

ENGLISH 7972 UGLY WOMEN IN SOUTHERN LITERATURE

INSTRUCTOR: Ms. Monica Miller
EMAIL: mmil132@lsu.edu

OFFICE: 114 Allen Hall
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30
Thursdays 1:30-3:30
and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In contrast to popular ideas of beautiful southern belles, the fiction of the American South contains a preponderance of women described as ugly: differing from the norm enough in a negative way to catch the attention while simultaneously repulsing the viewer. In this course, we will analyze texts which contain these figures of ugly woman and try to figure out why they are so ubiquitous. If so much of southern ideology is based on what W.J. Cash referred to as “gyneolatry,” the worship of the beautiful white woman, what does it mean that so many representations of women fail to meet the standards of white female beauty? Questions we will consider include, what is ugliness? Is it—and if so, how—different from other negative characterizations, such as the grotesque, freakish, or abject? Is there, as Sarah Gleeson-White claims, a “peculiarly southern” form of ugliness? If so, what is it? How do male and female authors deploy these figures differently—if they do?

REQUIRED TEXTS

- ❖ Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*
- ❖ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- ❖ William Faulkner—*Absalom, Absalom!*
- ❖ Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*
- ❖ Eudora Welty, *Curtain of Green*
- ❖ Katherine Anne Porter, *The Old Order*
- ❖ Flannery O’Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*
- ❖ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
- ❖ Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*
- ❖ Lee Smith, *Saving Grace*
- ❖ Jack Butler, *Jujitsu for Christ*
- ❖ Helen Ellis, *Eating the Cheshire Cat*

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- ❖ **Critical Text Presentation (20%)**—20 minute presentation in which you offer an overview of the principle arguments of the critical text at hand as well as some insight into how the ideas in that text might productively illuminate that week's fiction reading (or the readings of past weeks, if applicable). You might also address the strengths and weaknesses of the text as you understand them, and give some sense of the critical conversation of which it is a part. That is, with whom is this critic arguing, and what are the stakes? You should select a chapter or other relevant section from your critical text that you feel would be useful for the whole class to read and provide me a PDF of the reading by the Thursday prior to the presentation.
- ❖ **Contexts and Criticism Presentation (20%)**—20 minute presentation in which you offer a broad overview of the scholarly criticism on the work of fiction under consideration that week as well as any significant book reviews, substantial blog posts, interviews, or essays by the author. The goal of these presentation is not to be completely comprehensive but to provide a sense of what kinds of conversations the books has provoked. A bibliographic handout should accompany this presentation.
- ❖ **Short Response Essays (20%)**—Over the course of the semester, students will submit seven essays, **not to exceed 750 words**, which should offer a thoughtful consideration of some specific aspect of the text under consideration for the week it is submitted. These essays should be thesis-driven and should support their argumetns with close analysis of the text.
- ❖ **Conference Presentation (10%)**—A formal presentation based on your final essay, not to exceed twenty minutes. This grade will be determine based on both the strength of your argument and the professionalism of the presentation itself
- ❖ **Final Essay (30%)**—A thesis-driven research essay of 18-25 pages that advances an original argument about one or more of the texts at hand.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change; any changes will be announced in class. You are responsible for noting these changes and for turning in all assignments on time to avoid penalization.

Week	Date	Topic
Course Introduction		
1	Tu 8/23	Course Introduction and Overview
2	Tu 8/30	Erskine Caldwell, <i>Tobacco Road</i> W.J. Cash, <i>The Mind of the South</i>
3	Tu 9/6	Zora Neale Hurston, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> Barbara Ladd, <i>Resisting History</i>
4	Tu 9/13	Katherine Anne Porter, <i>The Old Order</i> Jay Watson, <i>Reading for the Body</i>
5	Tu 9/20	Carson McCullers, <i>The Heart is a Lonely Hunter</i> Gary Richards, <i>Lovers and Beloveds</i>
6	Tu 9/27	William Faulkner, <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> Minrose Gwin, <i>The Feminine and Faulkner</i>
7	Tu 10/4	Eudora Welty, <i>Curtain of Green</i> Patricia Yaeger, <i>Dirt and Desire</i>
8	Tu 10/11	Flannery O'Connor, <i>A Good Man is Hard to Find</i> Gary Ciuba, <i>Desire, Violence, and Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction</i>
9	Tu 10/18	Alice Walker, <i>The Color Purple</i> Anne Goodwyn Jones & Susan V. Donaldson, eds, <i>Haunted Bodies</i>
10	Tu 10/25	Ellen Douglas, <i>Can't Quit You, Baby</i> Tara McPherson— <i>Reconstructing Dixie</i>
11	Tu 11/1	Dorothy Allison, <i>Bastard Out of Carolina</i> Katherine Heninger, <i>Ordering the Facade</i>
12	Tu 11/8	Sherley Anne Williams, <i>Dessa Rose</i> Trudier Harris, <i>The Scary Mason-Dixon Line</i>
13	Tu 11/15	Lee Smith, <i>Saving Grace</i> Richard Gray, <i>Southern Aberrations</i>

14	Tu 11/22	Helen Ellis, <i>Eating the Cheshire Cat</i> Betina Entzminger— <i>The Belle Gone Bad</i>
15	Tu 11/29	Conference Presentations

FINAL PAPER Due by
