

Course Syllabus

Course Information

LIT 3312 (Honors)

MON. and WED 5:30-6:45

THE EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

Professor Contact Information

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OFFICE HOURS M/W 4:30-5:30

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

Membership in Collegium V

Course Description

WARNING: THIS CLASS WILL CONTAIN FICTION THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED OFFENSIVE BY SOME INDIVIDUALS. THE CLASS MAY ALSO CONTAIN WHAT SOME CONSIDER FOUL LANGUAGE. Students who feel uncomfortable in such situations should consider enrolling in a different literature course. No student will be asked to participate in any lecture or discussion that that student finds offensive.

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE

In the past fifty years, the American literary scene has witnessed the development of a series of oftentimes competing camps, from the Beats of the 50's, to the Black Humorists of the 60's, to the New Journalists of the 70's, to the Minimalists of the 80's, to the Maximalists and Postmodernists of the 90's, and now to genre literature such as so-called Chick Lit of the 21st Century. Through each of these successive stages, there has been a marked trend in the fiction produced toward an increased, sometimes absurd, sometimes flat, almost hyper-realistic portrayal of characters and action, where plot *per se* has become less and less important. This course will focus (1) on the reasons for the shift toward realism, (2) on the various techniques used to achieve that realism, and (3) on the moral and social implications behind such a shift.

In the last fifty years, American fiction has also become markedly more "self-aware," especially regarding the role of the author as the creator of the text. Kerouac, Vonnegut, Mailer, Hempel, Bell, Naylor, Maso, and Bender are not content to

be merely implied beings--to the contrary, these authors have made themselves palpably (and often autobiographically) present on the page. The discussions in the class will center around questions of authorship, of how each author created his or her story, of the various ways in which each author was suffering from what Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence," and of the similar and combative technical means that each author used to instantiate in the minds of his or her readers seemingly real (no matter how lyric, absurd, or fantastic) fictional worlds.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

1. Given the weekly discussions and presentations, students will be able to discuss the techniques that mark the various eras of contemporary fiction.
2. Given the written biographies of contemporary writers of American fictions, students will be able to discuss how writers' lives impact what they write.
3. Given the final exam and presentations in class, students will be able to classify contemporary writers into appropriate categories, such as new journalism, minimalism, etc.
4. Given the final exam, students will be able to analyze the evolution of American fiction since Jack Kerouac's groundbreaking work.

Required Textbooks and Materials

Aimee Bender:	<u>The Girl in the Flammable Skirt</u>
T. C. Boyle:	<u>If the River Was Whiskey</u>
Amy Hempel:	<u>Reasons to Live</u>
Jack Kerouac:	<u>On the Road</u>
Macauley and Lanning:	<u>Technique in Fiction</u>
Carole Maso	<u>The Art Lover</u>
Norman Mailer:	<u>The Executioner's Song</u>
Gloria Naylor:	<u>Bailey's Café</u>
Kurt Vonnegut:	<u>Slaughterhouse-Five</u>

Suggested Course Materials

Harold Bloom:	<u>The Anxiety of Influence</u>
Annie Dillard:	<u>Living by Fiction</u>
Karl Kroeber	<u>Retelling/Rereading</u>

Assignments & Academic Calendar

August 21st **REALISM VS. REALISTIC TECHNIQUES—AUTHORS VS. CRITICS**

Read: (Recommended, Harold Bloom—entire book)

Discuss: The history of Realism; the differences between realism as a genre and realism as a technique; the role of the author in making a text

August 23rd **JACK KEROUAC**

Read: On the Road, pp. 1-148; Macauley, pp. 1-54

Discuss: How stories are created; the role of the “personal” in writing; autobiography vs. fiction

August 28th **JACK KEROUAC**

Read: On the Road, pp. 149-310; Macauley, pp. 55-84

Discuss: How authors achieve and maintain voice; techniques for establishing style; form vs. content

August 30th **JACK KEROUAC DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION**

Assignment due: 3 page biography of one of the authors (biography cannot be on the person about whom the student will doing a presentation)

September 4th **KURT VONNEGUT**

Read: Slaughterhouse-Five, 1-74; Macauley, pp. 85-128 (Recommended: Dillard, pp. 36-41)

Discuss: The role of the absurd in writing; how authors convert personal experience into fiction; how characters are built as composites

September 6th **KURT VONNEGUT**

Read: Slaughterhouse-Five, 75-186

Discuss: Science fiction vs. new journalism; politics and American fiction

September 11th **KURT VONNEGUT DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATIONS**

September 13th **NORMAN MAILER**

Read: Executioner's Song, pp. 1-494; Macauley, pp. 129-152 (Recommended: Dillard, pp. 41-48)

Discuss: New journalism vs. standard fiction; various forms of point of view; fictionalizing history

September 18th **NORMAN MAILER**

Read: Executioner's Song, pp. 495-1024; Macauley, pp. 153-176

Discuss: The role of setting in fiction; instantiating action into narration; the author's role as society's conscience

