

**ENGLISH 534-11:  
THE MODERN AMERICAN NOVEL (3.0 CR.)**

Instructor: Christian Moraru  
Summer Session II, 2000

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This graduate survey focuses on the modern American novel. We will begin with a discussion of the major notions in the course's title, e. g., the novel (as different from other genres), its modern history, and, in relation to the latter, the concepts of modernity and modernism. We will place such concepts in European and American contexts. We will move on, then, to analyses of certain novels by American authors of various backgrounds (male and female, European- and African-American, etc.). We will pay attention to both cultural-historical contexts and elements of style, narrative structure, and so on. We will pursue, at the same time, the main trends and moments in the development of the genre throughout American modernism and even "postmodernism."

METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT: We will usually spend two classes on a novel and, in some cases, secondary sources. While individual presentations may incorporate criticism and theory, we will devote most of our time to the works themselves. This graduate survey combines lecture, student presentations, and extensive discussion. Usually, our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and theoretical background and placing the readings for the day in the culturally appropriate context. The lecture will be more extensive at the beginning of each new unit (series of two or three classes focusing on the same novel or author). Following this introduction, students give 20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of the readings for the day, and then we will move on to collective discussion.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Writing Requirements:

Option 1:

A midterm and a final exam, 4-5 double-spaced pages each (take-home)



## Option 2:

A final paper, 14-15 pp. (including endnotes and Works Cited)

2. Individual Presentations. Students sign up for their final project proposal and oral presentations right away so that we can spread out the presentations throughout the term. Each student will give a 20-min. talk on the scheduled readings. The presentations need not be written. But if they are, you should probably aim for 7-8 double-spaced pages.

Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. I do not expect you to fully analyze or explain the day's assignments. You need to identify one major problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation.

3. "The Question for the Day." Each student will write up, before the class, one question on the scheduled readings and bring it up in class. You need not have the answer to the question. Nor does the question have to be fully formulated--you may, occasionally, phrase it more as a problem than a full-blown query. I will collect the questions/problems at the end of the class. Individual presenters do not have to contribute questions on the day they present.

4. Attendance and Participation. Both are expected and will factor in the final grade (see below under course policies).

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment to discuss your specific interests, goals, or any aspect of this class. I ask you to make at least one "formal" appointment during the term. I will schedule these meetings immediately. I will also hold formal conferences before the term ends to discuss final paper (if you choose Option 2) and your progress in our class.

## COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Papers: No late papers--and any other kind of work for that matter--accepted. However, if you foresee any deadline-related problems, please come to see me ahead of time. We shall work together to find a solution.

2. Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) absences during the semester for illnesses (which you must document afterwards), religious holidays, or any emergencies preventing you from attending. No undocumented absences. Should they occur, they will affect your final grade. I will subtract 5% from the latter for any undocumented absence. Attendance is particularly critical to the success of our work in this class. If you are the victim of an emergency, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone.

GRADING: As a general rule, no incompletes (but, again, come to see me if you foresee any problems). The quality of your work will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

1. Papers and exams: 80%
2. Oral participation (including presentations and questions): 20%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Willa Cather, O Pioneers! (1913). Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 0395083656

Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (1926). Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0684800713

Nella Larsen, Passing (1929). Penguin, ISBN 0141180250

William Faulkner, Light in August (1932). Random House, ISBN 0679732268

Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (1966). HarperCollins, ISBN 0060931671

Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping (1980). Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, ISBN 0374525188

Don DeLillo, Mao II (1991). Viking Penguin, ISBN 0140152741

OPTIONAL:

The Columbia History of the American Novel. Emory Elliott, General Ed. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

COURSE SYLLABUS:

**Week 1**

Mon June 26 Introduction. Our course: focus, objectives, format, and requirements.  
Modernity, modernism, and the American novel  
(lecture followed by discussion)

Tue June 27 Cather, O Pioneers! (Parts I and II)

Thu June 29 O Pioneers! (Parts II-V)  
Note: You need to have the entire Hemingway novel read by Thu., July 6

**Week 2**

Mon July 3 No class

Tue July 4 No class

Thu July 6 Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises

**Week 3**

Mon July 10 Larsen, Passing (the entire novel)

Tue July 11 Faulkner, Light in August (pp. 1-101)

Thu July 13 Light in August (pp. 101-391)  
Midterm evaluations  
Begin Pynchon

**Week 4**

Mon July 17 Light in August (the rest of the novel)  
**Midterm exam due**

Tue July 18 Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49; begin to read the DeLillo novel over the weekend; you will need to have it read (entirely) by Tue., July 24.

Thu July 20 Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 (wrap up)

**Week 5**

Mon July 24 DeLillo, Mao II

Tue July 25 Mao II (wrap up)

Thu July 27 Robinson, Housekeeping (the first six chapters)

**Week 6**

Mon July 31 Housekeeping (wrap up)

Tue Aug 1 Final class  
Course overview  
**Term paper due**  
**Final exam due**  
Final evaluations