

MID-20TH-CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

English 429B | UVic | Spring 2016 | CRN: 21309 | MR 10-11:20am

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Syllabus online (PDF): web.uvic.ca/~englblog/429bs2016.pdf

Syllabus online (repository): github.com/jentery/429b

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the 1940s through the 1970s, how did speculation and fiction intersect in the United States? During the period, how did novels depict the future, through what politics and aesthetics, and under what assumptions about society and culture? What utopias, dystopias, alternative histories, and possible worlds were written? Why? As a survey of mid-20th-century U.S. literature, this course engages these questions and more. We will not only foreground the importance of science fiction during the mid-1900s, but also unpack speculation as a literary device central to texts from the period.

OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this course, you should learn to:

- Articulate how science fiction and speculation inform accounts of mid-20th-century U.S. fiction,
- Purposefully read and analyze mid-20th-century U.S. fiction, with an emphasis on speculation as a literary device,
- Concisely communicate the relevance of social, cultural, and aesthetic issues common to the interpretation of 20th-century U.S. fiction, and
- Demonstrate an awareness of various strategies literary critics use to interpret fiction from the mid-20th-century.

These objectives will be evaluated through two short essays, two brief presentations, and a final exam.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kindred, Octavia E. Butler

Ubik, Philip K. Dick

"No Woman Born," C.L. Moore

Slaughterhouse Five, Kurt Vonnegut

Babel-17, Samuel R. Delany

The Left Hand of Darkness, Ursula Le Guin

Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed

With the exception of "No Woman Born" (which will be circulated during class), required texts are available (in used condition) at the UVic Bookstore, for a total of \$100-120. I will reference the Bookstore's copies during class discussion, but feel free to choose whichever edition you prefer, in print or digital format. (I

recommend reading these books in print.) If we are pressed for time this semester, then we will cut *Slaughterhouse Five* from the reading schedule.

ASSIGNMENTS

Short Essay 1: Close Reading or Deconstruction (25% of your final mark)

For your first essay in 429B, please write about one of the following: “No Woman Born,” *Babel-17*, or *Ubik*. The essay should consist of 1000-1500 words (excluding references) in MLA format, submitted to me in print with your name on it. For the essay, you have two choices:

- **Close Reading:** Please select a compelling passage in the text at hand and conduct a close reading of it. Focus your entire essay on this passage, offering context where necessary. Please do not compare the passage with other texts, and do not draw material from existing scholarship or historical documents. Ultimately, your close reading should: i) account for vocabulary, patterns, perspectives, and metaphors in the selected text; ii) underscore how an aspect of the text has more than one meaning; iii) articulate the consequence of these meanings coexisting in ambiguity; and iv) communicate why it is important for readers to know about this ambiguity (e.g., tell us how the passage you selected helps us understand the fiction at hand more completely).
- **Deconstruction:** Please select a compelling passage in the text at hand and deconstruct it. Focus your entire essay on this passage, offering context where necessary. Please do not compare the passage with other texts (primary or secondary sources), and do not draw material from existing scholarship or historical documents. Ultimately, your deconstruction should: i) account for something missing explicitly from, yet nevertheless present in, the text; ii) underscore how what’s missing informs an interpretation of the text; iii) articulate the consequence of that interpretation; and iv) communicate why it is important for readers to know why what’s missing matters (e.g., tell us how the absence you identified helps us understand the creation and reception of the fiction at hand).

Short Essay #2: Speculative or Reparative Reading (25% of your final mark)

For your second essay in 429B, please write about one of the following: *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Kindred*, *Mumbo Jumbo*, or *Slaughterhouse Five*. The essay should consist of 1000-1500 words (excluding references) in MLA format,

submitted to me in print with your name on it. For the essay, you have two choices:

- **Speculative Reading:** Please select a compelling passage in the text at hand and conduct a speculative reading of it. Situate this passage in relation to the balance of the novel. Please do not compare the novel with other novels, and do not draw material from existing scholarship or historical documents. Ultimately, your speculative reading should ask “what if?” of your selected novel by: i) identifying a core metaphor at work in the passage; ii) creating and using a specific technique to systematically alter the passage and enhance, diminish, or ruin its metaphor; iii) interpreting the altered passage as if it is the original; iv) articulating the consequences of altering the passage, with attention to differences between the original and its alteration; and v) communicating the relevance of your speculative reading to others interested in the fiction at hand (e.g., tell us what your alteration says about the novel’s aesthetics or politics).
- **Reparative Reading:** Please select a compelling passage in the text at hand and conduct a reparative reading of it. Situate this passage in relation to the balance of the novel. Please do not draw material from existing scholarship or historical documents. Ultimately, your reparative reading should address the capacities and pleasures of science fiction by: i) identifying a suggestive gesture or aesthetic at work in the passage; ii) amplifying that gesture or aesthetic by highlighting what it does persuasively; iii) interpreting the exceptional and everyday dimensions of the gesture or aesthetic; iv) articulating the consequences of your interpretation for science fiction at large; and v) communicating what the passage suggests about the transformative potential of science fiction (e.g., tell us how the novel prompts people to consider aesthetic or political change).

