NOTE to prospective students: This syllabus is intended to provide students who are considering taking this course an idea of what they will be learning. A more detailed syllabus will be available on the course Canvas site for enrolled students and may be more current than this sample syllabus.

ENG 318: The American Novel – The Modernist Period

Oregon State University
Extended Campus
Winter 2017
4 Credits

Instructor: Gilad Elbom
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
Focusing on some of the prominent thematic, stylistic, historical, and cultural aspects of American modernism, this class will combine famous classics with important novels other than the ones commonly perceived as canonical. Through close textual analysis and active participation in ongoing class discussions, we will examine seminal works of American modernism that have paved the way for previously silenced voices, paying attention to the rise of nontraditional authors, characters, literary strategies, and subject matters.

REQUIRED TEXTS
5. Ernest Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

Note to prospective students: Please check with the OSU Bookstore for up-to-date information for the term you enroll (OSU Bookstore Website or 800-595-0357). If you purchase course materials from other sources, be very careful to obtain the correct ISBN.

This course fulfills the Baccalaureate Core requirements for two categories:
1. Literature and the Arts.
2. Western Culture.
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<tr>
<th>Category and Outcomes</th>
<th>Relative to Course Content</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LITERATURE &amp; THE ARTS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognize literary and artistic forms/styles, techniques, and the cultural/historical contexts in which they evolve.</td>
<td>A close reading of important American novels in the context of modernist ideas about plot, voice, characters, structure, and other literary devices and strategies that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century.</td>
<td>Discussion posts. Assignments 3 and 4.</td>
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<td>Analyze how literature/the arts reflect, shape, and influence culture.</td>
<td>Careful observation of relations between the novels on our reading list and important cultural events and ideas: urbanization, modern warfare, the collapse of old notions of order and stability, the concept of fluid and dynamic identities, etc.</td>
<td>Assignments 1, 2, 5.</td>
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<td>Reflect critically on the characteristics and effects of literary and artistic works.</td>
<td>Special attention will be paid to the development of analytical tools, the acquisition of critical terminology, and the strengthening of scholarly writing skills.</td>
<td>Discussion posts. Assignments 1-5.</td>
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<td><strong>WESTERN CULTURE</strong></td>
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<td>Identify significant events, developments, and/or ideas in the Western cultural experience and context.</td>
<td>Discussion of the meaning and effects of World War I, the suffrage movement, race relations in America, and other important events and concepts.</td>
<td>Discussion posts. Assignments 2-5.</td>
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<td>Interpret the influence of philosophical, historical, and/or artistic phenomena in relation to contemporary Western culture.</td>
<td>Analysis of the various ways in which modernist American novels reflect, interpret, and wrestle with some of the historical accomplishments and traumas of Western culture.</td>
<td>Discussion posts. Assignments 1-5.</td>
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Analyze aspects of Western culture in relation to broader cultural, scientific, or social processes.

A close reading of American novels not only as representatives of Western culture but also as texts that contribute to global processes, enter into literary conversations with other cultures, and become part of universal developments.

Discussion posts. Assignments 1-5.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

Week 2:
-- *My Ántonia* assignment (10 points). Stay tuned for the prompt on this novel and post a 400-word analysis. A longer essay is always welcome.
-- Participation on the discussion board (10 points). Post at least two comments on other essays. Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

Week 4:
-- *Black No More* assignment (10 points). Stay tuned for the prompt on this novel and post a 400-word analysis. A longer essay is always welcome.
-- Participation on the discussion board (10 points). Post at least two comments on other essays. Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

Week 6:
-- *Nightwood* assignment (10 points). Stay tuned for the prompt on this novel and post a 400-word analysis. A longer response is always welcome.
-- Participation on the discussion board (10 points). Post at least two comments on other essays. Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

Week 8:
-- Gertrude Stein assignment (10 points). Stay tuned for the prompt on *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and post a 400-word analysis. A longer response is always welcome.
-- Participation on the discussion board (10 points). Post at least two comments on other essays. Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.
Week 10:
-- *The Sun Also Rises* assignment (10 points). Stay tuned for the prompt on this novel and post a 400-word analysis. A longer response is always welcome.
-- Participation on the discussion board (10 points). Post at least two comments on other essays. Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

