

Southwestern Literature

English 4302
Fall 2013

Split web course
T 6-8:45 p.m. on the dates designated

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Goals

Most people who read a lot think that novels reveal important insights into human nature. That is a good enough reason for studying them. In other words, the ultimate goal of this course is to make you thoughtful about the human condition. Reading these novels will give you a place to begin. This course will also help hone your skills of critical thinking.

After taking this course, you should be able to use these novelists' insights into the human condition to develop your own insights and to help others develop theirs. That does not mean you just adopt these ideas as your own. You can argue, disagree, cite contradicting evidence. It does mean you take these ideas and winnow them through your own experience. Do the characters seem real? Do the incidents, motives, plots seem plausible? You may adopt these ideas, modify them, or reject them, but this is a good place to start developing your own.

To develop your own ideas, you need to think critically, and this course should help you develop critical thinking skills. For example, after taking it you should be able to see patterns in characters and incidents in several novels, synthesize them into a coherent idea and then compare and contrast that idea with what you know. For one thing, that means you will need to see each novel in relation to the others. You should also hone your skills of assessing evidence and developing theses and presenting arguments.

To do all that, of course, you will need some basic knowledge about the novelists and the novels, such as plots, characters, and incidents. For example, you should be able to match characters and novels and even identify specific incidents.

Texts

Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*, 0-446-60025-3
Hillerman, *Skinwalkers*, 978-0-06-201811-3
Kelton, *The Time It Never Rained*, 0-91264-689-6
Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*, 0-06-093194-9
Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War* 0-8050-6374-9
Silko, *Ceremony*, 0-14-008683-8
Waters, *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, 0-8040-0194-4

Class procedure

You will read the novels on your own, and then we will discuss them in class, comparing them with what you know about human nature. You will also present oral reports on the novelists' lives and on what critics have said about the novels.

Grading

You will be graded on your knowledge of the novels and on your understanding of the novelists' insights, and your ability to develop and support your own. Specifically, you will take exams and quizzes, write response papers and a term paper, and participate in class discussion. You will accumulate points, up to a possible 1,000, and if you have 900, you will make an A and so on.

Exams. 250 points. A mid-term exam on October 6, worth 100 points, and a final exam on December 8, worth 150 points. You will need to identify ideas, literature, characters, etc. and write a

couple of short essays on topics you select from a list. The object will be to show that you can analyze and synthesize evidence and produce a conclusion and a coherent argument to back it up.

Assignment sheets for the following are on Blackboard.

Weekly question. 130 points. Each week you will submit a question to Blackboard regarding that week's readings and respond to one of your peers' questions. Each question will be worth 5 points, and each answer will be worth five points.

Response papers. 300 points. You will write two papers, of one to two pages, responding to questions that I give you or to questions that you ask. Basically, they will ask what a piece of literature indicates about human nature or about American culture. You will submit a rough draft of each paper, and I'll tell you what you need to do to make an A.

A list of response questions is on Blackboard. You may respond to questions on any of the literature we have covered up to the time you write a paper. If you wish, you may write all the response papers about the same topic and then put them together with appropriate polishing for the term paper.

Term paper. 170 points. You have a choice. You may select a topic regarding American literature, develop a position, and write a six- to eight-page paper to support that position. Or you may emulate a type of literature. I will look over your work at various points to assure that you are doing acceptable work.

Author report. 150 points. You will research an author's life and literary interests and submit a report to me, which I'll look over, return to you for corrections, and post online.

Late papers

Late papers without a legitimate, documented reason for being late will get a grade no higher than a C. Legitimate means you were incapacitated and could not do the work. Documented means a document indicating you were incapacitated.

