

**Course Syllabus for English 587 (20<sup>th</sup> Century American Literature)**  
**“Searchers, Seekers, Wanderers, and Nomads: Looking for Answers in the**  
**Landscape of American Fiction”**  
**Summer I, 2008**

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My official office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., Monday through Friday. That is also a good time for those of you at the University Center to e-mail or call me. However, if that time isn't convenient for you, make an appointment. This is my only class this semester, but I do have daily duties as director of the university honors program. I will be over there most afternoons. If you need to see me in the afternoons, give me a call over there, and I will hustle over to Evans.

**Required Texts:** NOTE: The editions/printings below (identified by the ISBN) are the ones on order for the course and available in the bookstore (I hope). While it will certainly be more convenient (especially because of common pagination) for you to have these specific books, you will probably do just fine with older editions or editions from other publishers. For instance, if you have both standard Hemingway short story collections, you'll have all the stories we will read. One specific requirement is that you have a hard copy of each text to bring class, not an online copy (except of *The Waste Land* and perhaps “Barn Burning”). One caution, though. Make sure you get a copy of the whole *Go Down, Moses*. Don't try to cobble that together. The main reason, but not the only one, is that you must have the version of “The Bear” that appears in *Go Down, Moses*, not the one that appeared in *Saturday Evening Post*. If you can save yourself money by going on line or visiting used book stores, feel free to do so.

- *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot (any way you can get hold of it, including on line.)
- *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*, Hemingway (ISBN: 0-684-80334-8)
- *Go Down, Moses*, William Faulkner (ISBN: 0-679-73217-9)
- “Barn Burning,” William Faulkner (not included in the text order)
- *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, Porter (ISBN: 0-15-618876-7)
- *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy (ISBN: 0-679-72875-9)
- *Sula*, Toni Morrison (ISBN: 1-4000-3343-8)
- *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien (ISBN: 0-7679-0289-0)

**Introductory Remarks.** Please read this section (and the rest of the syllabus) carefully and thoughtfully. I'm trying to inform you (in a way that I hope will help you in your reading) of the decisions that went into the course and the selection of readings. First of all, the catalogue course description for English 587 specifies only that the course cover “selected writers, movements, or literary types of the period.” I've decided to make the focus of this course Modernism and the Modernist Novel (though we will begin with the poem that more or less started it all). We will consider some Post-Modernist theory toward the end of the term, but that will be peripheral to our examination of Modernism. I also have a theme in mind: “Searchers, Seekers, Wanderers, and Nomads: Looking for Answers in the Landscape of American Fiction.” We won't be handcuffed by the theme, but it will provide us a focus for the term. Giving

suitable coverage to a graduate course in the summer is difficult if not impossible. I never did intend for this course to try the same coverage as during the long semester, but I did begin with eight novels. I've been through various iterations, but here are some of the ones that ended up on the cutting room floor (all befitting the "Seekers . . ." theme): *Invisible Man*, *Rabbit Redux*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *them*, and *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Some of them were just too long for the summer. (*Invisible Man* was particularly hard to leave out of a course with a "seekers" theme.) Anyhow, we end up with a very approachable reading list, and I hope you enjoy it. I settled on the first five novels, and after laying out the reading schedule, I added *The Things They Carried*. I think we can do it all, especially since we will not be doing a 25-page graduate research paper. I feel a little guilty about not covering more, but I'm fairly sure the final product is in keeping with the typical departmental summer graduate course reading load. I should say that the major concession I have made to the summer is not in primary but in secondary readings. We are still going to do some secondary reading, but rather than try to incorporate them in bulk into the reading schedule, I am going to refer you to electronic or online sources. In lieu of the traditional 25-page research paper, you will do three research problems. More on that below.

**The Readings.** First of all, in selecting the texts, I was guided by the M.A. comprehensive exam reading list. Just about every selection we are reading appears all or in part on that list. I've tried to balance the readings, both in the amount of reading and in terms of our focus for a given day, but there's a little imbalance still. You will see that a couple of daily reading assignments are relatively light. Rather than taking a rest on such days, plunge ahead. (Actually, it would be even better for you to begin reading now.) You might think of various strategies for getting this reading done. You could just read ahead chronologically, or you might get a head start on a text we will be doing later in the session. The most obvious choice is *Blood Meridian*, which is not tremendously long but which is dense, at least as dense as *Moby-Dick*. A couple of the choices on the reading list are also concessions to the summer. Here's a brief set of remarks about them:

