

ENGL 3384: The American Novel
Prof. Michael Soto

Annotated Bibliography and Essay #2 (7 pages)
Due: Thursday, 7 May 2015
in the English Department office

Annotated Bibliography

Write an annotated bibliography for the novel you plan to discuss for essay two. The annotated bibliography must include at least one single-author book and three journal articles. (A book article may stand in lieu of the journal article with my prior approval.) All books and articles must have been published within the last decade (since 2005). Not all novels on the syllabus will have a single-author book devoted strictly to the novel or to the book in question; for example, Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) has yet to receive much attention from single-author books. If you find this to be the case, please discuss a suitable alternative with me.

Attached is a page from Cynthia Davis's *Zora Neale Hurston: An Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (2013). Your bibliography entry should resemble these examples in terms of scope (very short, no more than a small paragraph) and tone (primarily objective description).

To complete this part of the assignment will need to consult the on-line MLA Bibliography database and the Trinity University library catalog.

Essay

The second essay should be roughly 2,000 words in length (6 to 8 double-spaced, typed pages). It should center on one of the following novels: Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*; Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll*; or Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. The essay may concentrate on issues either of form/rhetoric or of content, but preferably it should deal with both, since the two domains cannot really be separated. Wherever possible, your argument should be concrete rather than abstract, rooted in close textual analysis rather than merely speculative.

Once you have completed the annotated bibliography entries, your essay must incorporate a scholarly review of at least two titles (one book and one article) listed on the bibliography. The essay should address a focused question that you find interesting and important; the review section should indicate how the titles under study handle the question. You will find that it is helpful to keep this question in mind when you select titles to annotate.

Attached is a page from my book *The Modernist Nation* (2014) to give you a sense of how I handled the recent evolution of "modernism" as a category in American literary studies.

The purpose of this assignment is three-fold: first, to reacquaint you with the on-line MLA International Bibliography database; second, to give you some experience writing an annotated bibliography; and third, to encourage you to think critically about scholarly sources and to engage them in your own work.

The American Novel

ENGL 3384
The American Novel
Spring 2015
Course Time: TR 12:45-2:00 p.m.
NH 312

Prof. Michael Soto
NH 347
Hours: TR 2:00-3:30 p.m., W 1:00-3:30 p.m.
and by appointment
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Course Description and Objectives:

This course examines several classic works, from the late eighteenth century to the postmodern era, that seem to ask (and sometimes answer) the question, “What is an ‘American’ novel?” The course is designed with five primary goals in view: 1) to offer a broad outline of American literary history; 2) to map a few contours of America’s diverse cultures, literary and otherwise; 3) to explore themes that consistently inform the American intellectual tradition, from community-building and individualism to sex and death and conspiracies; 4) to provide a critical vocabulary for narrative analysis; and 5) to supply a challenging and enjoyable reading list.

Required Texts (available at the Trinity Bookstore):

L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Signet)
Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Anchor)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Dover)
Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (Scribner)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper)
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (Penguin)
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (Norton)
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (Oxford)

Reserve Texts (available at the Coates Library circulation desk):

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* rev. ed. (Verso)
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (California) [also available as an e-book]

Course Requirements and Policies:

Required Work: Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory; full preparation and active participation are also mandatory and will be evaluated as part of the final grade for the course. Three or more unexcused absences may result in a lower final course grade. There will be three in-class exams and two essays (five and seven pages each).

Late Work: Unless otherwise noted on this syllabus, **assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class the date on which they are due**. Essays late except for reasons of illness or personal emergency will be penalized at a rate of a full letter grade (e.g., from A-minus to B-minus, or from C to D) each business day they are late. An essay is considered one day late if it is turned in after the start of class. Academic or extracurricular pressures are *not* acceptable excuses for late essays. Computer problems are an unfortunate fact of life, but they are *not* acceptable excuses for late essays

Academic Honesty: You are free to discuss ideas and reading assignments with fellow students outside of class as well as within, including general ideas you may have for essays and other work. However, the specific arrangement of essays and the writing process must be strictly your own work, except insofar as you discuss these matters with me. If you quote from sources, or if your ideas are substantially indebted to them, you should acknowledge them in an appropriate manner.

