

Máster en Estudios Textuales y Culturales en Lengua Inglesa

60704 - Main Trends in Contemporary U.s. fiction

Course 2010 - 2011

Curso: 1, Semestre: 2, Créditos: 7.5

Basic information

Teachers

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Recommendations to attend this course

The main aim of this course is the study and practice of critical and textual analysis in the context of contemporary US fiction and its relation to English-speaking culture. The course will contemplate the ongoing debate on the role of the human being in contemporary US American fiction and globalizing culture, paying more detailed attention to its ideological implications, namely the role of the posthuman being and globalization politics. On a practical basis, the course offers students the possibility to improve their skills in the use of English in a scholarly and critical environment.

This course complements other optional subjects offered in the second semester, especially the ones devoted to literary, film and cultural issues.

Course Schedule and Deadlines

Presentation and discussion of the theoretical approaches included in the program and application of the main tenets of these approaches to the analysis of various types of narrative texts (see course planning). 1:30 hours per week.

Group analysis of a selection of texts from the perspective of the critical approaches and methods presented in the theory sessions (see course planning). 1:30 hours per week.

Presentation of the 3,000 words essay: last day of the second semester.

Home

Learning outcomes that define this course

The student, in order to pass the course, will have to show her/his competence in the following skills:

1:

The student can use the basic critical tools to understand and analyze US American texts.

2:

The student is capable of testing the explanatory power of the most relevant critical approaches to texts through their application to a corpus of US American literary and cultural texts in English.

3: The student is capable of developing skills in the use of English in a scholarly and critical environment.

4: The student can provide a critical response to USA literary texts and films.

Introduction

Brief presentation of the course

The course offers an introduction to some of the most relevant notions about the US postmodern and posthumanist understanding of the self within the present globalized civilization. Close analysis of a selection of US American texts in English from the various theoretical perspectives presented to the students.

E-learning platform

When registered in the course, students are expected to access and consult, on a regular basis, its webpage at <http://moodle.unizar.es/> From there, students may download additional information about the course program, learning methodologies, headlines and powerpoint presentations for each unit in the course, as well as supplementary bibliography

Competences

General aims of the course

The expected results of the course respond to the following general aims

The main aim of this course is to provide students with an introduction to some of the most relevant approaches and topics that study the role of the individual in contemporary US American society and the new versions of the self brought about by different factors since the 1960s: poststructuralist theory, anthropology, science, technology, and media. Theory will be tested by the close analysis of a selection of literary texts and films in English.

The specific aims of this subject are the following:

- 1) To provide the students with basic critical tools to understand and analyze the selected corpus
- 2) To familiarize the students with the most relevant critical approaches to literary and cultural texts
- 3) To test the explanatory power of these approaches through their application to a corpus of US American texts in English
- 4) To improve the students' skills in the use of English in a scholarly and critical environment
- 5) To reinforce the students' critical response to literary and cultural texts.

Context/Importance of the course for the master degree

"Main trends in contemporary US fiction" belongs into the branch of different courses in the degree that focus their attention in recent fiction written in English by evaluating its response to contemporary ideologies and the problems they generate. More specifically, the course centers on US American fiction and texts and on their influence/response to recent issues referred to globalization and the role and borders of the individual human being.

After completing the course, the student will be competent in the following skills:

1: Developing and applying original ideas in a professional as well as in a research context, especially related to

the background of USA values and beliefs and globalized culture.

2: Understanding and applying acquired knowledge to solve problems related to professional and social contexts as well as to broader multidisciplinary contexts.

3: Being able to connect and relate knowledge from different subjects

4: Expressing informed critical views and provide conclusions in the form of written essays and oral presentations, in clear and appropriate English, aimed at both specialized and non-specialized audiences.

5: Being able to handle complex information and apply the proper methodology and frameworks

6: Finally, after acquiring the required critical and methodological skills, students are expected to possess the ability to carry out a piece of research in an autonomous way.

Relevance of the skills acquired in the course

The proposed aims of this course are crucial to provide students with a sound theoretical and methodological background that will allow them to conduct research in the field of US American literature and cultural studies successfully. Similarly, the specific aims of this subject are essential skills to carry out the research process (i.e. using critical tools for understanding and analyzing literary and cultural texts in English, applying critical approaches to the selected corpus, and developing a critical response to the corpus).

