

## FIRST ASSIGNMENT

As you watch parts of Ross Spears' documentary films "Tell About the South: Voices in Black and White" take notes and write down any questions you have about the writers or literature mentioned, Southern culture in general, or the so-called Southern Renaissance. Since "Tell About the South" is a three-hour documentary on the rise of Southern Literature beginning in the 1920s, we will not have time to watch all of it, but each of the three videos is available for checkout in the GSU Library media center, and Spears's films are available for purchase from his website: <http://www.ageefilms.org/>

During the course of the semester, we will encounter most of the writers who appear, or who are discussed or mentioned, in the film. We will also watch portions of another Spears film, "Long Shadows," an anecdotal and sometimes comical account of the lasting influence of the Civil War in the American South and elsewhere in the United States, and "Unchained Memories" (the title plays on a popular song, "Unchained Melodies"). "Unchained Memories" presents dramatic readings of first-person accounts of slave life in the South before the Civil War. These accounts were taken down by Depression-era workers for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) as part of the Federal Writers' Project. Because descendants of former slave-owners were sometimes the interviewers, these narratives were occasionally edited by the situation or the transcriber, but many of them, as you will see, sound quite authentic. The originals, still on the shelves of the Library of Congress in volumes of bound typescripts, are used for these performances. Some of these narratives have reached print in recent times, often focusing on a single state or even region of a state.

We will, if time permits, see parts of some other documentaries about the South, but there are hundreds that one might find and use. They will be used to evoke a more immediate sense of places, people, language, food, and lifeways that, taken all together, have helped to create images, myths, or lasting aspects of the region.

One such film concerns the 1927 Mississippi River flood that covered the Delta region of the state of Mississippi. The film is focused on the Percy family, two members of which are featured in our main text, *The Oxford Book of the American South*: William Alexander Percy, planter, poet, and author of a 1941 memoir titled *Lanterns on the Levee*, and Walker Percy, his young cousin, author of several novels, most noteworthy of which are perhaps *The Moviegoer* and *The Last Gentleman*.

I hope to bring in a couple of short films on Southern foodways and at least one of a trio of dramatizations of Georgia folk tales by retired GSU professor Gary Moss. If any of you have special interests in film, especially in documentary film, you might want to consider a project on the topic of Southern documentaries.

**English 8850/ CRN 83257: Southern Literature**

**Mondays 7:15 p.m.-9:45 p.m./ 904-GCB**

**McHaney Office Hours: 3-5 p.m.: Mon & Wed and by appointment**

**Fall 2006: Tom McHaney**

**Office: 938 GCB**

[I'm teaching another MW class from 5:30 to 6:45; if you'd like to see me before class, e-mail me and we can arrange to meet at 6:45 or so.

For this class I'm also happy to meet with any students following the class.] Telephone: (off:

404-654-6146/ (home: 404-378-2319)

e-mail: <tmchaney@gsu.edu>

English Department Fax: 404-651-1710

**Oct 16--Full semester midpoint (last day to Withdraw and possibly receive a "W").**

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

**Edward Ayers and Bradley Mittendorf, editors, *The Oxford Book of the American South* (Oxford: paper or hardback)**

**William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (Vintage International, paperback)**

**Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes were Watching God* (Harper Perennial Classic/paper)**

**Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (Milkweed Editions, paperback)**

**Ellen Douglas, *Can't Quit You, Baby* (Penguin, paperback)**

**These texts are available at Georgia State University Bookstore (in the Student Center), which lists on-line excellent used book prices for all these items: here's the web address: [http://shop.efollett.com/htmlroot/textbooks/SelectByCourse\\_02.jsp](http://shop.efollett.com/htmlroot/textbooks/SelectByCourse_02.jsp)**

**Copies are also sometimes available at Georgia Bookstore, at the corner of Edgewood and Courtland, and Park Place Bookstore on the corner of Decatur St. and Park Place beyond the new Science building. One can also usually find most of them at any good bookstore in Atlanta. If you have the time you can find them, usually quite cheap, on the Web, using various sources (Amazon.com, alibris.com, abebooks.com – though it takes a bit longer to get these).**

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT, IF YOU PLAN TO REMAIN IN THE CLASS, THAT YOU READ THE ENTIRE SYLLABUS VERY CAREFULLY RIGHT AWAY SO THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS. THEN REFER BACK TO IT WEEKLY, RE-READING BOTH THE INTRODUCTION AND THE LIST OF**

**REQUIREMENTS AS THE COURSE DEVELOPS. YOUR CONTINUED ENROLLMENT IN THE COURSE SIGNIFIES THAT YOU ACCEPT THIS RESPONSIBILITY.**

**Your E-mail address**

During the course of the term I often send handouts to members of the class and make announcements about opportunities, websites, etc. Right now I have a valuable list of materials for the study of southern literature and culture it's more economical to send you via e-mail; and I will, if you like, send you the syllabus that way too, so you'll have it on disk or hard drive and can hit links to web sites with one stroke. Information from the graduate office, the English Department, and the university, as well as news and queries from other graduate students through the Graduate English Associations list serv – all these come to your university-assigned address. It is a simple matter to have mail sent to that address re-directed to the e-mail address you prefer. You should go to the GSU university web site, look under student services, and fill out the required form to get all your e-mail. If you go to the English Department web site, go to graduate matters, etc., you can find out how to put yourself on the GEA (Graduate English Association) List Serv to receive job and research opportunities, party invitations, etc.