All students are covered by a policy that prohibits dishonesty in academic work. Under the Honor Code, a faculty member will (or a student may) report an alleged violation to the Academic Honor Council. It is the task of the Council to investigate, adjudicate, and assign a punishment within certain guidelines if a violation has been verified. **Students who are under the Honor Code are required to pledge all written work that is submitted for a grade: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this work” and their signature. The pledge may be abbreviated “pledged” with a signature.**

Grade Weights:	Essay 1	=	20	points
	Essay 2	=	30	points
	In-class exams	=	10	points each
	Class participation	=	20	points
	Total	=	100	points

Assignment Schedule:

Week 1: Introductory Matters

R 1/15 Introduction and overview; or, “How did we get here from there?”

Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Lecture: Tim Wise
7:30 p.m. in Laurie Auditorium

Week 2: Nationalism and Narrative Analysis

T 1/20 **Anderson**: chapter 2 in *Imagined Communities* [on reserve]
Review of “The American Novel: A Critical Vocabulary” [handout]
Start reading **Twain**: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*

R 1/22 **Twain**: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) [through chapter XXXVIII]

Week 3: Modernity and the ‘American’ Way: Mark Twain

T 1/27 **Twain**: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* [finish]

R 1/29 **Twain**: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* [continued]

Week 4: Recapping the Things We Know

T 2/3 Exam review

R 2/5 **In-class exam**

Week 5: Love and Death in an American Novel: Nathaniel Hawthorne

T 2/10 [no class today]

R 2/12 **Hawthorne:** *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) [through chapter XVI]

Week 6: Love and Death in an American Novel: Nathaniel Hawthorne

T 2/17 **Hawthorne:** *The Scarlet Letter* [finish]

R 2/19 **Hawthorne:** *The Scarlet Letter* [continued]

Week 7: The Great American Novel?: Harriet Beecher Stowe (part one)

T 2/24 **Stowe:** *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) [through chapter XVII]

R 2/26 **Stowe:** *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [through chapter XXXI]

Week 8: The Great American Novel?: Harriet Beecher Stowe (part two)

T 3/3 **Stowe:** *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [finish]

R 3/5 **Baldwin and Tompkins** commentaries in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

3/7-3/15 SPRING BREAK 🏖️

Week 9: Buckle Your Seatbelt, Dorothy: L. Frank Baum

T 3/17 **Baum:** *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) [finish]

R 3/19 **Baum:** *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* [continued]

Week 10: Mid-semester Reflections

T 3/24 **Essay one due** at the beginning of class
Exam review

R 3/26 **In-class exam**

Week 11: In Search of the Lost Generation: Ernest Hemingway

T 3/31 **Hemingway:** *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) [finish]

R 4/2 **Hemingway:** *The Sun Also Rises* [continued]

Week 12: The Talking Book: Zora Neale Hurston

T 4/7 **Hurston:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) [finish]

R 4/9 **Hurston:** *Their Eyes Were Watching God* [continued]

S 4/11 San Antonio Book Festival (free)
All day at the San Antonio Public Library/Southwest School of Art

Literary Death Match (\$10)
7:00-8:30 p.m. at the Charline McCombs Empire Theater

Week 13: The Beat Minds of Their Generation: Jack Kerouac

T 4/14 **Kerouac:** *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (1951/2007) [through page 280]

R 4/16 **Kerouac:** *On the Road: The Original Scroll* [finish]

Week 14: The Day the Music Died: Jennifer Egan

T 4/21 **Egan:** *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) [through chapter 10]

R 4/23 **Egan:** *A Visit from the Goon Squad* [finish]

Week 15: Taking Care of Business

T 4/28 **In-class exam**

R 4/30 From American Novel to American Film
Course Evaluations

R 5/7 **Essay two due** in the English department office (NH 344) by 4:00 p.m.

A Note About Essay Grades: *The following remarks are intended to provide a sense of criteria for grading essays. Note that four topics recur: thesis, use of evidence, design (organization), and basic writing skills (grammar, mechanics, spelling). If you have any questions about essay writing, please do not hesitate to ask me during my office hours.*

The Unsatisfactory Essay (D or F): The D or F essay either has no thesis or else it has one that is strikingly vague, broad, or uninteresting. There is little indication that the writer understands the material being presented. The paragraphs do not hold together; ideas do not develop from sentence to sentence. This essay usually repeats the same thoughts again and again, perhaps in slightly different language but often in the same words. The D or F essay is filled with mechanical faults, errors in grammar, and errors in spelling.

