

Major American Writers
ENGL 20503.10
Spring 2008
Meeting: MWF 9:00-9:50 in Reed 103

Dr. Michael Garcia
309B Reed Hall
Phone: 257-6248
Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00

Course Description

The dark secret of American literature is the presence of the Other. A good subtitle for this course would be “The Ubiquitous Other in American Literature.” We will trace this thread in the works of major American authors from the antebellum period to the contemporary. We will explore themes common to these works such as American identity, the problem of slavery, and the individual in society.

In addition to situating texts in their relevant social, historical, political, and other critical contexts, we will pay particular attention to rhetorical and stylistic choices made at the prose level. This course will involve writing, close readings, literary analysis, and rigorous participation in class discussions.

Course Requirements

4 essays in the following formats: Opening Exam (In Class: Essay #1), Paper (Formal: Essay #2), Reading Journal (Informal: Essay #3), Final Exam (Take Home: Essay #4).

Course Objectives

In this course you will:

- Gain greater familiarity with key texts in the American tradition.
- Read texts closely.
- Consider the multiple levels of context in which words and texts are meaningful.
- Improve critical thinking and writing skills.

Grading

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| Essay #1 | 20% |
| Essay #2 | 20% |
| Essay #3 | 20% |
| Essay #4 | 20% |
| Class participation, pop quizzes, and attendance | 20% |

Required Texts

Engl 20503.10 Course Packet (Available at Frog Prints). Instructor, Michael Garcia
The Elements of Style by Strunk and White
Understanding and Writing about Literature by Aimee Pozorski
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass (Norton)

Benito Cereno by Herman Melville (Bedford)
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (Norton)
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (Penguin Classics)
The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston (Vintage)
House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (Vintage)
Beloved by Toni Morrison (Vintage)

Optional Texts

A Writer's Reference by Diana Hacker

Film

Beloved

Books on Course Reserve

I have placed the following texts on four-hour reserve at Mary Coats Burnett Library. You will find the titles on this course reserve list helpful for improving your writing and critical thinking skills. The reserve list is shelved under the course ENGL 10833.50:

Munson, Ronald, David Conway, and Andrew Black. *The Elements of Reasoning*. 2004.

BC175 .W45 2005 Whyte, Jamie. *Crimes Against Logic*.

PE1408 .C5886 1999 Corbett, Edward P.J. and Robert J. Connors. *Style and Statement*. 1998.

PE1409.5 .E5 1998 Elbow, Peter. *Writing without Teachers*. 1998.

PE1408 .G6294 1998. Gorrell, Donna. *A Writer's Handbook from A to Z*. 1998.

Marius, Richard. *A Writer's Companion*. 1998.

Trimble, John R. *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. 2000.

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 2006.

E185 .F8266 2000 Franklin, John Hope. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African-Americans*. 2000.

PS173.N4 M67 1992 Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark*. 1992.

E184.A1 T335 1993 Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. 1993.

Electronic Course Reserves

Over the course of the semester I may place materials on electronic course reserve through the campus library. These materials will be required reading.

Course Website

No course website is available at this time. If one is made available later in the semester, you will be given instructions on how to enroll in the site.

Writing Assignments

Essay 1 will take the form of an exam. Bring Blue Books to class that day.

Essay 2 is literary criticism (4 pages).

Essay 3 consists in turning in your Reading Journal.

Essay 4 is a Final Paper (6 pages), on the text and topic of your choice.

Reading Journal

The Reading Journal should have two typed, double-spaced pages on each text. Journal entries need not have the narrative and logical flow of a class paper. In fact, use this more informal venue to write more honestly and colloquially than you would when using the more elevated and aloof register of a formal paper. Refrain from plot summaries in your journal entries. Instead, get right to the pith of your own unique insights about these texts. Why do these texts matter? (Why do they matter in our society? Why do they matter to you?) Try to express how you think and feel about these texts at the most intellectual and visceral levels. Which ones do you love and which generate personal antipathy? And why?

Reading Journals will be handed in (stapled, no binders) three quarters through the semester. Be prepared to read, aloud in class, from your journal at any time during the semester. I may also come around and look at journals during class, and on any given day I may ask that they be handed in.