September 20th **NORMAN MAILER DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATIONS**

September 25th **AMY HEMPEL**

Read: Reasons to Live, pp. 1-51, Macauley, pp. 177-243 (Recommended: Dillard, 163-173)

Discuss: Minimalism and minimalizing techniques; less is more; symbolism vs. plot

Assignment due: 5 page paper on New Journalism

September 25th **AMY HEMPEL**

Read: Reasons to Live, pp. 52-129 (Recommended: Kroeber, pp. 1-14)

Discuss: Objectification; showing vs. telling; triangularization in narrative (to, by, about)

October 2nd **AMY HEMPEL DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION**

October 4th **MIDTERM EXAM**

October 9th **T. C. BOYLE**

Read: If the River Was Whiskey, 1-117 (Recommended: Dillard, 69-102; Kroeber, pp. 59-119)

Discuss: The argument against minimalism; the moral imperative of the author; commercialism; the author as a commodity; humor and irony

October 11th **T. C. BOYLE**

Read: If the River Was Whiskey, 118-224 (Recommended: Dillard, 49-63 and 103-127; Kroeber, pp. 120-165)

Discuss: Experimentation in writing; possibility vs. probability in fiction; the influences of postmodern skepticism on authors; fictional pyrotechniques

October 16th **T. C. BOYLE DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATIONS**

October 18th **GLORIA NAYLOR**

Read: Bailey's Café, pp. 1-93 (Recommended: Dillard, pp. 127-155, Kroeber, pp. 166-214)

Discuss: Ventriloquism in fiction, magic and realism; romance and realism; meaning and fiction

October 23rd **GLORIA NAYLOR**

Read: Bailey's Café, pp. 94-229 (Recommended: Bloom, 1-16)

Discuss: Race and gender in contemporary fiction; the future of fiction; technique vs. heart

Assignment due:

October 25th **GLORIA NAYLOR DISCUSSIONS AND PRESENTATIONS**

October 30th **CAROLE MASO**

Read: Carole Maso: The Art Lover, 1-119 (Recommended: Bloom, pp. 17-92)

Discuss: How can a writer ground a consciousness in a text? When is stream of consciousness effective and when should it be avoided? How can a writer evoke psychological reality?

November 1st **CAROLE MASO**

Read: Carole Maso: The Art Lover, 120-249 (Recommended: Bloom, pp. 93-157)

Discuss: What is the future of fiction? Is minimalism that future or is minimalism dead? What experiments are still possible? How does a writer maintain a close bond with her reader while taking risks with storytelling techniques?

November 6th **CAROLE MASO DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION**

November 8th **AIMEE BENDER**

Read: The Girl in the Flammable Skirt, pp. 1-77

Discuss: Genre and category fiction; the waning of influence; new influences; the preponderance of audience

Assignment due:

November 13th **AIMEE BENDER**

Read: The Girl in the Flammable Skirt, pp. 78-184

Discuss: Literary vs. popular fiction; the influence of the marketplace; publication and marketing

Assignment due:

November 15th **AIMEE BENDER DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATIONS**

November 20th **EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN FICTION DISCUSSION**

November 22nd **NO CLASS**

November 27th **REVIEW SESSION FOR FINAL EXAM**

November 29th **FINAL EXAM**

Grading Policy

3 page biography—10 points; 5 page paper—20 points; in-class presentation—20 points, class participation—10 points; midterm exam—10 points, final exam—30 points.

Course & Instructor Policies

Class attendance is mandatory. All students may have one unexcused absence. For each subsequent day missed without an excused written absence (no emails or phone messages will be accepted), the student's over-all, final grade *will be docked 5 points*.

Late work *will not be commented on and will result in an automatic 2 point deduction* for each class the assignment is late. *No work that is over two weeks late will be accepted.*

Student Conduct & Discipline

The University of Texas System and The University of Texas at Dallas have rules and regulations for the orderly and efficient conduct of their business. It is the responsibility of each student and each student organization to be knowledgeable about the rules and regulations which govern student conduct and activities. General information on student conduct and discipline is contained in the UTD publication, *A to Z Guide*, which is provided to all registered students each academic year.

The University of Texas at Dallas administers student discipline within the procedures of recognized and established due process. Procedures are defined and described in the *Rules and Regulations, Board of Regents, The University of Texas System, Part 1, Chapter VI, Section 3*, and in Title V, Rules on Student Services and Activities of the university's *Handbook of Operating Procedures*. Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the

Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations (SU 1.602, 972/883-6391).

A student at the university neither loses the rights nor escapes the responsibilities of citizenship. He or she is expected to obey federal, state, and local laws as well as the Regents' Rules, university regulations, and administrative rules. Students are subject to discipline for violating the standards of conduct whether such conduct takes place on or off campus, or whether civil or criminal penalties are also imposed for such conduct.