Attendance

To participate in class, you must be present and on time. If you are absent or late frequently, you will lose points on the quizzes. **If you miss three classes, you will be dropped with an F.**

Plagiarism

Plagiarized work will not be accepted. Plagiarism means turning in someone else's work for credit. We will discuss documentation and citation so you will know how to submit work without plagiarizing. **If you plagiarize, you will be dropped with an F.**

Tentative Schedule

August 26

Introduction to the course
Introduction to Ceremony

August 28

Discuss Ceremony

September 2

Ceremony

Due: your first online post

September 4

Due: Response to the first post

September 9

The Time it Never Rained

September 16

The Milagro Beanfield War

September 23

Milagro

September 29

Due: draft of your first paper

September 30

Bless me, Ultima -- poetics

October 6

Due: your first paper

October 7

Bless me Ultima -- hermeneutics

October 13

Due: draft of your second paper

October 14

House Made of Dawn -- hermeneutics

October 20

Due: your second paper

October 21

House made of Dawn – poetics

October 27

The Man Who Killed the Deer

October 28

Mid-term examination

October 30

Due: proposal for your term project

November 4

Skinwalkers

November 6

Due: annotations for your term project

November 11

So Far from God

November 13

Due: outline of your term project

November 18

Caballero

November 20

Due: draft of your term project

November 24

Due: second draft of your term project

November 25

Y no se lo Trago La Tierra

December 2

December 4

Due: your term project

December 9

Due: Final examination

Assignment sheet: author discussion

Author: _____

Due

Notes: _____

Report: _____

Value: Notes, 10 points; report 40 points

You will lead a discussion of an author, and you will give the class notes, like those I gave you for *Ceremony*.

Your grade will be based on how well you lead a discussion of the author's philosophy and how well you lead a discussion. Ask at least three questions, based on the author's philosophy.

These things are essential:

1) Focus on the author's philosophy, for lack of a more comprehensive word. It is not sufficient just to tell when the author was born and died and whom he or she married. Answer questions like these: Why did he write the kind of books he wrote? What was important to him?

2) Lead a discussion; do not lecture. Describe the author's philosophy and then ask the class to discuss examples of that philosophy in the literature.

Discuss an aspect of the author's philosophy and ask at least three questions. For example, if the author was concerned about the environment, ask how the novel reflects that concern.

3) Your notes should cover the following topics:

Personal – when the author was born, where, other careers if any

Career – major events, such as meetings with other writers, awards, jobs, especially jobs that might have affected philosophy

Refer to these briefly and focus on philosophy.

Philosophy – what was important, why they wrote the kinds of literature they wrote

4) You must talk, not read.

If you read, lecture, or fail to discuss philosophy, you will have to do another report.

Grade

____ A. You focused on the author's philosophy and led a lively discussion.

____ B. You focused on the author's philosophy and led a discussion, but it was dull.

____ C. You focused on biographical details, barely mentioning the author's philosophy.

____ D. You focused on biographical details and ignored the author's philosophy.

____ F. You focused on biographical details but were too brief.

Assignment sheet: response papers

Value: 150 points each

Length: At least two pages, 12-point type, regular margins, double spaced

One requirement of this course is to write two papers responding to questions about the readings. Below are several questions, and I may add questions later. Choose one question for each paper and write an answer. Give a precise thesis and cite evidence specifically: use quotes or refer to specific incidents, passages, etc.

Because as a scholar you must learn to ask questions, you may ask your own questions. If so, you should ask a question about hermeneutics or poetics. Regarding hermeneutics, what is the author telling us about human nature or about culture? Regarding poetics, what techniques does the author use and are they effective?

When I return the paper, it will have a grade on it, but you are welcome to revise it and turn it in again. You will have one week to rewrite it. If you do not turn in a revision within a week, you will get the grade I have posted, but as long as you continue to rewrite it, I will continue to work with you. It is possible to make an A on each of these papers. If it takes several weeks to get a grade you want, when you go on to the next paper, you may respond to any of the topics we have covered up until that time. You will have one week to write the next paper.

I will not begin working with you on a term paper until you have all three of these in good order.

An A paper will have a clear, concise thesis and good evidence from the readings to support it and will be written well, with almost no errors in style and grammar. A B paper will have a few errors in style and grammar, and a C paper will have more. A D paper will have an imprecise thesis or will present inadequate evidence or have a distracting number of errors in grammar or style. An F paper will have no thesis and so many errors in grammar and style that a reader cannot follow the paper.

Ceremony

1) Stream of consciousness. What kinds of things trigger another thought in Tayo's mind? Find the times when Tayo changes from one topic to another and ask whether there is any pattern to the jumps. Does one kind of thought or emotion trigger a jump?