**REQUIREMENTS**
-- Buy the books.
-- Read the novels carefully. Follow our reading schedule and plan ahead.
-- Take notes while you read: underline or highlight key passages, write comments or annotations in the margins, identify important or difficult sections. Make a list of questions about the text and raise them on the discussion board.
-- When working on our assignments, please remember to avoid plot summary. Pay close attention to the complexity of the text and focus on analysis rather than description. Many elements in our novels revolve around ambiguity, uncertainty, fragmentation, and fluid or dynamic identities. Your goal would be to examine the text from multiple points of view. Refrain from simplifying the narrative to an objective truth, bottom line, or single message. Respond to the assignments as accurately as you can while registering as many perspectives as possible.
-- Articulate your observations on our novels in coherent, insightful, fully developed paragraphs. Be specific. Anchor your analysis in the text, demonstrating a close familiarity with the novels. Pay attention to major and minor characters, important events, key scenes, narrative strategies, and other literary components and devices. Do not use outside sources.
-- Be active on the discussion board. Feel free to raise additional questions, suggest different interpretations, or propose other directions to explore and discuss.
-- Please remember to be critical but civilized. In other words, please feel free to disagree with posts made by other people, including your instructor, but keep in mind that arguments delivered in a polite and respectful manner are often more effective than outbursts of passionate refutation.
-- Turn in all assignments on time. Late work may not be accepted.
-- Retain copies of all assignments.
-- If you need help, contact me as soon as possible. If you feel you are falling behind, act immediately. Send me an e-mail. I will respond in 48 hours or less.

**OFFICIAL GRADING SCALE**
94 - 100 = A
90 - 93 = A-
87 - 89 = B+
84 - 86 = B
80 - 83 = B-
77 - 79 = C+
74 - 76 = C
70 - 73 = C-
67 - 69 = D+
64 - 66 = D
60 - 63 = D-
0 - 59 = F
ACADEMIC HONESTY
Please review carefully the information provided on the following webpage, including the various definitions of academic dishonesty:
http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/offenses-0
Academic dishonesty is a serious offense that could result in a failing grade for the course or suspension from the university. Do not use outside sources. If you have questions about the topic in general or a specific assignment, please contact me.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval, please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at http://ds.oregonstate.edu. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
If you need assistance using Canvas, access 24/7 help through the Help link at the top right within Canvas. If you experience computer difficulties, need help downloading a browser or plug-in, or require assistance logging into the course, contact the OSU Help Desk. You can call 541-737-3474, email osuhelpdesk@oregonstate.edu, or visit the OSU Computer Helpdesk online.

ASSIGNMENT #1: My Antonia
With the transition into the twentieth century, the world became a much more urbanized, industrialized, volatile, unstable place. Modernist literature often reflects these sensibilities: dislocation, alienation, rootlessness, loneliness, the collapse of familiar structures, subjective experiences and a variety of individual perspectives rather than an objective reality or universal truth. This is very different from previous literary traditions, which tended to emphasize the reintegration of the individual into society and the reaffirmation of social, religious, or moral structures. In addition, modernist literature proposed the idea that the real hero is a regular person—an antihero—as opposed to older literary traditions, where the main characters are often people of special status or importance: brave men, kings and princes, adventurers and warriors, etc. Generally speaking, modernist fiction tends to focus on the lives of characters that have traditionally been excluded from the roles of literary heroes and heroines: ordinary men and women, immigrants, blacks, Jews, gays and lesbians, etc. How does My Antonia explore these themes and sensibilities? Respond to the question in the form of an articulate essay. Demonstrate a close familiarity with the text. Make references to specific events, characters, narrative strategies, and other textual components. Avoid plot summary. Do not use outside sources.
Post a 500-word essay in response to this prompt by Tuesday of Week 2 (10 points). Longer essays are welcome. Articulate your analysis in coherent, insightful, fully developed sentences. Be specific. Anchor your analysis in the text, demonstrating a close familiarity with the novel. Do not use outside sources. Feel free to raise additional questions, suggest different interpretations, or propose other directions to explore and discuss.

Post at least two comments on other essays by Friday of Week 2 (5 points each). Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

ASSIGNMENT #2: Black No More

Looking at our first novel, we can see America through the eyes of immigrants, women, poor people, possibly gay people—points of view that have previously been rare in American literature. Black No More explores another literary taboo—the black perspective—in the form of a political satire. Following are some of my thoughts about the novel. Pick one of the statements below—or more than one, if you wish—and respond to it in the form of a well-written essay. Make specific references to key elements in the novel—particular characters, scenes, moments, themes—and demonstrate a close reading of the text. Do not use outside sources.

1. Nobody is free from guilt in this novel—Schuyler seems to implicate everybody: whites and blacks, men and women, Democrats and Republicans, rabid racists and freedom fighters, religious folk and secular people. Everybody seems to participate in this elaborate and predictable game—the race game—and everybody seems to be there for the same self-serving reasons: money, power, prestige, sex, booze, good food, good cigars. In other words, racism is a business. Take racial discrimination out of America, and millions of people will go bankrupt: political parties, white supremacists, black liberation movements, factory owners, and so on. Equality, justice, and tolerance would mean enormous monetary losses—and that, needless to say, is something that nobody can afford.

