

SYLLABUS: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

Fall 2014

Professor: David Madden Office: Calaveras 156
Telephone: 278-5623 Office hours: MW 10:30-11:30; MW 6:00-6:30
web site: <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/maddendw>
email: maddendw@csus.edu

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

M--9/1--**LABOR DAY HOLIDAY**

W--9/3--INTRODUCTION ("Primer of Existentialism")

M--9/8--OVERVIEW

W--9/10--OVERVIEW & Ralph Ellison, *INVISIBLE MAN* (1950)

M--9/15-- "

W--9/17-- "

M--9/22--"

W--9/24--John Barth, *THE END OF THE ROAD* (1958) (Laocoon image)

M--9/29--"

W--10/1-- "

M--10/6--Philip Roth, *THE GHOST WRITER* (1979)

W--10/8-- "

M--10/13-- "

W--10/15- " **PAPER DUE!!**

M--10/20--Thomas Berger, *LITTLE BIG MAN* (1964)

W--10/22--"

M--10/27--**MIDTERM**

W--10/29-- "

M --11/3-- "

W--11/5-- Joan Didion, *PLAY IT AS IT LAYS* (1970) ("Why I Write")

M--11/10--"

W--11/12--"

M--11/17-- " **PAPER DUE!!**

W--11/19--

M-11/24--Thomas Pynchon, *THE CRYING OF LOT 49* (1966)

W-11/26--**HOLIDAY**

M-12/1-- "

W-12/3-- "

M-12/8--**TAKE HOME FINAL DUE**

W-12/10--LAST DAY OF INSTRUCTION

EXPECTATIONS

*Complete all reading assignments by dates assigned

*Participate in class discussions

*Regular class attendance

Since this is not a correspondence course, attendance is **mandatory**. A student will be allowed no more than **TWO** (2) **unexcused absence** (and no more than TWO excused absences). Those who have more than 3 hours of unexcused absences will have **one full grade** deducted from the final grade for each additional hour. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If a student arrives after attendance has been taken, it is his/her responsibility to see that s/he is recorded as being present. Excused absences will be granted only for extenuating circumstances (neither general malaise nor an assignment in another class will do) and must be cleared no later than the next class period. It is your responsibility to check your attendance; my records are final.

I recommend you **date your class notes** in order to demonstrate your attendance should there be a conflict in records. Be prepared to show those notes at the time that you inquire about your absences.

Class begins on the hour; students arriving consistently late by more than 5 minutes will be considered absent for any time missed. The time missed will be calculated as absences which will affect the final grade as explained above.

GRADING

The final course grade will be based on;

1 essay midterm--20% final grade (bring blue book)

1 essay--50% final grade

1 essay final exam--30% final grade (bring blue book)

quizzes—TO BE DETERMINED and factored in at no more than 10%

class participation, improvement--swing factors

*To miss any of the assignments above will result in an automatic failure of the course.
NO EXCEPTIONS.

GRADING STANDARDS

Grading standards are identical to those defined by the university in the Catalog.

- A Exemplary achievement of the course objectives. In addition to being clearly and significantly above the requirements, the work exhibited is of an independent, creative, contributory nature.
- B Superior achievement of the course objectives. The performance is clearly and significantly above the satisfactory fulfillment of course requirements.
- C Satisfactory achievement of the course objectives. The student is now prepared for advanced work or study.
- D Unsatisfactory achievement toward the course objectives, yet achievement of a sufficient proportion of the objectives so that it is not necessary to repeat the course unless required to do so by the academic department.
- F Ineffective achievement toward the course objectives. The student has made no clearly significant progress.

NB: **I do not negotiate grades.** If you have questions, I will be glad to explain, but I will not barter a grade up or down. If you wish to discuss a paper, you may not do so on the day it is returned to you; see me at my next office hour. No exceptions.

GENERAL POLICIES

LATE PAPERS--in this class they do not exist; the date an assignment is due is the date the assignment is due. If there is some clear and compelling reason for a late paper (not great powder at one's favorite ski resort, general malaise, or an assignment in any other class), see or call me in advance of submission. All papers must be submitted in class on date due, not some time that day. I strongly encourage each of you to purchase a thumb or memory drive and back up your work on it in case of a hard drive or printer failure.

TYPING--mandatory for all papers and out-of-class exercises or assignments. Papers should be neat and free of extreme typographical errors. Double-space, use 1" margins, and use *only* a 12 pt font. Print on only one side of the page. Number pages, beginning with second page, in upper right hand corner, and secure pages only with a staple in the upper left hand corner. On a cover page center the title and put in the lower right hand corner your name, the date the assignment is due, the topic number you are addressing, and my name.

PLAGIARISM—Plagiarism is the false assumption of authorship, and, as the *MLA Handbook* notes, it constitutes the “use of another person’s ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person’s work. . . Passing off another person’s ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud.” Simply put, if you didn’t think of it, didn’t say it, or didn’t write it, you must give full attribution in the form of proper citation. I will not tolerate plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, and I will fail anyone I catch cheating and report that student to the Dean of Students. For information on the university’s policy concerning plagiarism and academic honesty, see <http://www.csus.edu/umannual/student/UMA00150.htm>.

