

Instructor: Jon Smith

**Syllabus I:
Postcoloniality and Trauma in the Two Souths**

Course Description:

As American Studies morphs into New World Studies, the U.S. South, with its traumatic history of slavery, is coming to seem less an exception within “American exceptionalism” than typical within New World paradigms (and increasingly typical within U.S. paradigms as well). Latin American writers saw the connections well before critics did. This course a) places the U.S. South within broader New World histories, b) examines how three major Latin American writers drew on the example of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* as a literary form to address their own traumatic histories and memories, and to some degree c) places this discussion in the context of Germany’s own methods of dealing with historical trauma and d) probes the degree to which individual psychoanalytic models of dealing with trauma may be applied to cultures as a whole, or to which traumas can be compared at all.

Primary Texts:

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Robert Penn Warren, *All the King’s Men*

Gabriel García Márquez, *El Otoño del Patriarca (The Autumn of the Patriarch)*

Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Rosario Ferré, *The House on the Lagoon*

Since a knowledge of Spanish is rapidly becoming essential to 21st-century American Studies, students comfortable in Spanish should consider reading García Márquez in the original.

Secondary Texts:

Deborah Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1999.

George Handley, *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000.

Christine Gerhardt, “North, South, East, West: Constructing Region in Southern and East German Literature.” *South to a New Place*. Ed. Suzanne Jones and Sharon Monteith. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002. 303-19.

Eric Santner, “History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Notes on the Representation of Trauma.” *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution.”* Ed. Saul Friedlander. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. 143-54.

Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.

Yaeger, Patricia. *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.

A few other essays.

Course Requirements:

The Reading

My main requirement for the course is that you *read all assigned texts*. Because this is a course in fat novels, you will not have time to look up all the words you do not know. I will try to help in advance with regional expressions (Quentin's "Yessum"="Yes, ma'am," for example) and unusually important terms (e.g., "unregenerate").

The Writing

To help you relate to the novels and criticism, I want you to keep a reading log. For each class (starting with class 3), simply *write 1-2 pages* (or more) about one (or more) of the texts assigned for that day. It doesn't have to be formal writing: you can start out from your personal reactions and move slowly towards your analysis (which should always be related to questions of region, postcoloniality, slavery, colonialism, and/or the topic of the specific class). The reading log will help you find your own approach and trust your own interpretation. Always bring your logs to class, I will collect them sporadically.

Class Discussion

Regular attendance and active participation are crucial in this course. Try to become an active and creative member of our weekly discussion group, and you will get the most out of it. To make this work, you may not miss more than two sessions.

Oral Reports

After *Absalom, Absalom!*, each of you (by yourself or in a small group) will give a short, polished oral report (10-15 min.) on either a historical or a critical topic pertaining to one of the works. These might include, for example, a discussion of the Insular Cases' impact on Puerto Rican identity (and how it relates to Ferré's novel) or of a major supplementary article in postcolonial theory from a list I provide (for example, Baker and Nelson's Introduction to the special issue of *American Literature* called "Violence, the Body, and 'The South'"). You should:

- explain the topic or theoretical argument and provide a one-page, easy to follow handout;
- connect the topic to the topic of our seminar and to discussions we've had so far; and
- start discussing the text from the angle of the theoretical or critical approach you just presented (main part of your report)

The Final Grade

For a Leistungsschein A, you will write a 15-20 page paper applying postcolonial theory to one of the novels we read in this class.

For a Leistungsschein B, you will write an exam in the last week of the term.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction and welcome. Cohn, "The U.S. South and Spanish America" (1-44). Handley, "Introduction" and "Narrative and Genealogy: Toward a Postnational Study of Postslavery Literatures" (1-40). Smith and Cohn, "Introduction: Uncanny Hybridities."

Week 2: *Absalom, Absalom!* chs. 1-3.

Week 3: *Absalom, Absalom!* chs. 4-6.

Week 4: *Absalom, Absalom!* chs. 7-9 and Santner.

Week 5: *All the King's Men*
Week 6: *All the King's Men*
Week 7: *All the King's Men*
Week 8: *Otoño* (1st half).
Week 9: *Otoño* (2nd half)..
Week 10: *In the Time of the Butterflies*
Week 11: *In the Time of the Butterflies*
Week 12: *In the Time of the Butterflies*
Week 13: *The House on the Lagoon* Parts 1-4.
Week 14: *House* Parts 5-7.
Week 15: *House* (finish); Gerhardt; conclusion.

Attendance: Students will have a minus added to their earned final grade for every absence beginning with the fourth.

Schedule:

Unit 1 Before Faulkner

Week 1 1/15 Introductions

Week 2 1/22 Modernism: Beebe, "What Modernism Was"; Berman, "Modernity—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"; Williams, "When Was Modernism"; Harvey, "Modernity and Modernism"; Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meaning of Modern/Modernity/Modernism"

Week 3 1/29 *Winesburg, Ohio*; Rideout, "The Simplicity of *W, O*"; Rigsbee, "The Feminine in *WO*"; Stock, "Anderson's Expressionist Art"

Week 4 2/5 *In Our Time*; Locke, "The New Negro"; Baker, from *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* *

Unit 2 Faulkner and the Politics of Space

Week 5 2/12 Faulkner, "Barn Burning," "A Rose for Emily," "That Evening Sun," "Turnabout," start *The Sound and the Fury* #

Week 6 2/19 *The Sound and the Fury*; Irwin, "Doubling and Incest"; Porter, "Faulkner's America"; Davis, "Faulkner's 'Negro'"; Lester, "Racial Awareness and Arrested Development" *

Week 7 2/26 *As I Lay Dying*; Matthews, "AILD in the Machine Age"

3/5 SPRING BREAK

Week 8 3/12 *Absalom, Absalom!* *

Week 9 3/19 Saldivar, "Looking for a Master Plan"; Porter, "A, A!: (Un)making the Father"; Godden, "A, A! and Faulkner's Erroneous Dating"; Ladd, "The Direction of the Howling"; start *Go Down, Moses*

Week 10 3/26 *Go Down, Moses*; Willis, "Aesthetics of the Rural Slum"; Davis, "Crying in the Wilderness"

Week 11 4/2 *Intruder in the Dust* * #

Unit 3 After Faulkner

Week 12 4/9 *Leafstorm*; Fuentes, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Tragedy"

Week 13 4/16 Cohn, "The U.S. South and Spanish America"; Kanafani, *What is Left for You*

Week 14 4/23 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

5/2 Final Papers Due

* By the beginning of class on Wednesday 1/29, sign up to give a short paper in class on one of these dates or find a classmate to present a paper with you on any alternative day.

An (optional) extra session will be arranged on the weekend following these two classes in order to screen and discuss the films *Today We Live* and *Intruder in the Dust*.