Presentation about Assigned Reading (10% of your final mark)

Once during the term, you will present for three to four minutes about an assigned text. Conducted at the beginning of a class meeting, this presentation should prompt group discussion by: a) drawing us to a specific moment in the text at hand, b) contextualizing that moment within the plot of the assigned text, c) telling us why you think this moment is interesting, and d) giving us one question to consider as we proceed with discussion.

Final Presentation (10% of your final mark)

During our last meeting, you will give a one-minute presentation about the most important thing you learned from the assigned texts and class discussions this term. These presentations should be not only well prepared but also precise in their composition.

Final Exam (30% of your final mark)

At the term's end, I will administer the final exam during the official exam period. It will cover all texts assigned during the term and will consist of short-answer and multiple-choice questions, together with quote identifications. It will not include essays, and it will not be open-book.

ASSESSMENT

The English Department uses the following scale for grading purposes:

A+	90-100	B-	70-72
A	85-89	C+	65-69
A-	80-84	C	60-64
B+	77-79	D	50-59
B	73-76	F	0-49

I do not use plagiarism detection software when assessing student work, and final grades will be determined in accordance with the University's official grading system.

N Grades

Students who submit the following will complete the course and will be assigned a final grade:

- One short essay, and
- The final exam.

Failure to complete these will result in an "N" regardless of the cumulative percentage on other assignments. An "N" is a failing grade, and it factors into your GPA as a 0 (the maximum percentage that can accompany an "N" on a transcript is 49).

Grading Rubric for Essays

A+: The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is incredibly focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected text, and the argument is incredibly persuasive.

A- through A: The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected text, and the argument is persuasive.

B- through B+: The content meets expectations of the prompt. It is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. It demonstrates some awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects engagement with the selected text, and the argument is sound.

C or C+: The content meets some expectations of the prompt. It is somewhat focused and integrates some examples with explanations or analysis. It demonstrates minimal awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers few perspectives. It reflects engagement with the selected text; however, the argument is not sound.

D: The content does not meet expectations of the prompt. It is not focused, or it does not integrate examples with explanations or analysis. It does not demonstrate awareness of its own limitations or implications, or it does not consider multiple perspectives. It does not reflect engagement with the selected text, and the argument is not sound.

F: The content is missing or falls extremely short of the word count.

(Aspects of this grading rubric were borrowed from a syllabus by Mark Sample.)

Grading Rubric for Presentations

A+: The content and delivery exceed expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate a highly proficient, even memorable knowledge of the course material. They spark significant discussion.

A- through A: The content and delivery exceed expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate a proficient knowledge of the course material. They spark significant discussion.

B- through B+: The content and delivery meet expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate accepted knowledge of the course material. They spark some discussion.

C or C+: The content and delivery meet some expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate accepted knowledge of the course material but spark little to no discussion.

D: The content and delivery do not meet expectations of the prompt. They demonstrate some knowledge of the course material but do not spark discussion.

F: The presentation is not given, or the content and delivery do not meet expectations of the prompt. They do not demonstrate knowledge of the course material, and they do not spark discussion.

How to Do Well in this Course

Read the books before we discuss them. Otherwise, you will not be able to follow lectures or conversations in class. Plus, demonstrating you've read the book means you'll likely do well on the final exam.

Write while you read. For me this means annotating a text as I read it. You can annotate print and digital texts. (See me if you need ideas or resources.)

Come to class with ideas and questions. Be curious. Seek connections not only between texts but also between this course and other courses you're taking.

Take notes during class meetings. A good portion of the final exam will cover what we talk about in class. Students who take good notes not only understand but also retain the material better. They also do better on the exam than students who do not take notes.

Let me know when you don't follow what I'm saying. I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or learn more about. If you have questions, then please don't hesitate to ask them. There's no need to feel like an imposter in this course.

Persuasive writing takes time. Before you submit an essay or present during class, consider writing and circulating drafts. Ask friends or peers to give your writing a gander. Come chat with me during office hours. Consider how your writing can extend and even complicate our class discussions. Also, avoid writing that is primarily

descriptive. Push your work into an analysis of the assumptions, aesthetics, and ambiguity at work in literature.

During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone's work (including the novels we're discussing). Quote it. Speak to specific gestures. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, affirm their ideas (e.g., "I like how you...").

Use class meetings to share ideas, but also discuss what we're reading outside of class. If you have a question, then ask me or your classmates. If you hear something you want to remember, then write it down for later reference. If you feel like we're ignoring something important in class, then bring it to our attention. Consider forming reading and writing groups for the course.

