

Syllabus for
English 436—Contemporary Literature
3 Credit Hours
Spring 2007

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of contemporary literature of the English language with an emphasis on contemporary American fiction.

Prerequisite: None

II. COURSE GOALS

The students will recognize the major themes and styles of American fiction writers from the 1930s to the present. The modern masters, such as William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, who are presented in the survey course in American Literature, will not be emphasized here. Attention will be paid to authors who were neglected at first, but who have influenced later American writers. The student will also come to know of major writers and of Southern African-American writers. Throughout the study, the students will be learning to evaluate literature morally and aesthetically and to relate the themes of the literature to their Christian faith. They will be directed to the critical theories of such Christian writers as William Lynch and Dorothy L. Sayers. The survey of short stories by contemporary writers will let the students become aware of those good authors who are publishing work currently.

III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS COURSE

A. Terminal Objectives

1. As a result of successfully completing this course, the student will be able to write well-developed and fully supported essays on any of the following topics:
 - a. America as a symbolic place in modern literature.
 - b. The struggle of values in modern society.
 - c. The technique of the absurd.
 - d. Authority and the individual in modern American literature.
 - e. The movement of grace in modern American literature.
 - f. What is a Christian Aesthetic?
 - g. The image of the fall in modern American literature.
 - h. Human freedom imaged in the characters of Flannery O'Connor.
 - i. Walker Percy's affirmation of value.
 - j. Absurdity and the establishment of value in the writing of Heller and Ellison.
2. The student will demonstrate an ability to analyze the styles of the authors studied by writing brief essays which deal with specific passages taken from the novels. These analyses need to include such elements as structures, imagery, setting, characterization, theme, and symbolism.
3. The student will be able to identify the major philosophical attitudes toward life illustrated by the authors studied.
4. The student will be able to give examples of grace, redemption from social, psychological, or spiritual emptiness, operating in the various works studied.

B. Unit Objectives

1. Unit I
 - a. The Definite
The student will be able to analyze various attitudes toward the definite,

- naming them as the various "imaginings" discussed by William Lynch in Christ and Apollo.
- b. Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises
The student will be able to do the following:
- (1) Support an interpretation of the books, based on Lynch's categories in Christ and Apollo and on the archetype of the "American Adam, in the New World Garden."
2. Unit II
- a. Time
The student will be able to define several attitudes toward time found in the modern imagination.
- b. William Faulkner, The Bear
- c. James Agee, The Morning Watch
The student will be able to do the following:
- (1) Show the way the story achieves meaning on several levels.
 - (2) List the major images of the story, describing their symbolic function.
 - (3) Compare the "moment of grace" in this work with similar moments in Flannery O'Connor's fiction.
 - (4) Describe the function of time and liturgy as it informs the three parts of this novel.
- d. Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon
The student will be able to do the following:
- (1) Explain the epigram at the beginning of the book in terms of the images of soaring (flying) and naming.
 - (2) Explain the various kinds of names, and their significances, given to places and people in the text.
 - (3) Trace the character development of Macon Dead, Pilate Dead and Milkman.
 - (4) Write an essay showing the development of the story in its two major settings, showing how the development of plot and character relates to the main character's search for knowledge, love, and "roots."
3. Unit III
- a. The Univocal and the Equivocal
The student will be able to explain and illustrate Lynch's definition of the univocal and the equivocal imaginings.
- b. Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
The student will be able to do the following:
- (1) Discuss the movement of the book in terms of the search of identity.
 - (2) Relate the concepts of equivocality, univocality, and analogy to the structure of the book.
 - (3) Explain how this book is also structured on the "fall from innocence, outcast from Paradise" theme.
- c. Joseph Heller, Catch 22
The student will be able to:
- (1) Illustrate Heller's satiric humor by discussing examples from the book. The method and purpose of the humor will be explained.
 - (2) Analyze the relative success or fortune of the various characters in sustaining a sense of meaning in their environment.
 - (3) Explain the purpose of the absurd in this book.
4. Unit IV
- a. The Analogical and Theological Imagination