If your computer system is not compatible with mine, or non-existent, let me know and I will make a point of giving you handouts on paper from the start.

**The Scope of the Course:** A selective survey of the literature--fiction, poetry, drama, essays, memoirs, history--created in and about what the world has come to know as the American South, primarily in the 19th and 20th centuries. One text, *The Oxford Book of the American South: Testimony, Memory, Fiction*, will help the student build a context of historical and personal documents to assist in "reading" the South as it appears in works of fiction in the Oxford collection, in an anthology of Southern poetry, and in a select group of Southern novels, memoirs, and historical or cultural studies. Southern Literature is read and taught now in most parts of the world. In Europe, scholars have formed a Southern Studies Forum and hold annual meetings to discuss the literature of the American South. Canadian women writers identify strongly with the Southern tradition of writing by women, especially Eudora Welty, and writers from Quebec--especially women writers--venerate the grotesque mysticism of Flannery O'Connor. In Japan there are more collected editions of Southern writers than there are in the South--or in America. And while many Southern writers are very important abroad, none has had more influence than William Faulkner. Russians and Finns agree on Faulkner's greatness. Latin Americans, Germans, and the French write novels imitating his styles. Faulkner's imaginary world, embodied in more than a dozen novels and dozens of story about the citizens of the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, is known, and often imitated, in most of the world's literary cultures. Among the questions this course takes up, then, is Why? What has the Southern experience taught its writers, what have they taught the world, and what can they teach us, not

merely about the writing of literature but also about the power of the past in the present, the tragic consequences of enforced poverty and unfounded prejudice, the models of human endeavor endurance represented in the economic and moral struggles to which the South has long been a witness?

One of the simplest things the class will do is to engage repeatedly in the comparison of texts. We will also have encounters with previously unheard voices and discover revisions and rewritings of both history and myth. The South is not, and never has been, a homogeneous place: each southern state has 8 or 10 or more very distinct regions, with different topographies, different soils, different crops and products and occupations, different settlement patterns, different dialects, and, consequently, different lifeways and different stories. There are about 150 distinct pockets of culture in the south, probably more; from each of them could come a new literature--and from many of them a literature, in fact, has come..

In addition to selections in the *Oxford Book of the American South*--a book sufficiently good looking that you are going to want to keep it, and your family and friends are going to want to take it away from you--we will read together two novels with related themes of relationships between some of the south's peoples, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, and a recent memoir by a Georgia author that, without intending to, puts both Hurston's and Faulkner's novels into a richer context. Each student will also have the assigned task of discovering some other works of the southern imagination, one from the nineteenth and one from the twentieth century, by perhaps less widely known writers, and of surveying a work of history or cultural studies that takes up some aspect of the South often treated by its creative writers.

**FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT**  
**READ THE FOLLOWING ESSAY AND WRITE A 2-PAGE RESPONSE TO IT.**  
**DUE SECOND WEEK OF CLASS, AUGUST 28.**

***What English 885 is About: A Short Essay on Southern Literature***

Originally, this course concentrated on what was called, beginning in the 1950s, the Southern Renaissance, a term coined in part from the title of F. O. Matthiessen's landmark study of the New England/New York writers of the mid-nineteenth century, *American Renaissance*. The point, or the focus, was that the remarkable production of poets, persons of letters, novelists, and even dramatists in the southern states, beginning in the 1920s, was a phenomenal event comparable to what had happened in Europe and England in various stages from about the fourteenth century through the seventeenth, or in the American northeast from about 1820 to 1860. For a couple of decades, at least, "Southern Renaissance" was, however, too often a chauvinist or sentimental and self-congratulatory term, one that made rather fuzzy claims about a narrowly regarded "southern culture" as a unique producer of literary people. To put it as

Garrison Keillor, the inventor of Lake Wobegone, Minnesota, might: The sky was bluer, the grass was greener, the talk was better, and most of the people were whiter.

The perspective of this course, this quarter, will try to place this phenomenon within a larger cultural context, one that relates it to a broad range of literary expression in the 18th and 19th century south, including personal narratives and memoirs only recently made widely available, and equally to the various expansions and revolutions of European and American thought and expression in the first two decades of the twentieth century gathered under the somewhat slippery term "Modernism."

The South I'm interested in is defined, first, by its historical roots as the Slave States of 1860: how it got to that point and what happened thereafter; second, by its diversity within these former slave states: that is, each southern state is clearly made up of eight to ten or more distinct geographical, topographical, commercial regions, many with very different settlement patterns, even starting with the native peoples who lived here before the coming of Europeans and various groups from the very different cultures of the British Isles. Southern dialects are apparently coming closer together, but recent research still shows us that there are well over a hundred different pockets of dialect in the former slave states.

