

English 343
American Fiction
after World War II
Wed., 6:30-9:30
Fall 2013

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Office Hours: Mon., 11-12; Tues., 10:30-11:30; Wed., 2-3; Thurs., 1-2; and by appointment.

Course Description

English 343 will combine the reading, discussion, and written exploration of works of fiction by American writers from roughly 1950 to the present. In reading, discussing, and writing about these works, we will consider national and world events, as well as cultural shifts and developments, that have influenced the fiction of this period. We will also look closely at the genre of fiction and its evolution from mid-twentieth century to the present, particularly the emergence of the many types and forms (such as popular culture and pastiche, revisionary history, science/speculative fiction, feminist fiction, multicultural fiction, punk/hardcore works, etc.) of what has been termed postmodern fiction. We will also read, discuss, and draw on important critical voices from this period of American literature.

Course Goals

Students should complete English 343 with the following:

- A greater familiarity with the works and styles of canonical post-World War II American fiction writers;
- An understanding of the effort, on the part of many writers and critics of postmodern American fiction, to *expand* the literary canon, and a familiarity with a number of the writers and critics who have been influential in this work;
- An expanded understanding of the genre of fiction, as it has evolved in the latter half of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century;
- The ability to speak and write about American fiction of this period, demonstrating knowledge of historical and cultural influences on, as well as important critical approaches to, the works read and discussed for the course;
- Experience in shaping, articulating, and revising critical responses to works of post-World War II American fiction, including written work that demonstrates knowledge of MLA documentation.

Required Texts

John F. Callahan, ed. *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Casebook* (Oxford UP, 2004).
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Second Vintage International Edition, 1995--or edition of your choice).
Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (Harper Perennial paperback to be released Sept. 24, 2013).
Paul Geyh, Fred G. Leebron, Andrew Levy, eds. *Postmodern American Fiction: An Anthology* (W.W. Norton, 1998).
Handouts and/or posts to course Blackboard or Google Docs sites, provided by instructor

Recommended Texts

Alix Ohlin, *Signs and Wonders* (Vintage, 2012)

Stephanie Powell Watts, *We Are Taking Only What We Need* (BkMk Press, 2011)

*One or both to be purchased in advance of reading/talk by one or both authors at the course's end.

Attendance Policy, and a Note on Plagiarism

Because we will meet only once a week for fourteen weeks, more than one absence (excused or unexcused) will automatically lower your final grade. Please arrive for class *on time*; if you are chronically late to class (more than twice), I will count lateness as an absence.

I would hope that it goes without saying that any work you submit for this course must be your own; to plagiarize in an upper-level English course is to convey a shocking disrespect for writers and their work. Refer to the College's policy on academic honesty (available in the Student Handbook) for any needed clarification.

*****Note to English Majors:** In preparation for creating an English Major Portfolio in your senior capstone seminar, please save both digital and hard copies of your work for this class, including drafts with peer and instructor comments.

Moravian encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation or have questions about the physical access provided, please speak to Dr. Hinnefeld. Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of learning services for academic and disability support at 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Evaluation

Essay 1 25%

Addressing one aspect of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and drawing on at least one critical response in John F. Callahan's *Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Casebook*; minimum 2,000 words, plus appropriate MLA citations and Works Cited page.

Essay 2 25%

Addressing two or three of the works read during weeks 6-11, and discussing each in terms of (a) stylistic differences and similarities; (b) responses to historical and cultural contexts; and/or (c) ways in which these works align, or contrast, with critical perspectives presented by one of the theorists included in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology's* "Casebook of Postmodern Theory"; minimum 2,000 words, plus appropriate MLA citations and Works Cited page.

Online Discussion Questions and Written Responses 15%

Prior to class meetings, several students will be assigned to post discussion questions on that week's reading to the course Google Docs page or Blackboard site by 6:30 PM Sunday evening, and to prepare notes for the coming class discussion, based on other students' written responses to posted discussion questions (minimum 300 words; due by 6:30 PM Tuesday evening). Instructor will model

discussion questions, etc. for class meeting 2 on Wed., Sept. 4.

Oral presentation 10%

A fifteen-minute class presentation (a) on a “classic” (pre-WW II) American text, discussed in terms presented at class meeting 1 on Aug. 28 (character; setting; language/style; voice/structure); (b) of one’s own postmodern autobiography--and an explanation of why it is one; or (c) of an unassigned reading selection in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology*, including synopsis, reading of selected passages, and explanation of why it is considered an example of postmodern fiction. Collaborative, 30-minute presentations by two or three students may also be arranged, in negotiation with instructor. To be scheduled at class session 2.

Final exam 20%

Short-answer and essay questions addressing assigned primary texts, including *Invisible Man* and *The Round House*.

Participation 5%

Grade to be assigned, based on:

--class discussions

--contributions to in-class work on writing assignments, including peer editing

Schedule

Week 1: 8/28

Course introductions; American literature pre-1945: antecedents; planning and scheduling of oral presentations and online discussions; etc.

Week 2: 9/4

Ellison, Prologue & chs. 1-9 (pp. 3-195); Welty; O’Connor

Week 3: 9/11

Ellison, chs. 10-18 (pp. 196-408); Bellow; Salinger

Week 4: 9/18

Ellison, ch. 19-Epilogue (pp. 409-581), plus Prologue again; Baldwin

Week 5: 9/25

Irving Howe, “Black Boys and Native Sons”; selections from Callahan, *Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man: A Casebook*; paper 1 outline/thesis/introduction in class.

Week 6: 10/2

Paper 1 first draft due; *Postmodern American Fiction*, Part I introduction, plus Barthelme, Shange, Gass

Week 7: 10/9

Paper 1 final draft due; *PAF*, Vonnegut, Paley, Phillips; Carver

Week 8: 10/16

PAF, Part II introduction, plus Capote, Lorde, O'Brien, Anzaldúa; Part III introduction, plus Barry, Anderson, Mason

Week 9: 10/23

PAF, Part VII introduction, plus Hassan, Bérubé, Jameson

Week 10: 10/30

PAF, Part IV introduction, plus Spiegelman, Morrison, Roth, Alexie; *PAF*, Part V introduction, plus selections TBD

Week 11: 11/6

Part VI introduction, plus selections TBD; paper 2 outline/thesis/introduction in class

Week 12: 11/13

Paper 2 first draft due; Erdrich, pp. TBD

Week 13: 11/20

Paper 2 final draft due; Erdrich, pp. TBD; Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (viewed and discussed in class)

Week 14: 11/27—Thanksgiving

Week 15: 12/4

Moore; Lahiri; Diaz; Saunders

6:30-8:00 "The State of the American Short Story" (work by Alix Ohlin and Stephanie Powell Watts);
8:15-9:30 final exam review

Final exam: Wed., 12/11, 6:30 PM