The student will be able to explain how the analogical and theological imaginations can interpret reality more comprehensively than can either the univocal or the equivocal views.

b. Henry Roth, Call It Sleep

The student will be able to do the following:

- (1) Explain the book in terms of its "Eden" or "Golden Land" motif.
- (2) Show how image of light and dark help carry the meaning of the stories.
- (3) Analyze the structure of the novel.
- (4) List the major steps of David's initiation.
- (5) Comment on the significance of the various characters' use of language.
- (6) Discuss the structure of the book, and its resolution of tension, in terms of analogical insights.

c. John Updike, selected stories

The student will be able to do the following:

- (1) Analyze a selection from these stories, commenting on the qualities that make his style distinctive.
- (2) Discuss the author's major themes in these stories (such as the initiation theme, the affirmation of values themes) demonstrating how the themes are supported by the story structure and images.
- (3) Show how the story "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Lot, A Traded Car" attains a unity of theme based on related images.
- (4) Explain how images employed by Updike illustrate transformation of meaning based upon analogical relationships.

5. Unit V - The Christian Imagination

a. Flannery O'Connor, Complete Stories

The student will be able to do the following:

- (1) "Revelation"
 - (a) Suggest how this story arrives at its meaning in a way similar to the method of parables.
 - (b) Explain how O'Connor uses the two settings of the story's action, the doctor's office, and the hog pen, to illumine Mrs. Turpin's changing view of herself.
 - (c) Show the relationship between Mrs. Turpin's social structures and the order of persons in her vision. From this, he will be able to define how the story develops a particular kind of irony.
 - (d) Given the story's first three paragraphs, identify the narrative technique employed, and suggest how O'Connor develops the tone of the story.
 - (e) From these same paragraphs, identify at least four methods of characterization used by the author.
- (2) "The Displaced Person"
 - (a) Select the images of the story that most clearly portray the pride of Mrs. Shortly and Mrs. McIntyre.
 - (b) Given the above characters, write a definition of pride, supported by concrete attitudes and actions of the story.
 - (c) List at least 4 persons who fit the title as a "displaced person," discriminating the various ways they are "displaced."
 - (d) Given the various responses elicited by the peacock, show how O'Connor uses these responses as signs of the character's moral vision.

- (e) Write a paragraph discussing the validity of Mrs. Shortly's religious vision, evaluating her interpretation of it, and showing its relation to the scene drawn at her death.
 - (f) Give an example of a dialogue between the priest and Mrs. McIntyre which shows them to be speaking on such differing levels of intention as to fail to communicate. He will be able to suggest how this dialogue method produces, for the reader, an ironic perspective.
 - (g) Support, with details from the story, various persons or objects that are analogues of Christ, or "Christ figures."
 - (h) Given the following statement from O'Connor's essay, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" suggest various levels of meaning in the story: "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation. The medieval commentators on Scripture found three kinds of meaning in the literal level of the sacred text: one they called allegorical, in which one fact pointed to another; one they called tropological, or moral, which had to do with what should be done; and one they called anagogical, which had to do with the Divine life and our participation in it. Although this was a method applied to Biblical exegesis, it was also an attitude toward all of creation, and a way of reading nature which included most possibilities, and it is this enlarged view of the human scene that the fiction writer has to cultivate if he or she is ever going to write stories that have any chance of becoming a permanent part of literature."
 - (i) Given an explanation of the levels of meaning found in scripture by medieval exegetes (1.) literal, (2.) allegorical, (3.) tropological (moral, existential), (4.) anagogic (the heavenly sense, relating to "last things"), explore the multiple significations inherent in the literal level of this story.
 - (j) Write a brief essay suggesting the significance of the setting of this story, especially focusing on the relation of the setting and the title.
- (3) "Greenleaf"
- The student will be able to do the following:
- (a) Given the first two paragraphs of the story, trace the various symbolic lines developed by the image clusters first introduced there.
 - (b) Show how these various symbolic meanings associated with the bull, and images related to him, develop through the story to form a coherent action with moral and spiritual significance.
 - (c) Demonstrate how the story is structured in terms of time, and the significance of all the images connected with the flow of time through the day (especially the sun and the sky).
 - (d) Discuss the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the