BEHAVIOR---recently a professor in another department did a survey of standards of behavior, and the results suggested there is some confusion about what is (and is not) acceptable in university classes. She has advised that professors define their standards, so here are mine: certain fundamental standards of behavior must be observed in this class. Common courtesy and respect is demanded of all enrolled in this class. Therefore you are not to read the newspaper or a textbook for another course once the class meeting has begun. **Turn off your cell phones**; no one is to take or make a call during class; the same goes for texting, don’t send or view any during class. **Turn off the laptops**; no one may use a laptop during class. No digital pads or ereaders with a net connection. Likewise, no one is to work on assignments for another course in this class. Do not talk or otherwise interrupt me or another student who is speaking, and under no condition will anyone be permitted to sleep during class lectures or discussions. Those who cannot or will not follow these obvious rules of behavior will be counted as absent for that class period and may be subject to dismissal from the course.

MISCELLANEOUS--Students must keep abreast of assignments; I will not accept the excuse that because someone misses a class s/he did not know there was a change in the syllabus or an assignment. If there are any changes in the syllabus, they will be announced in class, and students are then responsible for these on dates announced.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

INVISIBLE MAN

- 1.) Analyze the structure of the novel. Some have argued that it is sprawling and formless; do you agree? Does the novel's structure suggest a particular literary form or reveal a particular literary tradition?
- 2.) Examine Chapter 2 in which Mr. Norton meets Jim Trueblood. What is the importance of this encounter; analyze for its significance.
- 3.) What is the point of all the attention given to the protagonist's adventures in the Brotherhood? What do these sections reveal?
- 4.) Examine the figure of Rinehart in Chapter 23; who is this figure and how is he important?
- 5.) Does the novel reveal any existential influences; if so explain and analyze these.

THE END OF THE ROAD

- 1.) Compare Joe Morgan and Jacob Horner and analyze their respective and collective significances.
- 2.) What is Cosmopsis and Mythotherapy and explain how they figure in the novel.
- 3.) Explain the importance of the scene where Jake and Rennie spy on Joe.
- 4.) Analyze and explain the significance of Rennie's eventual fate. Do you think the author is making any specific point here?
- 5.) Explain the novel's title.

THE GHOST WRITER

- 1.) What is the significance of the chapter entitled "Nathan Dedalus"? Who is Nathan Dedalus?
- 2.) What is the nature of Lonoff's relationship with Amy?
- 3.) How does Nathan discover that Amy is Anne Frank?
- 4.) Why is the narrative point of view switched from first person to an omniscient third person narrator (see p. 71)?
- 5.) What is the significance of the chapter entitled "Married to Tolstoy"?

- 6.) What is the significance of the novel's title?
- 7.) What realization(s) does Zuckerman come to after his meeting with Lonoff? Is there a point to this rather small adventure?

LITTLE BIG MAN

- 1.) Who is Jack Crabb, literally and figuratively?
- 2.) It is obvious that the novel is a Western, but what kind of Western is this? Consider the conventions of the Western form (relying on novels first or films you are familiar with) and apply those to the novel.
- 3.) There are repeated comparisons between the white and Native American cultures. What is revealed through these?
- 4.) Look closely at Custer; why so much attention given to this figure, what do you suppose is the point?
- 5.) Take an overview of the novel--what is it saying, how is it important, analyze it as a document of postmodern American literature.

PLAY IT AS IT LAYS

- 1.) Discuss the importance of the setting.
- 2.) Analyze the significance of the recurring snake and gambling imagery.
- 3.) At one point the narrator writes, "Sometimes in the night she had moved into a realm of miseries *peculiar to women* [my italics], and she had nothing to say to Carter" (62). The suggestion here is that Maria's experiences are uniquely female; explain the effect of the author's choosing a female protagonist.
- 4.) Analyze and explain why Kate is so important to Maria. Granted that she is the woman's child, but Maria's obsession indicates that there may be something more involved here.
- 5.) What are some of the novel's major themes; analyze the treatment of these.

THE CRYING OF LOT 49

- 1.) What is the point of the Rapunzel and tapestry images. Look especially at the

description of the Remedios Varo painting, “Bordando el Manto Terrestre” (“Embroiderers of the Terrestrial Blanket”), and Oedipa’s reaction to it. Why does she respond as she does?

- 2.) What is the Second Law of thermodynamics and what might its significance be for the novel?
- 3.) What is entropy; how does it figure in the novel?
- 4.) What is the significance of Maxwell’s Demon, which John Nefastis has perfected?
- 5.) What is the Tristero system?
- 6.) What do you think the major theme(s) of the novel might be? It would appear that Pynchon is out only to confuse us; do you see echoes of any of the ideas we have discussed about other novels?

HOUSEKEEPING

- 1.) Analyze the importance of the house. Look closely at descriptions of the structure and its individual parts. What significance does it have?
- 2.) There are repeated references to the lake and water in general. Analyze these for their importance.
- 3.) Explain the meaning and significance of the title.
- 4.) Ruthie frequently meditates on the importance of memory and dreams; explain and analyze this importance.
- 5.) Compare the work with others this semester; what areas of similarity do you find?