

Gwendolyn Brooks and Walter Mosley

Course: 4381 Major African and African American Writers

Class Meetings: 2 -3:15 MW in 304 Irby Hall

Instructor: Dr. Isiah Lavender, III

Office: 401 Irby Hall

Office Hours: MW 8 a.m. – 12 p.m., 8 - 9 a.m TTh, and by appointment

Phone, E-mail & **Facebook**: (501) 450-5118; lavender@uca.edu

Required Books: Available at UCA Bookstore

Gwendolyn Brooks: *Blacks*

Walter Mosley: *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned, Devil in a Blue Dress, Fearless Jones, Futureland, Killing Johnny Fry, The Man in My Basement, Workin' on the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History*

Recommended Books: Available at UCA Bookstore

Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice by D.H. Melhem, *Finding a Way Home: A Critical Assessment of Walter Mosley's Fiction* edited by Owen E. Brady and Derek C. Maus, *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* by George Kent, *Urban Rage in Bronzeville: Social Commentary in the Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, 1945-1960*, B. J. Bolden, *Walter Mosley: A Critical Companion* by Charles E. Wilson.

You are responsible for gaining access to the textbooks in a timely manner.

Course Description: Gwendolyn Brooks continues to be a celebrated, modern black poet, though her star has apparently faded on the academic/literary horizon. Walter Mosley is a red hot writer of contemporary popular fiction, noted for his detective Easy Rawlins, eager to escape the ghettos of popular fiction. Why juxtapose two such disparate writers: the literary and the popular? What is considered lit-er-a-ture and why does popular fiction veer away from lit-er-a-ture? Why is lit-er-a-ture inveighed with a sense of snobbery whereas popular fiction is embraced by the masses? Who decides what lit-er-a-ture is? Who is to say that popular fiction is less meritorious than lit-er-a-ture? Why? Which kind of writing survives, remains well-liked, favored, in demand, sought after, famous, renowned, accessible, readily understood, and commonly approved to be good? While there are myriad responses to these questions in regard to canon formation, this course, frankly, is an experiment to decide once and for all what form the ultimate written expression of humanity takes on white pages in black words or not as we ponder the works of two masters. So then, do you prefer the nuance of poetry and its mercurial portrait of human nature, or do you fancy the tough talking, street-wise detectives who investigate a darker side of humanity?

Expectations: My expectations are very high, and you should demand the same from me, and especially from one another: if you come to class prepared to fully engage with the material, you should expect the same from everyone in the room. Every absence or withheld participation is palpable; I therefore expect regular attendance, consistent preparation, and active participation. Finally, I expect all of us to have fun because learning should be and can be fun. For my part, I will try to cultivate a lively discussion for each class.

Responsibilities and Behavior: Remember that you only have time for the activity that you put first, and by signing up for this course you are agreeing to put this class first during the specified time period. While I am always willing to work with a student in the event of a legitimate emergency such as the death of an immediate family member or a student's own emergency hospitalization, you should schedule dental appointments, elective surgery, court appearances, family celebrations, work, and any other non-emergency activity outside of class time. Keep a written record of your absences/tardies so that you know your precise status as I will be doing so.

It is your responsibility either to resolve potential conflicts well in advance of an exam in the exam's favor or to drop the course; never presume upon me to solve your conflict for you.

Each absence after **four** absences lowers your final grade for the class by ten points. Absences are not excused or unexcused, so use your absences wisely. Any rare exceptions to this policy will be determined on a case-by-case basis; it is your responsibility to contact me immediately to inquire about an exception if such a situation occurs. If you have **four** consecutive absences, you will be dropped from the class. You paid your money to take your chances. If you miss class, you will get behind as well as miss important discussions which further understanding of the works being examined. You need to be here. Arriving to class after the official start time or after me is an absence.

It should be understood that respect for the instructor, fellow students, and the material itself is required. ANY BEHAVIOR that inhibits the ability of students to learn WILL NOT BE TOLERATED and could result in BEING DISMISSED FROM THE CLASS—PERMANENTLY.

Academic Misconduct (page 36 in your student handbook): Avoid even the appearance of possible impropriety during an exam or quiz; leave books and notebooks closed and out of sight; do not let your eyes stray to another's paper, do not leave the room while the exam is in progress; speak only to the instructor or the exam proctor. A grade of zero will be assigned to any quiz or exam the integrity of which has been opened to question in any way; serious cases will be referred to the university authorities for discipline, which may include expulsion from UCA.

Late work: Outside work is due at the start of the specified period; I DO NOT ACCEPT late work with two exceptions—a death in the family accompanied by an obituary or funeral program and emergency hospitalization supplemented by admittance papers.

GRADING: Course requirements include active participation in discussion, 5 reader responses, the possibility of a quiz or three, 2 mid-length writing assignments, a term paper, and a final exam. All formal writing assignments must be typed in a **12 point Times New Roman font and also be uniformly double-spaced with 1-inch margins**. In addition, **all responses must have titles**. Any assignment that does not meet these specific requirements **in addition to length obligations** will receive an X grade and no feedback; an X grade garners zero credit at the end of the semester unless you redo it to my satisfaction. You and you alone are responsible for the condition and submission of your assignments. **DO NOT** rely on spell check alone. **PROOFREAD** your papers and save them. However, I encourage you to seek me out and discuss your ideas or lack thereof and to bring drafts to me. Keep all graded assignments easily available for consultation until after the final grade has been recorded, both so that you may compute your average at any point in the semester, and so that any dispute over the final grade's computation may be efficiently resolved. There are **100 points** for the semester.