- meanings developed by the sense of place in the story, show how Mrs. May's pride is imaged in terms of place.
- (e) Identify some significance of the names of the characters, focusing particularly on "Greenleaf" and "May."
 - (f) Show the ironic effect rendered in the situational separating and imagistic relating of Mrs. May and Mrs. Greenleaf.
 - (g) Given the last two paragraphs of the story, support a position about meaning of the ending.
 - (h) Given statements from O'Connor's essays about the use of violence in her fiction, discuss whether the violence of this story is in any way justified.
- (4) "The Artificial Nigger"
- The student will be able to do the following:
- (a) Given the opening paragraph, write a description of the suggested spiritual and psychological state of Mr. Head.
 - (b) Given a chance to examine the meaning of the relationship of Virgil to Dante in The Divine Comedy and Raphael to Tobias in Tobit, explain how these identities assumed by Mr. Head become ironical.
 - (c) Given a description of Dante's vision of the "moral geography" of hell, trace how the story progresses along a similar route and. cite supporting evidence from the story for any thesis developed about the city as a kind of entrance to hell.
 - (d) Given the weight and fortune given by the scale, show how O'Connor employs both irony and foreshadowing in this device.
 - (e) Identify and evaluate the respective "sins" committed by Mr. Head and Nelson in the story.
 - (f) List and illustrate the methods of characterization used most effectively by O'Connor in this story. The pride of Mr. Head and Nelson, and their mutuality in sin and forgiveness, independence and dependence, should be focused on.
 - (g) Draw a visual image that best illustrates the structure of the story.
 - (h) Identify the statements which best reveal the despair of Nelson and Mr. Head.
 - (i) Write a brief paragraph showing why the confrontation with the statue of the Negro is an effective, or ineffective, stimulus for the radical change suggested in the characters.
 - (j) Given the last three paragraphs of the story, compare the images there with those of the opening paragraph to determine if anything of significance has happened to the characters.
- (5) "Parker's Back"
- The student will be able to do the following:
- (a) Illustrate, with textual citations, the reasons for Parker's desire for tattoos; suggest the spiritual significance found in this desire, and locate the textual places where this desire is imaged.

- (b) Suggest various meanings of the title.
 - (c) Given a chance to read the book of Obadiah and the speeches of Elihu in Job, suggest reasons for O'Connor's choice of these names for Parker.
 - (d) Relate the images given in O'Connor's telling of the tractor accident with some Biblical stories.
 - (e) Suggest the meaning of Parker's telling his name to Sarah Ruth, the significance of his claiming this name at the end of the story, and the relation of these "name claiming" acts to (1) his desire for the tattoos and the human harmony they suggest to him and (2) the meaning of the sacrament of baptism, where his name was given him.
 - (f) Discuss the validity of Parker as a "Christ bearer," comparing his witness to that of Sarah Ruth, whose words seem to mark her as the "Christian" of the story.
- b. Love In the Ruins, Walker Percy
- The student will be able to discuss the following questions:
- (1) What are the meanings of the word "ruins" in the novel's title?
 - (2) What is the technique used which enables the novelist to comment on today's culture while the action takes place in the future?
 - (3) What is the chief catastrophe that Doctor Thomas More foresees?
 - (4) What is the significance to the theme of this novel of Yeats' line, "The Center Will Not Hold"?
 - (5) Explain the sudden peacefulness of the resolution of the end of this book.
 - (6) What significance does the setting of the book have?
 - (7) How does Percy rely on allusion to the past to establish the value systems of this book?
6. Unit VI - Toward a Christian Aesthetic
- Objectives:
- a. The student will be able to define analogy, explaining why it is a valid way of knowing within the Christian worldview, and will be able to show the implications of this for knowledge of God (theology), man (psychology).
 - b. The student will be able to diagram how the Trinity is mirrored in the thinking process of man, and the creative process of art and will be able to describe how art may be evaluated according to a "trinitarian" pattern.
 - (1) Leif Enger, Peace Like a River
 - (2) Annie Dillard, Holy the Firm

IV. TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

Required textbooks:

Dillard, Annie. Holy the Firm. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 1988.

