

ENGL 392: Modern American Fiction
Fall 2020
MWF 11:00am – 11:50am
Bairnick Women’s Center MSC

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Office: Gailor Hall 102A
Office hours: T 10:30am-12:00pm
(and by appointment)

Race, Environment, and Modern American Fiction

Students in this course will study the intersection of race and the environment in modern American fiction. This intersection is especially important in the twentieth century, because writers often imagined new literary forms by responding to environmental contexts and racial pressures. Thus, focusing on race and the environment will allow us to investigate a major feature of twentieth-century fiction. This course’s focus will also lead us to evaluate key scholarly approaches to modernist and early post-1945 fiction.

One of the primary goals of the course is for students to master the use of scholarly ideas and terminology as techniques for becoming better readers. Some attention will be paid to how the so-called canon of modern American fiction has been constructed by reference to ideas of race and place. Students will also learn key terms for the study of twentieth-century American fiction, the environmental humanities, and critical race studies.

Course texts:

- Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (ISBN 978-0295993539)
- Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (ISBN 0-679-73180-6)
- William Faulkner, *Light in August* (ISBN 0-679-73226-8)
- N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (ISBN 978-0060916336)
- Ann Petry, *The Street* (ISBN 978-0395901496)
- Jean Toomer, *Cane* (ISBN 9780871401519)

Course Assignments	Due Date	Grade %
Close Reading Paper (2000 words)	September 30	20
Seminar Paper (3000 words)	November 20	25
Env-Lit Notebook (5 entries)	Weekly	20
Final Exam	December 7	25
Course Participation		10

Course Learning Objectives:

This class will...

- study the historical context of modern fiction, taking note of differences and continuities with earlier American literary culture.
- develop techniques for interpreting modern formal experimentation, environmental imagery, and literary representations of racial and national identity.
- expand students’ skills as close readers and historicist critics.
- require students to demonstrate their abilities through clearly written academic prose.
- require students to engage with the ideas of their peers through discussion, citation, debate, and group work.

ASSIGNMENTS

Close Reading Paper

This paper should closely analyze a focused image, theme, or set of interrelated passages from one of the three novels we've read so far. Papers should be approximately 2000 words in length and must conform to the formatting parameters set out above (see "How to Format Your Writing Assignments"). This paper is due on Wednesday, September 30. Please upload your assignment as a .doc or .docx (NOT as a .PDF or Google doc link) to Brightspace. I will distribute a rubric for this paper, but here are the basic parameters:

- This is a thesis-driven paper.
- Your argument should rely primarily on close reading; secondary research is not necessary.
- Your paper shouldn't include unnecessary introduction or summary. You can assume your reader knows the plot; focus on interpreting the language of the text.
- Let your topic sentences state claims that are then supported or unpacked by close reading. Your task is to unpack the language of the text to show what's meaningful but not obvious about the passage.

Seminar Paper

Choose two or more of the assigned readings from the course schedule and write a thesis-driven research paper that is approximately 3000 words in length. You may not use material from the first paper, although you may develop an idea first expressed in your Environmental-Literary Notebook. You should (a) formulate a clear thesis or arguable interpretation about the novels and/or short stories. You should (b) support that thesis by analyzing salient ideas, images, language, and the artistic form of the texts. Finally, you should (c) situate your thesis and close reading in peer-reviewed scholarship and/or wider conversations (e.g., historical research, philosophy, environmental science, media studies, literary theory). I will evaluate final papers based on the following criteria: sophistication of the thesis (30%); "close reading" or textual support for the argument (30%); prose and paper structure (20%); incorporation of scholarly material and/or a "wider conversation" (20%).

I will be happy to serve as a sounding board, recommend secondary sources, and discuss drafts of your papers during my office hours. If you ask me to discuss a draft of your paper, you'll read your draft aloud during a Zoom or face-to-face meeting. We would then discuss what you've noticed about your draft and my impressions based on the four criteria listed above.

Environmental-Literary Notebook

This assignment adapts the genre of writing known as the naturalist's notebook, in which an observer records his or her interaction with the natural world. In contrast to the naturalist's notebook, though, you will be tasked with observing, interpreting, and writing about environments around you in response to a given week's assigned reading. The method of your writing should be what I call *reading-through*—that is, the analysis of lived phenomena *through* the lens of literary texts you're reading. To put it another way, these entries ask you to use the literary texts as a framework for making sense of the environments you encounter in your daily life. So, each entry will make a connection between an environment you experience (built, lived, digital, natural, industrial, etc.) and one passage in a required text from the week.

You must submit **five entries** to your Env-Lit Notebook. There are thirteen weeks of assigned readings this semester. You may submit additional entries to replace the evaluation of one of the original five entries. The Env-Lit Notebook is worth 20% of your course grade; as such, each entry is worth 4% of your course grade.

Each entry should be approximately 500 words. These entries are low-stakes in the sense that you do not need to have flawless prose or a cogent thesis. Instead, you should spend equal time (a) describing the lived environment, (b) examining a focused passage, image, or idea from the literary text, and then (c) using that literary examination to read-through the lived environment you've described.

For example, you might take 150 words of your first entry to describe the representation of a historical marker on a trail (or a digital ad campaign that invokes the natural world). In a separate paragraph, you would then analyze a passage from the week's assigned reading (e.g. "A White Heron") that comes to mind in response to this lived environmental experience. This should take approximately 150 words. Be sure not to summarize; the emphasis here is on textual analysis. Finally, in 200 words you would read the lived environment through the literary text. You might practice *reading-through* by addressing one of the following questions: How does the literary text lead you to see the lived environment in a new way? Or, how does the lived environment lead you to see the literary text in a new way? What are the differing intersections of race, identity, and the environment between the lived experience and the literary text?

