David Blake

Fall 2015

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OH: M 11:00-12:20, Th 3:30-5 *and by appointment*

**LIT 376: United States Literature, 1900-present**

**Required Texts:**

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Mariner, 978-0618871711

T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, Norton, 978-0393974995

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Vintage, 978-0679732764

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Norton, 978-0393964817

Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time*, Scribners, 978-0684822761

Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Harper, 978-0061120060

Toni Morrison, *Sula*, Vintage, 978-1400033430

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, Vintage, 978-0679723165

Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*, Vintage, 978-1400079490

Nathaniel West, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, New Directions, 978-0811218221

**Optional Text:**

David Lehman, *Oxford Book of American Poetry*, Oxford, 978-0195162516

**Course Introduction and Objectives:**

LIT 376 offers an intensive study of U.S. Literature from 1900 to the present. The course covers a tremendously rich period of literary, political, and social history, a period that included two world wars, economic collapse, the dropping of the atomic bomb, the collapse of empires, the struggle for civil rights, and the erosion of traditional notions about race, class, gender, sexuality, and personal identity. Writers during this period sought to be increasingly experimental and avant-garde, even as literature itself developed into a cultural institution, a commercial commodity, and an intellectual antidote to movies, television, and popular culture. This course introduces you to a variety of works that self-consciously address questions of genre, history, and experimentation. It includes works of poetry composed of fragments, novels composed of other stories, and graphic texts that combine memoir, fiction, and the comic book.

Students who complete this course will be able to:

* Read independently and develop a strong sense of how aesthetic form and style intersect with content and theme;
* Identify and discuss major literary movements in 20th-century US Literature;
* Appreciate and de-code the conversations that take place between texts and the role these conversations play in creating different versions of literary history;
* Develop their own critical voice as they encounter both primary literary texts and secondary critical sources

**Schedule of Readings**

31 August: Hemingway, *In Our Time*; Strychacz, “*In Our Time*, Out of Season” (Canvas)

Stein, "Cezanne" (Canvas)

8 September: Eliot, *The Waste Land*; Eliot selections from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Hamlet" (114-121); Gardener, “*The Waste Land*: Paris 1922,” (72-89); Armstrong, “Eliot’s Waste Paper,” (275-280).  
 **\*\*Remember: TCNJ follows a Monday schedule on this Tuesday\*\***

14 September: The Poetry of Gertrude Stein, Robert Frost, and William Carlos Williams, Williams, “Burning the Christmas Greens,” "The Young Housewife," "Danse Russe," "Portrait of a Lady," "By the Road to the Contagious Hospital," "This Is Just to Say,” “The Red Wheelbarrow”; Frost, “Mending Wall,” “Home Burial,” “The Wood Pile,” “The Oven Bird,” “After Apple Picking,” “Desert Places,” “Design;” Stein, selections from *Tender Buttons* (Canvas)

21 September: The Harlem Renaissance: Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the poems of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay (Canvas)

28 September: Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, sections 1-2

**Paper #1 Due**

5 October: Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, sections 3-4

12 October: **No class: Fall Break**

19 October: Literature of the 1930s: West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (title novel only); Williams, “Proletarian Portrait," "The Yachts," “To Elsie”; Hughes, selections (Canvas)

26 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man*

2 November: The Literature of Selfhood at Mid-Century

Ginsberg, "Howl"; Plath, "Lady Lazarus," “Daddy,” and "The Arrival of the Bee Box"; and Baldwin, “Notes on a Native Son” (Canvas)

**Paper #2 Due**

9 November: Nabokov*, Lolita*

16 November: Roth, *The Plot Against America*

23 November: Morrison, *Sula*

**Thanksgiving Break**

30 November: Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

**2 December: Paper #3 Due by 5 pm**

TBA December: Final Exam

**Course Policies**

1. The success of this course depends on your keeping-up with the reading and participating in class. On some days I will take a firm hand in guiding you through the texts; on others, I will leave the discussions open to the class. Your attendance and participation are mandatory. After two absences (regardless of the reason), your participation grade will suffer. If circumstances arise which mandate a prolonged absence, please contact the Office of Student Life (771-2201) and provide me with appropriate documentation. TCNJ’s policy on academic absences is available on the web:  [http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134](http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9134" \t "_blank)
2. You will write three papers in this course. All essays must be typed or printed legibly on 8.5 x 11 white paper. They must be turned in during class on the date that they are due. I will reduce the grade by 10% for each 24 hour period a paper is late. Students must complete each assignment to pass the course.
3. All essays must be printed legibly on 8.5 x 11 white paper. They must be turned in during class on the date that they are due and also submitted to Canvas. I will reduce the grade by 10% for each 24 hour period a paper is late. Papers over 72 hours late risk failure, unless you’ve made prior arrangements with me.
4. The College of New Jersey prohibits students from using the same paper for two different courses *unless the student receives written permission from both instructors*. All work for this course must be done by you. Please avoid plagiarism! If you ever have questions about plagiarism or proper citation methods, please consult me. All cases of plagiarism will be referred to the Academic Integrity Officer of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. They will also result in a zero grade for the paper and/ or a failure in the course.  
     