As a consequences of these differences of culture and language and, of course, history, within each of the southern states, as well as from state to state, we might see that there are over a hundred "souths." They share some common burdens and common history, but any expression coming from any one of them is apt to be different from that which comes from any other. We know that each southern state is different in many respects from the others, though we often forget that, and we rarely think how different the specific regions of each state are from one another. Think of Georgia: mountains, valleys, coves, piedmont, piney woods, wiregrass, black belt, swamp, coastal plain, tidal marsh, barrier island. Settlement patterns--i.e., the origins of people who came here at various times--reacting on these different environments in southern states produced different lifeways in themselves that were then subject to later incursions and transformations from following immigrant groups. The native Americans of the south--before it was the South--were diverse and lived diverse lives. Among Africans brought here against their will to serve Southern agriculture were likewise representatives of a good many different styles of culture. We now have evidence, for example, of early Muslim immigration among African slaves, traditions that did not die out but were surreptitiously sustained and adapted. More richly, traditions of such important cultural expressions as food preparation, hospitality and courtesy, crafts and music and agriculture sustained and adapted, too, in order to become, or influence, what we think of as distinctly "southern." Even a writer of fiction, drama, or poetry who doesn't intuit this will make serious mistakes as she or he represents the south: for example, Shelby Foote, the novelist and historian of the Civil War, admits that his own fiction did not represent the life of the Mississippi Delta where he grew up and had very interesting roots (his grandfather was a Jewish bookkeeper who married a planter's daughter) but was modeled after the writing of Faulkner (whose country was the north-central hills of Mississippi, a place remarkably different from the Delta in every respect, including language and settlement and daily life).

If southerners with minds as acute and serious and imaginative as Foote's can make this mistake, imagine what part-time writers and critics can do. Too much writing about the south and southern literature for a long time made the false assumption that there was a single "South" and that it all sounded alike. I take the view expressed well by a contemporary poet, novelist and cultural essayist, Wendell Berry of Kentucky, that the truest and most valuable regionalism is "local life aware of itself." All five words in that phrase deserve to be accented strongly when you say it over again five times, each time putting the emphasis on a different word. Of course, the greatest southern writers, like the greatest writers everywhere, are those who find the universal in the local, making a literary language out of local vernacular and local feeling, constructing stories and character and a subtle sense of fictional place out of the melding of observation and reading, remembering and thinking, all moderated by the ambition to make something as artful as whatever has inspired them the most.

What we now know--and are still learning--doesn't destroy or demean the pride that one may take in a "southern renaissance" as invented in the 1950s, it enlarges it and includes more southerners in its creation and continuation. Oddly, what we know actually validates the imaginations of writers who had no way of knowing how right they were when they meditated on the specific places where they grew up and wrote honestly about what Faulkner called "the human heart in conflict with itself." Modernism, as it turns out--and it's still with us--is a radical means of re-discovering and even of conserving the power of what has preceded us in this world.

So we will look behind the Southern Renaissance and beyond it as well as "at" it. I hope I have devised some simple projects that will give you the experience of investigating this on your own, of making some discoveries about the subject you haven't had before, of discovering that you have talents and skills for reading and researching and analyzing and teaching that you were perhaps only mildly aware of. It's a given that you'll be able to read some remarkable literature, most of which you will, I think, not only profit from but enjoy. A syllabus in this field is, I think, inevitably instinctive and impressionistic, not a distinct program toward a set of concrete skills or applicable facts, and yet a course of reading and writing like this has the potential to teach us how to do something we didn't know how to do before, encourages us to alter attitudes and opinions about the past, the present, and the future. The "South" is one of the most exciting subjects in the world today, partly because the PAST has changed radically since I left graduate school myself. How can that be? Mainly it has changed because of the work of two generations of historians who have re-considered it and brought forth new documentation that has led to new interpretations of southern life. We have new information, based on good archival research, about the history of many southern institutions and phenomenon: farming, slavery, religion, the role of towns, the role of industry, the importance of music, the lives of women, etc. But the south has also changed because the world changed. Tides of new thought have swept over the south just as they have swept over the rest of the world. Acutely important are the tides that swept the western world in the first two decades of the twentieth century, that interesting reaction to "modernity" that revolutionized the arts of music, painting, and writing: the work of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, Picasso, Braque and Matisse, Joyce, Eliot, and Thomas Mann.

Likewise, the new sciences of these times, as well as philosophy, had their effect as well: physics, biology, psychology, and anthropology especially filtered new impressions of both everyday reality and the micro- and macro-life of the universe into common perception. Freud and Jung, James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Henri Bergson's ideas about time and memory, and Einstein's Physics found their way into modern Southern literature. Increasingly, political activity and social change kept pressure on southern society that continues into the present.

The best southern writers always seem to have known that when the past changes, the present changes; when the present changes, the past changes. There is a sense that both the individual and any society is, as Marcel Proust put it, memory incarnate, but memory, oddly, is not static, fixed, determined---it adjusts to new information all the time. When William Faulkner has a character in Requiem for a Nun say, "The past is never dead, it isn't even past," he was expressing such an idea. Both the past and the present will indeed continue to change, and, I think, out of the south will come even more remarkable writing, especially writing from quarters of the south--from people and places in the south--that we have yet to hear from. That makes the course all the more exciting. When you finish, if you devote yourself to reading and thinking and writing, you will be able to anticipate, perhaps even to create yourself, some of that new expression.

-end-

### **SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT**

Review *The Oxford Book of the American South* by reading the Preface and the short introductory essays to each of the book's five sections and scanning the table of contents of the entire book. Write a two-page summation of what the book offers and how its organization seems to fulfill the subtitle of the collection. **Due September 11**

### **THIRD WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT**

Write a one- to two-page report on the main editor of the *Oxford Book of the American South*, University of Virginia historian Edward Ayers; using the Internet or the library at GSU to find out what kind of scholar he is, what he has written or published; and what he has otherwise done as an historian of the South. Use your evidence to speculate briefly how Ayers' research and writing might have inspired the construction of this anthology. **Due September 18.**

