Nabers

EL 1511P

Realism, Modernism, Postmodernism: The American Novel and its Traditions

Fall 2014

This course charts the course of American novel from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. We will attend to the development of a distinctly novelistic literary tradition in American writing over the period and to the interactions between this tradition of literary novel writing and the emergence commercial novelistic generic forms (ie. the detective novel, science fiction). We will also consider the novel’s relations to alternative literary modes (narrative history, the sketch, the short story, the occasional essay) and to alternative media (film, television, music). Our discussions will hinge on questions such as these: What is distinctive about the novel as a form? Why do novelists produce novels rather than other works? Did their reasons for doing so remain constant over the course of the twentieth century? What subjects are especially susceptible to novelistic treatment? What subjects are especially hostile to it? With what discourses does the novel compete for cultural authority? How has it sought to establish its legitimacy in relation to those discourses? If things go well, by the end of the semester you will have a firm grasp on the broad shape of the American novel’s development in the twentieth century and a strong sense of the broader intellectual and aesthetic environment in which it defined itself.

We will concentrate on six prominent novels, with a view toward situating each of them within a thick contextual and intertextual framework. You will be required to consider another work in a final term paper. Shorter papers of roughly two pages will be due after each of our six units. In addition to completing these papers, you must also show up at each class session ready to participate in a vigorous discussion of the assigned material. (The longer paper will comprise 40% of your final grade, the shorter papers 50%, and class participation 10%.) I will circulate specific assignments for the various response papers as the semester progresses.

**[Note: There are no texts for this course in the campus bookstore. The Twain material is in the public domain. All of the non-novel material will be available electronically through canvas. You can order all of the novels, at a considerable discount from campus store prices, from any of a number of etailers. The works you will need to purchase are marked with two asterisks below.]**

1. Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894)/ “Those Extraordinary Twins” (1892)

W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (selections)

*Plessy v. Ferguson* (1895), *Fong Yue Teng v US* (1893)

[weeks of September 1, 8, 15]

2. \*\*Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905)

\*\*Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (1909-1916), “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)

William James, *Pragmatism* (1907) (selections); Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, “Preface”

*The Cheat* (1915) (film)

[weeks of September 22, 29]

3. \*\*F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

\*\*Dashiell Hammett, *The Glass Key* (1931)

*The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933) (film)

[weeks of October 6, 13]

4. \*\*Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

\*\*Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (1945)

Duke Ellington, *Black, Brown and Beige* (music)

*Stormy Weather* (1944) (film)

[weeks of October 20, 27]

5. \*\*Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) (selections)

\*\*Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) / Judy Bloom, *Are You There God, It’s Me, Margaret?* (1970)

*Vertigo* (1958) (film)

*Bewitched* (selected episodes)

[weeks of November 3, 10]

6. \*\*Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night* (1968)

Martin Luther King, Letter from the Birmingham Jail

\*\*Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1917)

*In the Heat of the Night* (1967) (film)

*Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (selected episodes)

[weeks of November 17, 24, December 1]

CONTACT INFORMATION

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