

AML 2410 (1629): Topics in American Literature & Culture

Beyond the Story: Irregular Forms and Structures

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Location: MAT 0112

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In previous literature classes, you most likely read texts in which the narrative was easy to identify, one that consisted of chapter after chapter that kept the plot rolling forward until the denouement at the end. In this class, we will be looking at texts that challenge this traditional method of telling stories. Instead, our texts will destabilize the way we read through use of irregular structure and other aspects of form. Our reading list is composed of short stories and novels comprised of character sketches, poems, marginalia, or even a combination of the three. Some, like *House of Leaves*, might place a single word on the page, and it will be our job, as careful readers, to figure out what to make of it. We'll even look at graphic novels that we have to assemble ourselves.

Through writing assignments looking at structure, we will attempt to answer questions such as how does an author assemble a narrative? How does form invite reader participation, and how do form and content interact to form a narrative? How do these texts destabilize the way we read? What stories become unavailable if told through more traditional forms? By interrogating the texts with these questions, we will become closer to figuring out how we assemble our identities in a society that prevents such easy classification.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, students will be expected to be able to:

- Identify how the form of a text shapes its content and narrative
- Synthesize textual observations and course themes into essay-length arguments
- Develop critical reading and thinking skills
- Improve grammar and revision skills

General Education Objectives

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They

require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

REQUIRED TEXTS

(Other texts not listed below will be available in pdf form on Canvas.)

- Cane, Jean Toomer
- Paterson, William Carlos Williams
- As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner
- §f, JJ Abrams
- The Selected Works of T.S Spivet, Rief Larsen
- House of Leaves, Mark Z. Danielewski (offered through Course Reserves, though I recommend buying a copy)
- Nox, Anne Carson (offered through Course Reserves)
- Building Stories, Chris Ware (offered through Course Reserves)

ASSIGNMENTS

- Weekly Response Papers- (4 x 500words = 2000 total) Throughout the semester, you'll be asked to "respond" to the reading in a focused, analytical fashion. Share

your original insights about the text, questions the text poses, how the text relates to others, or anything else that would make for a fruitful discussion.

- House of Leaves “Journal” Entries- Throughout the semester, you’ll be reading *House of Leaves* on your own—we’ll be checking-in three times during the semester, so be sure to stay on top of the reading. Along the way, you’ll respond to the reading five times however you want. As this is excluded from the 6000 words, there is no minimum or maximum word count for these entries. You might analyze the text or compose a poem, or even write a single word, as *HoL* so often does.
- Paper #1 Analyzing Form: Close Reading- (1000 words) You’ll choose a selected passage or section from one of the texts we have read so far and consider how the form of the text shapes the passage as well as the way the passage contributes to the form. We’ll discuss strategies in class. The point is to show how effectively you can examine a passage and relate it to the larger theme of the text it belongs to.
- Paper #2 Analyzing Form: Using Sources- (1000 words) You will be doing the same as Paper #1, but this time, you will be incorporating two critical sources into your work. This will be good practice for incorporating sources into your final paper.
- Paper #3 Final Paper- (2000 words) As the final assignment, you’ll develop (at the very least) an 8-page paper that explores an original argument about the text. You should consult at least three critical sources, and you will develop a thematic analysis of the text that examines and reveals a sophisticated argument.
- Outlines- For both of the papers, you’ll turn in an outline sometime before the assignment illustrating your intentions and organization of your thought process to your argument. I will provide feedback and suggestions.

Grading Percentages

Assignment	Value
Weekly Response Papers	20% (4x5%)
<i>House of Leaves</i> Journal	15%
Form Paper	10%
Midterm Paper	15%
Final Paper	20%
Outlines	10% (2x5)
Class Preparation/Participation	10%
	100%

CLASS POLICIES

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. **Attendance-** Attendance is mandatory, though exemptions can be made for religious holidays, medical or family emergencies, and university-sponsored events such as athletics and band. Please provide documentation in advance. Vis-à-vis the University attendance policies, you are allowed up to six absences of a fifty minute class. After the sixth absence, you will fail this course. If you are expecting to be absent be sure to email me your work sometime before class AND bring a hardcopy of your work to class the following week.
3. **Paper Format & Submission-** Please double-space all papers, unless otherwise specified. Papers should be stapled and handed in at the beginning of class.
4. **Paper Maintenance Responsibilities-** Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
5. **Late Material-** Late material will be accepted only once during the semester—that means you have one grace period to have a printer malfunction or a brain slip-up. I am happy to provide extensions, but please see me at least 4 days in advance (before the due date). I will go over your reason and decide if an extension is needed.
6. **Tardiness-** Please arrive on time—late arrivals disrupt the entire class, and it is frustrating for your peers to have to re-listen to the instructions again. Tardiness will be defined as being more than 5 minutes late. Two tardies= 1 absence.
7. **Preparation & Participation-** Come prepared. This means printing out all of the reading and/or hard copies of the texts AND coming armed with comments and reactions to the readings. Participation livens up the class and produces more fruitful discussions, and I'd like to hear from everybody in the class. Please try to contribute at least once per class meeting.
8. **Disruptions-** No cell phones or computers, nor talking in class at inappropriate times. I will write you down without warning, and two instances of this = 1 tardy. Also remember that people come from all types of backgrounds and have gone through all types of experiences. It is our job to make this a welcoming environment. Any disruptions will have you dismissed from the class.
9. **Revisions-** 1 allow one revision from one of your response papers—this leaves room for trial and error. I want to see you break out of your comfort zone and push yourself.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Student Disability Accommodations

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and

support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.