### **Specific Requirements and Grade Weights:**

**10%: Quality and appearance of final portfolio, Due by December 8.**

*YOU WILL NEED A GOOD-SIZED THREE-RING NOTEBOOK OR SOME OTHER KIND OF PORTFOLIO IN WHICH YOU ORGANIZE THE DOCUMENTS THAT PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF YOUR PROGRESS AND COMMITMENT IN THIS CLASS. THESE INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: CLASS NOTES; A READING LOG; YOUR NOTES ON VOCABULARY, YOUR DRAFT AND REVISED PAPERS AND OTHER WRITTEN MATERIALS; CLEAR EVIDENCE (DOWLOADS) OF YOUR MEANINGFUL VISITS TO SOUTHERN WEBSITES ON*

*THE LIST YOU WILL RECEIVE; HANDOUTS FROM THE INSTRUCTOR AND OTHER STUDENTS REGARDING COURSE MATERIAL; RESEARCH NOTES. STUDENTS WHO ANNOTATE THEIR TEXTBOOKS SOMETIMES PREFER TO HAND IN THESE MARKED-UP TEXTS.*

*ALL THIS MATERIAL WILL BE HANDED IN, EVALUATED, AND RETURNED AFTER THE END OF THE SEMESTER. IT SHOULD BE A GOOD INDICATION OF YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE COURSE, ITS GOALS AND REQUIREMENTS, AND FOR THE CONSCIENTIOUS IT SHOULD REMAIN IN YOUR POSSESSION AS A VALUABLE DEMONSTRATION OF YOUR ACHIEVEMENT, A REFERENCE SOURCE, AND AN INTERESTING SITE OF MEMORY FOR WHAT YOU LEARN THIS SEMESTER.*

**15% total:** the three short preliminary papers @ 5% each **(You'll have the chance, or the obligation, to revise these little essays as much as you like; they'll go into your portfolio as a kind of introduction to the portfolio.)**

**10% total--**Evidence of on-line learning in portfolio:

World Wide Web research:

Southern Sites

Center for the Study of Southern Culture

Center for the Study of the American South

Documenting the American South

Southern Author Sites

Southern History

Valley of the Shadow project

Other historical sites with relationship to course material

Miscellaneous related Southern web sites: get creative, going after on-line encyclopedias from participating states, sites about language (Linguistic Atlas, Dialect Atlas, Dictionaries of southernisms or dialects, sites about southern food or southern pleasures—stock car culture, moonshine, voodoo and hoodoo, etc

**10%--**Poetry Report: In-class report on Southern poet and poem

**15% --**Fiction Writer Report: total: A short (no more than two-page single-spaced handout) report on ONE author and her or his significant fictional work, seeking to interest fellow students in reading a text chosen from Southern authors NOT represented in our anthology or on the syllabus assignments.

Here's how to find your author: Look at the "Documenting the American South" web-site, sub-section entitled "Library of Southern Literature" and Sub-sub-section entitled "Collection of Electronic Texts" <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/texts.html> . Scroll through this looking at titles; try to find three that seem particularly interesting. Then look at the web sites of at least three of the following university presses to find three MODERN titles of fiction that seem interesting. Pick your author and title from these six, EITHER a 19<sup>th</sup> century text OR a twentieth century text. You may, whenever you like, download any of the



texts on “Documenting the American South” to a hard or floppy disk, which allows you to employ the “word search” function to analyze them, if you like, but in most cases the texts should be in the GSU library; many texts are available for purchase cheaply on line from the used book sites listed the “Required Texts” section of this syllabus.

For reprints of some 19<sup>th</sup> century texts and many 20<sup>th</sup> century texts, consult the websites of the following Southern university presses:

Louisiana State U Press: [http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Subject\\_Listing/litstud\\_us\\_south.htm](http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Subject_Listing/litstud_us_south.htm) or , . [http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Lectures\\_Series/voices\\_south.htm](http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Lectures_Series/voices_south.htm)

. U of Georgia Press: <http://www.ugapress.uga.edu/books/georgiabooks/> and <http://www.ugapress.uga.edu/books/subjectcats/>

U of North Carolina Press: <http://uncpress.unc.edu/FMPro?-db=pubtest.fmp&-format=search-results.htm&-sortfield=BIP%20Author%20full%20name&-sortfield=BIP%20title&op=cn&aup%20full%20subjects=southern%20studies&-find>

Perhaps the simplest way to get to these sites is to “Google” the name of the press and then to look for “Southern Fiction” or “Books About the South” (which will give you history and other fields); be creative, and if you have problems let me know and I’ll try to help you.

You may want to consult one or more of the following presses, too, which are most likely to reprint early and long out of print texts from their own states: U of Alabama Press, U Press of Mississippi, U of Tennessee Press, U of Arkansas Press, U of South Carolina Press, U of Kentucky Press, U Press of Virginia, Mercer University Press). Each of these presses publishes series or individual examples of creative work by southern writers, in some cases work from the recent past that they are bringing back into print, like, for example, LSU Press’s “Voices of the South” series and U Georgia Press’s “Brown Thrasher” series. [http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Lectures\\_Series/voices\\_south.htm](http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/catalog/Lectures_Series/voices_south.htm). Just recently, Kennesaw State University has started a press that will publish out-of-print work by Georgia writers.

You should also take a look at titles of critical or historical work each of these presses has to offer on the topics of southern literature, southern history, and southern culture, while you’re at it. A perusal of one or more of these sites per week will give you an idea of how rich and broad the field of southern studies has become.

**15%--**Outside Critical Reading Report: [Essentially a short book review of something from a list of works on southern culture I will give you or something that you find on Southern culture or history as you browse the web sites of Southern University Presses. You may do this book review **without** a detailed reading of the entire book, using some

of the strategies that allow you to “review” *The Oxford Book of the American South* before you have read it.