Such aims will result in the student's ability:

- to develop and apply original ideas in a professional as well as in a research context in the field of English and American Studies.
- to interrelate knowledge from different subjects
- to handle complex information
- to apply the proper methodology and frameworks
- to express a critical view and provide conclusions in both written essays and oral presentations, in clear and appropriate English, aimed at both specialized and non-specialized audiences
- to conduct work (research) in an autonomous way

Evaluation

Assessment tasks

The student will prove that he/she has achieved the expected learning results by means of the following assessment tasks:

1: Throughout the course, students will have to read a number of compulsory and recommended texts for analysis and discussion in the practical sessions. Students who do not participate in a dynamic way in class activities may also be required to write a number of short essays as a way to monitor their progress and sit a final interview. These activities will be assessed following the evaluation criteria and the established level of exigency. The activities will be graded from 0 to 10 and represent 20% of the final grade of the student in this subject.

1: Before the end of the course, students will also be required to write a 3,000-word essay in correct academic English on a specific aspect of the course contents, on a topic previously agreed with the teacher. In this essay, the students are expected to assimilate the critical approaches to narrative texts presented by the

teacher and to prove their ability to use those approaches in the analysis of specific texts. The essay will be graded from 0 to 10, this grade representing 80% of the student's final score in the course. A pass mark in this essay is a sine qua non condition to pass the course.

This 3,000-word essay must follow the norms and format specified in the Guidelines available below and at the Moodle page of the course.

Writing the Final Essay

Guidelines for writing the final essay

Guidelines and assessment

Writing an essay in English

1. First, you need to be sure of the topic you want to write about. Your choice should be something that you find "useful," that is to say, an original/innovative approach to some aspects or topics in any given novel or film in the syllabus, something that may discover new perspectives for you and your companions.
2. In order to find a suitable aim for your paper, you need to start thinking about "ways to discover things." That is to say, you have to be sure of the **theoretical frame** or ideological approach you want to follow in your research. You also need to use a **method of textual analysis**; you may find, for instance, that a narratological analysis can help you to discover the existence of certain reiterative themes, topics or obsessions in the story, in the narrator or even in the total implications of the literary or filmic work you are analyzing. Then, you can focus your research analysis on one or two of those topics or themes or on the use of some specific narrative strategies, etc.
3. When you finally decide to write the paper, the first thing you have to do in it is to specify your critical aims, topic of research, frame, and method of analysis to your readers. You can do it in one or two pages (**Introduction**).
4. The following step is to develop your analysis in a detailed way (**discussion** of your hypothesis). Along this part of the essay, you will probably need to mention other critics' ideas and you do NOT want to be a plagiarist. Therefore, you will clearly specify every time you use somebody else's ideas. You can do it **either** by means of introducing, between quotation marks or in indented lines, passages from your original source, followed by the name of the critic and the year of publication of his/her work (between brackets) **or** by using your own words but introducing phrases of the type "as Newton wrote in his *Principia*, there is no ... (year and page number)."
5. Once you have progressed gradually in the discussion of your thesis, you need to reach a conclusion or results that may occupy twenty or thirty lines, approximately (it can be longer or shorter, it is up to you).
6. You can always see, as a model for writing a paper, the structure used in the essays written by other critics that you can find in your recommended bibliography list.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR RATING ESSAYS

From 0 to 7points

Key concepts

- Are the key concepts defined appropriately?
- Are the key concepts applied appropriately relative to the field in which the writer is working?

Thesis statement or research aims

- Is the *thesis statement* stated?
- Is the research question answered?
 - Is the research question (leading to a hypothesis) justified by its importance either in practice or in the research bibliography?

Theoretical framework or critical approach

- Is a theoretical framework used (and justified)?
- Are the analytical categories defined clearly, non-overlapping, and related to sources in the bibliography?
- Where appropriate, are the central analytical categories problematized?

Methodology

- Is the method adequately described?
- Is the method used appropriate to the field in which the writer is working?

Material (primary sources -i.e. texts analyzed)

- Is the material relevant?
- Is the material used appropriately to answer the research questions?

Literature review (bibliography)

- Are the bibliographic sources used relevant to the research question or aims?
- Does the bibliography demonstrate that the student has understood the relevant secondary material?
- Is the bibliography referred to in accordance with academic conventions for attribution in general (properly attributing the work of others) and citation in particular (quoting and paraphrasing)?
- Is the secondary material used appropriate to support the analysis and results?
- Are the relevant sources compared, contrasted, and synthesized?

Argumentation or discussion

- Is the argumentation effective? If applicable, are possible counterarguments or alternative interpretations of evidence brought up and, if so, is the claim made in the essay convincingly defended against those counterarguments?

Conclusion or results

- Are the results clearly stated? Do they follow logically from the evidence that has been presented in the essay?
- Are the implications of the findings discussed and connected to a wider context?

From 0 to 1 point

Independence, originality and critical examination

- Has the student worked independently, showing high level of initiative in both reading and research?
- Has the student been able to contribute novel or original ideas (such as improved methodology; creative analysis; new findings) that are of value to the research community?
- Has the student been able to critically examine the various aspects of the study (such as secondary sources, the material, methods, conclusions drawn)?

From 0 to 2 points

Information structure and organization of essay

- Is the information structured appropriately such that the essay is both coherent and cohesive? Is the paper well-structured both at sentence and paragraph level?
- Is the essay organized in a clear and logical manner? Are the expected components present (presentation of background; statement of aims; description of method and material; presentation and analysis of results; and conclusion)?

Formatting

- Have the appropriate formatting and referencing conventions been followed consistently?

Language and style

- Is the language correct with respect to spelling, punctuation, and grammar?
- Is the style appropriate for an academic text?

Activities and resources

Course methodology

The learning process that has been designed for this course is based on the following

activities:

This course has been specifically designed to train researchers in criticism and theory in the field of US American Studies and evaluate the impact American society and its present values have on our contemporary globalized lives at the beginning of the new millennium. For this reason, the learning process is based on a number of activities. Namely, the analysis of narrative texts and films by means of critical tools, and the comments on, presentation of, and reflections on these analyses from various theoretical perspectives. These activities are aimed at the application of the fundamental principles of the most relevant critical and theoretical approaches to the analysis of the selected American topics in the program.

The course is organized in three stages: 1. the revision of the critical approaches and analytical tools. 2. The application of critical concepts through the analysis and collective discussion of the selected texts in the program. 3. Writing of an individual essay, applying the theoretical approaches and methods learned on the selected topic of research.

Outline of the Programme

The programme offered to the students to help them achieve the learning results includes the following activities :

1:

Learning Schedule

The course is structured in three parts. The first one consists of a brief theoretical introduction of the notions of postmodernism and the resulting understanding of the human subject, together with an analysis of some of the most important historical events since the 1970s in the USA and the resulting globalization impulse. The second section deals with the ideological response offered by the contemporary US American novel; special emphasis is given to the role of science, metafiction and the notion of the human self in the works of some influential US American novelists. The third part of the course centers on the concepts of posthumanism, posthumanity, the blurring of barriers in narrative genres, and the cultural role of the novel in its relation to informatics, the cinema and audiovisual culture, with special emphasis on the creation of new values that disrupt the traditional understanding of the humanist, enlightened, and liberal self.

2:

The course syllabus is structured as follows:

a) Theoretical and analytical seminars (30 hours / 20 sessions. 1.2 credits): Exposition in class of general and methodological aspects for each one of the program topics and illustration with the analysis of a selection of texts related to those topics. These are the main teaching lines for this part of the course:

I- Introduction: the concept of the self and the postmodern condition:

1. The notion of the self: from Humanism to the postmodern condition
2. Jacques Derrida and the quest for the original Logos
3. Jacques Lacan and the formation of the self
4. Michel Foucault and the notions of power and knowledge

II-The postmodern novel in the USA: From the counter-culture to the roles of science and metafiction in the post-war US novel:

1. The contemporary US novel and the textualization of relativity and quantum analysis: Newton, Einstein, Heisenberg, and Borg or the perceptual difficulties of the new science.
2. The literary anticipation of scientific fashion: From the second law of thermodynamics to contemporary chaotics, or the limits between myth and discriminating language.
3. Postmodern reality and its representation in a new type of realism: Science, nostalgia, identity, and metafiction.

III-From prosthetic cyborgs in written fiction to the power of the audiovisual media. Blurred cultural frontiers at the turn of the millennium. The notion of the posthuman:

1. Science Fiction re-writes it again: cyberpunk looping narratives as dystopia, and the construction of the simulated posthuman.
2. Looping upon loops: or the novel about "the novel about the novel." The (lack of) limits between historiography and metafiction, man and woman, chaos and order, or how postmodern can you be?
3. Techno-ideology and contemporary US film: human or post-human? Artificial Intelligence vs. human power or the creation of the cyborg: From movie "classics" to Star Trek, horror remakes, and the ultimate

intertextual mix. Globalization, conspiracy theory, and the bleak future for the Age of Aquarius.

b) Tasks/Class activities (30 hours / 20 sessions. 1.2 credits): Class analysis and guided tutorials of a selection of short texts and films from the perspective of the theoretical approaches, methods, and contexts explained in the theory sessions. The list of texts and films is published in the annual syllabus of the course. The reading / viewing of this corpus is compulsory.

c) Assessment tasks/activities, self-assessment of classroom work, and preparation of individual essay (40 hours. 1.6 credits): Tutorials, both individual and in group, as well as participation in practical sessions, will be used to help the students to prepare their essays and to assess their learning process.

d) Individual work (87,5 hours. 3.5 credits): Revision of the concepts explained in the theory sessions and individual analysis of the texts commented on in the practical sessions. Preparation of essay. Individual reading / viewing in library and in the course's web-page (at <http://moodle.unizar.es/>).

Course planning

Calendar of actual sessions and presentation of works

The first ten sessions in the course will comprise only theoretical and analytical seminars centered on providing students with the necessary critical and methodological tools to approach the different units in the syllabus.

Sessions 11 to 30 will alternate theoretical seminars with class analysis of the most relevant literary texts and films in the syllabus.

Sessions 31 to 40 will be dedicated to class analysis and tutorials with the aim of helping students to prepare their essays and to assess their learning process.

The 3.000 word essay has to be submitted before the end of the course (first week in June).

Bibliographical Resources

Corpus

Compulsory Texts and Films

II-“The postmodern novel in the USA: From the counter-culture to the roles of science and metafiction in the post-war US novel”:

List of compulsory texts for this section:

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-5* (1969)

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)

Eric Kraft, *Where Do You Stop?* (1992)

III-“From prosthetic cyborgs in written stories to the power of the audiovisual media: Blurred cultural frontiers at the turn of the millennium. The notion of the posthuman”:

List of compulsory texts and films for this section:

William Gibson, Selected stories from *Burning Chrome* (1986): “Johnny Mnemonic,” “The Gernsback Continuum,” and “The Belonging Kind.”

Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* (1993)

Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner (The Director's Cut)* (1982, 1999)

Jonathan Frakes, *Star Trek: First Contact* (1997)

David Cronenberg, *The Fly* (1986)

The Wachowski Brothers, *The Matrix* (1999)

Specific Bibliography for each section in the Syllabus

The following web pages, electronic articles, and sections from books on criticism will be used as material for class and tutorial discussion, and will help students to assess their own progress. They are accessible through the Moodle page or can be requested from the teacher:

Part I:

- a) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippie>
- b) <http://www.watson.org/~lisa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/index.html>
- c) Derrida: A selection from *Of Grammatology*. Available in electronic format.
- d) Lacan: <http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html>

Part II:

- Nadeau, Robert. 1981. *Readings from the new book on nature: physics and metaphysics in the modern novel*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Geyh, Paula E. "Assembling postmodernism: Experience, meaning, and the space in-between." *College Literature*; Spring 2003. 30, 2: 1-29 (available in electronic format).
- Collado Rodríguez, Francisco. 1996. "There is a Story to Go with Every Figure in the Picture: Kurt Vonnegut Talks about Science, Fiction, and Dystopia." In *Atlantis* XVIII, 1-2: 477-85 (available in electronic format).

Also on line at:

<http://www.atlantisjournal.org/Papers/v18%20n1%202/v18%20n1%202-35.pdf>

-Kraft, Eric. 2006. <www.EricKraft.com>

Part III:

- <http://project.cyberpunk.ru/>
- Donna Haraway. 1990. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Linda Nicholson. London: Routledge. Available in electronic format.
- Neil Badmington, 2000. "Approaching Posthumanism." In Badmington, Neil, ed. *Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism*. Houndsills: Palgrave. 1-10.
- About "The Gernsback Continuum." A PowerPoint Presentation. Available in electronic format.

