

English 336 – Postmodern American “Fiction” (1945 +)
Hendrix College, Fall 2019

Dr. Alex Vernon
office hours: MWF 2:10-3:30; Th 9:30-11:00; mostly! & by appt.
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“modernist, postmodernist—who cares?”

—novelist James Salter in a personal letter, 31 March 2002



Claes Oldenburg, ‘Fireplug Souvenir—Chicago August 1968’ (1968)

Photo: Claes Oldenburg/Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

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1	Wed, 28 Aug	“Introduction,” <i>Postmodern American Fiction: A North Anthology</i>
2	Fri, 30 Aug	Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”
	Mon, 2 Sep	Labor Day
3	Wed, 4 Sep	Hemingway, <i>The Garden of Eden</i> chapters 1-14 (through p.127)
4	Fri, 6 Sep	AV away – no class
5	Mon, 9 Sep	Hemingway, <i>The Garden of Eden</i> chapters 15-30 (to end)
6	Wed, 11 Sep	O’Connor, <i>Wise Blood</i> chapters 1-4
7	Fri, 13 Sep	O’Connor, <i>Wise Blood</i> chapters 5-9
8	Mon, 16 Sep	O’Connor, <i>Wise Blood</i> chapters 10-14
9	Wed, 18 Sep	➤ Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulation” ➤ Berger, “Ape Theatre.”
10	Fri, 20 Sep	Pre-writing #1 due
11	Mon, 23 Sep	➤ Barth: “The Literature of Exhaustion” & “... Replenishment” ➤ Barth, <i>Lost in the Funhouse</i> “Night-Sea Journey”
12	Wed, 25 Sep	Barth, <i>Lost in the Funhouse</i> through “Water-Message”
13	Fri, 27 Sep	Barth, <i>Lost in the Funhouse</i> through “Glossolalia”
14	Mon, 30 Sep	Barth, <i>Lost in the Funhouse</i> through “Anonymiad”
15	Wed, 2 Oct	DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> Part I
16	Fri, 4 Oct	DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> Part II and chapters 22-27 of Part III
18	Mon, 7 Oct	DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> rest of Part III
19	Wed, 9 Oct	Pre-writing #2 due
20	Fri, 11 Oct	writing day/office hours, no class
21	Mon, 14 Oct	writing day/office hours, no class
22	Wed, 16 Oct	essay #1 draft due; draft workshop
	Fri, 18 Oct	Fall Break

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23	Mon, 21 Oct	➤ Essay #1 due ➤ In-class: bring Dillard, <i>Teaching a Stone to Talk!</i>
24	Wed, 23 Oct	Dillard, <i>Teaching a Stone to Talk</i> , “Total Eclipse” & “Expedition...”
25	Fri, 25 Oct	Dillard, <i>Teaching...</i> , “In the Jungle” thru “On a Hill...”
26	Mon, 28 Oct	Dillard, <i>Teaching...</i> , “Lenses” thru “A Field of Silence”
27	Wed, 30 Oct	Dillard, <i>Teaching...</i> , “God in the Doorway” thru “Acres and Eights”
28	Fri, 1 Nov	Baldwin, “ The Devil Finds Work ”
29	Mon, 4 Nov	Hooks, “ Postmodern Blackness ” Morrison, Nobel Prize Lecture
30	Wed, 6 Nov	Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> Part I stop at “It was time to lay it all down” (p86?)
31	Fri, 8 Nov	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> stop at end of Part I [78pp]
32	Mon, 11 Nov	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> Part II
33	Wed, 13 Nov	Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> Part III
34	Fri, 15 Nov	John Edgar Wideman, “ Brothers & Keepers ”
35	Mon, 18 Nov	John Edgar Wideman, <i>Philadelphia Fire</i> Part I
36	Wed, 20 Nov	Wideman, <i>Philadelphia Fire</i> Part II
37	Fri, 22 Nov	Wideman, <i>Philadelphia Fire</i> Part III
38	Mon, 25 Nov	Pre-writing #3 due
	Wed, 27 Nov	Thanksgiving Break
	Fri, 29 Nov	
39	Mon, 2 Dec	writing day, office hours—no class
40	Wed, 4 Dec	essay #2 draft due; workshop
41	Fri, 6 Dec	writing day, office hours—no class
42	Mon, 9 Dec	➤ Essay #2 due
	Tue, 10 Dec	Reading Day
	Tues, 17 Dec 2:00-3:00	No Final

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the history and variety of American literature from the second half of the 20th century. Given the extent and richness of the subject, the course will be suggestive rather than inclusive or even representative. The second half of the 20th century has been dubbed the postmodern period in literary and cultural studies, and one aspect of this course will be an exploration of what exactly the terms *postmodernism* and *postmodernity* might signify.

It aims to: (1) increase your understanding of this period of literary history; (2) foster your interpretation of literary texts, especially from the modernist era; (3) improve your ability to work with literary scholarship; and (4) develop your mastery of writing about literature.

In order to gain as much from this course as possible, we will actively engage the course content. While short lectures by the professor will certainly occur, student interaction—with the stories, with classmates, with the instructor, with your own imaginations and critical eye—will constitute the primary course activity. For class, you may be asked to work with a small group to interpret a work; you may be asked to do some in-class writing; etc. My role is to foster your talents and to help you succeed.