**25%** --Perfect short paper (a 10-15 page paper discussing how any two of the separate book-length texts read this semester -- *Go Down, Moses*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, or *Can't Quite You, Baby* – address the myth of the cultural hero specifically in terms of the Southern experience of male or female, white or black characters. Like all written class work, this paper, if presented early enough, may be revised, with the instructor’s advice, to improve content, argument, style, form, or mechanics, if necessary)

***FIRST DRAFT DUE NOVEMBER 20 OR SOONER; FINAL DRAFT DUE WITH PORTFOLIO ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 8.***

### **Some Tips on How to Read Our Texts:**

As readers, we might have the ambition to fulfill either Henry James’s admonition to be a person on whom nothing is lost or Vladimir Nabokov’s definition of the ideal reader: an insomniac with perfect recall. But that is very difficult. However, as one of my students realized, uttering the phrase in true surprise, you can’t read a novel until you have read it, and this is true of poetry as well. What follows are some hints about what we should pay attention to as we read seriously, often intently, not merely to satisfy the requirements for a course but to become more conversant with good writing, which in turn makes us better speakers and even, sometimes, better human beings and better citizens, believe it or not. We’ll begin with prose:

You’ve been speaking prose all your life, practically, and reading it for a fairly long time, but how to you read it as a successful student? First, ALWAYS have a dictionary handy as you read. I’m going to demonstrate more specifically why this is necessary in some remarks about reading poetry later on, but using the prose that introduces your poetry anthology, so be sure to consult that section as soon as you finish this one. The main point is not to let words remain gaps in the text. Serious writing doesn’t have any gaps; you can’t fast-forward through it. So look up words that are the least bit unfamiliar, and in the back of your Reading Log notebook keep a Vocabulary List with definitions of new words encountered in the reading—and make them short but at least long enough for you to get the sense of their use in the sentences where you encounter them.

It has been argued that the South can still be identified as a coherent culture, and as a culture somewhat different from other regions of the United States, by virtue of differences not merely in term of history, settlement, climate, etc., but in a great number of what are called “lifeways”: ways of cooking, of celebrating birth and death, of creating music, of eating, of using language, etc. Keep your eye out for evidence of such differences as you read, and pay attention, as well, for the things about which some Southern writing is also remarkably silent: social and historical and economic issues that you imagine should be visible.

Pay attention, of course, to the ways in which Southern writing employs these larger matters we find in almost all narrative, whether it is fiction, memoir, or the writing of history:

Time, Narrative Point of View, Presentation of Place and Human Character, Naming, and Dramatic Encounters. When reading the two novels and the memoir that are assigned, try to focus not only on small details but also on large ideas, themes, and patterns. As you read, make notes about the main issues, recording as well how they may change as the plot shifts, as complications occur. Record, as you read along, how ongoing events in a novel and subsequent shifts of narrative perspective or structural pattern change early impressions. Trust your own feelings and puzzlements, but try to see how the novelist constructs situations that give mistaken perceptions or partial understandings and then constructs scenes that clarify things later on, at least for the reader. Your questions about these matters and others, such as authorial intention, character motivation, narrative order, patterns of language, event, characterization, and setting should help other readers see and discuss such things, so don't be reluctant to bring questions to class. Before you read, perhaps, make a simple chart listing these items and, as you read, identify how each is deployed. What are main events and central characters? Indicating to yourself, as you go along, perhaps by highlighting your own notes, which dramatic scenes are absolutely central in importance and which scenes are more narrative and appear mainly as transition or as preparation for what is to come. Be on the lookout for that object, character, event, or theme that is exposed to you early on in order to prepare for a much more important re-appearance of the same thing, with a different human or fictional value, later in the book.

Try to sketch out the **time structure** of each novel and be prepared to see how this time structure complicates or adds to the telling of the story and the development, or sense of development, of character and plot. Note any keys to the time structure that appear within the book in some other form (i.e., references to clocks, calendars, etc.). [Eudora Welty says that she learned something important about the presentation of time in fiction from reading Katherine Anne Porter, whose stories always had a "clock" that was set into motion in the opening paragraph. Be prepared to speak about the fictional importance of time in the work.]

Observe the **shift of setting** in the novel, even if it is very small, and how "place" is evoked or portrayed (through description, through stories, through character's perspectives of vision or memory?) in different parts of the text. Make a list of settings, shifts of scene, and the repetition of similar aspects of scene (beds and porches, for example). Be prepared to discuss the fictional importance of setting in the work. "**Place**" in fiction is invariably a construct by the author, even in autobiographical writing such as memoir, because in good writing you need only the details that matter to the story, that help characterize or advance the conflicts that occur. See if you can tell how place is being constructed.

Observe how **character** is portrayed: physical or psychological description, observation by outside point of view, authorial or narrative explanation, self-expression, place or possessions, reactions of others, etc. Make a list of major characters and note which ones "change," how they change, and what prompts them to change. Make a list of minor characters that have impact upon the action of main characters, whose job may be to motivate, illuminate, report on, or reveal the significance of or dramatize the acts of the more important figures.