2. Ultimately, the novel seems to claim is that the whole concept of race is utterly ridiculous and completely fabricated. No one can trace their ancestry to pure whiteness. In fact, it is most likely that pure whiteness does not exist. We all belong to one race—the human race—and almost everybody in America is “mixed” or “colored.” Race, according to Black No More, is a political and economic category, not biological or genetic.

3. The way Max’s wife and in-laws react to the baby is one of the truly moving, less sarcastic moments in the book. Max is terrified that his wife and her parents might freak out when they find out the baby is not white—and we completely identify with his fear. But once the baby is born, the problem is immediately resolved: the baby is not white—so what? We often hear the expression “gave birth to a beautiful baby boy” or “a beautiful baby girl”—and we usually imagine a cute, pink, pale little bundle of joy. My guess is that most white Americans do not imagine a black bundle of joy. Schuyler says: it was a beautiful brown baby! Please treat these prompts as entry points into a meaningful discussion of the novel. Please remember to avoid plot summary. Pay close attention to the complexity of the text and focus on analysis rather than description.
Post a 500-word essay in response to this prompt by Tuesday of Week 4 (10 points). Longer essays are welcome. Articulate your analysis in coherent, insightful, fully developed sentences. Be specific. Anchor your analysis in the text, demonstrating a close familiarity with the novel. Do not use outside sources. Feel free to raise additional questions, suggest different interpretations, or propose other directions to explore and discuss.

Post at least two comments on other essays by Friday of Week 4 (5 points each). Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

ASSIGNMENT #3: Nightwood

Choose one cluster of questions and respond to it, as usual, in the form of an analytic, carefully constructed, effectively argued essay, taking into consideration the overall themes of the novel while paying attention to specific moments in the text. You may respond to more than one cluster of questions—feel free to mix and match.

1. How does Djuna Barnes portray the differences between Felix and Robin? Each of them seems to belong to a different world. How would you define these worlds? What is the role of their child in this novel? What attracts them to each other in the first place—and what makes their relationship impossible? What makes Robin’s relationships with Nora and Jenny impossible?

2. Who is the main character in Nightwood? Robin seems to be the focus of this novel, but most of the time she is absent. Matthew O’Connor, the doctor, is very dominant—but not really an active participant in the plot. Or is he? What exactly is his role in the novel? Would you agree with critics who claim that he is, in fact, the main character here? What makes him so central to the story?

3. If modernism is about the disintegration of order, social structures, and the individual, Robin might be the perfect example. She seems to be falling apart before our very eyes—until she finally turns into a dog. In that sense, the novel questions the idea of unity that was so crucial to older literary traditions: unity of action, tangible characters, clear motives, consistency, coherence. Robin of the earlier chapters is not the Robin of the middle chapters—and definitely not the Robin of the later chapters (or the last scene). What other characters, events, and literary elements in this novel seem to question notions of order and unity? Who else in this novel is broken, inconsistent, or made up of many dynamic, fluid, ever-changing aspects?

Post a 500-word essay in response to this prompt by Tuesday of Week 6 (10 points). Longer essays are welcome. Articulate your analysis in coherent, insightful, fully developed sentences. Be specific. Anchor your analysis in the text, demonstrating a close familiarity with the novel. Do not use outside sources. Feel free to raise additional questions, suggest different interpretations, or propose other directions to explore and discuss.
Post at least two comments on other essays by Friday of Week 6 (5 points each). Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.

ASSIGNMENT #4: Gertrude Stein

A gay woman who writes the autobiography of her lover. The whole idea of writing someone else’s autobiography is, of course, paradoxical. And perhaps revolutionary—as is Gertrude Stein’s special literary style. Here are two quotes from her “autobiography” of Alice B. Toklas:

-- “Gertrude Stein always speaks of America as being now the oldest country in the world because by the methods of the civil war and the commercial conceptions that followed it America created the twentieth century, and since all the other countries are now either living or commencing to be living a twentieth century of life, America having begun the creation of the twentieth century in the sixties of the nineteenth century is now the oldest country in the world.” (78)

-- “She always says she dislikes the abnormal, it is so obvious. She says the normal is so much more simply complicated and interesting.” (83)

How do these quotes relate to our previous discussions of modernism? How do they relate to major characters and episodes in the novel? Try to address the complexities of gender, sexuality, identity, voice, art, literature, America, war, and other themes that Gertrude Stein introduces and explores in this novel.

