LIT 211-01: American Literature Since 1865

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Hours: W 1-3, Th 1-2, & by appt.

REQUIRED TEXTS

American Poetry and Literacy Project, The. *101 Great American Poems*. (Dover Thrift.)
Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Other Stories*. (Oxford.)
Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. (Riverhead.)
Hacker, Diane and Nancy Sommers. *A Pocket Style Manual* 7th Ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s.)
Hughes, Langston. *Selected Poems*. (Vintage.)
Murfin, Ross C and Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* 3rd Ed. (Bedford/St. Martin’s.)
Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. (Bantam Classics.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

LIT 291 explores a limited number of extraordinary American poems and novels (and one film) produced after the Civil War. We’ll situate the texts in their cultural, historical, and especially literary contexts, and explore such major movements as romanticism, realism, regionalism, naturalism, and modernism. The course also involves the advanced study of literary terms and concepts. Over the course of the semester, we’ll work on close reading skills and the (smart) interpretation of literary texts.

COURSE OUTCOMES (Adapted from the Department of English’s 2010 Assessment Report)

1. Students should be able to understand the characteristics of the major movements in American literary history since the end of the Civil War and to read and analyze individual examples in terms of those movements.
2. At the same time, students should be able, on the basis of their reading and analysis of individual works, to sharpen, refine, complicate, and challenge their understanding of American literary history and American literary movements.
3. Students should also be able, in their reading and analysis of individual works, to look beyond the general tenets of the relevant literary movement(s) to understand a work’s particular literary innovations and accomplishments.
4. 1-3 Recap. In sum, students should be able both to read and analyze individual works and to situate them in their relevant literary, cultural, and historical contexts. Put another way, and as a habit of mind, students should be able to set the individual work and the broader literary history in dialectical tension and endeavor at all times to see as deeply into the individual work and literary and cultural history as possible. Students should cultivate a restless mind.

5. Students will be introduced to the major historical, creative, and theoretical areas of study in American literature.

6. Students should be able—while drawing on appropriate critical terms and concepts—to state clearly the central themes, concepts, and ideas governing works of American literature and then, as a separate but related act, to evaluate their literary importance and/or cultural significance.

7. Students should be able to engage thoughtfully with a range of critical and theoretical perspectives on literary and cultural (and even controversial) issues, including an ability to state clearly the assumptions and premises of their own position.

8. Students should be able to perform a literary close reading (both in class and in writing assignments), demonstrating an ability to interpret insightfully literary texts by thoughtfully integrating quoted passages into larger argumentative claims.

9. Students should be able to write clear, grammatically consistent, and rhetorically effective papers, driven by a thesis and sustained by an ordered, coherent argument or sequence of ideas.

GRADING

- Essay 1 (3+ pages): 20%
- Essay 2 (3+ pages): 20%
- Essay 3 (5+ pages): 25% (A REVISION of either Essay 1 or Essay 2)
- Final Exam: 25%
- Participation: 10%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Please note that you must complete all written work to pass LIT 291. You must, in other words, turn in all three essays, and take the final exam. Essays will be deducted ONE letter grade for EACH class period they are late.
Please note as well that you must bring, on a 3X5 notecard, 3 questions, observations, comments, or critiques of the authors or works under consideration to each Discussion Session; the notecards must bear your name and be turned in at the end of the session.

**Attendance Policy:** Since the course involves note taking during Lectures and informed discussions of the readings during Discussion Sessions, attendance and participation are mandatory: after THREE absences, your FINAL GRADE will be deducted ONE letter grade for each additional TWO absences.

**DEPARTMENT AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

**Department Assessment:** The Department of English’s ongoing process of assessing its curriculum requires a committee of professors to read student papers (including exams) to learn how students in general are progressing through the program. Thus, your professor may choose a copy of one of your papers or ask for an electronic version of it to use in this assessment process. (All identifying information—such as name or ID number—will be removed and no evaluation of student work outside the boundaries of the course will play any role in determining a student’s grade.) If you do not want your work used in such a way, please inform your professor and she or he will not forward it to the Assessment Committee. Otherwise, we appreciate your tacit consent.