- ***The Waste Land*.** When this poem was published, in 1922, it quickly became the defining document in Modernism. It chronicles the despair, disintegration, and loss of faith and love that in his darker moments Eliot felt characterized the world, post WWI. Not everyone loves the poem or grasps it, but it is a formidable looming presence in American literature and thought, even today. We will actually take the poem up on our first class day. Ideally, you would have read it by then. You do not have to read the lengthy end notes that Eliot wrote. Just read the poem trying to get a sense of how it became the startup to Modernism. If you don't have a hard copy of the poem, you can find it online easily. If you have trouble, get in touch with me, and I'll help you.
- **Hemingway short stories.** A Hemingway novel might have been preferable, and truth is, we're not doing but a few of his stories (though they are very representative of Modernism, Hemingway, and Searchers). Hemingway was definitely an "Anti-Eliot," but he is the epitome of Modernism, not in written style, but in world view.
- ***Go Down, Moses* and "Barn Burning."** *Go Down, Moses* is also a volume of short stories, but we will read it pretty much like a novel. Our focus will be on "The Bear" and its difficult but phenomenally rich fourth part. "The Bear" is certainly one of the finest stories ever written. The first story in the book is "Was," and I may need most of that class period just to explain the poker game. To work our way into Faulkner, we will

read “Barn Burning,” which is also on the master’s reading list. (“Barn Burning” is not one of the stories in *Go Down, Moses*. You will need to lay your hands on a copy.)

- **Katherine Anne Porter stories and novellas.** In addition to the Porter inclusions on the master’s comprehensive list (the three novellas of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*), we are doing a number of her Mexican-setting stories (including the puzzling but great “Flowering Judas”), a few of the “salt of the earth” Southern-style stories (to accompany “Noon Wine”), and some of the “Miranda” stories (to accompany “Old Mortality” and “Pale Horse, Pale Rider”). Porter is our most literary Texas novelist, and a fascinating lady.
- ***Sula*.** I would probably have preferred *Beloved*, which is also on the master’s list (along with *The Bluest Eye*), but I chose *Sula* because (1) it fits our course theme, (2) it is a great novel which introduces some elements of Post-Modernism, and (3) it is fairly short. Toni Morrison is the most recent American Nobel Prize winner. Like Hemingway, Faulkner, and Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison is one of those rare authors credited with multiple masterpieces. She is a great writer, and I think you will enjoy *Sula*. It’s sexy and earthy.
- ***Blood Meridian*.** Cormac McCarthy’s fiction is a principal interest of mine. However, I’m not alone in my admiration. Recently, he is being ranked next to the greatest writers in our national literature. Harold Bloom compares him with Melville, and others put him in a class with Faulkner and Hemingway. McCarthy scholars argue over which of his novels is the greatest: *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Suttree*, or *Blood Meridian* (or even his most recent novel, *The Road*). *Blood Meridian* is a great novel and a difficult one. It is like *Moby-Dick* in many respects. You need to prepare yourself for the unrelieved and sometimes blood-curdling violence you will encounter there. (It’s about a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century scalping expedition. How is it not going to be violent?) McCarthy shares two distinctions with Katherine Anne Porter. They are the two “Texas writers” on our list and, along with O’Brien, the only ones who are not Nobel Prize winners.
- ***The Things They Carried*.** Tim O’Brien is the most prominent novelist of the Viet Nam war, though he has written significantly and well about other subjects. This novel helps articulate the uncertainties about that time and that war on a personal level, but through a post-modern lens. O’Brien won the National Book Award in 1979, for *Going After Cacciato*, another Viet Nam novel. *The Things They Carried* was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

**Course Goals:** My main intent for this course is, as implied above, for us to read as widely as possible in this significant period in our national literature and for you to respond to the readings from both a critical and personal perspective. What this means is that that you will make the standard use of secondary sources but that the principal drive for your understanding should be just that—your own understanding. I value highly a student’s ability to use secondary sources without becoming a slave to them. Finally, I hope that you will commit yourself to entering into each reading intent on wringing out all the simple pleasure possible. Considering that you are in the presence of some of the world’s greatest literature, that should not be too hard to do.

**Course Objectives** (what you should learn):

- The genesis of Modernism, its principal characteristics, and how it informs major fiction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- The identifying characteristics of Post-Modernism as reflected in selected fiction of the later 20<sup>th</sup> century

- How each of these authors and the works we read helps shape and define American literature of the century
- How this body of literature taken together illuminates our “Searchers, Seekers, Wanderers, and Nomads” focus

**Course Requirements.** I will explain each of these more fully, but I am completely willing to consult with you at any time about any aspect of this course, from reading and critiquing drafts to discussing your own readings or talking about problems you are having. In fact, I may require some individual consultation as you approach the major paper. Before long, I will provide you detailed handouts on the requirements for each assignment and the evaluation criteria for each. The course requirements are as follows:

