

# **The American Novel: An Experimental Genre**

English 604A | SDSU | Spring 2017  
**Professor Jessica Pressman**

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The course examines the novel as an experimental genre and on that, because of its claim towards newness and innovation, is a typically American one. We read examples of experimental American novels from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>-centuries that strive to make new the novel genre through formal innovation and that understand “making it new” as a distinctly American project. We pair literary reading with scholarship on the history and theory of the novel genre as well as criticism about specific works. This course intends to provide breadth and depth in its study of the novel and to American literature more broadly.

## **Learning Outcomes**

- You will become familiar with a few canonical novels from American literary history
- You will gain a foundation for understanding the novel as a genre that has a history of development
- You will recognize a connection between the novel genre and theories of American individualism
- You will hone your skills as a critical thinker, listener, and writer by focusing on the development of a thesis statement and the ability to prove it through explication

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

Email: <a href="mailto:jpressman@mail.sdsu.edu">jpressman@mail.sdsu.edu</a> *Do not expect a response within 24 hours	Course Website: <a href="http://spring2017-eng604a.jessicapressman.com">spring2017-eng604a.jessicapressman.com</a>
Office: AL 261 Office hours: Tuesday 10-12 and by appointment	Course Meeting: Th 4-6:30 Room: Storm Hall 320
English Subject Librarian: Markel Tumlin  Special Collection Librarian: Anna Culbertson	<a href="mailto:mtumlin@rohan.sdsu.edu">mtumlin@rohan.sdsu.edu</a>  <a href="mailto:aculbertson@mail.sdsu.edu">aculbertson@mail.sdsu.edu</a>

**REQUIRED READING:** Available in the SDSU Bookstore

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (1851). Norton Critical Edition, eds. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford

Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914)

Vladimir Nabakov, *Pale Fire* (1962)

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)

Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (1980)

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1997)

Tender Claws, *Pry* (2015) \*app for touchscreens available at iTunes

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**ASSIGNMENTS**

Participation 20%

Weekly Blog Posts 25%

Short Close Reading 15%

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography for Final Essay 5%

Final Essay Project 35%

**Participation 20%**

This is *your* class, and your participation is vital to its success. You must attend *all* class meetings in order to receive full credit for participation. Come to class prepared to discuss the text in depth; this means having read the *entire* text *before* class. I expect you to speak and listen.

- **Your participation grade includes engaging in dialogue in class.** This means speaking and listening actively, attentively, and respectfully. (If you have fear of speaking in public, this seminar is a good place to learn to address that fear. Please come see me early in the term to discuss strategies for dealing with this fear).
- **Your participation grade includes an in-person meeting with the professor.**
- **You will give a 5-minute presentation on one of the texts.** This presentation should serve to start the class's conversation for the day. You will point us to a question from the day's reading and to the specific passage in the text that sparked that inquiry for you. You will get the discussion rolling. You should be able to direct the class to a passage for close reading and/or a series of questions for discussion.

**Weekly Blog Posts (25%)**

You will write (**500 words**) **blog responses to the reading and each provide a comment on a peer's blog each week**, before the next week's class meeting. The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor to address and incorporate these topics in that week's meeting. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

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- Blog posts are due *on Wednesday at 6pm* weekly; **late posts will not receive credit.**
- You will be given an *overall* grade for blog posts, based on completion and content, not a grade for each post. Rubric for grading is available on our website and below.

Your Blog Grade is based on 2-parts: 1) a completion grade, and 2) a content grade.

<b>The completion component of the blog grade</b> requires you to have the following number of posts:	<b>The content component of the blog grade</b> is based on the following grading rubric
A= 11-13 posts B= 8-10 posts C= 6-7 posts D= 4-5 posts F= 3 or less	A= Post contains a focused thesis or question and close reading of a passage, B= Post contains a close reading of content but no focused question or thesis C= Post contains no analysis of text (no close reading), just summary and undirected ideas D=Post contains little substantive thinking as content

### **Mini Essay-- Short Close Reading (15%)**

This short (2-3 page) essay is intended to provide a *benchmark* for your writing (and grade), a place to test your thesis and explication skills before the final essay. You will revise one of your blog posts or write new content that demonstrates your ability to 1) develop a thesis, and 2) use a text to support, through textual explication/analysis/close reading, your argument.

