midnight. You should think of the weekly discussion post guidelines as a minimum. This online class will be much better, much more fun, and ultimately more fulfilling if we have a robust discussion on the discussion board. I will post questions and prompts for discussion each day. Please feel free to respond to me and to your classmates as often as you like!

6) **Introduce yourself:** A 4-6 sentence statement introducing yourself to me and the rest of the class, due Tuesday, June 25th, by noon, on the Introduce Yourself discussion board on Canvas.

**Grading:**

Three traditional close reading essays—45%

Creative assignment—15%

Quizzes—20%

Two Live Discussions—10%

Four Discussion entries and four comments—8%

One Introduce Yourself entry—2%

**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 participation (via voice or webcam), logging on to live sessions prepared (and on time), AND showing you’ve done the reading and thought about it carefully.

https://blogs.uoregon.edu/eng292summer18/course-syllabus/
• All written work must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Font should be 12 point. Please include page numbers for any passages quoted. Paper guidelines can be found on Assignments page of the UOBlogs coursesite (this site).
• 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.

Schedule

**Week One**

Read Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*

Tuesday, June 25th—Write 4-6-sentences introducing yourself to me and the rest of the class in the Introduce Yourself discussion board section of the Canvas course site. **Due by noon.**

Wednesday, June 26th—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence comment (and 1-2-sentence response to another’s comment) due by midnight in Canvas Discussion page.** Remember, these are minimum guidelines, so chime in to the discussion board as often as you like!

Thursday, June 27th—**Quiz on Canvas, due by 11 a.m.**

Friday, June 28th—Finish *The Age of Innocence*

Saturday, June 29th—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by 2 p.m. on Canvas.**

**Week Two**

Read James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*

Wednesday, July 3—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence comment (and 1-2-sentence response to another’s comment) due by midnight in Canvas Discussion page.** Remember, these are minimum guidelines, so chime in to the discussion board as often as you like!
Thursday, July 4—**Independence Day.** No Quiz

Friday, July 5 —Finish *Giovanni’s Room. Quiz on Canvas, due by 11 a.m.*

Saturday, July 6 —**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by 2 p.m. on Canvas.**

**Week Three**

Read Helena María Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus.*

Wednesday, July 10—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence comment (and 1-2-sentence response to another’s comment) due by midnight in Canvas Discussion page.** Remember, these are minimum guidelines, so chime in to the discussion board as often as you like!

Thursday, July 11—**Quiz on Canvas, due by 11 a.m.**

Friday, July 12—Finish *Under the Feet of Jesus.*

Saturday, July 13—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by 2 p.m. on Canvas.**

**Week Four**

Read Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Wednesday, July 17th—Read two-thirds of the graphic novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence comment (and 1-2-sentence response to another’s comment) due by midnight in Canvas Discussion page.** Remember, these are minimum guidelines, so chime in to the discussion board as often as you like!

Thursday, July 18th—**Quiz on Canvas, due by 11 a.m.**

Friday, July 19th—Finish *Fun Home.*
Saturday, July 20th—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by 2 p.m. on Canvas.**

**No mid-term or final**

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