As a Literary Studies learning domain course, ENGL 336 has the following collegiate learning goals:

- 1) To engage in the practice of written and oral expression.
- 2) To read a text critically to determine what meanings it holds, how and why those meanings are produced, and the effects of these choices.
- 3) To examine how literary works provide insight into the human experience.

Texts

☞select theoretical and critical essays (see syllabus)

“Transitions”

- ☞Ernest Hemingway, *The Garden of Eden* (1986)
- ☞Flannery O’Connor, *Wise Blood* (1952)

“Postmodern America”

- ☞John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968)
- ☞Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

“Creative Nonfiction/Selves in the World”

- ☞Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night* (1968)
- ☞Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1988)

“Postmodern Blackness”

- ☞Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
- ☞John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire* (1990)

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Requirements/Assessment

- ✎ *Class Participation (20%)*: Class participation includes attendance, tardiness, and **active** participation in class activities. Excessive absences will result in a failure for the course.
- ✎ *Pre-Writing Essays (10%)*: Choose one of the two books or long essays from the prior set and write a 3-5 page essay that begins to explore the dimension of the text that most interests you. Why is it of such interest? What are the stakes and open questions, for the text, for yourself, for readers? Your essay should draw on one or two essays or articles and suggest how they might help us better understand the text under study. Do not think of your essay as an assignment for this class; think of it as a smart, self-contained essay for a general reader with a passing familiarity with the novel. Think of this essay as a proposal. You do not need a formal introduction—dive right in—or a conclusion. Bring two copies to class. Grade based on seriousness of effort and quality of prose, NOT on argumentation or organization. This is brainstorming space.
- ✎ *Critical Essay Drafts (2x10%)*: Bring one copy to class; email a copy to the instructor. Grade based on relative completion and seriousness of effort.
- ✎ *Critical Essays (2x25%)*: In 8-10 pages, make a significant argument about one of the studied novels. You are limited only by the range of your own intellectual curiosity and your ability to present your case. You are encouraged to take up where one of your Pre-Writing Essays left off. Consultation is recommended. Use at least two secondary sources in significant fashion. Feel free to use secondary material from outside this class, including from other academic disciplines. Do not use internet sources unless they are clearly online versions of valid printed sources or are otherwise substantial and legitimate sources (you might want to check with me). Submit one hard copy and one e-copy.

In terms of essay grading criteria/expectations, use the following general guidelines: An **A** essay provides insights beyond class discussion; it is clearly and gracefully written and organized. A **B** essay might be well written and organized but not push the ideas much past class discussion, or it has some problems of logic/evidence in that effort; or it is successful in its ideas, but the execution—the writing—has some shortcomings. A **C** essay does not go beyond class discussion, depends on plot summary, or otherwise has logic/evidence problems preventing its argument from being particularly convincing or compelling. If most readers don't need you to explain what you are explaining, your paper is probably a “C” in content. A “C” paper might also have somewhat compelling and even convincing ideas, but exhibits serious problems in written expression. A **D** essay has serious shortcomings in both content and expression.

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Other Policies

- ☒ Drinks are permitted in class, but no food. No hats, either, except for religious headgear.
- ☒ The syllabus is subject to revision as the course progresses.
- ☒ *Learning Disabilities*: Any student who needs accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. In order to receive accommodations, students with disabilities are required to contact Julie Brown in Academic Support Services at 501-505-2954.
- ☒ *Email*: Email will be used to contact the entire class for communicating changes to the syllabus and other matters. Check your Hendrix account daily.
- ☒ *Laptop and other wireless devices*: These are not permitted in class, unless required for disability accommodation (see above).
- ☒ *Academic Dishonesty*: Intellectual dishonesty will not be tolerated. See the academic integrity statement and policy in the student handbook. Frequently, failure to document and attribute secondary sources adequately is not a deliberate attempt to pass another’s ideas and words off as one’s own, but rather a misunderstanding of how to give that other person sufficient credit properly. Please consult with me on any documentation question so we can avoid problems.
- ☒ *Late essays*: If you have extenuating circumstances, you must consult me at least one week prior to the due date (except in the case of actual emergencies). Otherwise, you will lose five points for every day it is late, starting from when class begins on the due date.
- ☒ *Essay Format*: All submitted essays must follow the MLA style for format, documentation, and bibliography. Specifically:
 - ☒ MLA format: 12 point font, with serifs. 1” margins all around (campus MS Word default is 1.5” left margin). No cover sheet. No folders. Attach pages with a staple (which I will not provide). Page numbers must appear in the upper right corner of each page except the first. All papers must have a title and a “Works Cited” section.
 - ☒ Exceptions to MLA format: Single-space the name/course/date/professor information on the first page. 1.5-space block/indented quotations. If you have room, add your entire “Works Cited” section at the bottom of your last page.
 - ☒ MLA documentation: MLA calls for parenthetical documentation, not footnotes or endnotes. Consult any recent English handbook, the *MLA Handbook* in the library, or the online guide linked via the English Department’s website. *Rule of thumb*: *Given the context of the surrounding passage and the bibliography listing, include the absolute minimum amount of information necessary within the parentheses.*