Post a 500-word essay in response to this prompt by Tuesday of Week 8 (10 points). Longer essays are welcome. Articulate your analysis in coherent, insightful, fully developed sentences. Be specific. Anchor your analysis in the text, demonstrating a close familiarity with the novel. Do not use outside sources. Feel free to raise additional questions, suggest different interpretations, or propose other directions to explore and discuss.

Post at least two comments on other essays by Friday of Week 8 (5 points each). Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.
ASSIGNMENT #5: Hemingway

Here are some of my thoughts about this novel:

Brett:

What appeals to me about Brett is that she is a complex character: tough yet vulnerable, capricious yet calculated, determined yet defeated, sexy yet desperate, full of life yet deeply morbid. Complex and interesting female characters were very rare before modernism—and to Hemingway’s credit I must say that he was successful in his depiction of weak men and strong women.

What I also like about Brett is that she often exposes the conservative gender roles that we are, to a large extent, still trapped in. What makes some readers uncomfortable is that she thinks about her own sexual fulfillment. Isn’t that a normal thing to do? Apparently, not for women. Men are often admired for their sexual appetite, their hunger for life, their sense of adventure, their conquests, their charm, their strong impulses. But when a woman does that, we respond with shock and horror, and claim that she is selfish, that she uses men, that she takes advantage of them, that she is lost, that she is insecure, that she is irresponsible, that she can’t commit.

It could be argued that Brett is simply an ordinary human being: a woman who thinks about sex, a woman who is aware of her own needs, a woman who doesn’t pretend that females, by nature, are self-sacrificing saints with no desires, no individual will, no cravings, and no sense of adventure. I like her because I think that she is an interesting literary character: a character with a presence, a prominent role in the novel, a will of her own, desires, dreams—a personality—instead of being merely a beautiful prize, an instrument of temptation, a damsel in need of rescuing, or any of those stereotypical roles that have been traditionally assigned to women. She identifies her objects of desire, goes after them, and gets them—a role that is usually reserved for male characters. Once again, what we have here is a work of fiction that challenges preconceived notions about gender roles, sexuality, and relationships.

Jake:

Jake knows he doesn’t have a chance with Brett—after all, a man who has lost his reproductive organ will never satisfy her—but he still tries. He struggles to accept his own impotence, which is probably an admirable thing. How does a man handle his loss of manhood with dignity? How does he live with the notion that he is powerless—without resorting to self-pity? In a sense, that is the central conflict in the novel.

Robert:

Robert finds himself in a similar position. Brett would never take a Jew seriously, and the novel exposes the fact that it is very hard for the dominant culture to accept a Jew as a man—or a black man as a man, as we have seen in Black No More. What Hemingway seems to be saying here is that in the eyes of the dominant culture, a Jewish man is a contradiction in terms—like a man without a penis. No matter how Robert acts—politely, rudely, quietly, explosively—he will
never be accepted, he will never fit in. His Jewishness is a deformity, and sadly, he has to learn to live with it—just like Jake has to learn to live with his own physical deformity.

Modernism:

In many cases, modernist literature expresses a deep anxiety about humanity as a whole, our collective destiny, and the future of social structures. It had very good reasons to do so—and in many cases, it was uncannily accurate, almost prophetic. The treatment of Robert Cohn, for example, is a remarkable foreshadowing of the collective treatment of the Jews in 1930s Europe—which culminated with the genocide of the 1940s, also known as the Holocaust. A similar thing happens in another famous work of modernist literature: James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, written and published in the early 1920s, a few years before *The Sun Also Rises*. Leopold Bloom enters a den of anti-Semitism—a local pub in Dublin. He is harassed by a scary racist, tries to reason with him, mentions tolerance and open-mindedness and all that stuff—only to be chased out of the pub. The scene echoes Odysseus’ journey into the Cyclops’ cave—except human monsters are always scarier.

And if the lives of millions are apparently worth nothing, if disorder and instability have become the norm, if the world is marching toward self-destruction—then maybe the only thing to do, as this novel suggests, is eat, drink, and enjoy the company of friends and lovers. This is what the biblical book of Ecclesiastes argues, from which the title of the novel is taken—“The Sun Also Rises”—the futility of life.

*Please respond to these notes in the form of a 500-word essay by Tuesday of Week 10 (10 points).* Demonstrate a close familiarity with the text. Make references to specific events, characters, narrative strategies, and other textual components. Do not use outside sources. As always, feel free to suggest additional directions for analysis, focus on scenes, characters, and themes that are not included in my notes, and expand the discussion.

*Post at least two comments on other essays by Friday of Week 10 (5 points each).* Each comment should be at least 200 words. Read the essays on the discussion board carefully and post meaningful, articulate, fully developed comments.