2) The hero story. Discuss one of the hero stories in *Ceremony*. Tell how each part reflects the hero story. For example, who is the mentor? Questions like that. More important, what does Silko's hero stories say about culture or human nature?

3) Setting. How does the setting affect the story? What is the setting? In discussing the setting, be sure to talk about more than just the place. Talk about all the elements of setting as listed in the handout and give evidence. More important, discuss at least one thing that could not happen in another setting.

4) Characterization. How does Silko reveal character? Pick at least one character and discuss how she tells you about his character. See the list of techniques on the handout on characterization.

Bless Me, Ultima

Discuss the conflict between Antonio's two heritages. What are the two heritages and how are they in conflict? More important, what point is Anaya making about human nature? What does the conflict tell you about culture? Be sure to give plenty of evidence to back up your position, by citing specific lines, incidents, etc.

The book reveals a lot about folklore. Discuss the folklore you have read about so far and tell what it indicates about culture. What kind of people are these, as evidenced by their folklore? You might want to review a discussion of folklore before answering this question.

One issue in reading the book is point of view. We see the story through Antonio's point of view. Discuss how Anaya does that. For example, in several instances, Antonio is specifically forbidden from seeing something, but he does anyway. How does Anaya allow him to see that?

How does Anaya get us interested in Antonio? Cite specific lines, incidents, attitudes, etc. that excite our interest in him.

Take one of Antonio's questions and explain why it is important to him.

Compare and contrast the Christian God and the Golden Carp. In what ways are they similar and different? More important, what does that mean about the point of the book? How does it fit into the book's themes?

Discuss Ultima's relationship with men. What is that relationship? Cite evidence for your opinion. Then discuss what that relationship means. What does it tell you about culture and about the point of the book?

What is courage? Who shows courage? When? How? What does Antonio learn about courage?

After seeing the Golden Carp, Antonio feels its beauty "burdened me with responsibility." What is that responsibility, and does he fulfill it? Be sure to cite evidence for your opinion.

What's the point of the Christmas pageant? How does it fit the theme of the book?

In the course of the book, Antonio hears at least five confessions. Besides the fact that his mother wants him to be a priest, why are these confessions important? What point is Anaya making by having Antonio hear confessions?

Discuss the scene in which the children force Antonio to hear confessions. What does the scene tell you about culture, about people's attitudes, beliefs, etc.?

On page 260, Ultima distinguishes between a *curandera* and a *bruja*. Discuss her distinction and, more important, explain how it fits into the theme of the book.

Discuss the owl as a symbol. What does it do? What does it symbolize?

On pages 237-8, Cico and Antonio discuss beauty and God and the necessity to choose between them. How does that fit in with other incidents in the book, particularly Florence's refusal to confess sins?

The Time It Never Rained

So far, is *The Time It Never Rained* realistic or does it give a romanticized view of relationships or of people's attitudes, sense of responsibility, etc.? Is there anything unnatural about relationships? Cite instances of realism and romanticism.

What is the theme of the book? What is Kelton saying about that theme? Be sure to cite specific examples of the theme and of Kelton's point. State briefly how you feel about that theme.

Contrast Tom Flagg and the Flores family. What is Kelton's point about family life or about manliness? (You probably will not have room to discuss both.) How does that point relate to theme of the book? How do you feel about that point?

Discuss nature, economy, and culture. How does nature affect economics and culture, according to Kelton? Be sure to cite specific evidence to prove that Kelton is saying that.

Manuel says it is his place to defend his sister (93). How does that relate to the theme of the book? What is the theme and how does Manuel's attitude relate?

Charlie Flagg exercises a lot of paternalism. Give instances of paternalism and discuss how you feel about them. Be sure to look up "paternalism" if you are not sure what it means.

What is Kelton saying about community and individualism? How do you feel about that.

There is a good deal of a kind of raw humor in *The Time It Never Rained*. Discuss this dark humor. Cite instances of it and discuss Kelton's point.

Now that you have read the whole book, what is Kelton saying about gender relations and about women?