Since we're reading only two novels, you should have time to find out something about

the standard **critical judgments** about these texts. Here are some hints about how you can efficiently find out a bit concerning what has been written on the text in question: For contemporary reviews, you need consult only *Book Review Digest* for the time of the book's publication. You may also find that there is a volume devoted to contemporary reviews of an author's works. For a book, and author, with a long career, such as Faulkner, you can go to *Sixteen Modern American Authors*, and for Hurston, one of the many books edited by Joseph Flora and various collaborators on writers of different eras in American literary history. For recent reports on either author, look into volumes of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (in reference area of the library) *American Literary Scholarship: An Annual* (a full set is in the Troy Moore Library, and another in the library's reference area) and, of course, use the Internet.

Are there **themes** or **patterns of story** in the work that are archetypal themes of literature or mythology? Is there a psychological, philosophical, or theological (or, for that matter, economic) dimension to the work tipped off by allusion, naming, story pattern, or simply by cultural material the book presents?

Finally, one often sees remarks about narrative **point of view**, especially the judgment that it should remain consistent throughout a work. And yet it rarely is consistent in a work, shifting from first person, to omniscient, to limited, to what is called "free indirect discourse," where the author's language projects the feelings and perspectives of a character in the work through a writing 'voice.' But be aware of point of view and take some delight in all the voices a writer is able to summon to tell her or his tale without losing the reader's attention.

#### **How to read a Southern poem**

The simplest answer is "very carefully" and "more than once," of course, and since most poems are short that is fairly easy to do. But what do we see when we look at a series of written lines that don't go to the margins and don't fill the page and sometimes rhyme but sometimes don't and that speak, often, in an oracular indirect mode, not spelling everything out and even shifting the terms of expression from the everyday into a metaphorical mode where not just one thing but a whole sentence stands for something it doesn't specifically say?

Well, let's say we are looking for music—since much poetry is self-described as 'lyric.' And I like to think even the most sedate poems are a bit like jazz. So we pay attention to the form of a poem: is it regular or irregular, has some formal element of rhyme or stanza pattern forced the poet to use words we don't expect? Is there improvisation? Is there deliberate irregularity within the regular beat of the poem? Are there "allusions"—like the trumpet player dropping in a line from a nursery tune or a military call or some popular tune? And since this is writing do the allusions sometimes take the form of references to realms of thought seemingly 'outside' the borders of the poems, even outside the sense of most of its words: a geological reference in a love poem, an astronomical reference in a poem about a child, words about animals or weather or flowers that clearly refer to human things?

In reading a very limited number of poems by Southern writers, we will be looking for poems about the South, the Southern experience, perhaps poems that can be construed as expressing themselves in some kind of Southern language, though not necessarily dialect. We

will pay attention to blues, jazz, country, gospel, and other Southern music, as well, and in both so-called standard poetry and the poetry that relies upon music for much of its power and meaning, we will pay more attention to story, perhaps, than to pure lyric expression of feeling. This is not to say that Southern poets cannot be as abstract, as modern, or as lyrical as other poets of the present or the past centuries, just that this is what we'll look for.

Regardless of what a poem is about or how it is written, can you get a feeling of your own from the poem? Or can you intuit what the poem itself feels? Is the poem about history or the present moment? Is it about both, and how one impinges on the other (a two-way street)? A recent anthology of Southern poetry uses the following words for things that we should seek: freshness, depth, clarity, rigorous craftsmanship, acuteness of images or thought. Some of such things are harder to see than less abstract matters such as story, character, visual sense, and like our taste for music or movies, getting to know how to find these things in poetry sometimes simply takes a good deal of exposure to poetry and to specific poems. We'll work at this together a bit, and what we learn about reading poetry will help us read fiction, memoir, and testimony, and vice versa. If the best fiction makes us dream the writer's dream, the best poetry may make us see or even feel the world through the poem's eyes—eyes that are more sensitive, cleverer, and have better command of interpretation than our own—and the poem's emotional field.

However you read poems and seek to find out more about them and the poets who write them, the following web site is very useful: The *Modern American Poetry Site* at the University of Illinois: <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/about.htm>

Several of the poets whose work will be assigned for reports are represented on this site, and thus you can find out information about their lives, their poetic practice, and the interpretation of their work. There are several sites on the web about “how to read a poem.” Here are a few links: <http://www.geocities.com/benjonsonjournal/howtoreadapoem.html>  
<http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/literature/tech/howto.html>  
<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-howtoread.html>

**And now, a word about reading with a dictionary:**

Reading a textbook on poetry I noted the following terms, phrases, and references I suspected most of us would really need to think about if we encountered them, and in most cases we would even need to look them up, because of where and how they were used in this book. Here they are: bounty / myopic / scope and depth / coherence and divergence / Fugitives / Agrarians / New Criticism / historicism / ex nihilo / resonance chamber / poets plumped up by the historical moment / aesthetic criteria / canonical poets / Kantian heights / minutiae / subversive of the larger investments with which the reigning standards are in tacit compliance / intertextual / paradigms / literary bent / cultural affirmation / canon formation / modernism / reconnoiter / New Humanists / ameliorations of time / Western values / myth of the lost cause / Platonist / something metaphysical / Enlightenment goals of rational progress / materialist philosophies / rampant commodification / aesthetic vulgarity / evils of high capitalism / pied-a-terre / alienation / mythical South / antebellum / enabling signifier / benign grades of Parnassus /

fin de siecle / irony / ahistorical aestheticism

These are not all terribly strange words, but unless we looked them up we might not get the sense of them. As it happens, they are significant for the politics, writing, publishing, teaching, and reading of Southern poetry. See if you can add them to at you're a first level of understanding, and any other words you encounter in your reading that do not have immediate clarity, look them up! Write down a short definition. You're sure to see them again soon, like new friends.

