

ENG222: LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES: POST-HUMANISM

ADAM JOHN WATERMAN
NICELY 101
12:30 - 1:45 T, R
SPRING 2014

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers students the opportunity to explore a wide range of texts through analytic frameworks derived from contemporary cultural studies. Cultural studies should be understood, in this instance, as an intellectual project that interrogates relationships between cultural practice and the operations of power. Culture, from this perspective, is understood not as a discrete object or tradition, but as a terrain of social struggle over the conditions of meaning that give shape to the present. Cultural studies seeks to highlight the process by which cultural texts participate in the elaboration of social norms that assume the appearance of common sense, thereby shaping our perception of what is given, true, and right. Cultural studies exposes relationships between the production of texts and the construction of norms as a means of enabling alternate modes of sociality.

In this semester, we will be reading texts that relate to the production of the “human” as a regulative social norm. We will consider the ways in which writers have drawn upon or critiqued “the human” as a normative framework through which to contain the potentialities of what Marx referred to as species-being. Drawing upon the tradition of anti-humanist critique inaugurated by anti-colonial thinkers and later elaborated by French post-structuralists, we will explore the ways in which “the human” contributes to the reproduction of epistemic and physical violence against ostensibly in-human others, transforming social and cultural differences into hierarchical relations between self and other, subject and subjected. We will interrogate post-humanist perspectives on what it means to be a post-anthropocentric subject in the era of the Anthropocene, the historical age in which human beings have become the dominant geological force on the planet.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Octavia E. Butler, *Parables of the Sower* (Grand Central Publishing)
William Gibson, *Spook Country* (Berkeley Books)
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Penguin Classics)
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (Anchor Books)
Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (Oxford World Classics)

Readings that are marked by an asterisk (*) will be distributed in class

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge and Content: During the course of the semester, we will discuss and develop the following issues, in addition to others that will come up along the way. 1) Relationships between the history of literature and the emergence of the human as a social and cultural norm. 2) Relationships between ideologies of

normative embodiment and literary culture. 3) Generic blending and experimentation. 4) Relationships between notions of literary genius, canon formation, and the construction of “the human.” 5) Allegory and allegorical figures in narration. 5) Literary anthologization and the production of norms.

Critical Thinking: 1) To read a text in different ways and to appreciate it in its historical and cultural context. 2) To read closely and critically. 3) To identify elements of a text with increasing complexity. 4) To formulate meaningful questions about a text. 5) To discuss one’s ideas in an atmosphere of mutual respect and freedom. 6) To ground one’s arguments in evidence drawn from a text. 7) To analyze, and produce critical arguments in English about texts in both verbal presentation and written form.

Classroom activities will include discussion of issues and problems related to the works, close readings, occasional in-class writing exercises and lectures.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This is a reading intensive course. You are expected to have completed the assigned readings, and to be prepared to discuss them, in class, on the day designated by the syllabus. Throughout the course, you should practice reading closely, and critically; you should keep a notebook of thoughts, comments, and questions that occur to you while reading; and you should come to class prepared to share your observations. You are expected to offer topics for discussion during class, and throughout the semester you will be called upon to do so.

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1) In-class short essays
- 2) Take-home short essay: MIDTERM (Frankenstein, Flush)
- 3) Take-home long-form essay: FINAL (Butler, Gibson, Whitehead)

ATTENDANCE

Attendance will be taken. Because our time in class is limited, you are expected to be present, in your seats, at the start of each session. Tardiness will be noted and will hurt your overall class participation grade. In this matter, I will accept no excuses. If there is some personal matter so dire that you absolutely must attend to it, and this means that you are going to be late for class, it is probably better to miss class, deal with your situation, and return--promptly--for our next session. You may take three unexcused absences. After three, each absence will cost you one point off your final grade (and put your participation grade in doubt). The only legitimate excuses for missing a class are medical, but you must provide documentation of your medical condition. Students who miss more than one-fifth of the sessions in the first ten weeks of the semester will be dropped from the course.

GRADING POLICIES

Grades are not given; they are earned. As such, I will not discuss your grade. I will provide comments on your written work and your classroom presence. I will gladly discuss ways to improve your academic performance. These discussions

are for your benefit, and should not be taken as negotiations concerning the grade you will eventually receive.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

- Participation 10%
- In-class exam 25%
- Short essay 30%
- Long essay 35%

Grading will follow the criteria posted on the AUB website.

90-100	Outstanding
85-89	Excellent
80-84	Very Good
75-79	Good
70-74	Fair
60-69	Weak
Below 60	Fail

COMPUTER AND CELLPHONE POLICIES

Computers, e-readers, and cell phones will be allowed in class for the purposes of note taking and internet research. You are responsible for monitoring your use of these technologies.

PLAGIARISM

At its most basic, plagiarism implies the reproduction of other people's words, work, or ideas without citation. Do not do it. All academic work is, at some level, based upon collaboration, so you need to know and understand what other people have written and said about any given subject before you can write or speak effectively about it. Nonetheless, other people's work or ideas or writing should be thought of as the seed from which "the plant" of your work grows. You can--indeed, you must--use other people's words and ideas, but you cannot build a paper from quotations, and you must give credit where it is due. If you have questions about what sorts of practices constitute plagiarism, please feel free to ask.

All incidents of **suspected** plagiarism will be grounds for failure, and will be referred to the relevant disciplinary committee.

January 28

January 30

February 4

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism**

February 6
Rosi Braidotti, "Post-Humanism: Life Beyond the Self"*

February 11
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 3-51

February 13
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 51-110

February 18 IN-CLASS ESSAY
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 110-164

February 20
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 164-197

February 25
Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, 5-50

February 27
Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, 51-106

March 4
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 3-60

March 6
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 60-115

March 11
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 116-166

March 13
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 167-213

March 18
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 214-278

March 20
Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, 278-329

March 25 ANNUNCIATION DAY – NO CLASS

March 27 SECOND ESSAY DUE
William Gibson, *Spook Country*, 3-101

April 1
William Gibson, *Spook Country*, 102-199

April 3
William Gibson, *Spook Country*, 200-292

April 8
William Gibson, *Spook Country*, 293-393

April 10
William Gibson, *Spook Country*, 394-480

April 15
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*, 39-69

April 17
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*, 70-134

April 22
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*, 134-201

April 24
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*, 201-271

April 29
Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*, 271-322

May 1 LABOR DAY – NO CLASS

May 8 – May 16 EXAM PERIOD

MAY 12 – FINAL ESSAY DUE