

SURVEY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

AML 2070 / 1625

MWF 3 (9:35-10:25) / MAT 251

Mitch R. Murray
m.murray@ufl.edu
Office: TBD
Office Hours: TBD

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce you to a range of American literature from what will likely be familiar-sounding literary-historical periods, such as *modernism*, *postmodernism*, and the *contemporary*. But how coherent are any of these categories? How do such historical divisions enrich our understanding of literature? Is contemporary literature all that different, somehow, from modernist or postmodernist literature? What *is* literature anyway, and what does it do? Further, does the qualifier “American” make much sense since the acceleration of globalization? We will collectively aim to complicate, and venture answers to, questions such as these throughout the semester as we work through a number of novels, short stories, and poetry.

A comprehensive survey of American literature, or any literature, is impossible. Nevertheless, attempts to do one anyway have been made over and over, often by paying attention to a handful of canonical authors of ‘great works.’ We will read texts from the past century of American literature (while also reading a number of excerpts from earlier periods, for context and comparison) to gain some breadth. But we will not read texts as exemplars of a particular ideal of literary craft. As we will see, the concept of literature is not a constant. So in place of this common assumption we will ask, why *this* literary form *then*? Why *now*? We will pay special attention to literary (and what might more often be called non- or para-literary) genres in order to more fully understand what literature is and how it changes within formal, ideological, and historical contexts. We will also read a few supplementary critical texts, on the works discussed in class, and some macro-theory relevant to the themes and goals of the course.

By the end of this course, you will have knowledge of a broad swathe of American literary history. You will also have a richer understanding of how literature changes and how it is constituted by and constitutive of its own formal, cultural, ideological, and historical situation. You will be able to read texts closely and critically, and, as this course is designed to satisfy the UF writing requirement, you will also have by semester’s end ample practice in critical and argumentative writing.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland and Selected Stories*
 ISBN: 978-0451469878
- James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
 ISBN: 978-0140184020
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*
 ISBN: 978-0060512750
- Ben Lerner, *10:04*
 ISBN: 978-0865478107
- Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*
 ISBN: 978-0307455178
- Charles Yu, *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe*
 ISBN: 978-0307739452

I prefer that everyone purchase the editions indicated by the ISBNs provided above. That way we will all literally be on the same page. The UF bookstore will have all these titles available. You can also search books by ISBN at bookfinder.com to find the cheapest available used copies online. Amazon is another good resource. Some of our books are available in hard and softcover editions, but with the same pagination; *in these particular cases*, there is no preference for soft or hardcover editions.

Additional readings will be, or will be made, available electronically in advance.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

More detailed assignment guidelines will be provided in class or online throughout the semester. Below you will find a general layout of your course requirements.

Assignment	Word Count	Possible Points	Final Grade Percentage
Participation	0	100	10%
Close Reading 1	500	50	5%
Close Reading 2	500	50	5%
Synthetic Paper	1,200	200	20%
In-Class Presentation and Short Paper	750	150	15%

Abstract	300	50	5%
Final Research Paper	2,750	400	40%
Totals	6,000	1,000	100%

Participation (100 pts/10%)

You are expected to come to each class prepared to discuss the scheduled readings. Participation does not mean being able to recite what happens in a text (although that is important!). That tells me only that you've read the text and have done the absolute minimum amount of work. Participation means, rather: offering critical insights on texts, expanding on discussions of and drawing connections between earlier texts, posing questions and responding to others' questions, and complicating and building upon our collective understanding of the course material. Students who participate regularly in these ways will earn above average participation grades.

2 Close Readings (500 words / 50 pts. / 5% ea.)

For each close reading: select one text discussed in class, select a short passage (no more than a page) from that text, and write a brief argumentative analysis. You must use textual evidence from the text to support a thesis. Why should we pay attention to this passage? What points/arguments does the text itself help to clarify/assert? What is at stake in reading this passage? Do not use secondary sources.

Synthetic Paper (1,200 words / 200 pts. / 20%)

Something of a midterm paper, you must in this assignment make an argument that engages two or more of the texts we've so far discussed in class, using textual evidence as support. This assignment is meant to make and explore connections (whether thematic, formal, ideological, or historical) among different texts. Unlike your close readings, you may use secondary sources, *if* they provide support for your argument. Secondary sources should never displace your own voice.

