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ENG 3705-001: Multiculturalism and the Bildungsroman

Tim Engles
Eastern Illinois University

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3705-001

Multiculturalism and the *Bildungsroman*

English 3705: Multicultural American Literature

Fall, 2009

Tuesday/Thursday, 3:30 – 4:45 (CH3691)

Instructor: Tim Engles
Phone: 581-6316
E-dress: tdengles@eiu.edu

Office: Coleman 3831
Course listserv: 3705f09@lists.eiu.edu
Office hours: 1:45 – 2:45 Tuesday/Thursday,
and by appointment

Required texts:

Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Plum Bun* (1929)
Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967)
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
Edmund White, *A Boy's Own Story* (1982)
Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1975)
Brian Ascalon Roley, *American Son* (2001)
Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (2007)
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)

Anthony Grooms, *Bombingham* (2002)
Laila Halaby, *West of the Jordan* (2003)
Don De Grazia, *American Skin* (1998)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

**(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract,
and I will request your written agreement to them)**

COURSE DESCRIPTION: We will be working with texts from various cultural traditions that more or less conform to the basic plotline and rules of a literary genre, the *Bildungsroman*. A brief definition of this term has two important parts:

a novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place in the world.

This type of novel first arose in Germany during the eighteenth century, which is why we still use the German term to describe it (*bildungsroman* translates to “novel of education”). Hundreds of American novels now conform to this format—perhaps thousands. Those which have become famous are typically by white, heterosexual American writers and have white, heterosexual protagonists. How, we will repeatedly ask this semester in this “multicultural literature” course, does such a story differ when the writer and protagonist differ from these norms?

We will take a sociological/anthropological approach to our material, considering along the way such relevant factors as race, class, gender, and sexuality, and how these factors play out differently in different societal contexts. This course will require dedicated daily work, frequent pop quizzes (you will definitely need to do the assigned readings to get through this course), two formal essays, and two exams.

Finally, note that some of the works we'll study contain a good deal of "bad" language, unconventional ideas, controversial themes, and strong sexual content. If for any reason you strongly object to such material or otherwise find it upsetting, you should consider taking another course. If you decide to stay after becoming upset, you're welcome to speak to me about your feelings and concerns. You should also do your best to maintain an open mind, to reconsider where your own values and judgments are coming from, and to understand as fully as you can the circumstances of others before judging them.

GRADES: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

Exam 1	20%
Final exam	25%
1 st Formal essay (4-5 pages)	15%
2 nd Formal essay (6-8 pages)	25%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	15%

MISSED QUIZZES, MISSED EXAMS, AND LATE PAPERS:

1) Because the success of our conversations will depend so heavily on everyone's participation, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading, and that you do so with careful attention. In order to help keep everyone literally on the same page in this course, we will begin many sessions with a reading quiz, primarily intended to insure that you maintain attentive reading habits. Because the answers to unannounced quizzes often come up in class after quizzes are taken, ***they cannot be made up (even if you come to class late)***. These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. I recognize that some students must be absent at times; accordingly, when I compile your quiz grades at the end of the semester into an average score, I will drop the lowest one—if you miss a quiz, that will be your one dropped quiz. If you don't miss any quizzes, I will still drop your lowest score from your quiz average.

2) There will also be ***no makeup exams*** in this course; if a student misses an exam, for any reason, the makeup option will be a formal, eight-page essay on a topic chosen by Dr. Engles.

3) Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in the two essays before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day.

REGARDING READING: Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and

bring to light. Also, as noted above, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings.

E-MAIL ACTIVITY: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to the course. You already have a free EIU e-mail account, which I would prefer that you use. You can use a commercial account for this course, but be aware that free web-based accounts -- such as Hotmail or Yahoo -- sometimes cause problems with listserv subscriptions (check your junkmail folder occasionally). Our class discussions may carry over onto the e-mail listserv, and I will occasionally send messages to the entire class.

E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. *Getting an e-mail account AND CHECKING IT REGULARLY is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message – tdengles@eiu.edu – by Friday, August 28 at 5:00 p.m. to confirm that you have established an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you.* In your message, describe yourself in whatever ways you choose (including your major and career aspirations), and also write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. I expect all of you to participate in class discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say.

As noted above, be aware that many sensitive issues tend to arise within a course on multi-cultural material, so we must respect the opinions of others—try to respond to ideas, rather than to the person stating them. In my opinion, it’s okay for discussions to become “heated,” as long as we respect each other. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other students will have the same question.

Also, in the interests of keeping everyone in class undistracted and focused, ***please do not read outside materials or eat food in class (drinking beverages is okay), and do not use a computer in class.*** Also, if you have a cell phone, ***be sure to silence it ahead of time, and do not write text messages during class.***

ATTENDANCE POLICY: The rule regarding attendance is: be here. I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily schedule.” Missing class frequently will lower your final grade as well as your grade on the reading quizzes. In addition, note that coming to class “prepared” means coming to class with that day’s assigned reading—anyone who does not have the day’s assigned reading with them may be considered absent. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily

do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time because of other commitments, drop it and take another section. Finally, you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone number of one or two other students in class, or get a hold of me, so you can find out about any missed assignments *before* you come to class.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Keep in mind, of course, the English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

ENGLISH 3705: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change;
bring the day's reading material to class—
students who don't do so may be marked absent)

T AUG 25 Introduction to the course; Langston Hughes, "Theme from English B"

R AUG 27

F AUG 28, 5 p.m. **Deadline** for sending Dr. Engles an e-mail (tdengles@eiu.edu)

- identify which course you're in (English 3705)
- describe yourself in whatever ways you like, including your major and career aspirations
- After reading the above "course policies and procedures" carefully, write a statement in this e-mail saying that you have read and agree with them (also, if you disagree with any of them, feel free to describe those)
- as with all e-mail messages to your teachers, type your name at the end of it, as you would in a letter
- finally, watch your email inbox for a message from me – I will respond individually to each student's message

T SEP 1 *Plum Bun*, Jessie Redmon Fauset (1929), 11-62

R SEP 3 *Plum Bun*, 63-151

M SEP 7 LABOR DAY (no classes)

T SEP 8 *Plum bun*, 151-210

R SEP 10 *Plum Bun*, 211-292

T SEP 15 *Plum Bun*, 293-end