

# **English 392 : American Novel, 1900 to the Present Online--Summer 2016**

Professor: Professor Mary Wood  
Email: mewood@uoregon.edu

## **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 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 small 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*

## 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:

1) **Three** close readings essays (500 words each), on each of three novels, **each due by noon on Saturday**. The essay you turn in on Saturday should be about the novel we read the previous week. Close reading expectations are explained on the Assignments page of the UOBlogs coursesite. I've provided oral 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 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). **You may turn in your creative assignment whichever week you choose.**

3) **Four** quizzes total, one 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 more general knowledge (such as "Why were Beauford Delaney, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and other mid-century African American writers and artists drawn to Paris?").

**Quizzes will be due Thursday mornings by 10 a.m.**

4) **Attendance** at **two** remote real-time sessions over the course of the term (to be scheduled via the Canvas site—Calendar section-- by the second day of class). These will be small-group sessions of 10-12 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 (through the Canvas Calendar) and attending these two sessions—each in a different week--via webcam, voice, or chat connection. Evening sessions will be available to accommodate work schedules.**

5) Every week, students should also write **one 2-3-sentence comment** in the **Discussion** section of the Canvas course site as well as **one 1-2-sentence response** to someone else's entry. These are due each Wednesday by midnight.

6) By **Tuesday at noon** of the first week of class (July 19<sup>th</sup>), each student should enter a 2-3-sentence introductory statement **on the Introduce Yourself! posts page of the UOBlogs site**. Tell us about yourself! What you include is up to you, but you might include your major and year in college, interests in school and outside of school, where you're from, favorite books.

### Grading:

Three traditional close reading essays—45%  
 One Creative assignment—15%  
 Four 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**, logging on to live sessions prepared (and on time), AND showing you've done the reading and thought about it carefully.
- All written work must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Font should be no larger than 12 point. 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.

### Schedule

#### Week One

Read James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

Tuesday, July 19th--Write a 2-3-sentence introducing yourself to me and the rest of the class in the **Introduce Yourself!** posts section of this UOBlogs course site. **Due by noon.**

Wednesday, July 20<sup>th</sup>—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence entry (plus 1-2-sentence comment on another student's entry) due on Canvas Discussions page by midnight.**

Thursday, July 21<sup>st</sup>-- **Quiz on Canvas, due by 10 a.m.**

Friday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>—Finish *Giovanni's Room*

Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by noon on Canvas.**

### Week Two

Read William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

Wednesday, July 27<sup>th</sup>—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence entry (plus 1-2-sentence comment on another student's entry) due on Canvas Discussions page by midnight.**

Thursday, July 29<sup>th</sup>--**Quiz on Canvas, due by 10 a.m.**

Friday, July 29<sup>th</sup>—Finish *The Sound and the Fury*

Saturday, July 30<sup>th</sup>—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by noon on Canvas.**

### Week Three

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

Wednesday, August 3<sup>rd</sup>—Read two-thirds of the novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence entry (plus 1-2-sentence comment on another student's entry) due on Canvas Discussions page by midnight.**

Thursday, August 4<sup>th</sup>-- **Quiz on Canvas, due by 10 a.m.**

Friday, Aug. 5<sup>th</sup>—Finish *Under the Feet of Jesus*.

Saturday, Aug. 6<sup>th</sup>—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by noon on Canvas.**

### Week Four

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

Wednesday, August 10<sup>th</sup>—Read two-thirds of the graphic novel and online supporting material (UOBlogs site) by this point. **2-3-sentence entry (plus 1-2-sentence comment on another student's entry) due on Canvas Discussions page by midnight.**

Thursday, August 11<sup>th</sup>--**Quiz on Canvas, due by 10 a.m.**

Friday, Aug. 12<sup>th</sup>—Finish *Fun Home*.

Saturday, Aug. 13<sup>th</sup>—**Close reading essay or creative assignment due by noon on Canvas.**