

Chaminade University of Honolulu
Fall Term Evening Program
October 5 – December 14, 1998
Naval Station, Pearl Harbor

COURSE: English 431 Themes in American Literature: Between the Wars

TIME: Mondays 1645– 2055

INSTRUCTOR: Steven W. Bannow Telephone 471-3298 X 301/ 286-1547
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TEXTS: Faulkner – As I Lay Dying
 Fitzgerald – The Great Gatsby
 Hemingway – The Sun Also Rises
 Lewis – Babbitt
 Steinbeck – Of Mice and Men

*These novels and key criticism on each will be covered in depth. (I will provide important critical articles on these works.)

ADDITIONAL REQUIRED READINGS:

Frost – Selected Poems (To be distributed in class.)
 O'Neil – The Emperor Jones (To be distributed in class.)
 Miscellaneous. – Short Stories (To be distributed in class.)

ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL READINGS:

I will distribute various selections covering the historical, cultural, and artistic background of American literature between WWI and WWII at key points throughout the term. These selections will come from the a variety of texts and critical journals.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION AND TERM PROJECTS:

I will supply an additional list of novels from which each student shall make a selection for reading and in-class presentation. In the alternative, students may submit proposals for documentary projects involving black and white photography. (Novel presentation projects are preferred for English majors.)

I. General Objectives of Literature and this course:

Literature helps us to understand and respond to the major realities of human existence: life, death, love, good, evil, the spiritual. Writers speak to us in many ways: poetry, drama, short prose, and novels. Some authors succeed in reaching us – through the generations – while others do not.

We study literature to learn about life and, through this process, to grow – emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. We also study literature to acquire a sense of quality and taste. Why, for example, is one author widely regarded as a master or a genius and another is not? Why do the works of one writer withstand “the test of time” and become classics while others’ works are set aside and virtually forgotten soon after they are published?

We will explore the issues raised in the preceding two paragraphs as well as others. Our references will be drawn primarily from the Twenties and Thirties. The writers we will study are all American. We will conduct our study in a manner that will cover as much territory as possible without attempting overly ambitious goals. Most of the works we will read and discuss are relatively short works. Our studies will be most beneficial if we keep a few things in mind:

1. Read actively, pen or pencil in hand, challenging the writer, noting key passages, and asking questions;
2. Get ahead and stay ahead with your reading assignments: The earlier in the semester you read a work, the more time you will have to reflect upon it;
3. Look for key themes and motifs and try to establish ways of linking or differentiating between the works and their creators through these themes and motifs;
4. Keep your mind open, your creativity unfettered, and your sense of humor engaged at all times.
5. Above all, be ready to think and have fun.

II. Relationship of this course to the general objectives of the university:

To develop in the student approaches to the creative and analytical understanding and appreciation of fiction, specifically through the study of representative American writers.

To open to the student the wealth of American cultural heritage – both artistic and intellectual.

To encourage a search for truth through literature and to assist the student in forming a value system or a philosophy of life.

III. Format of Course:

Presentation of key points in literary works and in depth supplements by the instructor.

Class discussion of key issues and themes within the novels. Student involvement will be emphasized in all aspects of the learning experience. Active reading of the assigned material is absolutely essential to a complete understanding of class discussion and to successful completion of all graded requirements.

Student-led responses to various concerns found within the works – both to encourage student critical thinking and research and to afford an opportunity to demonstrate effective oral communication.

NOTE: Each student will submit two questions (with answers) for each novel we cover (one t/f or fill-in-the-blank style and one short answer style) at the beginning of each class period. This is an essential component of your class-participation grade.

IV. Grading:

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| Background/Cather/Lewis | In-class, open-book quiz | 15% |
| Frost/Fitzgerald/O'Neil | In-class, open-book quiz | 15% |
| Hemingway/Faulkner/Steinbeck | In-class, open-book quiz | 15% |
| Reading and Research | In-class presentation/photo project | 20% |
| Final Exam | Three page (typed) take-home exam (cumulative) | 20% |
| Attendance/Class Participation | Active involvement in all aspects of the class | 15% |

NOTE: Class attendance and promptness are essential – especially since we meet for a total of only ten sessions. Unless particularly unusual circumstances can be demonstrated by the student, more than two absences will result in a failing grade. PLEASE give me advance notice any time you must miss a class. (Each student shall obtain the names and telephone numbers of at least two other classmates for the purpose of exchanging information about class notes, syllabus changes, and assignments in the event of an absence.)

V. Schedule:

- October 5 Introduction/Historical Framework/Video/Cather
- October 12 COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY - NO CLASS
- October 19 Lewis' Babbitt/selected criticism/Quiz #1
- October 26 An Evening of Poetry/selected criticism
- November 2 Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby/selected criticism/video
- November 9 O'Neil's The Emperor Jones/selected criticism/Quiz #2
- November 16 Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises/selected criticism
- November 23 Faulkner's As I Lay Dying/selected criticism
- November 30 Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men/"The Chrysanthemums" (in class)/video
Assign Final Take-home Exam
- December 7 Quiz #3/Student Presentations
- December 14 Submit Final Exam/Student presentations/Course Wrap Up

IN CLASS PRESENTATION IDEAS

Virtually any novel by the following writers, but clear with me first.*

Cather
Dos Passos
Faulkner
Fitzgerald
Hemingway.
Lewis
Steinbeck

*NOTE: There are many others from which to choose. These are just a few of the giants of the period. See me for additional options. The main caveat here is to keep your selection within the time span of the course (i.e., "Between the Wars").

General Guidelines for Presentation Format

Title

Year of Publication

Author

Quick biographical sketch

Plot

Key Themes

Artistic Interest: Symbolism, imagery, language, style.

Critical Evaluation: Does it work? Is it good? Why/Why not?

Those wishing to do a black and white photo documentary project should see me early in the course to discuss ideas. (In any case, there will have to be some connection to the theme's addressed in the course.)