ENGL 390: Visibility and Invisibility in the 20th-century American novel
MWF 12:30-1:20 | Welles 119
Fall 2005

Professor Alice Rutkowski
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Office Hours: MWF 10:30-12:30, 1:30-2:30 and by appointment
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Course web site: http://www.geneseo.edu/~rutkowsk/f2005/390/390.html
(site has links to: syllabus, course reserves, bulletin board, class contact information, copies of all
assignments and the course email list-serv)

Course Description
This course will deal with the form and themes of the twentieth-century American novel as
written by (relatively speaking) outsiders to American culture. The first third of the course will
cover novels by African-American writers which take race and racial identity as their central
themes, playing with ideas of passing, belonging, and outsidership. The middle third of the
course will deal with “white paranoid” texts, placed in the context of post-World War II paranoia
about both new technologies and the fear of the spread of communism. Finally, we’ll examine
several novels by Asian-American writers which foreground issues of immigration, identity, the
often paralyzing cultural differences and the difficulties of cultural translation.

Course Objectives:
Ideally, in this course, students will:
• acquire familiarity with less-known twentieth-century American writers
• practice and polish their close-reading skills
• gain knowledge of the generic assumptions of the novel as well as how the writers we
read break these rules
• learn to construct and refine arguments about literary texts using literary criticism

Required texts:
All texts are available at the campus bookstore, Sundance. If at all possible, please buy the
edition indicated, to make finding page numbers easier for us all.

Burroughs, William, Naked Lunch (Grove, 1992)
Chin, Frank, Donald Duk (Coffeehouse, 1991)
Ellison, Ralph, Invisible Man (Vintage, 1995)
Kingston, Maxine Hong, The Woman Warrior (Vintage, 1989)
Larsen, Nella, Quicksand and Passing (Rutgers, 1986)
Lee, Chang Rae. Native Speaker (Riverhead, 1996)
Petry, Ann. The Street (Mariner Books, 1974)
Pynchon, Thomas, The Crying of Lot 49 (HarperCollins, 1999)
AND ERes readings, password is “ghost”
Recommended Texts:
A good essay-writing handbook, such as The Bedford Handbook for Writers (Diana Hacker, Bedford) or the MLA Handbook for Writers (Joseph Gibaldi, MLA)

Evaluation
4-6 page paper 10%
annotated bibliography 5%
10-12 page critical essay 25%
final exam 20%
participation 20%
bulletin board posts 20%

Final grades in my courses are not meant to come as a surprise and the calculations I use to arrive at them should not be mysterious. If, at any point during the semester, you would like to know what grade you have earned up to that point in the course, let me know. The procedure for inquiring about your current overall grade is as follows: 1) let me know you’d like to know your current grade (by email, in person, etc.) and then 2) schedule an office appointment with me. This will give me time to calculate your grade and then together we can discuss your performance in class.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments must be completed by the date they appear on the syllabus. Often the reading assignments are somewhat complicated – that is to say, there are several readings from several different places, so pay close attention to the syllabus. Students are expected to bring the assigned text(s) to class; when the reading is from ERs, students must print a hard copy and bring it to class.

Writing Assignments: see course schedule for due dates
4-6 page paper: This paper will be an examination of the way irony functions in The Invisible Man. More details about this assignment will be provided closer to the due date for this essay, which is Wed, Oct 26.
Annotated bibliography and longer essay: A bibliography/paper proposal will precede the paper and is designed to ensure every student’s paper addresses and interesting and arguable question. The proposal will count towards 5% of the final grade. Students who fail to complete the proposal will not be allowed to write the paper. The final version of the paper will be worth 25% of the final grade.
Format: Papers should reflect attention to the conventions of standard English, including appropriate documentation (MLA).
Late papers: Late paper policy is as follows: penalties begin to accrue at 5 PM on the day the paper is due; up to one day (24 hours) late, penalty is 1/3 letter grade (e.g. A becomes an A-); up to two days late, 2/3; three days, 1 full grade; four days, 1 1/3; five days, 1 2/3; six days, 2 full grades; seven days, 2 2/3; more than seven days late, not accepted for credit without excuse certified by the Dean of Students’ office (this includes Counseling center). Weekends count in calculating lateness – if you need to hand in a paper late, either have a secretary in Welles 226 initial, on the paper, the date/time it was finally handed in or send a duplicate copy to me by email (hard copy still should be handed in to Welles 226 box) to get credit for the time you
turned it in. Documenting the time a paper was handed in is YOUR responsibility; given a lack of documentation, the penalty will be calculated based on when I receive the paper.

E-Bulletin Board Posts
Students will post – ten times over the course of the semester – a short but pithy question/interpretation to the course electronic bulletin board. Students are responsible for keeping track of their own posts (although there are functions on the site to help you with this). At the end of the semester, students will turn in a portfolio of their best posts and this will count for 20% of the final grade. See assignment for more details on the logistics of this assignment.