- **Mid-term Exam (20%).** The mid-term will be all or mostly essay. It may contain some objective questions.
- **Assignments. (30%).** At selected times during the term, I will ask you to write brief formal non-research responses to our readings and discussions. I’ll give you guidelines later, but the main purpose of these assignments is to allow you to articulate your own ideas, not someone else’s. You will write these responses out of class and submit them through the Blackboard. You will have minimal time (probably a day or two) to complete these, so they are also my check that you are staying up with the reading.
- **Research Problems (30%).** The last two graduate summer courses I have taught, I have foregone the traditional long research paper in favor of a set of research problems (which I view as research “conundrums”). Both classes responded well to this variation. The great advantage of these conundrums is that they afford us the opportunity for broad, useful, targeted research in a summer term. The traditional research paper never has worked well for me in the summer, so I have ditched it in favor of these research problems. There will be five or six of them, from which you will choose three.
- **Final Examination (20%).** The final will probably be entirely essay. I will ask you to respond comprehensively to general questions about the readings, the authors, and the culture of the period. These questions will be similar to the kinds of questions you see on the master’s comprehensive examinations. It is likely what we will do this exam online.  
**Exam Date: Tuesday, July 1.**

**Attendance.** Simple. I expect you to be in class every time, although—in keeping with university policy, which allows three hours of absence—I will not penalize you for having as many as two absences. After that, I will deduct points from your final grade. Since the two allowed absences are supposed to cover all emergencies the semester, be judicious about taking them. If you know you are going to be absent, try to let me know ahead of time.

**The Television Show.** This will be my third experience with ITV instruction, and basically it has not been as bad as I expected it to be. My classes, when they function well are discursive. There’s lots of talk and lots of give and take, and I like to be on the move. ITV does not lend itself too well to such a classroom approach. Still, we’ll work it out, and especially in a way that does not disadvantage the students at the remote site. I have another class, but I will try to drive down there to meet with the UC class at least three or four times during the term. Whatever happens, I’m sure we can make this work to the benefit and inclusion of everyone.

Below are official University statements on other aspects of academic conduct and classroom procedures (with a link to the full guidelines). If you have any questions, please ask.

**Student Syllabus Guidelines:** You may find online a more detailed description of the following policies. These guidelines will also provide you with a link to the specific university policy or procedure:

<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Classroom Rules of Conduct:** Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.

**Student Absences on Religious Holy Days:** Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Students with Disabilities Policy:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Visitors in the Classroom:** Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

<p><b>Daily Reading Schedule</b>  <b>English 587.01—Summer I, 2008—Dr. Gene Young</b></p>
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Meeting Date	Readings and Reminders
Tue., June 3	Course introduction and overview; Discuss Modernism and <i>The Waste Land</i>
Wed., June 4	T.S. ELIOT— <i>The Waste Land</i> (online); ERNEST HEMINGWAY (from <i>The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway</i> ) –“Big Two-Hearted River” (Parts I and II, 207-32) and “Hills like White Elephants” (273-78)
Thu., June 5	HEMINGWAY—“Indian Camp,” (89-96) “The Short Happy Life of Francis McComber” (3-37), and “The Undeclared” (233-66)
Fri., June 6	Finish HEMINGWAY—“The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (52-77) and “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” (379-83); Begin WILLIAM FAULKNER—“Barn Burning” (from any source) and from <i>Go Down, Moses</i> —“Was” (1-29);
Mon., June 9	FAULKNER—“The Fire and the Hearth” (31-127) and “Pantaloon in Black” (130-54)
Tue., June 10	FAULKNER—“The Old People” (155-80) and “The Bear” (Parts 1, 2, and 3, 181-242)

Wed., June 11	FAULKNER—Finish “The Bear” (Part 4, 243-300 and Part V, 300-15)
Thu., June 12	FAULKNER—Finish <i>Go Down, Moses</i> , “Delta Autumn” (318-48) and “Go Down, Moses” (349-65); <b>Mid-term Exam</b> (last hour of class)
Fri., June 13	KATHERINE ANNE PORTER (from <i>The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter</i> )—“María Concepción” “Flowering Judas” (90-102) “Rope” (42-48), “He” (49-58), “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” (80-89)
Mon., June 16	PORTER—“Noon Wine” (222-68) and “Old Mortality” (173-221)
Tue., June 17	PORTER— “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” (269-317)
Wed., June 18	CORMAC McCARTHY— <i>Blood Meridian</i> (Chapters I-IV, 3-54)
Thu., June 19	McCARTHY— <i>Blood Meridian</i> (Chapters V-XIII, 55-185)
Fri., June 20	McCARTHY— <i>Blood Meridian</i> (Chapters XIV-XX, 186-294)
Mon., June 23	McCARTHY—finish <i>Blood Meridian</i> (Chapters XXI-Epilogue, 295-337)
Tue., June 24	TONI MORRISON— <i>Sula</i> (Part I, 1-85)
Wed., June 25	MORRISON— <i>Sula</i> (Part II, 86-174)
Thu., June 26	TIM O’BRIEN— <i>The Things They Carried</i> (through “Church”)
Fri., June 27	TIM O’BRIEN— <i>The Things They Carried</i> (through “Field Trip”)
Mon., June 30	O’BRIEN—finish <i>The Things They Carried</i>
Tue., July 1	<b>Final Exam</b>