Paper Formatting

All assignments handed in are to be in 12 point font, double-spaced, and paginated. In the upper left-hand corner should appear, single-spaced, your name, the date, and the course number (e.g., ENGL 10833). (For an example of how this format is laid out in the upper left-hand corner of the paper see page 27 in the Pozorski booklet.) Each paper should have a title. Center the title so that it will stand out better.

Use MLA style citation: (<http://www.wrt.tcu.edu/MLA%20Style%20Sheet.html>)

Assignments must be handed in *in class* on the day that they are due. Late assignments lose one letter grade for each day that they are late. Keep copies of all your work.

Expect papers to be shared with other class members for peer editing, group projects, and class discussion. Student papers might also be shown to other instructors, writing advisors, and the like. I will ask your permission first if using your work as a model paper to show students in other courses.

A word about content: your paper should offer your own unique ideas, insights, and arguments. Don't just repeat what we discussed in class. You can start with a topic that we discussed in class but your thesis must be your own. It should present the reader with *your* argument. The most ambitious and interesting papers tend to explore topics and themes beyond those covered in class. Since papers in this class will always discuss a particular literary text there is little need to worry about straying beyond the boundaries of the class when choosing a paper topic.

Class Participation

This is a reading, writing, and discussion seminar, not a lecture course. Come to class prepared to talk about the text. Read the text closely, engaging in mock dialogue with the text as you read. Asking questions of the text as you go through it will bring you

to class with many questions, observations, and arguments about the reading to share with the community of literary critics, readers, and writers that the class will provide.

I may occasionally require that you write 150-200 word pre-discussion notes to hand in before class. Or I may ask you to bring to class one or two discussion questions about the reading. In-class writing might also be assigned.

Pop quizzes may be given at any time. As long as you have read the text the quiz will be easy. Any detailed questions that I may ask will be readily answerable if you have carefully read the text, but not something that could be cribbed from Cliff's Notes, a website summary, the film version of the book, or having someone else tell you the plot.

As a discussion course, attendance is critical. The first three absences will not be counted against you but all subsequent absences will negatively impact your grade in the course. The three free absences should easily cover medical, family, or other emergencies in most cases, so there is no need to present the instructor with "sick notes," or to make excuses for absences after the fact, though I may inquire about the nature of prolonged absences. Tardiness or leaving class early may be counted as an absence, particularly if the problem becomes excessive over the course of the semester.

As a discussion class, open laptops are not allowed. Cell phones should be put away during class and may be confiscated if used (such as for texting) during class.

Citing and Plagiarism

For any questions about Academic Misconduct and what it consists of, particularly in regard to plagiarism, cheating, or collusion, I refer you to the TCU Undergraduate Studies Bulletin. A definition of plagiarism bears repeating in any class that involves writing, and I quote:

Plagiarism: the appropriation, theft, purchase or obtaining by any means another's work, and the unacknowledged submission or incorporation of that work as one's own offered for credit. Appropriation includes the quoting or paraphrasing of another's work without giving credit. (TCU "Academic Conduct Policy," Section I, Paragraph B, 1995).

Cite your sources. That is the simplest advice I can give you. Though there are gray areas as to when one should cite and when a paraphrase is adequate, we all recognize blatant plagiarism when we see it. In such cases the paper will receive an immediate grade of F and the student will be referred to the office of the Academic Dean.

As for the gray areas:

We all stand on the shoulders of giants; we all benefit from the ideas of others. Many of our best ideas are common knowledge, societally and globally shared. It is hard to imagine an idea that does not owe something to someone else's brilliant thoughts too. A class like this is partly about finding your own voice. When you write down the great ideas that others have undoubtedly thought before you, you should do so in your unique voice. If your great idea (or your agreement with a great idea, or the realization that somebody else has stolen your idea before you even thought of it) was inspired by a passage in a book you just read five minutes ago you will have to be more mindful of your wording. Your thinking and writing should be your own: make sure it hasn't been supplanted by the thought and phrasing of the book's author. **When in doubt, cite.** If your paraphrase is not clearly in your own words and voice—perhaps because the kernel

of truth you wish to glean gets lost as you deviate from the original wording—then cite your source.

Writing Center and Writing Resources

The William L. Adams Center for Writing is an academic support service available to all TCU students. In addition to a library of helpful writing books, the writing center offers one-on-one assistance with writing. Writing specialists and peer tutors are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in room 244 of the Rickel Building. Additional evening hours are available from 6 to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday in the Library Annex. The writing center encourages students to make online appointments, but drop-ins are also welcome. Students may also make an appointment by calling 257-7721.