Academic Integrity

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work.

Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, statements, acts or omissions related to applications for enrollment or the award of a degree, and/or the submission as one's own work or material that is not one's own. As a general rule, scholastic dishonesty involves one of the following acts: cheating, plagiarism, collusion and/or falsifying academic records. Students suspected of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Plagiarism, especially from the web, from portions of papers for other classes, and from any other source is unacceptable and will be dealt with under the university's policy on plagiarism (see general catalog for details). This course will use the resources of turnitin.com, which searches the web for possible plagiarism and is over 90% effective.

Email Use

The University of Texas at Dallas recognizes the value and efficiency of communication between faculty/staff and students through electronic mail. At the same time, email raises some issues concerning security and the identity of each individual in an email exchange. The university encourages all official student email correspondence be sent only to a student's U.T. Dallas email address and that faculty and staff consider email from students official only if it originates from a UTD student account. This allows the university to maintain a high degree of confidence in the identity of all individual corresponding and the security of the transmitted information. UTD furnishes each student with a free email account that is to be used in all communication with university personnel. The Department of Information Resources at U.T. Dallas provides a method for students to have their U.T. Dallas mail forwarded to other accounts.

Withdrawal from Class

The administration of this institution has set deadlines for withdrawal of any college-level courses. These dates and times are published in that semester's course catalog. Administration procedures must be followed. It is the student's responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, I cannot drop or withdraw any student. You must do the proper paperwork to ensure that you will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if you choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.

Student Grievance Procedures

Procedures for student grievances are found in Title V, Rules on Student Services and Activities, of the university's *Handbook of Operating Procedures*.

In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding grades, evaluations, or other fulfillments of academic responsibility, it is the obligation of the student first to make a serious effort to resolve the matter with the instructor, supervisor, administrator, or committee with whom the grievance originates (hereafter called “the respondent”). Individual faculty members retain primary responsibility for assigning grades and evaluations. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the grievance must be submitted in writing to the respondent with a copy of the respondent’s School Dean. If the matter is not resolved by the written response provided by the respondent, the student may submit a written appeal to the School Dean. If the grievance is not resolved by the School Dean’s decision, the student may make a written appeal to the Dean of Graduate or Undergraduate Education, and the dean will appoint and convene an Academic Appeals Panel. The decision of the Academic Appeals Panel is final. The results of the academic appeals process will be distributed to all involved parties.

Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations.

Incomplete Grade Policy

As per university policy, incomplete grades will be granted only for work unavoidably missed at the semester’s end and only if 70% of the course work has been completed. An incomplete grade must be resolved within eight (8) weeks from the first day of the subsequent long semester. If the required work to complete the course and to remove the incomplete grade is not submitted by the specified deadline, the incomplete grade is changed automatically to a grade of **F**.

Disability Services

The goal of Disability Services is to provide students with disabilities educational opportunities equal to those of their non-disabled peers. Disability Services is located in room 1.610 in the Student Union. Office hours are Monday and Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Tuesday and Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.; and Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The contact information for the Office of Disability Services is:

The University of Texas at Dallas, SU 22

PO Box 830688

Richardson, Texas 75083-0688

(972) 883-2098 (voice or TTY)

Essentially, the law requires that colleges and universities make those reasonable adjustments necessary to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability. For example, it may be necessary to remove classroom prohibitions against tape recorders or animals (in the case of dog guides) for students who are blind. Occasionally an assignment requirement may be substituted (for example, a research paper versus an oral presentation for a student who is hearing impaired). Classes enrolled students with mobility impairments may have to be rescheduled in accessible facilities. The college or university may need to provide special services such as registration, note-taking, or mobility assistance.

It is the student’s responsibility to notify his or her professors of the need for such an accommodation. Disability Services provides students with letters to present to faculty members to verify that the student has a disability and needs accommodations. Individuals requiring special accommodation should contact the professor after class or during office hours.

Religious Holy Days

The University of Texas at Dallas will excuse a student from class or other required activities for the travel to and observance of a religious holy day for a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20, Tax Code, Texas Code Annotated.

The student is encouraged to notify the instructor or activity sponsor as soon as possible regarding the absence, preferably in advance of the assignment. The student, so excused, will be allowed to take the exam or complete the assignment within a reasonable time after the absence: a period equal to the length of the absence, up to a maximum of one week. A student who notifies the instructor and completes any missed exam or assignment may not be penalized for the absence. A student who fails to complete the exam or assignment within the prescribed period may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment.

If a student or an instructor disagrees about the nature of the absence [i.e., for the purpose of observing a religious holy day] or if there is similar disagreement about whether the student has been given a reasonable time to complete any missed assignments or examinations, either the student or the instructor may request a ruling from the chief executive officer of the institution, or his or her designee. The chief executive officer or designee must take into account the legislative intent of TEC 51.911(b), and the student and instructor will abide by the decision of the chief executive officer or designee.

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.