

ENGLISH 7391/8391: MODERN AMERICAN NOVEL

University of Memphis, Spring 2005

Monday 5:30-8:30

Dr. L. A. Duck

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Office hours: MW 2:15-3:30 and by appointment

DESCRIPTION:

This class will examine how U.S. novels of the modernist period interacted with each other and with other forms of discourse to stage diverse problems in collective life. Themes include the construction of space, narratives concerning history and modernization, state-sponsored and other forms of violence and oppression, cultural diffusion and opposition, and modernism's relationship with mass media, spectacle, and anthropology.

POLICIES:

- Attendance and active participation are **mandatory**. **If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the course. More than two unexcused absences will lower your grade.** Because this is a graduate seminar, you are expected to come to class **ready to discuss the text**.
- Plagiarism, if detected, will result in a **failing grade** for the course. You can find further information regarding plagiarism and penalties at my web page.
- Your grade will be assessed according to a +/- scale. At the University of Memphis, an A- earns 3.84 out of 4 possible points; all other +/-s indicate a .33 distance from the nearest integer (i.e., a B+ = 3.33, and a B- = 2.67).
- Your final grade will consist of a weighted average:
 - Class participation—30%
 - Weekly short essays—25%
 - Research presentation/outline—10%
 - Final paper/workshop—35%
- **No extensions are available for any deadlines.** If you are not going to be able to keep up with readings and short papers, you should drop by 3/16. For students unable to complete the final draft of the final paper by the due date, I will record an incomplete if such an arrangement is negotiated **before** the due date. I will not, however, extend those incompletes: if you take an incomplete for this course, you **must** submit your work by **July 10, 2005**, or your "I" will be changed to an "F."
- You must complete all assigned work to pass this class.
- You are expected to be civil to others in the class. Discussion is an important element of this course, and our reading presents some unsettling images as well as controversial topics. You are encouraged to express your concerns and opinions, but please be aware that this right is shared by other members of the class. We will be able to work through the more upsetting elements of this literature most effectively by communicating both candidly and in a manner that demonstrates respect for the classroom community.
- Bring the relevant text to *every* meeting of class!

SHORT ESSAYS:

- For each class from **1/31-4/11**, you are **required** to submit a very short paper. Essays should be:
 - Typed (using one of the smaller 12 pt. fonts) and double-spaced.
 - Approximately 2/3 page in length.
 - Submitted as hard copies at the beginning of class or emailed to me in advance in .doc, .rtf, or .html format.
 - Documented, with textual references cited parenthetically within the text, and any external sources listed in a separate bibliography.
- These essays may be analytic or informative: in other words, they may support or develop an interpretive claim, or they may assemble information about the text or the writer. You should pursue an analytic approach in at least 6 of these assignments, however: the informative option is only offered in case, in considering some historical or formal aspect of a text, you feel strongly motivated to research what others have said about it. If you choose to assemble and present information, you should clarify in your introduction what led you to research this topic.
- These essays provide an opportunity for you to reflect on the text(s) specified for that week in relation to the development of the course. You may choose to explain why a certain passage (or image, or formal technique) of the text is particularly relevant to our central themes, or how it interacts with (counters, parodies, etc.) other texts we have read. If you choose to engage in close reading, you are strongly advised to focus on a small and clearly defined passage.
- You may use these essays to question the assumptions of the text or of the class, or to discuss the effect of the text on your own thinking or on the direction of the course. If you choose this broader option, which does not require or even really allow for you to engage in close reading in your paper, be sure to articulate your topic very clearly: I cannot expect, in such a short assignment, for you to support and develop a large point, but I do require you to articulate your idea coherently.
- Whatever option you choose for these assignments, you are advised to understand them as writing exercises. A collection of disparate and superficial observations concerning the text—which might be accepted under the broader rubric “response paper”—will not suffice for these essays.
- For your first short essay, due **Monday, January 31**, you must not only bring your paper to class or email it to me in advance, but also **upload** your assignment to <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/Modern%20American%20Novel> before class. In order to access this site, you will need your UUID and ph password—the same identifiers used to access electronic databases at the university library. If you do not have this information, you need to acquire it immediately: see <http://support.memphis.edu/guides/uuidinfo.php>. Once you log on, you should already have access to the Modern American Novel directory. Please report any problems that you have during the break.
- Like your final paper, these essays will be graded on the degree to which they engage with issues raised by the text or the course and the effectiveness with which they communicate to readers. See writing/grading guidelines at my webpage.