Even if you do not visit the writing center, I encourage you to take advantage of the extensive writing resources available on their website: <http://www.wrt.tcu.edu/>

Another indispensable resource is the Mary Couets Burnett Library (<http://lib.tcu.edu/www/>). In addition to print resources, many literary resources are available online, such as those links found at http://lib.tcu.edu/www/eref/virtual_reference_collection.asp#literature

ADA

TCU complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. Eligible students seeking accommodations should contact the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Center for Academic Services located in 11 Sadler Hall, 257-7486. Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities.

Course Schedule

The date that an item appears on the syllabus is the date that it is **due in class**. Email submissions are not accepted without the prior approval of the instructor, which will only be granted in extenuating circumstances. Reading assignments are usually listed first on each day. “CP” designates readings in the Course Packet. Readings are sometimes referred to by their title, and sometimes just by author name.

You will be expected to be familiar with the texts in their entirety on the first day that they appear on the syllabus. Lengthier readings will be spread out over several days but informed class discussion requires familiarity with the entire text. The syllabus announces when we will be focusing class discussion on a particular section of text, and I may periodically announce in class a chapter or section to pay particular attention to for the next class. Staying ahead of the readings is much more productive and less stressful than falling behind on them.

Week 1

- 1/14 Course Intro; (CP): Student Questionnaire
- 1/16 (CP): Grossenbacher, Dunbar-Odom, Lye
Frederick Douglass
- 1/18 *Frederick Douglass*

Week 2

- 1/21 MLK Holiday. No Class
 1/23 *Frederick Douglass*; Pozorski Chapters 1 and 2.
 1/25 *Frederick Douglass*; Pozorski Chapters 3 and 4.

Week 3

- 1/28 *Benito Cereno*; (CP): Baker, Sowards.
 1/30 *Benito Cereno*
 2/1 *Benito Cereno*

Week 4

- 2/4 *Benito Cereno*
 2/6 *Benito Cereno*
 2/8 **Exam (Essay 1), Bring Blue Books**

Week 5

- 2/11 *Benito Cereno*
 2/13 *Huckleberry Finn*
 2/15 *Huckleberry Finn*

Week 6

- 2/17 *Huckleberry Finn*
 2/20 *Huckleberry Finn*
 2/22 *Huckleberry Finn*

Week 7

- 2/25 *Huckleberry Finn*; (CP): Trimble, Scott, McNally
 2/27 *Huckleberry Finn*
 2/29 *Huckleberry Finn*

Week 8

- 3/3 *Grapes of Wrath*
 3/5 *Grapes of Wrath*
 (CP): “Instructor’s Symbols and Abbreviations on Essays,” “Symbols for Common Errors” (Baker), “Academic Standards for Analytical and Evaluative Writing.”
 3/7 *Grapes of Wrath*; (CP): “Mid-Semester Check-Up”
Essay 2 Due (4pp.; Paper Type: Literary criticism of *Frederick Douglass*, *Huckleberry Finn*, or *Grapes of Wrath*.)

Week 9

- 3/10 Spring Break
 3/12 Spring Break
 3/14 Spring Break

Week 10

3/17 *Woman Warrior*
 3/19 *Woman Warrior*
 3/21 Good Friday. No Class

Week 11

3/24 *Woman Warrior*
 3/26 *Woman Warrior*
 3/28 *Woman Warrior*

Week 12

3/31 *House on Mango Street*
 4/2 *House on Mango Street*
 4/4 *House on Mango Street*

Week 13

4/7 *House on Mango Street*
 4/9 *House on Mango Street*
 4/11 *Beloved*; (CP): Williams

Week 14

4/14 *Beloved*; **Reading Journals Due**
 4/16 *Beloved*
 4/18 *Beloved*

Week 15

4/21 *Beloved*
 4/23 Film: *Beloved*; (CP): Barnet
 4/25 Film: *Beloved*

Week 16

4/28 Film: *Beloved*
 4/30 Last Day of Classes

Final Exam Date:

Essay 4 Due (6pp; Paper type: Literary Criticism of text and topic of your choice)
 (Due on the day and at the scheduled hour of the final exam. Essay 4 serves as a “take home final exam” but you may hand it in early if you wish. Otherwise, check the Registrar’s schedule for final exam date and time.)