In-class Presentation and Short Paper (750 words / 150 pts. / 15%)

Each of you will claim responsibility for beginning a class discussion (5 or 10 minutes) on a major text. I encourage you to skim the texts, or at least read the synopses on Amazon or something, and pick one you will be excited to discuss. These presentations are meant to be entry points to the texts. They should provide some kind of critical claim, a way of analyzing the text, and/or some broad questions to get us thinking. You can use whatever methods you like here, including comparisons to other texts or critical supplements from class, an extension of a previous class discussion, an explanation of the major themes and

motifs of the text, etc. You will turn in a short argumentative paper, based on your presentation and the resultant discussion, by the class immediately following your presentation.

Abstract (300 words / 50 pts. / 5%)

An abstract often appears with a published essay to quickly explain the main points of that essay. Here, however, it will be more like a proposal for your final paper. In a way, the abstract makes you argue something you've not yet formulated. The ideas, therefore, will be tentative and rough. Which is the point: get some ideas on the page that you can work from. (*If you are particularly interested in texts to be read near the end of the semester, I advise you to begin reading them early on, and/or claiming them for your lead discussion, so that will have time to consider them for your final papers.*) I must approve your proposal before you begin your final paper. I suggest you see me during office hours to discuss your ideas before turning anything in.

Research Paper (2750 words / 400 pts. / 40%)

Based on your proposal, write an argumentative research paper that engages complexly with one or more of the issues we've been discussing throughout the semester. Your paper must be synthetic, i.e. it must engage with two or more texts. Your paper must include secondary sources (reputable and relevant to the texts) and be presented in MLA format. This is your final assignment and, as such, should be the most polished piece of writing you produce all semester.

GENERAL RUBRIC & GRADING SCALE

- A An A paper gives a strong and original argument. It is logical, well argued, supported, and organized, and demonstrates a thorough and complex engagement with the text(s) and the themes and concepts discussed in class. Papers at this level also contain strong prose and are mostly free of typos, as well as mechanical and stylistic errors.
- B B papers fall noticeably short in one of the criterion for a strong argument listed above, but still demonstrate a thorough and complex engagement with the text(s) and the themes and concepts discussed in class. Work at this level needs minor revision, but is otherwise stylistically and mechanically sound, with few errors.
- C If you just complete your assignment, you're probably looking at a C. C designates average work, which falls noticeably short of the criteria for B and A range papers. C work needs significant revision in terms of its content and organization. C papers often appear as summaries rather than arguments, but it still shows effort and kernels of potential

- D A D paper is disorganized, poorly argued, or too obvious in terms of its argument. It may also lack textual support for the arguments being made. Work in this range is in need of almost complete revision and contains numerous spelling and/or mechanical errors that affect the clarity of the student's writing.
- E An E paper is short of almost all the criteria listed above. It is incomplete or so poorly argued that it does not satisfy the basic requirements of the assignment. Work in this range is also full of spelling and mechanical errors, which make the writing unclear and/or unreadable.

A	4.0	93–100 (98)	C	2.0	73–76 (75)
A-	3.67	90–92 (91)	C-	1.6 7	70–72 (71)
B+	3.33	87–89 (88)	D+	1.3 3	67–69 (68)
B	3.0	83–86 (85)	D	1.0	63–66 (65)
B-	2.67	80–82 (81)	D-	0.6 7	60–62 (61)
C+	2.33	77–79 (78)	E	0.0 0	0–59 (0)

Final Grade appeals may be made by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION AND POLICIES

Electronic and hard copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due date.

Late work will not be accepted.

All papers must be formatted according to the MLA Handbook, 7th ed. See also <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> for help with MLA guidelines.

You are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work in this course (you never know when you might need it) and retaining all returned, graded work until the

semester is over.

Papers for this class will be graded rigorously for complexity of thought and the quality of their arguments. I will therefore not grade any paper that makes sexist, racist, homo- or xenophobic 'arguments.' The scare quotes are there because such stances do not subscribe to anything remotely resembling critical thinking or logical or academic rigor.

COURSE POLICIES

1. Attendance and Lateness

Attendance is mandatory, in all physical and intellectual senses. After two absences you will accrue grade penalties: minus half a letter on your final grade for each absence. Any more than six absences and you will earn a failing grade in the course. Not only because you will lose participation credit, but also because, after several absences, you will not know what we are doing in class. Exceptions will be made for students travelling for university-sponsored events and for religious holidays. You must tell me about these absences in advance so that we can make arrangements to have you make up missed work within an appropriate timeframe.

If you enter the classroom unreasonably late, which disrupts the entire class, you are absent.