Participation—This class is discussion oriented which makes your energetic participation essential in having a successful and productive semester. Thus, it is your obligation to read and

prepare the assigned readings for class. I strongly encourage you to express your pleasure in as well as your frustration with the readings because this will stimulate and inspire discussion in the classroom. Attendance is crucial. Another avenue of earning participation points for students who are afraid of speaking in class is by making your opinion known to me via email exchange where you and I will have an electronic exchange of ideas and thoughts. Silent people receive zero points for each class that they are silent (live or internet). **(1 point per class meeting)**

Reader Responses – (5) Ideally, these response papers will be a kind of diary where you contemplate issues, ideas, questions raised by the assigned readings and discussion. This affords me an opportunity to eavesdrop on “HOW” you are processing and engaging the material. Likewise, these response papers serve as a way for you to organize your developing thoughts, and recognize relationships between texts and ideas that you have about texts. Keep in mind that reading only succeeds if you gain “meaning,” and the meaning(s) that you gain are transmitted in your interpretations. You can write on any material covered in class, whether it be a response to another person’s expressed view or your own reading of a text or texts. You could possibly write all four on one text or spread them out over the course of the semester. You cannot turn in a response on a particular text after we take the quiz on it. This means any response written on a particular text must be turned in on the last day it is listed on the class schedule. Each response should be **no less than a full page and no more than three**. Any response which does not meet the minimum length requirement will receive a zero. **(3 points each)**

Quizzes – I reserve the right to quiz you during the class period at any time in any form I see fit from group and individual oral quizzes to silent discussions (**BEWARE**) and anything in between including traditional formats of the announced variety. Quizzes or the lack thereof greatly depend on your participation.

Mid-length Writing Assignments – Taming a Poem and Creative Writing Exercise:

Taming a Poem: you will choose your favorite poem by Brooks and write an essay following the guidelines to be provided at a later date that displays your understanding of the poem. This **4-5 page** paper is due on **Wednesday, February 25th, 2009**. **(10 points)**

Creative Writing Exercise: you have two options for this creative assignment of **3-5 pages** garnered from your understanding of Mosley’s detective fiction and the working class. Specific instructions will be provided at a later date, though the assignment is due no later than **Wednesday, April 1st, 2009**. **(10 points)**

Term Paper – The final writing project concerns the debate as outlined in the course description. In **7-10** pages reveal where you stand on the debate between lit and pop fic. You must use both of the authors to delineate your position before choosing a side and arguing for it. No fence sitting allowed!! The term paper is due on **Monday, April 27th, 2009**. **(25 points)**

Final – A no holds barred debate featuring all of you in a round circle arguing about what’s defined as literature. The rules: everyone must choose a side based on their paper; everyone must talk; key points will be recorded on the black board; the winners receive **10 points** and the losers receive **7 points**.

Grade Scale: A 90 and above; B 89-80; C 79-70; D 69-60; F 59 and Below

Participation – 26 points

Writing Responses (5 x 3 points each) – 15 points

Quizzes – 4 points

Taming a Poem – 10 points

Creative Writing Exercise – 10 points

Term Paper – 25 points

Final – 10 points

UNIVERSITY POLICIES: If you have questions about the university's academic policies, guidelines regarding sexual harassment, or any other matters, please consult the relevant sections of the UCA Student Handbook. UCA adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the UCA Office of Disability Services at 450-3135.

THIS SYLLABUS IS A TENTATIVE OUTLINE—IT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

CLASS SCHEDULE:

W 1/21: Course & Personal Intros	M 3/16: <i>Fearless Jones</i> 1-203 W 3/18: <i>Fearless Jones</i> 204- 351
M 1/26: Brooks: <i>A Street in Bronzeville</i> 17- 41 W 1/28: Brooks: <i>A Street in Bronzeville</i> 42-75	M 3/23 & W 3/25: Spring Break
M 2/2: Brooks: <i>Annie Allen</i> 77-110 W 2/4: Brooks: <i>Annie Allen</i> 110-139	M 3/30: <i>Workin' on the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History</i> 3-114 W 4/1: Futureland 1-59; Creative Writing Exercise due
M 2/9: Brooks: <i>Maud Martha</i> 141-230 W 2/11: Brooks: <i>Maud Martha</i> 231-322	M 4/6: <i>Futureland</i> 60-243 W 4/8: <i>Futureland</i> 244-382
M 2/16: Brooks: <i>The Bean Eaters</i> 323-371 W 2/18: Brooks: <i>The Bean Eaters</i> 372-400	M 4/13: <i>Killing Johnny Fry</i> 1-103 W 4/15: <i>Killing Johnny Fry</i> 103-185 M 4/20: <i>Killing Johnny Fry</i> 185-280 W 4/22: <i>the man in my basement</i> 3-97
M 2/23: Brooks: <i>In the Mecca</i> 401-456 W 2/25: Brooks: various excerpts from other collections 457-512; Taming a Poem due	M 4/27: the man in my basement 101-182; Term Paper due
M 3/2: <i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> 46-175 W 3/4: <i>Devil in a Blue Dress</i> 176-263 F 3/6: OPTIONAL FILM SCREENING OF <i>DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS</i> ?????	W 4/29: <i>the man in my basement</i> 185-249; Last day of class; party!! Finals Week 5/4 through 5/9
M 3/9: <i>Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned</i> 13-139 W 3/11: <i>Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned</i> 140-208	Final Exam Date, Time, and Location: TB