

**ENGLISH 565-51:
AMERICAN PROSE AFTER 1900 (3.0 CR.)**

Instructor: Assistant Professor Christian Moraru
Summer Session I, 2002

McIver 138, MTWRF 1:00 PM-3:30 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GENERAL GOALS: This graduate survey focuses on American Prose after 1900. We will begin with a discussion of the major notion in the course's title, prose, and its various genres such as the novel, the novella, and the short story. We will also address the distinction between fictional and nonfictional prose, "high-brow" and "low-brow" (popular) forms, finally, the differences among "prose," "fiction," and "narrative."

Second, we will relate modern prose to modern history, and, in relation to the latter, we will discuss the concepts of modernity, modernism, and postmodernism. We will place such concepts in European and American contexts, with an eye to how our texts participate in the construction of a certain cosmopolitan community across concepts, fictional representations, and cultural sites pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and national identity. This will be the thematic focus of our course.

Third, we will analyze certain prose texts by American authors of various backgrounds (male and female, European- and African-American). We will pay attention both to 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 the century and into the new millennium.

OBJECTIVES--UNDERGRADUATES AND GRADUATES: This class helps students understand the stylistic patterns, cultural contexts, major themes of American modernism and postmodernism in narrative, primarily novelistic form. Students become competent readers of a challenging type of literary discourse, coming to terms with the modernist/postmodern revolution in prose fiction. They will discover, that is, the impact this revolution has had on both literature and its audience. We will also emphasize issues pertaining to literary history (influences, chronology, periods), the dynamic tradition-innovation, as well the transnational, crosscultural exchanges and concerns behind the major achievements of American prose over the past hundred years.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES--GRADUATE STUDENTS: Graduate students are encouraged to use this course to put their work in the larger, more demanding and competitive perspective of professionalism and academic performance. While fulfilling the course's requirements is your major goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its specific standards, language, methods, tools, and venues. Here are a few questions for us: where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic and writer, and which are my goals? In what kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to intervene based on what I learn in this class? What steps do I have to take to do that? What are the resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do, for instance, to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper, journal article, M.A. thesis, dissertation chapter, or writing sample? (more details in class and individually).

Students who choose Option 2 (under Writing Requirements below) will also utilize research tools and resources to produce, with the instructor's help, a thesis-based paper modeled after a regular conference presentation. Option 1 will require the completion of a take-home exam in essay format. Both entail a command of basic notions in novel criticism and theory as well as the ability to work them into well-argued and polished writing. Finally, we will address throughout the course problems of pedagogy, learning and teaching strategy, the major challenges in the teaching of modernist literature, and related matters. Oral participation, group work, individual presentations and exams/papers are all geared towards these objectives.

METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT: We will usually spend two-three 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 final exam, 5-6 double-spaced pages (take-home)

Option 2:

A final paper, 8-10 pp. (including endnotes and Works Cited), recommended to graduate, (primarily Ph.D.) students

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 urge 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 or exams: 80%

2. Oral participation (including presentations and questions): 20%

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. 1932. New York: Random House, 1990. ISBN: 067972463X (pbk.).
2. Henry Roth. Call It Sleep. 1934. New York: Noonday P, 1992. ISBN: 0374522928 (pbk.).
3. Philip Roth, The Dying Animal. Boston. New York: Houghton Mifflin: 2001. ISBN: 0618135871. Please get a pbk. if available.
4. Curtis White. Anarcho-Hindu: The Damned, Weird Book of Fate. New York: Fiction Collective Two, 1995. ISBN: 1573660027 (pbk.).
5. Walter Mosley, Futureland: Nine Stories of an Imminent World. New York: Warner Books, 2001. ISBN: 0446529540 (hdcovr.) Please get a pbk. if available.

OPTIONAL (SECONDARY MATERIALS):

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

COURSE SYLLABUS:

Week 1

Mon June 10 Introduction. Our course: focus, objectives, format, and requirements.

Tue June 11 Modernity, Modernism, and autobiographical prose: Americans in Europe
Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas 1-85

Wed June 12 Stein 86-192

Thu June 13 Stein 193-252

Fri June 14 Realism and modernism: Europeans in America and narratives of immigration and cultural construction

Henry Roth, Call It Sleep 9-87

Week 2

Mon June 17 Henry Roth 87-328

Tue June 18 Henry Roth 329-462

Wed June 19 Transition to postmodernism and new communities
Philip Roth, The Dying Animal 1-91

Thu June 20 Philip Roth 91-156
Midterm evaluations

Fri June 21 Postmodernism, experimentalism, and the “avant-pop”
White, Anarcho-Hindu 6-71
Start reading Mosley over weekend

Week 3

Mon June 24 White 74-114
Final exam assigned

Tue June 25 Postmodernism and the politics of genre: cyberpunk, science fiction, utopia/dystopia, and detective narrative
Mosley, Futureland 1-168
Final project presentations

Wed June 26 Mosley 169-227
Final project presentations

Thu June 27 Mosley 229-356
Final project presentations

Fri June 28 Final class
Course overview
Term paper due
Final exam due
Final evaluations