This material can be **supplemented** with the bibliography recommended in the section below.

Additional Bibliography

Part I:

- Baudrillard, Jean. 1988. "Simulacra and Simulations," in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Ed. Mark Poster. Cambridge: Polity Press. 166-84.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *De la Gramatologie*. Paris: Minuit.
- Hendin, Josephine. 1978. *Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction since 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1991. "Discourse, Power, Ideology: Humanism and Postmodernism," in *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. Edmund Smyth. London: Batsford. 105-22.
- Klinkowitz, Jerome. 1992. *Structuring the Void: The Struggle for Subject in Contemporary American Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 1986. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Sarup, Madan. 1993. *An Introductory Guide to Postmodernism and Poststructuralism*. 2^a ed. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.

White, Hayden. 1987. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality". In *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1-25.

Part II:

Bercovitch, Sacvan, ed. 1999. *The Cambridge History of American Literature. Volume 7: Prose Writing 1940-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, Joseph. 1968. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. 2nd. ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Collado Rodríguez, Francisco. 2001. "Sobre caos, realismo y metaficción: novela y postmodernismo en los EE.UU.," in *Historia crítica de la novela norteamericana*, José A. Gurpegui, et al. Salamanca: Ediciones Almar. 271-320.

Copestake, Ian D. 2003. *American Postmodernity: Essays on the recent fiction of Thomas Pynchon*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Cowart, David. 1982. *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Elliott, Emory, et al., eds. 1988. *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Elliott, Emory, et al., eds. 1991. *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hayles, N. Katherine, ed. 1991. *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London: Routledge.

Ickstadt, Heinz. 1988. "Contemporary American Novel: Between Post-Modernism and Neo-Realism," in *Actas del XII Congreso Nacional de AEDEAN*. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1988. 99-109.

Jackson, Rosemary. 1981. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. 1982. *Kurt Vonnegut*. London: Methuen.

Klinkowitz, Jerome. 1992. *Structuring the Void: The Struggle for Subject in Contemporary American Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kraft, Eric. 2002. <www.EricKraft.com>

McHale, Brian. 1992. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge-Ark, 1987.

Nadeau, Robert. 1981. *Readings from the new book on nature: physics and metaphysics in the modern novel*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

O'Donnell, Patrick, ed. 1991. *New Essays on The Crying of Lot 49*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SHATT, Stanley. 1976. *Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* Boston: Twayne.

Part III:

Badminton, Neil, ed. 2000. *Readers in Cultural Criticism: Posthumanism*. Hounds mills: Palgrave.

Collado Rodríguez, Francisco. 1995. "Naming Female Multiplicity: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee." *Atlantis*, vol. XVII.1-2: 293-306. Available in electronic format.

Collado Rodríguez, Francisco. 2000. "Facing the Other: Bharati Mukherjee's Holder of the World." *Postmodern Studies 29: 'New' Exoticisms. Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*. Isabel Santaolalla, ed. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi. 217-28.

Collado Rodríguez, Francisco and Sergio SALVADOR. 1998. "Post-human: the cultural limits of 'cyberpunk' (including an Electronic Conversation with Bruce Sterling, and his own Selected List of Cyberpunk Readings)." *MisCELánea*, vol. 19: 21-37. Available in electronic format.

Davies, Paul and John Gribbin. 1991. *The Matter Myth: Beyond Chaos and Complexity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Fetherstone, Mike and Roger BURROWS, eds. 1995. *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*. London: Sage Publications.

Haraqay, Donna. 1990. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Linda Nicholson. London: Routledge. Reprinted in BADMINGTON 2000: 69-84.

Hayles, N. Katherine, ed. 1991. *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wicke, Jennifer. 1996. "Fin de Siècle and the Technological Sublime," in *Centuries' Ends, Narrative Means*. Ed. Robert Newman. Standford, CA: Standford University Press.

Students are also encouraged to consult web pages about the writers and film directors analyzed in the course.

Bibliographic references of the recommended readings