   Academic dishonesty is any attempt by the student to gain academic advantage through dishonest means, to submit, as his or her own, work which has not been done by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment. Such dishonesty would include, but is not limited to: submitting as his/her own a project, paper, report, test, or speech copied from, partially copied, or paraphrased from the work of another (whether the source is printed, under copyright, or in manuscript form). Credit must be given for words quoted or paraphrased. The rules apply to any form of academic dishonesty, whether the work is graded or ungraded, group or individual, written or oral. TCNJ’s academic integrity policy is available on the web: <http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9394>
5. Final Exam: The course will culminate in a comprehensive final examination which will ask students to apply their knowledge of literary history to course texts. The Registrar will announce details on the time and place of the exam later in the semester. TCNJ’s Reading Days/ Final Exam policy is available on the web: [http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9136](http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9136" \t "_blank)
6. The Tutoring Center in Roscoe West Hall, Suite 101, is an excellent place to get help on your papers. Call The Writer's Place at 771-3325 or see the hours at <http://www.tcnj.edu/~tutoring/humanities/writing.html>.
7. Any student who has a documented disability and is in need of academic accommodations should notify me and contact the Office of Differing Abilities Services (609-771-2571) [http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu/](http://differingabilities.pages.tcnj.edu/" \t "_blank). Accommodations are individualized and in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992. TCNJ’s ADA policy is available on the web: [http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8082](http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=8082" \t "_blank)
8. The College of New Jersey Policy Prohibiting Discrimination in the Workplace/Educational Environment governs the college’s commitment to and expectations of having an environment that respects the diversity of all members of the campus community. The link to this policy is: [http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9122](http://policies.tcnj.edu/policies/digest.php?docId=9122" \t "_blank). Under this policy, forms of discrimination or harassment based upon specific protected categories are prohibited and will not be tolerated.  If you wish to report a concern, please contact Kerri Thompson Tillett, Chief Diversity Officer, at 771-3139, or via email at thompsok@tcnj.edu.
9. The breakdown in grading percentages is:  
     
    15% Paper 1

20% Paper 2

30% Paper 3

25% Final Exam

10% Class Participation

100% Total

9) The grading scale in this course incorporates the principle of “rounding up,” so further adjustments will not be made:

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| --- | --- |
| 100 - 92.6 % = A  92.5 - 89.6 %  = A-  89.5 - 86.6 % = B+  86.5 - 82.6 % = B  82.5 - 79.6 % = B- | 79.5 - 76.6 % = C+  76.5 - 72.6 % = C  72.5 - 69.6 % = C-  69.5 – 64.6 % = D  64.5-0 % = F |

10) A syllabus is a plan not a contract. While we will make every effort to follow this schedule, I reserve the right to alter the due dates of assignments, to clarify and modify the nature and length of assignments, and to include unannounced assessments in order to meet the educational goals of this course.

11) Literature gains some of its power from its ability to explore the extremes of human relationships. The writers in this course address a wide range of experiences that range from the reflective to the traumatic and from the socially acceptable to the morally grotesque. If you are anxious about your personal response to these works, you should consider whether this course is appropriate for you. My expectation is that every student will complete every one of the assigned readings and be prepared to listen to discussions about them in class.

12) Please feel free to come by my office if you have questions you’d like to ask about the class. The best way to contact me is by e-mail – [blake@tcnj.edu](mailto:blake@tcnj.edu). I check my mail regularly and expect you to do the same.

**LIT 376/ U.S. Literature Since 1900, Fall 2015**

**Department, School, and College Goals and Policies**

1) As one of the courses that meet the Literary History requirements in the TCNJ English major, LIT 376/ U.S. Literature since 1900provides a rigorous survey of a historical time period. The course will meet the following English Department Learning Outcomes:

* (1) Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with a range of critical, generic, and literary traditions (including recent theoretical approaches) that shape – and are shaped by – literary discourses and texts of particular periods or movements.
* (3) Students will be able to identify historically specific elements relevant to a particular text.
* (4) Students will be able to read a literary work and characterize its main aesthetic, structural, and rhetorical strategies in an argumentative, thesis-driven essay.