**\*\*Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late**

### **Proposal/Annotated Bibliography (5%)**

In preparation for your final essay project, you will write a short proposal (500-words) and an annotated bibliography of 8-10 centrally relevant sources for the essay. Information of proposal and bibliography are available on our website.

### **Final Essay (35%)**

In this 15-20 page analytical essay, you will explore in-depth one research question raised by our course. You will propose your own essay topic and determine the best way to present, your argument and research. You will conduct and implement scholarly research, secondary sources (at least 3) not included on our syllabus, in your essay.

-Your essay must include a **thesis** that guides the analysis and **textual explication** (close reading) to support it. (We will discuss and practice these analytical skills throughout the semester; informative guides to thesis writing and explication are also available on our website).

-You are welcome to pursue a creative presentation of the essay. You can also *make* something-- a sculpture, bookart, painting, poem, etc.—that expresses your argument. You will write an essay that explains *what and how* your creative piece demonstrates your argument about the novel or the larger research question you pursue.

- You must *meet with the professor* to discuss your plans for the final essay
- You will *briefly present* your project during the final week of class.
- \*\*Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late**

### **Extra Credit (Total of 1%)**

There are multiple ways to earn extra credit in this class, all of which will be listed on our website but include the following:

- Attend the scholarly lecture by Professor Seth Lerer (UCSD) in “Year of the Book” program series, 2/7 at 4pm in Love Library 431
- Attend the Twine Workshop, 2-4pm in LARC lab (Storm Hall, second floor)
- Attend the Electronic Literature Reading Events on January 23 and/or April (date TBD)
- \*\*To receive credit for any of these events, you must not only attend but also write a blog post that situates that event (the reading, the literature, the discussion) in the context of our class**

## **READING SCHEDULE**

**January 19: Introduction** to the course and to each other

### **January 26: Readings in the History and Theory of the Novel**

Excerpts from:

- J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*
- Ian, Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*.
- MM. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel” (pps. 1-11)

### **February 2: *Moby Dick* (1851)**

Beginning (“Etymology,” “Extracts,” etc.) and Chapters 1-42 (pp. 1-212)

**\*\*2/7 Extra Credit event: Professor Seth Lerer (UCSD) lecture, 4pm in Love Library 431**

### **February 9: *Moby Dick*, Chapters 43-90 (pp. 213-439)**

-Edward Mendelson, “Encyclopedia Narrative: from Dante to Pynchon”

### **February 16: *Moby Dick*, Chapters 91-end (pp. 440-628)**

**\*\*Extra Credit: 2-4pm Twine Workshop\*\***

### **February 23: *Special Collections* visit to see American novels and experimental texts**

### **March 2: Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (1914)**

**\*\*Short class: class ends at 6:15\*\***

**March 9:** Vladimir Nabakov, *Pale Fire* (1962)

**March 16:** Vladimir Nabakov, *Pale Fire* (1962)

**March 23:** Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)

-Toni Morrison, "Romancing the Shadow" from *Playing the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1991)

*\*\*Mini Essay due on Sunday 3/26 at midnight, posted to blog\*\**

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

**April 6:** Art Spiegelman, *Maus* Vol. I (1973)

**April 13:** Art Spiegelman, *Maus* Vol. I (1973) and Vol. II (1986)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) Chapters 1 and 2

*\*\*Final Essay Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due\*\**

**April 20:** Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1997)

-Mark McGurl, "Introduction" to *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009)

**April 27:** Tender Claws, *Pry* (2015)

-N. Katherine Hayles, "How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis"

**May 4:** Student Presentations of Final Projects & Concluding Conversation

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## **OTHER INFORMATION**

***NOTE:** This syllabus is subject to change.*

### **SDSU as "safe space"**

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to 'protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students . . . including supporting DACA students.' Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit <http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/> for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College."

## Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

## Academic Honesty

The University adheres to a strict [policy regarding cheating and plagiarism](http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html). These activities will not be tolerated in this class. Become familiar with the policy (<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html>). Any cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by Student Affairs.

Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:

Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work); Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own; Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit; Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases; Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class.

If you have questions on what is plagiarism, please consult the [policy](http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html) (<http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html>) and this [helpful guide from the Library](http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf): ([http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard\\_5/plagiarism.pdf](http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf))