

**AML 2410- Special Topics in American Literature**  
**History and the Self in Modern American Experimental Fiction**  
**Section 1615, Class #10441**  
**Ryan Kerr**

Class time: MWF Period 6 (12:50 pm-1:40 pm)  
MAT 0115

Office hours: TBD

Course website: Canvas

Instructor e-mail: [ryankerr@ufl.edu](mailto:ryankerr@ufl.edu)

The goal of this class will be to understand how we conceive of different historical events as well as how novelists portray the past in post-WWII American fiction. Some of the questions this course will engage with include: How can a work of fiction accurately capture the past? Can an author's depiction of their own current moment be an important historical document? In what way is the novel useful in understanding actual historical events? What narrative techniques are most useful in enhancing our conception of the past? How can a representation of the past help us reflect on our current moment or our impending future? In this class, we will examine how American authors handle the issue of historical trauma and the way fiction can play a role in collective healing processes for the oppressed.

Texts we will read in this class include Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, Susan Sontag's "The Way We Live Now," Margaret Atwood's "My Life as a Bat," Sandra Cisneros's "Woman-Hollering Creek," Douglas Coupland's *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, and David Foster Wallace's "The Awakening of My Interest in Advanced Tax." There will be a wide variety of different novelistic techniques examined over the course of the semester, and we will identify similarities and differences in terms of the authors' choices when representing the past. Attention will be paid to the way specific historical events or periods demand a particular kind of novelistic representation. Course assignments will include two analytical term papers, an annotated bibliography, and a final research paper. Students will also be required to lead the class discussion once during the semester.

Primary Novel Reading List (Required for you to buy):

Douglas Coupland- *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*

Don DeLillo- *Falling Man*

E.L. Doctorow- *Ragtime*

Ralph Ellison- *Invisible Man*

Cormac McCarthy- *Blood Meridian, or the Evening Redness in the West*

Toni Morrison- *Beloved*

Cynthia Ozick- *The Shawl*

Kurt Vonnegut- *Slaughterhouse Five*

Primary Short Story List (PDFs available on Canvas):

Margaret Atwood- "My Life as a Bat"

Sandra Cisneros- "Woman Hollering Creek"

Susan Sontag- "The Way We Live Now"

David Foster Wallace- "The Awakening of My Interest in Advanced Tax"

Tentative Syllabus:

Week One- Jan 5-Syllabus overview

Jan 7- Read Vonnegut, Ch. 1-3

Week Two- Jan 10-Start Vonnegut, Ch. 4-6

Jan 12- Finish Vonnegut, Ch. 7-10

Jan 14- Start Doctorow, Ch. 1-9

Week Three- Jan 17- HOLIDAY, NO CLASS

Jan 19- Read Doctorow, Ch. 10-20

Jan 21- Read Doctorow, Ch. 21-31

Week Four- Jan 24-Finish Doctorow, Ch. 32-40

Jan 26- Start Ellison, 3-33, Prologue-Ch. 1

Jan 28- Read Ellison, 34-108, Ch. 2-4 (First paper due 11:59 pm)

Week Five- Jan 31- Read Ellison, 109-171, Ch. 5-8

Feb 2- Read Ellison, 172-250, Ch. 9-11

Feb 4- Read Ellison, 251-332, Ch. 12-15

Week Six- Feb 7- Read Ellison, 333-408, Ch. 16-18

Feb 9- Read Ellison, 409-461, Ch. 19-21

Feb 11- Read Ellison, 462-512, Ch. 22-23

Week Seven- Feb 14- Finish Ellison, 513-581, Ch. 24-Epilogue

Feb 16- Start Morrison, 3-59

Feb 18- Read Morrison, 60-124

Week Eight- Feb 21- Read Morrison, 125-195

Feb 23- Read Morrison, 199-235

Feb 25- Read Morrison, 236-277

Week Nine- Feb 28- Finish Morrison, 281-322

March 2- Read Ozick, "The Shawl"

March 4- Read Ozick, "Rosa" (Second paper due 11:59 pm)

Week Ten- NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK

Week Eleven- March 14- Start McCarthy, Ch. I-IV

March 16- Read McCarthy, V-X

March 18- Read McCarthy, XI-XIV

Week Twelve- March 21-Read McCarthy, XV-XIX

March 23- Finish McCarthy, XX-XXIII

March 25- Read Sontag

Week Thirteen- March 28- Read Atwood and Cisneros

March 30- Start Coupland, 3-59

April 1- Read Coupland, 61-121

Week Fourteen- April 4- Finish Coupland, 123-179

April 6- Start Wallace, first half

April 8- Finish Wallace, second half

Week Fifteen- April 11- Start DeLillo, 3-75

April 13- Read DeLillo, 77-135

April 15- Read DeLillo, 135-178 (Annotated Bibliography due 11:59 pm)  
Week Sixteen- April 18- Finish DeLillo, 181-246  
April 20- Course wrap-up, final remarks  
April 22- NO CLASS, READING DAY

**Assignments:**

10%- Attendance and participation- Students are expected to be in class and to participate. More than three absences will result in a lowered final grade and six or more absences will result in an automatic failure.

20%- Class discussion- Students will sign up to lead a class discussion at one point during the semester. Students are expected to bring key insights to the discussion and to ask important questions about the assigned reading in order to produce a helpful dialogue that can allow us to understand the text.

15%- First Paper, 1500 words- Students will pick either Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* or Doctorow's *Ragtime* and explain the novel's perspective on the connection between history and the self. Students must have a well-defined thesis statement about the novel's stance on historical thinking and must cite clear examples from the text to back up their argument.

15%- Second Paper, 1500 words- Students will pick either Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Morrison's *Beloved*, or Ozick's *The Shawl* and argue which aspects of the novel represent the terrors of racism and violence. Students must analyze the specific forms of trauma present in the novel by way of a clearly defined thesis statement and by citing specific textual examples.

10%- Annotated Bibliography, 1000 words- Students will provide brief explanations of their five secondary sources for their upcoming research paper and will discuss its usefulness for their project.

30%- Final Research Paper, 2000 words- Students will pick any work from the midterm to the end of the term and make an argument about the relationship between the self and historical/political/social conflict. To back up their claims, students must include five secondary resources in order to present a well-rounded, thoroughly researched argument.

**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

### **Course Policies:**

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. **Attendance: Four** or more unexcused absences will result in a lowered final course grade. Absences are excused in the case of field trips, religious holidays, etc. Students who have **six unexcused absences** will fail the course.
3. Tardiness disrupts the class and should be avoided. Being tardy **three** times will count as **one absence**
4. During class discussions, students are expected to be respectful to their peers. Online posts and e-mails should be courteous and respectful.
5. *UF's policy on Sexual Harassment:* The University of Florida is committed to providing a safe educational, working, and residential environment that is free from sexual harassment or misconduct directed towards any and all members of the community: <https://titleix.ufl.edu/about/title-ix-rights/> (Links to an external site.)
6. *Paper Format & Submission:* Students are expected to turn in assignments on time and they must communicate with me as soon as possible if extenuating circumstances (more about disability accommodations below) or technical difficulties are preventing them from completing assignments by the deadline.

7. *Late Papers/Assignments*: Late papers will be counted off half of a letter grade for every day it is late. Discussion posts must be made up at a later date for a different text since they are meant to be done in conjunction with upcoming class discussions.
8. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
9. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.’” The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/> (Links to an external site.)) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.

The UF Student Honor Code defines plagiarism as follows:

A Student must not represent as the Student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Stealing, misquoting, insufficiently paraphrasing, or patch-writing.
2. Self-plagiarism, which is the reuse of the Student’s own submitted work, or the simultaneous submission of the Student’s own work, without the full and clear acknowledgment and permission of the Faculty to whom it is submitted.
3. Submitting materials from any source without proper attribution.
4. Submitting a document, assignment, or material that, in whole or in part, is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment the Student did not author.
5. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <https://disability.ufl.edu> (Links to an external site.)) which will provide appropriate documentation to give your instructor early in the semester.
6. *Students who are in distress* who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you. UF’s Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support: 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)
7. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)
8. *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Please contact Ms. Blount at [cblount@ufl.edu](mailto:cblount@ufl.edu) Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
9. *Course Evaluations*. Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages requesting that you do this

online: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)

10. *Policy on environmental sustainability.* Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.) annual book sale.)

### **Grading/Assessment Rubric:**

**A:** The student has met the criteria of the assignment successfully. The paper strongly argues points that connect clearly to a well-written thesis statement. The grammar of the paper shows evidence of attentive proofreading and there are little to no errors whatsoever.

**B:** The student has met the criteria of the assignment, but the thesis statement could be more clearly defined. The connections between the argumentative points and the thesis statement itself could be clearer. There are several noticeable grammatical errors.

**C:** The student has only minimally met the criteria of the assignment. The argument either exhibits poor logic or barely resembles a clear argument. The thesis statement is not argumentative and the points do not clearly relate to the thesis statement. There are numerous grammatical errors that distract from the readability and meaning of the paper.

**D:** The student has not met the criteria of the assignment. The thesis statement is absent entirely and the paper does not form a coherent argument at all. There are numerous grammatical errors that strongly interfere with the readability and meaning of the paper.

**E:** (Equivalent to an F) These grades are given to assignments that are never turned in or are plagiarized. A paper that is very far outside of the parameters of the assignment, however, will receive an E grade.

Pluses and minuses are given to grades that overlap between the criteria of two different letter grades (a paper that has a clearly defined thesis statement and is free of grammatical errors but could use clearer connections between the thesis and the argument would receive an A-minus, for example).

### **Final Grade Breakdown:**

- A:** 93-100%
- A-Minus:** 90-92.99%
- B-Plus:** 87-89.99%
- B:** 83-86.99%
- B-Minus:** 80-82.99%
- C-Plus:** 77-79.99%
- C:** 73-76.99%
- C-Minus:** 70-72.99%
- D-Plus:** 67-69.99%

**D:** 63-66.99%

**D-Minus:** 60-62.99%

**E:** 0-59.99%

**Content Warning:** The topics in this class include controversial and sensitive subjects, including racism and sexual violence. See me privately if you feel a work might be triggering for you so arrangements can be made. Students who feel as though many of these works will be problematic for them may want to consider taking a different course.