("How to Do Well in this Course" adapted from a syllabus by Christopher Douglas.)

POLICIES

Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes in which you are enrolled. A department may require a student to withdraw from a course if the student is registered in another course that conflicts with it in time. An instructor may refuse a student admission to a lecture because of lateness, misconduct, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course. Students who neglect their academic work, including assignments, may be refused permission to write the final examination in a course. Students who are absent because of illness, an accident, or family affliction should report to me upon their return to classes.

Aside from attending for the sake of attending, I create several incentives for you to come to class. Those incentives include: 1) lectures and discussion related to your essays, presentations, and exam; 2) mentioning material that will be on the exam; 3) providing writing instruction and feedback; and 4) encouraging you to speak with others about the literature we're reading.

If you miss more than 20% of the scheduled class meetings (without documentation of illness, accident, or family affliction), then you may not qualify for the final exam.

Circulation of Marks

I will not—at any time—post your marks outside my office door, online, or in any other public forum.

Participation

Since conversations are essential to the quality of this class, we will work together to create an atmosphere premised on difference. University level discourse does not shy away from sensitive issues, including questions of race, gender, class, sexuality, politics, and religion, and neither will we. There are going to be differences in opinions, beliefs, and interpretations when we read literature, question it, and engage history and culture. You need not agree with the arguments presented during class or with what your peers or I have to say—in fact, it is important to think critically and question course material. But please do so intelligently, without the assumption that everyone agrees with you or shares your experiences. Difference is central to creating a classroom in which a variety of ideas can be exchanged and points of view can be explored.

Ultimately, what is crucial to this course is that you are comfortable expressing yourself and your ideas. If, for whatever reason, you are not, then you should notify me immediately in class or visit me during my office hours. I understand that some people are more comfortable speaking in front of the class than others. That said, participation in office hours also augments learning. If you are not comfortable bringing your concerns directly to me or are not satisfied with my response to your inquiries, then I encourage you to contact the Department of English.

Late and Missed Submissions

If writing assignments are submitted after the due date, then I will not comment on them. Extension of a due date must be negotiated with me in advance, and medical or other emergency exceptions to this policy must be properly documented. Barring extenuating circumstances, I will not accept either of your presentations after the date they are scheduled.

Mobile Technologies in the Classroom

I do not ban laptops or other mobile technologies in the classroom. Feel free to use them for note-taking, in-class research, or other class-related activities.

E-Mail

With the exception of holidays and weekends, I will respond to your emails within twenty-four hours.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy. Students should alert me immediately if they have any questions about this policy and its application, or if they have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

Writing Improvement

I may require you to seek general writing improvement and/or assignment tutoring at The Learning and Teaching Centre. If so, then I may also ask you to revise your work within three weeks of receiving notice from me.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, then please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. RCSD staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the sooner we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE TERRITORIES

The Department of English respectfully acknowledges that the University of Victoria is situated on the territory of the Coast and Straits Salish peoples and sits on the site of a former Lkwungen village.

SCHEDULE

Although it is subject to change, below is the course outline as of Week 1.

Week 1 (January 4 + 7)

Monday: Introductions; Aims of the Course; Lecture

Thursday: NO CLASS (Jentery in Austin, TX for a conference)

Week 2 (January 11 + 14)

Monday: “No Woman Born” (Discussion and Lecture)

Thursday: *Babel-17* (Discussion and Lecture)

Week 3 (January 18 + 21)

Monday: *Babel-17* (Discussion and Presentations)

Thursday: *Babel-17* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Week 4 (January 25 + 28)

Monday: *Ubik* (Discussion and Lecture)

Thursday: *Ubik* (Discussion and Presentations)

Week 5 (February 1 + 4)

Monday: *Ubik* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Thursday: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Discussion and Lecture)

Due: Short Essay #1

Week 6 (February 8 + 11)

READING BREAK

Week 7 (February 15 + 18)

Monday: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Discussion and Presentations)

Thursday: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Week 8 (February 22 + 25)

Monday: *Kindred* (Discussion and Lecture)

Thursday: *Kindred* (Discussion and Presentations)

Week 9 (February 29 + March 3)

Monday: *Kindred* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Thursday: NO CLASS (Jentery traveling for talks)

Week 10 (March 7 + 10)

Monday: *Mumbo Jumbo* (Discussion and Lecture)

Thursday: *Mumbo Jumbo* (Discussion and Presentations)

Week 11 (March 14 + 17)

Monday: *Mumbo Jumbo* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Thursday: *Slaughterhouse Five* (Discussion and Lecture)

Week 12 (March 21 + 24)

Monday: *Slaughterhouse Five* (Discussion and Presentations)

Thursday: *Slaughterhouse Five* (Discussion, Presentations, and Lecture)

Week 13 (March 28 + 31)

Monday: NO CLASS (Holiday)

Thursday: Review
Due: Short Essay #2

Week 14 (April 4)

Monday: Presentations