The C Essay: The C essay has a thesis, but it is vague, or else it is uninteresting or obvious. It does not advance an argument that anyone might care to debate (e.g., “*On the Road* is a strange book”). The thesis in the C essay often hangs on some personal opinion. If the writer is a recognized authority, such an expression of personal taste may be noteworthy, but writers gain authority not merely by expressing their tastes but by justifying them. Personal opinion is often the engine that drives an argument, but opinion by itself is never sufficient. It must be defended. The C essay rarely uses evidence well; sometimes it does not use evidence at all. Even if it has a clear and interesting thesis, an essay with insufficient evidence is still a C essay. The C essay often has mechanical faults, errors in grammar and spelling, but please note: an essay without such flaws may still be a C essay.

The B Essay: The reader of a B essay knows exactly what the author wants to say. It is well organized, it presents a worthwhile and interesting idea, and the idea is supported by sound evidence presented in a neat and orderly way. Some of the sentences may not be elegant, but they are clear, and in them thought follows naturally on thought. The paragraphs may be unwieldy now and then, but they are organized around one main idea. The reader does not have to read a paragraph two or three times to get the thought the writer is trying to convey. The B essay is always mechanically correct. The spelling is good, and the punctuation is accurate. Above all, the essay makes sense throughout. It has a thesis that is limited and worth arguing. It does not contain unexpected digressions, and it ends by keeping the promise to argue and inform that the writer makes in the beginning.

The A Essay: The A essay has all the good qualities of the B essay, but in addition it is lively, well paced, interesting, even exciting. The essay has style. Everything in it seems to fit the thesis exactly. It may have a proofreading error or two, or even a misspelled word, but the reader feels that these errors are the consequence of the normal accidents that all good writers encounter. Reading the essay, we can feel a mind at work. We are convinced that the writer cares for her or his ideas, and about the language that carries them. The sure mark of an A essay is that you will find yourself telling someone else about it.

Mellon Initiative Course Revision Grant Report Guidelines

The purpose of the “blog reports” is to create resources for other arts and humanities faculty who are considering integrating research skills and opportunities into their courses. Your report will be made available through the Mellon Initiative website. Please keep in mind this broader audience when you write.

Please use the following questions as a kind of template:

What course did you modify? Tell us about it (e.g., dept, level, type of students, goals, etc.). Why did you choose to modify this course?

ENGL 3384: American Novel was taken mainly upper division English majors along with three non-majors and one University staff member. I chose to modify this course because it is a regular staple in my teaching repertoire and I significantly update the syllabus and individual assignments on a routine basis. The course will soon satisfy the University’s Written Communication requirement, which calls for even more substantial revision.

What assignment or course module did you add? If possible, please include an attachment or link to the actual assignment. Why did you choose to add this component? What were the goals of the assignment or module? How did you assess the assignment?

I modified the second (and final) essay assignment. The revised assignment added an annotated bibliography; students were then required to incorporate secondary scholarship into their own independent, original literary analyses.

My goals in substantively revising the assignment were three-fold: First, I wanted to expose students yet again to the online tools of literary analysis. (Most students would have encountered these tools in ENGL 2311: Literary Methods.) Second, I wanted students to encounter professional literary scholarship and to view this work as models for their own efforts. Third, I wanted to expose students to the connection between scholarly research and independent critical thought.

I assessed the assignment using the attached essay-grading rubric (final page of the syllabus).

What worked? What didn’t work? Why? Any surprises?

By all appearances, all students in the course had little or no trouble navigating the library’s primary tools for online scholarship (such as the library catalog and the MLA International Bibliography). This was clear both during class discussion of the tools and as I reviewed the annotated bibliographies.

The essay results were on the whole successful, although (predictably) the more advanced students—Seniors with more experience in upper-division literature courses—handled the

assignment most smoothly. Students with less experience incorporating scholarly research into their own analyses tended to cite scholarship in clunky or less relevant ways.

It was also not a surprise that students (at all levels) tended to favor scholarship that was immediately available online. The same e-book, for example, was cited by multiple students, even though it was an inferior source.

What would you do differently next time?

During this iteration, I combined the annotated bibliography and essay assignment (that is, both were due on the same day). Going forward, I plan to require the annotated bibliography well in advance of the final paper so that I can discuss how bibliographic work might inform independent scholarly analysis (and so that more advanced students can model the connection for less experienced students). Students had no trouble citing relevant scholarship; their effectiveness in doing so varied widely.

I might also consider requiring students to incorporate references that are only available in print.