Ellison, Ralph. Invisible Man. Westminister: Random House, Inc., 1994.

Enger, Leif. Peace Like a River. New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2001.

Faulkner, William. Three Famous Short Novels. Knopf Publishing Group, 1958.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Great Gatsby. Penguin, 2003

Heller, Joseph. Catch-22. Old Tappan: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Hemingway, Ernest. The Sun Also Rises. Simon and Schuster, 1995.

Morrison, Toni. Song of Solomon. East Rutherford: Penguin/Putnam, Inc., 1977.

O'Connor, Flannery. Complete Stories. Gordonsville: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux.
Percy, Walker. Love in the Ruins. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977.
Roth, Henry. Call It Sleep. Gordonsville: Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 1991.
Updike, John. Pigeon Feathers. New York: Random House, 1996.

V. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. University Policies and Procedures

1. Attendance at each class or laboratory is mandatory at Oral Roberts University. Excessive absences can reduce a student's grade or deny credit for the course.
2. Students taking a late exam because of an unauthorized absence are charged a late exam fee.
3. Students and faculty at Oral Roberts University must adhere to all laws addressing the ethical use of others' materials, whether it is in the form of print, video, multimedia, or computer software. By submitting an assignment in any form, the student gives permission for the assignment to be checked for plagiarism, either by submitting the work for electronic verification or by other means.
4. Final exams cannot be given before their scheduled times. Students need to check the final exam schedule before planning return flights or other events at the end of the semester.
5. Students are to be in compliance with University, school, and departmental policies regarding ePortfolio requirements. Students should consult the ePortfolio handbooks for requirements regarding general education and the students' majors.
 - a. The penalty for not submitting electronically or for incorrectly submitting an ePortfolio artifact is a zero for that assignment.
 - b. By submitting an assignment, the student gives permission for the assignment to be assessed electronically.

B. Department Policies and Procedures

1. **Tardies**—Tardies are an inconvenience to the other class members and the professor, and they prevent the late student from obtaining maximum value from the class. Therefore, excessive tardies may adversely affect the semester grade. It is to the student's advantage to make sure that the professor is informed immediately following the close of the class that the student was tardy and not absent. It is not the professor's responsibility to stop the class to mark the tardy; the student is the one responsible for conveying that information immediately following that class, not at a later time.
2. **Incompletes**—As stated in the University catalog, incompletes are granted only for "good cause," such as extended hospitalization, long-term illness, or a death in the family. Students must petition for an incomplete using the form available in the English department. Very few incompletes are granted.
3. **Late Work**
 - a. The student is responsible for obtaining class assignments and material covered during an absence. All work must be completed as scheduled. Late work may result in a lower grade. An absence is not an excuse for turning in late work or for being unprepared with assignments for the class following the absence. Computer or printer malfunction does not constitute an excuse for late work; students should have their work prepared in time to ensure that they can get it proofread, edited, and printed prior to the instructor's due date. Any test taken late incurs a \$15 late-test fee. These responsibilities assist the student in professional development.