Assignment: online discussion

Due dates:

Question 1: February 20

Answer: February 27

Question 2: April 10

Answer: April 24

One requirement of this course is to post at least two questions to Blackboard and answer at least two. Here are the instructions.

To post a question, go to the Sul Ross web page and go to quick links and then click on Blackboard. You will need your user name and password. Once in, go to

discussion boards

the forum entitled "[ENGL 4302 E01 RGC SPRG2013](#)"

Click on "First question"

You should get boxes for a subject line and for the message itself. If not, click on the yellow line.

Write a subject that will let your classmates know the topic of your question.

Put your question in the message box and submit it.

To get credit, you must ask thought-provoking questions and give thoughtful answers. You will not get credit, for example, for asking questions about the facts of a piece of literature (What does Emo carry in the Bull Durham bag?) or questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no" (Does Emo carry human teeth in the Bull Durham bag?) You should ask questions about what the literature "means," what insight it gives us into human nature or culture. For example, you might ask, what the human teeth indicate about human nature or about culture

To answer questions, go to Blackboard. Again, you will need your user name and password. Go through the steps above and click on a question that sounds interesting and answer it.

In replying to questions, you must cite specific passages in the literature. In other words, don't mouth off about your ideas about cruelty. Refer to what *Ceremony* says about it. You will not get credit for a reply unless you somehow link it to the literature the question asks about.

Assignment Sheet: Term project

Value: 100 points for the final paper, 50 points for preliminary work

Due dates: (See below for specifics on what to turn in)

March 20: thesis and list of passages

April 3: rough draft

April 17: second draft

May 1: final draft

Length: 6 to 8 pages, double-spaced, 12 point type, regular margins

For your term paper, you have three choices. You may write an academic analysis of hermeneutics or poetics or you may emulate a writer's theme and style.

If you decide to write an academic paper about **hermeneutics**, you will select a topic concerning some question that southwestern writers have written about, develop a position, and write a paper supporting that position. You might discuss how southwestern literature reflects religious or social ideas or what it shows about people's visions, aspirations, dreams, fears, etc. For example, you might discuss what the literature had to say about class, about women's roles, men's roles, age, etc. You will need to discuss what several writers have said about the topic.

If you prefer, you may discuss a **poetic** technique. Pick a technique and discuss how the technique helps to create the effect of the story. For example, you might discuss how Silko uses the hero story in Ceremony to create a feeling of triumph.

If you do an academic paper an A paper will have

- an important thesis, stated concisely
- some indication of why the topic is important. What difference would it make if we see things your way?
- a compelling argument, using a variety of evidence, presented fully
- a title and an introduction that will grab the readers' attention
- a conclusion
- documentation in the MLA style
- almost no errors in grammar, punctuation, etc.
- an engaging style.

A B paper will have three or four errors and some faults in style. A C paper will have five or six errors. A D paper will have an imprecise thesis, sketchy evidence, weak evidence, or more than six or seven errors. An F paper will not have a thesis or will only refer to the evidence or will have more than eight errors.

At various steps in the writing process, I'll look over your work to make sure you are proceeding well. These steps will be graded, as shown below.

March 20 and a list of sources: your topic. 30 points. Turn in your thesis along with

- 1) a sentence or two about who would find the topic important and why.
- 2) a list of sources you will use. You might later add to or subtract from this list.
- 3) a list of questions you will try to answer.

April 3: rough draft. 10 points. Turn in something you hope will get an A without having to be rewritten – typed, six full pages, all the evidence, an introduction, conclusion, documentation, and so on.

April 17: second draft.

May 2: final draft. 100 points. An A paper will get 95 points, and so on.

Emulating a novel. If you prefer, you may emulate a novel. Basically, you will tell the story on March 20 and then revise it several times and then write a full chapter of several pages. The version on March 20 should have names, etc.

If you decide to try this, you should talk to me individually so I can make sure you are proceeding correctly. This is not a course in creative writing, and this assignment is designed mainly to make sure you understand the elements of the kind of novel you are writing and the writer's techniques.

Below is an example of the kind of thing you need to submit on March 20. We will talk about how to improve it as you go along.

