English 509—The American Novel between the Wars

Spring 2014

Texts: (available at New Jersey Books)

Arna Bontemps, Black Thunder: Gabriel’s Revolt, 1800 (Beacon)
Willa Cather, The Professor’s House (Wilder)
Pietro Di Donato, Christ in Concrete (Signet)
John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer (Mariner)
William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (Vintage)
Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (Scribner)
Nella Larsen, Quicksand and Passing (Rutgers)
Meridel Le Sueur, The Girl (West End)
Seth Moglen, Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism (Stanford)
John Sandford, The People from Heaven (Illinois)
Richard Wright, Native Son (Perennial)

Various critical essays will be available on Blackboard (B).

January 27 Introduction to the Course: The Politics of Literary Modernism
Seth Moglen, Mourning Modernity, Ch. 1 (B)

February 3 John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer
Michael Madsen, “‘No more’n a needle in a haystack’: The City as Style and Destructive Underworld in John Dos Passos’s Manhattan Transfer,” Nordic Journal of English Studies 9, 1 (2010): 36-46 (online RUL)
T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land” (B)

February 10 William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!
Excerpt from Richard Godden, Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South’s Long Revolution (B)
Moglen, Ch. 2

February 17 Absalom, Absalom!
Robert Zoellner, “Faulkner’s Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom!” (B)
Georg Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism” (B)
Bertolt Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács” (B)

February 24 Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms
Aimée Pozorsky, “Infantry and Infanticide in A Farewell to Arms,” Hemingway Review 23, 2 (Spring 2004): 75-98 (online RUL);

March 3 Nella Larsen, Quicksand

March 10 Willa Cather, The Professor’s House
Anna Wilson, “Canonical Relations: Willa Cather, America, and The Professor’s House,” Texas Studies in Language and Literature 47, 1 (Spring 2005): 61-74 (online at RUL)
Moglen, Ch. 3

Spring Break

March 24 Richard Wright, Native Son
Wright, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (B)
Critical essay TBA

March 31 Arna Bontemps, Black Thunder; critical essay TBA

April 7 Pietro Di Donato, Christ in Concrete; Critical essay TBA

April 14 Meridel Le Sueur, The Girl
Barbara Foley, “Women and the Left in the 1930s,” Ch. 6 of Radical Representations (B)

April 16 prospectus due

April 21 John Sandford, The People from Heaven

April 28 student reports

May 6 student reports

Requirements:

1. Attendance is mandatory; no more than one class meeting may be missed.

2. Each student will be required to lead the discussion once during the semester. He/she should plan on giving a thoughtful presentation engaging key points in both the assigned novel and the critical reading(s) (either those connected with the particular text or those engaging more general theoretical and historical questions). The student leading a given discussion is responsible for generating two prompts for pre-class discussion on the Blackboard Discussion Board no later than 8 p.m. Friday. (If two students are leading the discussion, they should collaborate before class, and each should generate one prompt.)

3. All students are required to respond to both questions on Blackboard each week. Comments must be communicated by 8 p.m. Sunday; late postings will not be accepted. Students are required to read one another’s comments before class. Brief remarks (e.g., I agree with what so-and-so has just said) do not suffice; each comment should be extended and thoughtful. Non-participation in the Blackboard discussions will lower the student’s grade.

4. There will be only one written assignment for the course (other than the Blackboard entries). This should be a major research paper—of at least 15 pages, 12 point type, minus notes and bibliography—on a topic of the student’s choosing. A prospectus of at least 3 pages, accompanied by an annotated bibliography of at least 8 items other than those contained on the syllabus, is due by email on April 16; this prospectus should present an argument—or at least a working hypothesis—and not simply describe a broadly conceived topic. The paper is due on May 13.