Exemption from these policies may be considered for students in exceptional circumstances who discuss these absences with me well in advance.

2. Classroom Behavior

This is a small class that involves lots of discussion and participation. It goes without saying then that your courtesy for the rest of the class is expected at all times. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you respect this class as an intellectual arena in which to discuss complex, and possibly uncomfortable, ideas. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

3. Devices in Class

During this class, that is, for fifty minutes per day, three days a week, active use of cell and smartphones will not be tolerated under any circumstances, except for UF campus-wide emergency messages. If you have your phone out at any time during class, you get

to leave and take an absence. I recognize that life happens to us all. If you need your phone on a particular day for reasons like family emergencies, job interviews, etc., let me know prior to class. Or, if you absolutely need your phone, feel free to quietly step out of class for a reasonable amount of time. Simply use common sense and common courtesy.

Some of our readings will be made available electronically, and I will accommodate devices for these readings only. But, again, I expect the same hard copy edition of all major required texts listed above. Most days, then, there will be no need for devices.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Statement on Academic Honesty:

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>

Statement of Humanities and Composition Credit:

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general.education.requirement.aspx>

Statement of Writing Requirement:

This course can provide 6,000 words toward the UF requirement for writing. For more information see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing.and.math>.

Statement of Student Disability Services:

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center in Peabody 202, which will provide documentation. Accommodations cannot be made until I have received documentation. For more about the DRC see <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.

Statement on Harassment:

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual discrimination for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment see <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1	8.24 Introduction	8.26 “Literature” from Williams, <i>Keywords</i> ; “Apprehensions of Time” from Anderson, <i>Imagined Communities</i>	8.28 Excerpts from <i>Frederick Douglass</i> and <i>Life of a Slave Girl</i> Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> Chap. 1
2	8.31 Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> , Chaps. 2-5	9.2 Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> , Chaps. 6-9	9.4 Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> , Chaps. 10-11
3	9.7 Labor Day	9.9 Gilman, <i>Herland</i> , chaps. 1-6	9.11 Gilman, <i>Herland</i> , chaps. 7-9
4	9.14 Close Reading 1 Due	9.16 Gilman <i>Herland</i> , chaps. 10-12	9.18 “Literature,” from Williams, <i>Marxism & Literature</i>
5	9.21 Poetry, Part I	9.23 Class cancelled*	9.25 Class cancelled*
6	9.28 Poetry, Part II Close Reading 2 Due	9.30 Poetry, Part III	10.2 Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse”
7	10.5 Barth, “Literature of Exhaustion” and “Literature of Replenishment”	10.7 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chaps. 1-3	10.9 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chaps. 4-5
8	10.12 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chaps. 6-7	10.14 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chap. 8	10.16 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chap. 9
9	10.19 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chaps. 10-11 Synthesis Due	10.21 Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> , chaps. 12-13	10.23 Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future”; Russ, “When it Changed”
10	10.26 Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum”	10.28 Yu, <i>Science Fictional Universe</i> , Chaps. 1-10	10.30 Yu, <i>Science Fictional Universe</i> , Chaps. 11-20
11	11.2 Yu, <i>Science Fictional Universe</i> , Chaps. 21-31	11.4 Recap of Yu	11.6 Homecoming
12	11.9 <i>Zone One</i> Part 1 Abstracts Due	11.11 Veteran’s Day	11.13 Class cancelled*

13	11.16 <i>Zone One</i> Part 2	11.18 <i>Zone One</i> Part 2 cont.	11.20 <i>Zone One</i> Part 3
14	11.23 Recap, Whitehead Rec. Hoborek, “Living with PASD”	11.25 Thanksgiving	11.27 Thanksgiving
15	11.30 <i>10:04</i> , Chap. 1 Rec. Harbach, “MFA vs. NYC”	12.2 <i>10:04</i> , Chap. 2	12.4 <i>10:04</i> , Chap. 3
16	12.7 <i>10:04</i> , Chap. 4 Rec. skim intro from McGurl, <i>The Program Era</i>	12.9 <i>10:04</i> , Chap. 5 Last day of class Final papers due.	

* Throughout the semester, I will be away on a couple of unavoidable trips. I have scheduled our readings of longer texts (novels) after these, and after holidays. So, you are expected to read more (in some cases double) than what I would normally expect of you. But, you will have more time to do so while I am gone, and over the breaks. This way, your readings should be completed well in advance of our discussions. Please read ahead, and come to class prepared to discuss longer sections of the texts.