Ceremony

Tayo, half Zuni and half Mexican, returns to his home in Laguna, New Mexico, from World War II suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He has flashbacks to his suffering in the Philippines. For example, he thinks that a Japanese soldier he killed is his Uncle Josiah, so he think he has killed Josiah. He also thinks that his prayer to stop the rain in the Philippines has caused the drought in New Mexico that is occurring when he returns.

He goes to a healer to get a curing ceremony, and the ceremony turns out to be a trip into the mountains, during which he is saved by a mountain lion.

Several friends who have also returned from World War II attempt to kill him, but he escapes and is healed.

Your grade will be based on how well you demonstrate that you understand the elements of the kind of literature you are emulating. We will talk about the kind of thing you are planning to do in order to make sure you understand it.



Leslie Marmon Silko
(1948-)

One quarter Laguna + European American and Mexican American

grew up on the edge of the Laguna reservation, not allowed to participate in rituals or join societies

But: educated by grandmother and aunts in traditional stories

identified with Laguna ancestry: "I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna."

Laguna Day School until the fifth grade, then Catholic school in Albuquerque

prohibited from using the Laguna/Keresan language
bachelor of arts degree from U of NM, 1969

Married twice and divorced twice

commentator on Native American issues

Concerned with the relations
between cultures
between humans and nature

storytelling to find justice

teacher at the Navajo reservation at Tsaile, Arizona

Ceremony

Hermeneutics

What is Tayo's purpose, quest?

What is his motivation, besides healing himself?

What problems does he think he caused?

What caused his problems?

What is the ceremony?

Why is it important?

Witchery

Whites

How do these all fit: Little Africa, Helen Jean, the bear, the Mexican girl?

The hero story

(based on Linda Seger's "Creating the Myth")

The basic framework

Beginning

An ordinary person

Extraordinary situation, change, often a trip

Reluctant person

Middle

Obstacles

Mentor or teacher

Rock bottom/final challenge

End

Taking possession of the treasure

A chase

Rebirth/transformation

Reintegration into society

Types

Mission or task

Healing/learning to love

Combination

Humility – overcoming ego

The important point:

Figuring out which parts of a story correspond to the hero story is not really that difficult or important. What is important is figuring out what a particular story says about human nature or the culture that tells the story. Different cultures have different persons – can a woman be a hero? – different obstacles, different final challenges, different treasures, etc. What a culture chooses for each part tells you something about that culture.

Ceremonial Time

(based on Bruce Charlton's "Ceremonial time versus Technological time"

<http://www.hedweb.combgcharlton/ceremonialtime.html>

a comment on John Hanson Mitchell's *Ceremonial Time: Fifteen thousand years on one square mile*)

technological time: uniformly-moving, irreversible, linear sequence of segments

factually true: it works. Economy, etc. based on it

but alien to thought

ceremonial time: how humans naturally experience time, because of the way memory works

memory – neither linear nor sequential

subjective and internal

psychologically true, subjectively valuable

pre-tech world: time recorded through human memory, time is memory, including a group's memory

"associational time"

claim direct knowledge of historic and prehistoric events

in ceremony, ritual, etc. able to have experiences in defiance of tech. defined time

"meaning of life"

problem: live by one set of rules but external lives governed by another

tech. time – human life is bleak

Ceremonial time – meaningfully linked with others people, places, times

"We're made of this, the marshes here, the trees. No different, see what I mean? You don't understand this because you look on this world as something that is not you. But Indian people believe that we are no different than a squirrel or bear, just a different form."

Solutions:

Life purely in ceremonial time, but hunter-gatherer, probably not desirable or practical

Life purely by technological time, but mind resists regimentation

Compromises

Encapsulate ceremonial time – evoke ceremonial time whenever possible

Encapsulate technological time – minimize work, sacrifice economic gain

In *Ceremonial Time*,

1) challenge to concept of time that underpins modern civilization

2) literary device that allows an author to "range freely"

Poetics

What are the three hero stories in Ceremony?

What does each say about the culture?

Poems as comment

Stories

The plot is the way the author arranges the story, and it is different from the story. Does Silko start at the beginning of the story, at the end, or in the middle?

