

University of Kansas

English

Fall 2006

JAZZ IN MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE

INSTRUCTOR: William J. Harris

From spirituals to rap, African American music is one of America's original contributions. In this course we will explore the interaction between jazz, one of the most complex forms of black music, and modern American Literature. Our main question is: How do writers use the forms, ideas and myths of this rich musical tradition? For the authors we are studying, jazz serves as a model and inspiration; they turn to it to find both American subject matter and an American voice. As well as reading a number of authors, including, Langston Hughes, August Wilson, Jack Kerouac, Ishmael Reed, Michael Ondaatje, Nathaniel Mackey, Jayne Cortez and Toni Morrison, we will listen to a number of African-American musicians and/or composers, including Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, and Abbey Lincoln. It turns out that we cannot understand the writers well if we do not understand the music well. Moreover, we will view two jazz movies, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and Sun Ra's *Space is the Place* and will discuss the blues-jazz musical theory of Baraka, Ellison and Albert Murray.

REQUIRED READING

Moment's Notice (MN)—Art Lange
The Collected Poems (CP)—Langston Hughes
Ma Rainey's Black Bottom—August Wilson
Coming Through Slaughter—Michael Ondaatje
Jazz—Toni Morrison
On the Road—Jack Kerouac
Living with Music—Ralph Ellison
Invisible Man—Ralph Ellison
The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader (BR)—Amiri Baraka
Mumbo Jumbo—Ishmael Reed
Atet A.D.—Nathaniel Mackey

WEEKLY TOPICS

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Hughes' blues poems (CP) and Wilson's *Ma Rainey*

Week 3: Ondaatje's *Slaughter* and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" (MN)

Week 4: Morrison's *Jazz*

Week 5: Kerouac's *On the Road* and "The Subterraneans" (MN)

Week 6: Ellison's *Living with Music*:

"Living with Music"
"Ralph Ellison's Territorial Vantage"
"The Charlie Christian Story"
"Remembering Jimmy"
"The Golden Age, Time Past"
"On Bird-Watching, and Jazz"
"As the Spirit Moves Mahalia"
"Flamenco"
"Richard Wright's Blues"
"Blues People"
"A Coupla Scalped Indians"

Week 7: *Invisible Man*

Week 8: *Invisible Man* and Baraka:

"How You Sound??" (BR)
"Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today" (BR)
"Blues People" (BR)
"Rhythm & Blues" (BR)
"The Screamers" (BR)

Week 9: Baraka:

"Dutchman" (BR and film)
"Answers in Progress" (MN)
"Jazz and the White Critic" (BR)
"The Changing Same"
"Black Art" (BR)
"Dope" (BR)
"In the Tradition" (BR)

Week 10: Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died" (MN), Michael Harper's poems (MN), Henry Dumas' "Will the Circle Be Broken" (MN) and Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy" (online)

Week 11: Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (CP) and Albert Murray, from *Stomping the Blues* (online)

Week 12: Sun Ra's film, *Space is the Place* and Hughes' *Ask Your Mama* (CP)

Week 13: Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*

Week 14: Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, his poems and Al Young's work from *MN*

Week 15: Mackey's *Atet A.D.* and his poems from *MN*

Week 16: Jayne Cortez, Wanda Coleman & Ntozake Shange (all in *MN*)