**University Assessment** (NB: this language largely provided by the Provost’s Office): Students should also note that this course may require an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a **rubric** developed from the following writing learning outcomes:

- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing
- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (MLA)
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university. Your work is used anonymously.

**Plagiarism:** *the use of someone else’s ideas or words as if they were your own.* To avoid this contravention of the fundamental values of the academy, you must acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and/or page number, work that has influenced your thinking. The University’s
Disability Accommodation: Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for coursework. To request accommodation, please contact the professor as soon as possible. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at http://www.umt.edu/dss/ or call (406) 243-2243 (Voice/Text).

SYLLABUS – Class Assignments

Tu Sept 1: Introduction

Tu Sept 8: Lecture: “Whitman’s Armpit, or, The Compendious Self of ‘Song of Myself’” Whitman 23-50 (SoM Chants 1-31)

Tu Sept 15: Discussion Session: Whitman
Lecture (begin): “Late 19th Century American Realism, Regionalism, and the (American) Self”

Tu Sept 22: Lecture: “Edna, Léonce, and the Creoles of Grand Isle (and New Orleans) and the (American) Self, or, The Sensuality of Water (and Other Matters)”
Also: An Exercise in Close Reading (Chopin, Chapter VI, 15-16)

Tu Sept 29: Discussion Session (cont.): Chopin
Lecture: “The Modern Age/Modernism and the (American) Self”
101 GAP 33 (Lazarus), 36 (Masters), 41-43 (Dunbar, Stein), 53-62 (Sandburg-Pound), 65 (Moore)

Whitman 1-11 (“Inscriptions”)
**Essay 1: Assigned**

Th Sept 10: Whitman 50-76 (SoM Chants 32-52), 77-79 (“From Pent-Up Aching Rivers”), 95 (“In Paths Untrodden”), 106 (“I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing”)

Th Sept 17: Lecture (cont.): “Late 19th Century American Realism, Regionalism, and the (American) Self”
Chopin 3-40

Th Sept 24: Lecture: “American Literary Naturalism and The Awakening, or Explaining Edna?”
Chopin 86-128
Discussion Session (begin): Chopin

Th Oct 1: Lecture: “Prufrock, Prufrockism, and the (American) Self”
101 GAP  66-70 (Eliot)

**Essay 2: Assigned**

Tu Oct 6:  Discussion Session: Modernism/Modern Poetry/The Modern Self
Th Oct 8:  Lecture: “Faulkner, Yoknapatawpha, and the High Modernist Novel”
          Faulkner 3-5

Tu Oct 13:  Lecture: “Faulkner, Class, the American South, and the (American) Self”
            Faulkner 3-84
Th Oct 15:  Faulkner 85-168

Tu Oct 20:  Discussion Session: Faulkner, or, What Did We Just Read? Really?!
            (American) Self”
            Hughes 1-46, 107-153

Tu Oct 27:  Lecture (cont.): “The New Negro Renaissance, Harlem, the Blues and the
            (American) Self”
            Hughes 219-297
Th Oct 29:  Discussion Session: Hughes and “Montage of a Dream Deferred”
            Hughes 219-272

           Díaz Epigraphs-64
           **Essay 2: Due, Including Folder + All Work Related Product**
Th Nov 5:  Lecture: “History of the Dominican Republic”
           Díaz 64-136
           **Essay 3: Assigned**

Tu Nov 10:  Lecture: “The ‘Historical’ Novel/Postmodern Fiction”
           Díaz 136-202
Th Nov 12:  Díaz 203-270

Tu Nov 17:  Díaz 270-335
Th Nov 19:  Discussion Session: Díaz

Tu Nov 24:  Workshop: Essay 3
Th Nov 26:  **No Class: Thanksgiving!**

Tu Dec 1:  Screening (begin): Mamet *Glengarry Glen Ross*
Th Dec 3:  Screening (cont.): Mamet *Glengarry Glen Ross*
           Discussion Session (begin): Mamet
           **Essay 3: Due, Including Folder + All Work Related Product**
Tu Dec 8: Discussion Session (cont.): Mamet Review for Final Exam
Th Dec 10: Review for Final Exam

Exam Week: **Final Exam**