Why start there?

Tayo keeps remembering things that happened in the past. Why does Silko have him do that?

Elements of a novel

How to talk about novels

What stories do

- 1) Pleasure – linked to desire to know secrets, the truth, the end
- 2) Show how the world works
 Show others' motives, etc.
- 3) police – show how aspirations are tamed and desires adjusted to social reality
 internalize social norms
 provide a model for social criticism

the basic question: Does literature teach or distort?

 If it distorts, why? What's the author doing?

Plot

Not just a sequence of events

Beginning, middle, end – planned

The way the author arranges incidents: chronological, back and forth, begin at end, begin on the verge of some important moment, flashback

Serious fiction: why something happens, not just happening

Transformation

 from one set of relationships to its opposite

 from fear or prediction to its realization

 from problem to solution

 false accusation to rectification

Two ways to think about plots

- 1) shaping events to make sense of things
- 2) gets shaped by narratives, by the presentation

Where does the story actually start?

Where does the telling start?

Characterization

What recognizable human characteristics do characters have?

Does any character have a set of characteristics that does not seem plausible?

Which of these techniques does the author use to show characteristics?

Direct exposition: the author tells you about the character (usually omniscient or first person point of view)

Actions, with little or no comment by the author

Representing how the character feels about actions, emotions (usually stream of consciousness)

Having other characters talk about them

Caricature: focusing on a dominant trait

“round” or “three dimensional” – a congeries of traits

Static or dynamic

Static: no change, the actions reveal the character but do not change him

Dynamic: changed by actions

Concrete Universal

Setting

time

place

social environment

Symbolism

A person, object, or event that suggests more than its literal meaning

Probably helps shed light on the story

Conventional symbols: symbols created deliberately

the Christian cross or the Star of David

Symbols the culture accepts as a symbol of an idea: winter=death, green=youth

Literary symbols

come up frequently in such a way that it seems connected to the idea

How does that meaning contribute to the meaning of the story

Style, tone, irony

Style: the author's distinctive way of arranging words

distinctive words or distinctive sentence structure

Tone: the author's attitude towards people, places, etc.

Irony: Meaning the opposite of what you're saying (except when lying).

Are there incidents in which the reader expects one thing but something different happens? This is situational irony.

Are there times when the reader knows something a character does not? This is dramatic irony.

Point of view

Who speaks?

To whom?

Male? Female? European? American?

When? Early or late?

What language?

With what authority?

Sometimes unreliable – need clues about biases

Self-conscious

Who sees? Point of view

Whose vision do we get? (not necessarily the narrator's)

Time – time the events occurred? shortly after or long after?

What the focal character knew or thought at the time or how he or she thought about things later

What she felt at the time versus what she feels when writing

Limitations of knowledge

Omniscient

Limited omniscient

First person

Third person

Third person

omniscient: the narrator reveals any thought in anyone's mind

editorial omniscient: the narrator comments (editorializes) on the actions, thoughts, etc.

neutral omniscient: the narrator does not comment

limited omniscient: the narrator reveals only the ideas in one character's mind

Stream of consciousness: the narrator reveals what's going on in someone's mind from minute to minute, often jumping oddly from idea to idea

Objective: can't see in anyone's mind

Give the dialog, action, etc. without analysis, interpretation, etc.

First person: A character is in the story, so the author uses "I" and tells the story from only one person's perspective.

Major character

Minor character

Unreliable narrator

Naïve narrator

Theme

The central idea or meaning. The point that all the plot, characters, etc. reveal.

one or two complete sentences

Must see how all the details fit together

Subject vs. theme

Two stories, same subject, but different themes.

The Scarlet Letter, Tess, My Antonia, Maggie, Sister Carrie

Explore human behavior, not necessarily give a moral or lesson

Must reflect the details of the story, not your attitudes, values, experiences

You might disagree, but you have to acknowledge that's the theme.

Things to look at:

What does the title tell you? Is it a major symbol or subject?

Details that have symbolic meaning, especially elements you did not understand at first.

Important insight gained by the protagonist

A generalized statement, not a specific description of the story you're reading

Avoid clichés

Some stories don't have themes.