- b. Each instructor has his or her own late-work policy that is given to students at the beginning of a course. Instructors use their own judgment in accepting late work resulting from all other absences. In cases where these absences can be anticipated, such as for non-University sponsored mission trips, the work should normally be submitted prior to the absence. In unanticipated absences, such as sickness or family crises, the instructor should be notified as soon as possible and agreement reached on due dates and possible penalties.
 4. **Attendance**—Because unavoidable circumstances can prevent perfect attendance, each student is allowed to miss class the number of times per week a class meets. This allowance is for absences such as illness, personal business, and emergency. The student may consider this "sick leave." If a student has absences in excess of this number, the earned grade for the course may be affected. A student who leaves class before dismissal may be marked absent. Extended illnesses are handled on an individual basis and require verification from a doctor.
 5. **Administratively Excused Absences**—Only absences that are required by approved University activities are given administrative excuses. Students who must miss class for University-sponsored activities must follow these procedures:
 - a. inform the professor before the event and make arrangement for the work to be submitted prior to the absence or at a mutually agreed upon deadline.
 - b. present an administrative excuse form with appropriate signatures when he or she returns to class. Doctors' or nurses' notes, or letters from groups sponsoring mission trips or activities do not qualify a student for an administratively excused absence.
 - c. obtain information covered during an absence. All work must be completed as scheduled.
 - d. not commit to class presentation (oral reports, speeches, group presentations, etc.) on a date that the student will be gone. Makeup work is not permitted if the student voluntarily committed to a performance on the date of an administratively excused absence.
 6. **Extra Credit**—Students should not expect extra credit to help raise a grade.
 7. **Plagiarism** – Each student attending Oral Roberts University is required to do his or her own academic work and must not inappropriately collaborate with other students on assignments. Students must document all sources and ideas that are not their own original information by following correct MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation procedures. Failure to do this produces a plagiarized paper, which results in an F for the paper. Photocopies of sources must be turned in with research papers. Flagrant cheating results in an F for the course.
 8. **ePortfolio**
 - a. Compliance - To be listed as "compliant" the student must correctly submit electronically the artifact for assessment. "Noncompliant" means the student has either not submitted or incorrectly submitted the artifact electronically. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he or she is in compliance. Compliance is verified by checking for the assessment results in the student's ePortfolio. If there is a problem, the student may receive notification by the professor/assessor through the student's ORU email address.
 - b. Requirements - The ePortfolio requirements for this class are listed in the General Education ePortfolio Handbook.

C. Course Policies and Procedures

Evaluation Procedures

1. Grading system—The final grade is determined chiefly on the basis of the quality of the critical essays required of all students. The final examination will count approximately 20% toward the final grade. The short quizzes are normally given on the first day a book is scheduled for discussion.
2. Theme Evaluations—The term grade is determined by the students' performance in the examination of their essays. The following is a general guide to writing the brief essays:
 - a. Content. The essay should be the result of careful reading and thinking. The first and last steps should be the forming and testing of a thesis sentence that guides and controls the argument. The thesis should be well thought out, soundly supported by the text and, therefore, not eccentric.
 - (1) Validity. I will question the thesis: Is the argument in general and specifically to be found inherent in the text? Has the student, by omission of important points (or by distortion) seriously misinterpreted? Is the thesis supported by a logical and a clearly stated progression of ideas? While no one interpretation may be the correct one, not all are equally valid—so a carefully reasoned and expressed argument will support the validity of the thesis.
 - (2) Focus. Is the thesis limited enough so that the student can deal with it satisfactorily in about 450 words? On the other hand, is it significant enough to suggest the meaning within the whole of the work being analyzed? Does each sentence lend itself to the progression of the thesis; is each paragraph a crucial development?
 - (3) Unity. Does the essay convey the one thesis statement? Do the parts cohere to form a whole? Is any part unnecessary?
 - (4) Development. Are the steps of analysis or argumentation following a clear pattern? Does the student shift strategies or structuring plans? Does the student achieve a clear introduction, solid body, and convincing conclusion?
 - (5) Proportion. Are the various aspects of the thesis presented in accordance to their proportionate importance? Does the student spend too much time on one point, neglecting another of equal importance?
 - (6) Support. The points should be supported by the text. Often quotations of varying length are needed. Effective introduction and incorporation of such material may be difficult. Observe how critics have dealt with this problem in their own essays and emulate them to avoid an awkward "cut and paste" tone.
 - (7) Organization. Some principle by which the student structures and presents ideas should be apparent from the opening of the essay. This principle, once established, should not be violated except for a very good (and clearly explained) reason.
 - (8) Coherence. Do the statements lead to a firm grasp upon the thesis? Is any argument or example misplaced, illogical, irrelevant? Are transitions made smoothly?
 - b. Style
 - (1) Diction. Avoid jargon and slang. The vocabulary ought not call attention to itself; it should be, as far as possible, a transparent medium of the subject. The essay should convey a sense of the student's voice, involved and convinced. The level should be formal, however, except for occasional use of other levels (e.g., the colloquial) for a special effect. Use of first person point of view and the personal pronoun "I" is acceptable (but avoid overuse of "I"). The words should be clear, functional, and not ostentatious.