In your own writing, remember to define terms, since each of us may define many terms, even many of the words, in our own ways for our own purposes of argument. But above all, when other writers do not define their terms by context, or by specific reference, our job is always clear. As the baseball manager Casey Stengel use to say, You could look it up. And poetry, by virtue of its compression, more often than not requires this of us, as does William Faulkner, who was, as he said, a failed poet.

### **Absences**

With regard to the poetry of words, or the words of poetry, I pay some attention to the word "absent." It's a sad word for me, and since this class meets only once a week, a single class absence is a week's absence, and that's a serious matter for concern. Legitimate absences to handle life's little problems are understandable, but a class this size depends upon the community it creates and cannot afford an empty chair any more than it can afford a chair with an empty mind. In the South you can say anything terrible you want to about someone if you preface your remarks with "Bless his/her heart." So, Bless your Hearts, if you miss classes, you're gonna feel like a roach in a hot frying pan.

### **WHY THE READING LOG?**

You will get more from the course, and I will be better able to judge your performance, and also help you with the material, if you conscientiously and week by week use a separate comfortable notebook to record impressions, ideas, puzzlements, comments, and even phrases from most or all of the assigned reading selections. To copy down passages that strike you as especially acute or meaningful is usually the only way to keep them. To discuss with yourself some of the formal--that is, structural, grammatical, dramatic--niceties of specific works helps you to perceive relationships *between and among* the different readings. As noted, I will take this up at the end of the course in your portfolio, evaluate it, and return it to you. The Reading Log is at best a form of—as well as record of—engagement with the course, and it should be kept up as you go along. Ideas that are not written down when we have them often evaporate overnight.

### **READING ASSIGNMENTS:**

Week I: **August 21:** First class: overview of the course and its requirements. Handouts.  
Viewing of short excerpts from the documentary film *Tell About the South*.

Assignment FOR Week Two: **Aug. 28:** In the *Oxford Book of the American South*, read the Preface and the Introductions to the five sections, so you can write the first small essay about the anthology (see assignments, above). Re-read introduction to "Old South" section, plus pages 5-36 in the anthology

Write draft of two-page response to my essay on Southern Literature contained in this

syllabus.

*Week II in class: Aug 28:* Discussion and lecture regarding the first week's reading assignments. **Written response to syllabus essay on Southern literature due.** Assignments for poetry, fiction, and book review handout projects will be arranged.

**Sept 4: No Class: NOTE: Sept. 4 is the Labor Day Holiday: No classes.**

For Week Three, Sept. 11, read selections by W. J. Cash, Katherine DuPre Lumpkin, and Frederick Douglass from "The Old South" section of *The Oxford Book of the South*, **and** read the first story in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*. The title is "Was." What does this title suggest? What does the first paragraph tell us? See if you can place this story within the context of some of the readings from "The Old South" section of our main text; note that it is not told by Faulkner, but is represented as an often told family tale, apparently remembered by the person named Isaac McCaslin. Reserve some judgment about this tale, because it is only the first of seven chapters, and Faulkner's plan is to surprise you enormously a little more than half way through the book. You will read it again when we begin serious discussion of Faulkner's novel, which is a book composed of a trilogy about plantation life, a trilogy about the hunter's life in the wilderness, and a "coda" [if that's an unfamiliar term, look it up and try to decide how it can be used about a work of literature] that reflects upon the tragic implications of various Southern values and ideas. If you know something about such Old Testament figures as Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and the women in their lives, you will gain a deeper appreciation of *Go Down, Moses*. Essay summarizing *Oxford Book of the American South* **due**.

**Week III: Sept. 11:** Discussion of the preservation of life under slavery and viewing "Unchained Memories" documentary film.

For Week Four (**Sept. 18**): Read selections by Frederick Douglass, Daniel Hundley, Harriet Jacobs, Mark Twain, and "Chapter One" of the 'Fire and the Hearth' episode of *Go Down, Moses*. Essay on Edward Ayers and the plan of Oxford anthology due.

*Week IV in class (Sept 18):* Discussion and comparison of "Old South" and Faulkner readings.

For Week Five (**Sept. 25**): Read introduction to "The Civil War and Its Consequences" and from the section entitled "The War," selections by Morgan, Watkins, Robertson, and Warren in the *Oxford Book of the South*, and remainder of 'Fire and the Hearth' episode of *Go Down, Moses*.

*Week V in class: (Sept.25): Discussion of the Civil War in literature.*

For Week Six (**Oct. 2**): Read in "The Consequences" all selections but those by Glasgow and Faulkner. From "The War" section read story by Bobbie Ann Mason, "Shiloh."

*Week VI (Oct. 2) in class: Discussion of the consequences of the Civil War.*

*For Week Seven (Oct. 10): Read "Pantaloon in Black" and "The Old People" in **Go Down, Moses** and re-read "Was" in *Go Down Moses*.*

*Week VII (Oct. 10) in class: Discussion of Faulkner. Excerpts from "A Life on Paper," a film about William Faulkner.*

### **Oct 14: semester midpoint (last day to Withdraw and possibly receive a "W")**

For Week Eight (Oct 16): From "Hard Times" section of *Oxford Book of the South*, read Introduction and selections by Twelve Southerners, Wolfe, Caldwell, Percy, and Wright, and "Wash" by Faulkner in "Consequences" section.

Week VIII (Oct. 16) in class, discussion of changing perspectives on the Southern experience and excerpts from "Tell About the South" film.