SUBSTANTIAL ESSAY (15 pages):

- You will develop your own topics for this final paper. You are highly encouraged to discuss these topics with me, and are **required to submit a prospectus by April 11.**
- You should focus on one text, or the relationship between two texts. If you define your topic very carefully, you may compare two texts' approach to a critical or historical problem.
- These papers must demonstrate engagement with a **critical, historical, or theoretical** archive:
 - For a critical example, you could attempt to situate, or reposition, one of these texts in relation to a particular formal definition of modernism; this would require consultation of theoretical accounts of modernism (or realism, or postmodernism), or might be satisfied largely by attention to the critical archive regarding the text or writer in question. Another relatively formalist topic would involve positioning a text in relation to prominent U.S. stereotypes or protest literature—considering, in other words, the political valences of the author's formal choices.
 - For a historicist example, you could attempt to situate, or reposition, one of these texts in relation to a particular socio-cultural conflict or dynamic during this period. How do these texts configure modernization, for example, or racial oppression? How do they construe problems in political leadership? Analyzing questions like this might require consultation of historical texts, literary histories, or work in American Studies.
 - Finally, if you have experience or avid interest in working with a theoretical archive, you might use such texts in your analysis of the novel. How might psychoanalytic theory, for example, help us to understand how these authors represent sexual violence or compulsive behaviors? How might Marxist theory help us to understand how they represent socio-cultural transformation? On the other hand, how might one of these novels lead us to rethink some of the models posited by psychoanalytic or Marxist theories?
- The prospectus need not posit a thesis, but should articulate the line of investigation that you plan to pursue: you need to articulate your research question clearly, and explain how you will approach that question.
- The section of your prospectus describing your research topic should be at least ½ page in length. You are, however, welcome to provide more discussion. The research problem described here will be the basis of your presentation and your paper, and the extent to which I can helpfully advise you in developing these projects will depend on the quality and quantity of information you provide me here.
- Your prospectus should also include a bibliography of sources you plan to cite. You should use MLA style (conveniently programmed at http://www.landmark-project.com/citation_machine/index.php). Please note that since websites are making it so easy to learn correct citation methods, I will lower the grade of your final paper if its bibliography is poorly formatted.
- Final papers should cite at least 5 books or journal articles. You can also cite educational websites, but these will not count toward your 5-source minimum.

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS:

- On April 18th, you will present your classmates with an overview of your research project for this class. Prepare 8 minutes-worth of material; feel free to use visual aids (hand-outs, PowerPoint, etc.). If you will need equipment, please alert me in advance.
- In describing your topic, clearly and carefully explain the “problem” that you are investigating. Why is this a significant question? What have previous scholars said about it? If they have not discussed this issue, is it possible to discern why? What can you gain from investigating this problem? Also explain how you will conduct this analysis: what kinds of sources will you use? What passages from the text provide particularly useful evidence? Finally, you should outline the sections of your paper: how will you organize your argument
- Though you do not need to submit a paper in addition to this presentation, you should provide legible notes.

DRAFT WORKSHOPS:

- You are **required** to workshop a complete draft of your substantial paper. Failure to participate in this process will lower your grade by at least one 1.3 points. (Because the process of peer review and revision helps writers to improve their papers, failure to participate may also limit the quality of your paper.)
- For these workshops, we will divide into 3 groups, meeting
 - Monday, 4/25 5:30-6:55 (1)
 - Monday, 4/25 7:05-8:30 (2)
 - Tuesday, 4/26 5:30-6:55 (3)
- To participate in these workshops, you must **upload a complete draft of your paper** to <https://umdrive.memphis.edu/lduck/Modern%20American%20Novel> by **Saturday, April 23 at 9:00 am. Be sure to upload your paper into the appropriate group directory!**
- For the final workshops, you must **write a brief commentary for each of your colleagues' papers**. You should be able to access these papers through UMDrive after 9:00 on Saturday, April 23. Bring **two copies** of these commentaries to class--one for the writers of the papers, and one for me.
- Commentaries should address each of the following questions.
 - What is the thesis of this paper?
 - What did you consider its most significant point or methodological trait? Why?
 - What aspect of the paper (a certain claim, a certain facet of the interpretive method, a certain transition in the argument) did you find most confusing? Why?
 - In what way did this paper expand/clarify your understanding of this particular text or of U.S. modernism?
- These commentaries need not be elegantly written: we will, after all, be able to clarify our statements in the workshop. But they need to be both precise and civil, in order to be productive. Please note that the quality of their participation in this process provides important evidence for me in writing letters of recommendation for former students seeking teaching positions.

SCHEDULE:**Sites of Narrative**

- M, 1/24** Course introduction
William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, “Was” - “The Old People”
- M, 1/31** *Go Down, Moses*, “The Bear” - “Go Down, Moses”
Eudora Welty, *The Golden Apples*, “Shower of Gold” – “June Recital”
See “short papers”—UMDrive assignment due

- M, 2/7** *The Golden Apples*, “Sir Rabbit” – “The Wanderers”

Visibility/Invisibility

- M, 2/14** Richard Wright, *Native Son*, parts I and II
- M, 2/21** *Native Son*, part III
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, “Prologue” – chap. 9
- M, 2/28** *Invisible Man*, chap. 10 - end

- M, 3/7** **SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS**

Power

- M, 3/14** Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, “Author’s Introduction” – chap. 30
- M, 3/21** *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, chap. 31 – end
Robert Penn Warren, *All the King’s Men*, chaps. 1 - 3
- M, 3/28** *All the King’s Men*, chap. 4 - end

Loss

- M, 4/4** William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*
- M, 4/11** Flannery O’Connor, *Wise Blood*
PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE

- M, 4/18** **RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS**

Sat., 4/23 **ROUGH DRAFTS DUE BY 9:00 A.M.!**

M, 4/25 and T, 4/26 **DRAFT WORKSHOPS**

F, 5/6 **FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 3! Papers may be submitted to my office or UMDrive.**