2) As part of the curriculum of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, LIT 376 meets the following Learning Goals devised by Dean Benjamin Rifkin and presented to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education:

* (1) Written Communication
* (5) Critical Analysis and Reasoning:  Ability to critique the arguments of others in the discipline and the construction of one’s own arguments in the discipline, using data/evidence as a focus of instruction and/or the ability to analyze linguistic and cultural patterns
* (7) Interpretation of Language and Symbol
* (12) Understanding the power of words
* (14) Sensitivity to historicity of texts

3) This course meets 160 minutes a week but carries 1 full unit of credit toward the completion of an undergraduate degree. Students enrolled in this course are expected to take substantial responsibility outside the classroom for their own learning experience and to complete assignments at a level of excellence that significantly exceeds what is required at many other colleges and universities, including at the College itself prior to 2006.

4) Because thestudents in this course are assigned additional learning tasks that make the semester's learning experience more deeply engaged and rigorous, no additional classroom time or space is needed.

**Grading Rubric**

Grading papers is not a precise business, and my comments will be holistic. I do not give or take off a fixed number of points for particular strengths or weaknesses. Sometimes an overwhelmingly good or bad performance in one area outweighs other factors. The following table, therefore, should be read as a guideline only. It breaks down the course’s grading criteria into four categories: argument, evidence, style, and mechanics. These are not, however, entirely discrete categories, and in fact, your performance in one area will often shape your performance in another. For example, readers will not be able to appreciate your argument if they have to struggle to understand the sentences that convey it. If you think it would be helpful, though, you are welcome to bring a copy of this rubric to office hours and ask me to show how your graded paper fits into these categories.

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| CRITERIA  GRADE | ARGUMENT | EVIDENCE | STYLE | MECHANICS/ GRAMMAR |
| A | Argument is focused, clearly stated at the beginning, and developed logically throughout the paper to a conclusion. Paragraphs organized around concepts with strong topic sentences. Argument is bold, fresh, and compelling | Extensive and varied factual evidence supports argument. No significant omissions, irrelevancies, or errors of fact. Quoted and paraphrased material is introduced fluidly, with varying and helpful framing. | Excellent prose style: clear, elegant, persuasive. Language and phrasing are precise and, in some cases, memorable. Writer has an identifiable and coherent voice. | Minimal errors in grammar, spelling, etc. |
| B | Argument relatively clear and focused but may fail to develop to a precise, ambitious conclusion. Topic sentences advance different stages of the argument. Papers in the B-/C+ range generally have a routine, pedestrian argument or one that re-hashes class discussion rather than breaking new ground. | Generally good evidence, but some lack of variety of sources, errors of omission, and/ or irrelevant data. Quoted and paraphrased material is framed properly, though at times mechanically. | Clear, serviceable prose that does not obscure understanding. Writer has used varying sentence patterns, although the sentences lack the rhythm and precision of an A paper. Writer’s voice is emerging. | A few errors ranging from typos and spelling mistakes to the inappropriate use of the passive voice. |
| C | Argument is vague, general and implied rather than explicitly stated; it does not lead to a well-developed conclusion. When organized, paragraphs and topic sentences emphasize sequence (time, scenes, etc) rather than concepts. Frequent and unnecessary plot summary. These papers often “recognize” an image or thematic pattern and “display” that pattern, but do not advance an argument. | Some evidence, but excessive dependence on a single scene or source, substantial omissions or irrelevancies, and/or minor errors of fact. Quoted and paraphrased materials are simply dropped into the text without attribution or framing. | Understandable writing, but sometimes vague, wooden, or choppy. Sentences are haphazardly constructed, giving the impression that the writer has little control. | Substantial errors which detract from overall effect of paper or suggest a wavering commitment to the assignment.\* |
| D | Argument is barely discernible and/or very poorly developed. | Very little, or largely irrelevant evidence, and/or substantial errors of fact. Problems in quoted and paraphrased material ranging from misquotations to passages that arouse suspicions of plagiarism. | Writing is confusing, vague, and/or hard to understand. | Frequent and serious errors which make paper hard to understand or suggest a profound lack of commitment to the assignment.\* |
| F | No discernible argument or paper totally digresses from argument. | Virtually no relevant evidence and/or very serious errors of fact. Problems in quoted and paraphrased material that indicate a case of either intentional or unintentional plagiarism | Writing is nearly unintelligible. | Massive errors which render paper nearly unintelligible.\* |

\*Note: my response to your paper will not be aimed at correcting your grammar or mechanics, but any paper in which these mistakes are plentiful will not receive a high grade, regardless of the quality of the argument and evidence. Students who clearly do not understand a grammatical or stylistic principle (passive voice, comma-splice, etc) will not be markedly penalized. However, once I have explained the principle (in class, in office hours, or in the paper’s annotations), the repetition of these errors in future assignments will dramatically reduce your grade.