WRITING THE AMERICAN SOUTH: Formal Innovation and Historical Change
Junior Tutorial Seminar | Kathryn Roberts

This course tracks major currents in literature of the U.S. South in the period known as the “Southern Renaissance,” roughly between World War I and the Cold War. Reading fiction, poetry, autobiography, drama, and some experimental cross-genre combinations, we’ll explore the ways that writers born in the South represented their native land in a time of intense political and social conflict, aesthetic experimentation, rapid but uneven economic modernization, and emerging political consciousness and demands for rights among African Americans, women, the working class, and sexual minorities. The course demands rigorous close reading of difficult, sometimes lengthy texts, and an active engagement with critical debates surrounding Southern Literature.

In addition to familiarizing you with the major themes and formal variety of Southern literature, the course will walk you through the steps of conceiving, planning, and executing a junior essay that engages intelligently in a critical conversation, thus preparing you to write a rigorous senior thesis.

Requirements

- Active, thoughtful participation in discussion 15%
- Brief written assignments in preparation for the final essay 15%
- Presentation framing discussion for one class meeting 10%
- Annotated bibliography and 2-page prospectus 10%
- ‘Starter’ and Full drafts of junior essay 10%
- 20 page junior essay 25%

Texts to Purchase

Jean Toomer, Cane – Liveright
Erskine Caldwell, Tobacco Road – Univ. of Georgia Press
William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom - Vintage
James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men - Mariner
Richard Wright, Black Boy – Harper Perennial
Zora Neale Hurston, Dust Tracks on a Road – Harper Perennial
Robert Penn Warren, All the King’s Men - Mariner
Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (any edition)

Provisional Topics, Readings, and Schedule
(tentative and subject to change based on student interests!)

Unit I: Contesting Southern Identity

[Jan. 25] WEEK 1: The Agrarians and the New Criticism
Allen Tate, “Ode to the Confederate Dead”
Katherine Anne Porter, “Old Mortality”
“Introduction” from I’ll Take My Stand
Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, from Understanding Fiction

*Incredible Shrinking Summary Assignment: due by email to Kathryn [Saturday 8pm]
[Feb. 1] WEEK 2: Realism and Southern Poverty
Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*
William Faulkner, “Barn Burning”
Karen A. Keely, “Poverty, Sterilization, and Eugenics in Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*”

*Short Paper: due by email to Kathryn [Saturday 8pm]*

[Feb. 8] WEEK 3: Race and Autobiography
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (selections)
Tanya Y. Kam, “Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails: The Body Speaks Resistance in *Dust Tracks on a Road*”

*Individual conferences with Tutor this week about Short Paper

*Topic warm-up assignment: write-up due by email to Kathryn [Saturday 8pm]*

[Feb. 15] WEEK 4: Library Consultation with Odile Harter

[Feb. 22] WEEK 5: Southern Anti-Fascism
Robert Penn Warren, *All the King’s Men*
Robert Brinkmeyer, from *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism*
*250-word blog post

*3-4 Annotations for Bibliography due (by email to Kathryn)*

Unit II: Formal Innovation in Southern Literature

[Feb. 29] WEEK 6: Lyrical Modernism and Racial Violence
Jean Toomer, *Cane*
*Student-led discussion 1
*250-word blog post (presenter 1 excepted)

*3-4 Annotations for Bibliography due (by email to Kathryn)*

[March 7] WEEK 7: Anti-Documentary and Depression Photography
James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
*Student-led discussion 2
*250-word blog post (presenter 2 excepted)

* 2-page Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due (by email to Kathryn)*

*Individual conferences with tutor this week about Prospectus*

[March 14] SPRING BREAK
(Read *Absalom, Absalom!*!!!)

*Prospectus revisions due posted to website

[March 21] WEEK 8: The Past in the Present: Memory and Modernism
William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*
*Student-led discussion 3
*250-word blog post (presenter 3 excepted)

**Unit III: Southern “Gothic”**

[March 28] WEEK 9: Bizarre Love Triangles: the Neo-Folk Tale
First 30 min: in-class Prospectus Conference
Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*
Carson McCullers, “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature”
*250-word blog post

*Starter draft of junior essay due by email to Kathryn (10-15 pages of your first draft)

[April 4] WEEK 10: Queer Dramas
Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
Michael Bibler, “A Tenderness Which Was Uncommon’: Homosexuality, Narrative and the Southern Plantation in Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*”
*250-word blog post

[April 11] WEEK 11: No Seminar Meeting, individual conferences with tutor

*Complete draft of junior essay due Tuesday, April 12

[April 18] WEEK 12: God and the Grotesque in the Southern Short Story
Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “Good Country People”
Eudora Welty, “Moon Lake”
*250-word blog post

[April 25] WEEK 13: Open Week (readings decided by students)
May 3 or May 4 (4-6:30 PM Thompson Room)

*5-minute conference paper presentations based on Junior Essay

*Junior Essay due in hard copy Tuesday, May 12 (Kathryn’s English Department mailbox)