

ENG3420: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

“OBSOLETE? THE NOVEL AND THE UNIVERSITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE”

William Paterson University
Fall 2014

Description:

English 3420 – Contemporary American Fiction

This course is designed to explore works of fiction in the contemporary United States after 1968. Our particular course this semester will focus on discourses of the novel in the age of television and digital media. In this course we will examine the role, and future, of both the novel and the university in the 21st century. These are both objects/institutions/practices that some critics have suggested are becoming obsolete for many reasons. We will examine some theoretical background on the novel, and explore the ideas of recent critics who have theorized about its history and its future. In the process we will also look at other fictional forms, including the short story, play, film, video, and various forms of digital storytelling. We will interrogate conceptions of “technology” and “obsolescence” in these creative works, and think about the broader role of storytelling and digital media in contemporary American culture. The particular novels that we will be reading also happen to belong to a genre known as The Academic Novel. We will spend some time discussing what this genre entails, how it fits into American literary history, and what these particular texts have to say about higher education and the role of colleges in American intellectual, artistic and political life.

Required Texts:

(Listed here in the order that we will be reading them.)

Fitzpatrick, Kathleen. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence*. Full digital text of the book is available at:
<http://www.anxietyofobsolescence.com/>

A physical copy of the book will also be on reserve in the library.

Shields, David. *Reality Hunger*. (non-fiction)

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*.

Roth, Philip. *The Human Stain*.

Everett, Percival. *Erasure*.

Smith, Zadie. *On Beauty*.

Cole, Teju. *Open City*.

WEEK ONE

9/3 WPUNJ semester begins, 9/3

WEEK TWO

9/8 Course Introduction; *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* (Read the Introduction completely; Click through the rest of the chapters to see what the book is about.)

9/10 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence*. (Chapter 1: “Three Discourses on the Age of Television”)

WEEK THREE

9/15 **Library Research Session – Cheng Library, Room L-01**; Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence*. (Chapter 2: “Machine”)

9/17 David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

WEEK FOUR

9/22 David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

9/24 David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

WEEK FIVE

9/29 Don DeLillo, *White Noise*; Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* (Chapter 3: “Spectacle”)

10/1 *White Noise*

WEEK SIX

10/6 *White Noise*

10/8 *White Noise*

WEEK SEVEN

10/13 Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*; **(White Noise Essay Due)**

10/15 *The Human Stain*

WEEK EIGHT

10/20 *The Human Stain*

10/22 *The Human Stain*

WEEK NINE

10/27 Percival Everett, *Erasure*; A. Lavelle Porter, “When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong.” (handout) **(The Human Stain Essay Due)**

10/29 *Erasure*

WEEK TEN

11/3 *Erasure*

This syllabus is subject to changes as deemed necessary by the instructor

11/5 *Erasure*

WEEK ELEVEN

11/10 Zadie Smith, *On Beauty*; Zadie Smith, “Generation Why?” (**Erasure Essay Due**)

11/12 *On Beauty*

WEEK TWELVE

11/17 *On Beauty*

11/19 *On Beauty*

WEEK THIRTEEN

11/24 Teju Cole, *Open City*; Teju Cole, “Hafiz” (**On Beauty Essay Due**)

11/26 *Open City*

WEEK FOURTEEN

12/1 *Open City*

12/3 *Open City*

WEEK FIFTEEN

12/8 Final Essay Review; (**Open City Essay Due**)

12/10 Final Essay Review

Exam Period begins 12/12

Final Essay Due 12/17