- (2) Rhythm. Try to vary sentence length. Avoid using a monotonous sentence or phrase pattern. Paragraph length should also vary somewhat—a collection of one-sentence paragraphs is not acceptable.
- (3) Audience. The student should write for his/her peers. Think of the reader as one who is literate, interested, but not overly familiar with the work being discussed. A brief orientation to the work, with some paraphrase or description, is usually necessary, but avoid writing an entire essay that simply paraphrases the work being discussed.
- (4) Tone. If the student is bored with the subject, or confused by it, the tone of the essay will reflect that, and the reader will respond with boredom or confusion. The student cannot write well about nothing, so work on the topic until there is something to say. Communication, incorporating all the aspects covered above, will result rather naturally from the student's own degree of involvement. The student should not affect a tone that is condescending to the reader; likewise, do not affect a tone assuming "chumminess" or "cuteness."

3. ePortfolio Requirement

There is no ePortfolio requirement for this class.

VI. COURSE CALENDAR

Unit 1. The Definite	
Weeks 1-2	Readings: Hemingway, <u>The Sun Also Rises</u> Fitzgerald, <u>The Great Gatsby</u>
Unit II. Time	
Week 3	Readings: Faulkner, <u>The Bear</u>
Week 4	Lecture: Agee, <u>The Morning Watch</u> Writing: Essay #1, on prose style assigned.
Week 5	Readings: Morrison, <u>Song of Solomon</u>
Unit III. The Univocal and the Equivocal.	
Weeks 6-7	Reading: Ellison, <u>Invisible Man</u>
Week 8	Reading: Heller, <u>Catch 22</u>
Unit IV. The Analogical Imagination and the Theological Imagination	
Week 9	Readings: Updike, Updike, <u>Pigeon Feathers</u>
Weeks 10-11	Lecture: Roth, <u>Call It Sleep</u> Writing: Essay #3 - imagery
Unit V. Christian Imagination	
Week 12	Readings: O'Connor, stories Writing: Essay #4, symbolism
Week 13	Readings: Percy, <u>Love in the Ruins</u>
Week 14	Annie Dillard, <u>Holy the Firm</u>
Week 15	Leif Enger, <u>Peace Like a River</u>

Course Inventory for ORU's Student Learning Outcomes
English 436—Contemporary Literature
Spring 2007

This course contributes to the ORU student learning outcomes as indicated below:

Significant Contribution – Addresses the outcome directly and includes targeted assessment.

Moderate Contribution – Addresses the outcome directly or indirectly and includes some assessment.

Minimal Contribution – Addresses the outcome indirectly and includes little or no assessment.

No Contribution – Does not address the outcome.

The Student Learning Glossary at <http://ir.oru.edu/doc/glossary.pdf> defines each outcome and each of the proficiencies/capacities.

OUTCOMES & Proficiencies/Capacities		Significant Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Minimal Contribution	No Contribution
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1	Outcome #1 – Spiritually Alive Proficiencies/Capacities				
1A	Biblical knowledge		X		
1B	Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit		X		
1C	Evangelistic capability			X	
1D	Ethical behavior	X			

2	Outcome #2 – Intellectually Alert Proficiencies/Capacities				
2A	Critical thinking	X			
2B	Information literacy		X		
2C	Global & historical perspectives	X			
2D	Aesthetic appreciation	X			
2E	Intellectual creativity	X			

3	Outcome #3 – Physically Disciplined Proficiencies/Capacities				
3A	Healthy lifestyle				X
3B	Physically disciplined lifestyle				X

4	Outcome #4 – Socially Adept Proficiencies/Capacities				
4A	Communication skills	X			
4B	Interpersonal skills		X		
4C	Appreciation of cultural & linguistic differences	X			
4D	Responsible citizenship		X		
4E	Leadership capacity		X		

(Revised 1/15/04)