Harassment

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

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: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>.

Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.

UF Grading Policies

For questions about the University's grade policies, please see, <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Grade Appeals

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(First and last names correspond to short stories, titles refer longer texts.)

Week 1: August 21-25: Orientation

8/21 M: Introduce Syllabus, Introduce course questions and themes

8/23 W: Mapping it out?: Discussion on our reading experiences

8/25 F: Gertrude Stein + Continuation of Wednesday's Discussion

Week 2: August 28-September 1: Warm-Up

8/28 M: excerpt from *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen Aarseth

8/30 W: Donald Barthelme

9/01 F: excerpt from "Cybernetics and Ghosts," Italo Calvino

Week 3: September 4-8: Going Back to the Past

9/04 M: No Class—Labor Day
9/06 W: *House of Leaves* Prologue Discussion
9/08 F: excerpt from *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville

Week 4: September 11-15

9/11 M: *As I Lay Dying* (Faulkner)
9/13 W: *As I Lay Dying* | RESPONSE PAPER #1 DUE
9/15 F: *As I Lay Dying*

Week 5: September 18-22

9/18 M: *Cane* Part 1 (Toomer)/Multimodality Theory
9/20 W: *Cane* Part 1/2
9/22 F: *Cane* Part 2

Week 6: September 25-29

9/25 M: *Cane* Part 3/Wrap-Up
9/27 W: Writing Day
9/29 F: *Paterson* (Williams)

Week 7: October 2-6

10/2 M: *Paterson*
10/4 W: *Paterson* | PAPER #1 DUE
10/6 F: No Class—Homecoming

Week 8: October 9-13

10/9 M: *Paterson* Concluding Thoughts
10/11 W: excerpt from *Red Doc* (Carson)
10/13 F: *Nox* (Carson)

Week 9: October 16-20

10/16 M: *Nox*
10/18 W: *Nox* | RESPONSE PAPER #2 DUE
10/20 F: excerpt from *Cybertext* (Aarseth)

Week 10: October 23-27

10/23 M: *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* (Larsen)
10/25 W: *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet* | OUTLINE OF PAPER #2 DUE
10/27 F: *House of Leaves* Check-In

Week 11: October 30-November 3

10/30 M: Introduction to Hypertext

11/1 W: *afternoon, a story* (Joyce)

11/3 F: *afternoon, a story*

Week 12: November 6-10

11/6 M: *Choose Your Own Adventure: The Cave of Time* (Packard) | PAPER #2 DUE

11/8 W: excerpt from *Cybertext* (Aarseth)

11/10 F: No Class

Week 13: November 13-17

11/13 M: *S.* (Abrams)

11/15 W: *S.*

11/17 F: *S.* RESPONSE PAPER #3 DUE

Week 14: November 20-24

11/20 M: *S.*

11/22 W: No Class—Thanksgiving | FINAL OUTLINE DUE before 5pm

11/24 F: No Class—Thanksgiving

Week 15: November 27-December 1

11/27 M: excerpt from *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud

11/29 W: *Building Stories* (Ware)

12/1 F: *Building Stories* | RESPONSE PAPER #4 DUE

Week 16: December 4-6

12/4 M: *House of Leaves* Epilogue Discussion

12/6 W: Last Day/Closing Statements | HoL JOURNAL DUE

FINAL PAPER DUE ON LAST DAY OF READING PERIOD

GRADING RUBRIC

Letter Grade System

“A” -A paper at this grade was done at an extraordinarily high-quality level. The work demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the concepts covered, and shows a thoughtful amount of creativity. This paper shows all the qualities listed below for a “B”, but goes beyond what was asked in terms of developing content and analysis. Papers at this level are usually free of grammatical errors.

“B” -A paper at this grade has done what was asked of the assignment at a high-quality level. The work is complete and may need further revision, but works at an elementary level. The style is straightforward and the organization is logical. It may contain grammatical errors, but it is otherwise readable.

“C” -A paper at this grade has done what was asked of the assignment. The work may need significant revision, but is complete in content and has logical organization. This paper may contain more grammatical errors that render it unreadable at times.

“D” -A paper at this grade has completed the assignment at level of poor quality. The work needs significant revision. It is usually incomplete and the organization doesn’t make sense. Attention to style is nonexistent.

“E” -A paper that does not address the needs of the assignment or shows little effort will result in a failing grade.

Check System

V+ — “Check-plus quality work” is thoughtful, sophisticated work that goes beyond what is asked of the assignment. (The point value is at 10 points.)

V — “Check quality work” is work that does what the assignment asks, no more and no less. (7.5 points)

V- — “Check-minus quality work” is usually that of a hurried and sloppy quality, or a disregard for the prompt or assignment. (5 points)

Sometimes you might fall between a check and a check plus (or minus) and the points will be averaged.

Grading Scale

A 4.0 93-100%	C 2.0 73-76%
A- 3.67 90-92%	C- 1.67 70-72%
B+ 3.33 87-89%	D+ 1.33 67-69%
B 3.0 83-86%	D 1.0 63-66%
B- 2.67 80-82%	D- 0.67 60-62%
C+ 2.33 77-79%	E 0.00 0-59%