Each Notebook entry should be submitted to Brightspace by 5pm on Saturday. Please submit these entries as a .DOC or .DOCX file. You are not required to submit a hard copy. Again, there are thirteen weeks of reading this semester, and you must submit entries for five of these thirteen weeks. Essays are due on the following dates: August 21 and 28; September 5, 14, 19, and 26; October 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31; November 7 and 14.

Final Exam

The final exam will ask questions about key terms, ideas, movements, and theories presented in the assigned readings and lectures. Readings IDs may also be part of the test. The final exam will be administered remotely through Brightspace. The Registrar has scheduled our exam from 9:00am to 11:00am CST on Monday, December 7. More details about the exam, including a study guide, will be distributed during the last week of class.

DAY-BY-DAY SCHEDULE

Short stories are posted to Brightspace (B).

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	August 17 Syllabus and introductions	August 19 Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron" (B)	August 21 Toomer, <i>Cane</i> , "Karintha" – "Blood-Burning Moon" (pp.1-35)
Week 2	August 24 Toomer, <i>Cane</i> , "Seventh Street" – "Harvest Song" (pp.39-69)	August 26 Toomer, <i>Cane</i> , "Bona and Paul" and "Kabnis" (pp.70-116)	August 28 Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i> , section I, chs.1-8 (pp.3-81)
Week 3	August 31 Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i> , section I, chs.9-17 (pp.82-155)	September 2 Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i> , section II, "Tom Outland's Story" (pp.157-230)	September 4 Cather, <i>The Professor's House</i> , section III, "The Professor" (pp.231-end)
Week 4	September 7 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.1-3 (pp.3-76)	September 9 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs. 4-6 (pp.77-145)	September 11 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.7-9 (pp.146-219)
Week 5	September 14 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.10-12 (pp.220-286)	September 16 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.. 13-16 (pp.287-391)	September 18 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.17-18 (pp.392-442)
Week 6	September 21 Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i> , chs.19-21 (pp.443-507)	September 23 <i>Writing Practicum I</i> Every student should email me a draft Introduction for Paper 1. I will anonymize these drafts, and we will discuss them during class.	September 25 <i>Writing Practicum II</i> Every student should email me a draft body paragraph for Paper 1. This should be a "close reading" paragraph. I will anonymize these drafts, and we will discuss them during class.
Week 7	September 28 <i>Peer-review Workshop (asynchronous)</i> Students should meet with their writing groups for conference workshops on Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday of this week. Each group should hold a 1.5-hour meeting, in which 15 minutes are spent reading each person's paper and another 15 minutes are spent discussing revisions for each person.	September 30 <i>Paper 1 due</i> Your papers should be submitted to Brightspace no later than 11:00am on September 30.	October 2 Bulosan, <i>America Is in the Heart</i> , Part I (pp.3-93)
Week 8	October 5 Bulosan, <i>America Is in the Heart</i> , Part II (pp.97-189)	October 7 Bulosan, <i>America Is in the Heart</i> , Part III (pp.193-261)	October 9 Bulosan, <i>America Is in the Heart</i> , Part IV (pp.265-327)

Week 9	October 12 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.1-3 (pp.1-84)	October 14 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.4-6 (pp.85-162)	October 16 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.7-9 (pp.163-230)
Week 10	October 19 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.10-12 (pp.231-301)	October 21 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.13-15 (pp.302-371)	October 23 Petry, <i>The Street</i> , chs.16-18 (pp.372-436)
Week 11	October 26 N. Scott Momaday, <i>House Made of Dawn</i> , Prologue-section 1, "The Longhair" (pp.1-86)	October 28 Writing Day	October 30 N. Scott Momaday, <i>House Made of Dawn</i> , section 2, "The Priest of the Sun" (pp.89-136)
Week 12	November 2 N. Scott Momaday, <i>House Made of Dawn</i> , section 3, "The Night Chanter" (pp.139-190)	November 4 Writing Day	November 6 N. Scott Momaday, <i>House Made of Dawn</i> , section 4, "The Dawn Runner" (pp.193-212)
Week 13	November 9 Ralph Ellison, "A Coupla Scalped Indians" (B)	November 11 Writing Practicum III There are two assignments for this practicum. First, every student should find a scholarly article that may be helpful for your argument in paper 2. Download it and create a MLA-style citation of the article. Second, email me a draft body paragraph for paper 2. This paragraph should conduct "close reading" but also engage with the article you've found and cited. I will anonymize these drafts, and we will discuss them during class.	November 13 Writing Practicum IV Every student should email me a draft Introduction for the seminar paper. Be sure to refer to the Writing Helps on thesis statements and introduction paragraphs (uploaded to Brightspace). I will anonymize these drafts, and we will discuss them during class.
Week 14	November 16 <i>Peer-review Workshop (asynchronous)</i> Students should meet with their writing groups for conference workshops on Sunday, Monday, or Tuesday of this week. Each group should hold a 1.5-hour meeting, in which 15 minutes are spent reading each person's paper and another 15 minutes are spent discussing revisions for each person.	November 18 Writing Day	November 20 Distribution of Final Exam Study Guide; Course wrap-up <i>Paper 2 due</i> Your papers should be submitted to Brightspace no later than 11:00am on November 20.