Grading: To receive an “A” on a paper or exam, you must do excellent work in all these areas: original thinking, organization, clear analysis, use of sufficient and specific evidence, and consistent and correct grammar and mechanics. I consider a grade of “B” a very good grade for work that is shy of excellent. Students who earn C’s and D’s fall short in these areas. In particular, they often fail to have a thesis, i.e. an arguable point, and they fill their essays with summary rather than analysis. Visit the Writing Center on the second floor of Welles for help in any of these areas.

Participation: Participation in class discussion is critical to the success of the course, and therefore will figure into the final grade. I will keep track of both the quantity and the quality of each student’s contributions; this factor can raise-- or lower -- the final grade significantly. For more details on the expectations and standards for participation, please see the attached sheet.

Policies
Academic Honesty: It is expected that the work you submit belongs to you and you alone. Any act of plagiarism or cheating will result in a failing grade on the assignment and the notification of the Dean of Students. Plagiarism includes using anyone else’s ideas or words without giving him or her credit, whether the author is a fellow student, a published author, or a web page on the Internet. It doesn’t matter how much you change the words if you are basically paraphrasing someone else’s ideas. If you want to engage with or acknowledge someone else’s ideas, include a clear and thorough citation. If you have any questions about plagiarism, feel free to speak to me. You may also find this Geneseo website helpful:
http://library.geneseo.edu/~Liles/plagiarism.htm

Accommodations: SUNY-Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for persons of documented physical, emotional or learning disabilities. Students should notify the Director of the Office of Disability Services (Tabitha Buggie-Hunt, 105D Erwin, tbuggieh@geneseo.edu) and their faculty of any needed accommodations as early as possible in the semester. Information on services and campus polices can be found at:
http://www.geneseo.edu/~doc/otherareas/disability.shtml

Required Work: To pass this course you must attempt both papers and the exam. Please keep a back-up copy of papers when you hand them in (either hard copy or disk). Should we disagree about whether or not you have turned in a paper, you will be able to produce a duplicate immediately. Incompletes will be granted ONLY if the following three conditions are met:
documented extenuating circumstances (e.g. severe illness or family crisis); a specific request from the student; AND a plan of action to make up the missing work, including due dates.

Course Calendar

M Aug 29: first day, welcome
Fri Sep 2: Larsen, Part II-III (181-242)
M Sep 5: Labor Day
W Sep 7: *Passing*: McDowell’s introduction (if you do not have the Rutgers edition of the novel, this article is also available on ERes). You may skim the sections that deal with Quicksand.
M Sep 12: Petry. Ch 3-5 (59-140)
W Sep 14: Petry. Ch 6-7 (142-184)
F Sep 16: Petry. Ch 8-9 (185-230)
M Sep 19: Petry. Ch 10-13 (231-326)
F Sep 23: finish Petry (372-435)
W Sep 28: Ellison, ch 4-8 (99-171)
F Sep 30: Ellison, ch 9-11 (172-250)
M Oct 3: Ellison, ch 12-16 (251-355)
W Oct 5: Ellison, ch 17-19 (356-422)
F Oct 7: Ellison, ch 20-22 (423-478)
M Oct 10: Fall Break
W Oct 12: finish Ellison, ch 23-epilogue (479-581)
F Oct 14: William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*. “Deposition” (xxxv-xlvi) and 3-42
M Oct 17: Burroughs, 42-122
W Oct 19: Burroughs, 122-168
F Oct 21: class cancelled – catch up on reading
W Oct 26: Burroughs. “Naked Lunch on trial” (ix-xxxiv) **4-6 page paper due**
M Oct 31: Pynchon. ch 3-5 (31-119)
W Nov 2: finish Pynchon (120-152)
F Nov 4: Pynchon discussion concluded
M Nov 7: Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*. “No Name Woman” and “White Tigers”
W Nov 9: Kingston, “Shaman”
F Nov 11: Kingston, “At the Western Palace”
M Nov 14: Kingston “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”
W Nov 16: Frank Chin, *Donald Duk*.ch 1-11 (1-85)
F Nov 18: Chin, ch 12-end (86-172)
M Nov 21: Chin discussion concluded; no new reading; **paper proposal due**
W Nov 23: Thanksgiving Break
F Nov 25: Thanksgiving Break
M Nov 28: Kingston vs. Chin. Read three ERes articles, Chin, Iwata and Chung
W Nov 30: Chang Rae Lee, Native Speaker. 1-59
F Dec 2: Lee. 60-130
M Dec 5: Lee. 131-202
W Dec 7: Lee. 203-258
F Dec 9: Lee. 259-312
M Dec 12: finish Lee. 313-349. bulletin board posts portfolio due

Final paper due on or before Wednesday, December 14, 12 noon. Turn in at Welles 226.

**Course final is Monday, December 19, 12-3 PM**