For Week Nine (Oct. 23) Read "The Bear" in *Go Down, Moses*; after you finish the story, re-read the fourth section and then *once again look back at "Was" and see how many connections you can make between that first episode and the fourth part of "The Bear."*

*Week IX (October 23): Discussion of "The Bear" as the central episode of *Go Down, Moses*.*

For Week Ten (Oct. 30): Finish *Go Down, Moses*

*Week X (Oct 30): Discussion of *Go Down, Moses*. Be sure to re-read "Was"*

**For Week Eleven (Nov 6): Read *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

Week XI (Nov. 6): Discussion of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in relation to *Go Down, Moses*.

**For Week Twelve (Nov. 13): Read *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*.**

**Week XII (Nov. 13): Discussion: *Their Eyes Were Watching God, Ecology of a Cracker Childhood, and Go Down, Moses*.**

**For Week Thirteen (Nov 20): Read selections by Ellison, Angelou, and Murray in "Hard Times."**

**Week XIII (Nov. 20): Discussion of above writers plus Hurston, Ray, and Faulkner**



**For Week Fourteen (Nov. 27): Read *Can't Quit You, Baby* by Ellen Douglas.**

**Week XIV: Nov. 27: Discussion of *Can't Quit You, Baby*.**

**For Week Fifteen (Dec. 4): Prepare reports on assigned poems.**

**Week XV (Dec. 4): Reports on poems and discussions of Southern poetry. *Last Class*  
-End of semester assignments-**

THIS SYLLABUS IS A TRIAL PLAN FOR THE COURSE; AS THE INSTRUCTOR COMES TO KNOW YOUR ABILITIES AND INTERESTS AND SEEKS WAYS TO HELP YOU MAXIMIZE YOUR POTENTIAL AS READERS, WRITERS, RESEARCHERS, OR TEACHERS, AND BEGINS TO HELP YOU ENGAGE WITH THE BROAD TOPIC OF SOUTHERN LITERARY STUDIES, THE NATURE OF SOME ASSIGNMENTS OR PROJECTS MAY CHANGE.

#### **Keeping Students Honest**

**Since most of you, perhaps all, aim to be teachers, this is a good time to bring up the subject of personal responsibility and academic honesty in students whom you teach. This is something all of you will have to deal with increasingly as teachers: students who don't read the texts but read Cliff's, or Gradesaver, or Sparknotes, or somebody else's website notes or brief guides to the assigned texts; students who download material from the internet but don't even read it, just turn it in as their own commentary. (I hear from many secondary school teachers that they've stopped assigning Internet research because parents simply download the material for their children, who turn it in without looking at it.) Worst of all, you will have students who turn in "research" papers, or topical essays, or book reports that are stolen from other writers or bought from services that sell such papers.**

**Making very specific assignments may thwart some of this, but you will still find secondary and undergraduate students who work harder to cobble together material from several purchases from Sparknotes than they would have had to do if they simply had visited the library to do the kind of primary and secondary research you wanted them to learn.**

**It is increasingly easy to catch students who cheat in these ways. You can Google most of these papers and find out where they come from: I was asked by a colleague last semester to read a suspect paper on Faulkner and it took me exactly two minutes to find that the student had taken it, without changing a word, from one chapter of a book-length manuscript on the Web . On another case, I spent only 5 minutes discovering that a student paper came from cobbling together several Sparknotes packages, though I could read this material only if I, too, paid. The revelation was concrete however, since the web site informed me that I had *googled* words from one of their papers but did not have authority to look at the paper.**

**More recently, a colleague had a prospect for the TEEMS program, an undergraduate, cobble together lots of s stolen words and ideas from a juvenile biography and then cite web pages as if the information came from them, though it did not. And one of my**

**daughters encountered a student who simply turned in one of the sample portfolios supplied by teachers at the beginning of a semester, Xeroxing it and then white-ing out the name of the person who had done it, who referred to herself several times within the text. Obviously, anyone who does this so stupidly shouldn't become a teacher, no more than a policeman or a lawyer should work his way through professional training by robbing houses.**

Instead of catching these flagrant acts of academic dishonesty or disrespect for the subject and the teacher, we should inform students of the perils, the penalties, and the indecency of such acts of misrepresenting their own work. Giving them a message like this one might be a place to begin, and you may revise it or develop you own, but be prepared.

Of course it's a bother to have to investigate a paper, but it's also depressing and a waste of valuable time to have to do the work.. We have to do a better job of explaining that plagiarism is the failure to provide clear, detailed citations of material that exceeds our own personal knowledge, whether quoted or not, and that the failure to put quotation marks around **anything** that had to be specifically taken from the writing of someone else is plagiarism. The mechanics of citation are not always easy, and in my experience even the various handbooks (MLA, Harbrace, etc.) sometimes do not supply the exact model for how to cite something we want to use. But we have to cite: we have to have all our cards on the table face up, so anyone else can see that the game is honest. The two points of citation are actually these: we are borrowing from someone else an authority, an expertise, that we do not possess ourselves, and a piece of academic writing is like a laboratory experiment: we need to keep perfect records of our process and then lay them out for the reader, who can check us every step of the way to see whether we've achieved what we claim to have achieved: whether our evidence is valid and traceable, not fudged or made up.

**In your own teaching you should make it clear on your syllabus or class description or an early handout to the class that a mild case of such theft receives a zero; a flagrant case may result in a grade of F in the class and disciplinary action from the school.**

**-end of syllabus-**