**Engl 235-02: American Literature Survey**
Tu/Th 11:20-12:35 | Welles 134  
Spring 2004

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**Course Description:**
The very title of this course presents us with a question: what, exactly, is “American” literature? Is it a book, a play, a poem written in the United States? What about those written before the US existed? Or is it literature written by an “American”? Does it have to be in English? In this course, we’ll address those questions by looking at selected texts from the canon of American literature, beginning in the 1600s and moving to the present day (or as near as we can get). We’ll look at books traditionally recognized as works of “great” literature, but we’ll also read books that have only recently been recognized, as well as some that fell out of favor for a time and returned to prominence.

In order to organize our course, we’ll read our texts via the theme of “Exploration, Migration, and Settlement.” We’ll talk about physical movement, but also about cultures coming into contact, and about the ways that writers explored new forms and themes in their work. We’ll find, however, that not all explorations are ventures into completely new territory. As the semester progresses, we will often revisit and re-worry situations that have haunted American literature and culture since its beginnings.

**Course Goals and Organization:**
While a fully comprehensive understanding of all of the traditions of American literature is not possible in a single semester, this course will teach students about the history and contexts of major cultural, artistic, and historic movements that affected the formation of American literature. The focus is on reading and coverage, but with careful attention to the practice of reading and understanding texts that might feel quite foreign (either culturally or temporally).

**Required Texts**
*All are available at the campus bookstore, Sundance; if you choose not to buy your textbooks there, please make sure to get the edition indicated.*
- Stein, Gertrude. *Tender Buttons* (Dover)  
- Twain, Mark. *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (Penguin)  
- Williams, Tennessee. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Signet)  

Plus, Electronic Reserve readings (ERes); class password is “george.”
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

papers 40%
midterm exam 10%
quizzes 10%
final exam 20%
participation 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. When assignments are from the Norton, be sure to read the head note for each author; often quiz material will come from this section. Students are expected to bring the assigned text to class; when the reading is from ERes, students must print a hard copy and bring it to class.

Essays: see course schedule for due dates

Short papers: Students will write two brief, 2-3 page papers to practice their close-reading skills. Each paper is worth 10% of the final grade.

Paper proposal and longer essay: The paper proposal will precede the paper and is designed to ensure every student’s paper addresses and interesting and arguable question. The proposal will not be graded, although I will comment extensively on it to help in the writing of the paper itself. Students who fail to complete the proposal will not be allowed to write the paper. The final version of the paper will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Format: Papers should reflect attention to the conventions of standard English, including appropriate documentation (MLA).

Due dates: papers are due in class on the day listed on the syllabus. Under extraordinary circumstances, extensions may be granted, provided you speak with me in advance. 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).

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.

***To pass this course you must attempt all three papers and both exams. 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.

**Group presentation:** These presentations will occur throughout the semester and will provide biographical, historical and cultural context for the works we are reading. In the beginning of the semester, students will be assigned to groups according to their interests. A more detailed list of requirements and expectations about this assignment will follow; but in general, think of this as an opportunity to teach your classmates. These should be interactive, informative, and relatively polished presentations. Students’ performance on the group presentation will be figured into the participation grade.

**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.

**Exams and quizzes:**
A take-home midterm exam will be given about halfway through the semester (see schedule below) and a final during the exam period in April/May. Makeup exams are not offered without substantial and verifiable reasons.

Quizzes will be given at the start of class on a random basis; the purpose of these are solely to check to see that the reading assignment has been completed. The lowest quiz grade of the semester will be dropped. There are no opportunities to make up quizzes.

**Policies**

**Attendance:** Attendance is expected and required; excessive absences can adversely affect your grade.

**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 through 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
## Course Schedule:

### Week 1: Encounters across Lands and Peoples
- **Tu Jan 13**  Introduction
- **Th Jan 15**  Norton intro, Native American songs and stories, Columbus, deVaca and Smith (Norton, 1-36 and 42-53).

### Week 2: Gender and Encounter
- **Tu Jan 20**  William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Norton, 75-93) and Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity* (Norton, 135-151)
- **Th Jan 22**  Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects* (Norton, 366-377) and “Phillis Wheatley on Trial” (ERes)

### Week 3: Nation-Making
- **Tu Jan 27**  Franklin, *Autobiography* (Norton, 219-292)

### Week 4: Transcendentalism and National Dissatisfactions
- **Tu Feb 3**  Cherokee Memorials (571-581) and Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, Chapter 1 and conclusion only (Norton, 853-895, 931-939)
- **Th Feb 5**  W. L. Garrison’s preface to *Narrative* (ERes) and Frederick Douglass, selections from *Narrative of the Life*, (Norton, 939-973); **paper #1 due**

### Week 5: American Renaissance
- **Tu Feb 10**  Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (preface to ch. 9, 5-112)
- **Th Feb 12**  Hawthorne, cont’d (ch. 10-end, 113-228)

### Week 6: A Revolution in Verse
- **Tu Feb 17**  Walt Whitman, preface to *Leaves of Grass* and “Song of Myself” (Norton, 985-1047)
- **Th Feb 19**  Emily Dickinson, selected poems (Norton, 1167-1188); **paper #2 due**

### Week 7: Toward a New Century and New Modes
- **Tu Feb 24**  Mark Twain, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (53-143)
- **Th Feb 26**  Twain, cont’d (144-233, through conclusion of novel plus preface to *Those Extraordinary Twins*) **take-home midterm exam distributed today, due Friday, Feb 27, by 5 pm; covers up to and including Dickinson**

### Week 8: Into the Modern (and Expatriation)
- **Tu Mar 2**  Henry James, “Daisy Miller” (Norton, 1498-1539)

### Week 9: Spring Break
- **Saturday March 6 – Sunday March 14**
Week 10: Modernist Prose (or is it?)
Tu Mar 16    Gertrude Stein, “Tender Buttons” (whole text)
Th Mar 18    Nella Larsen, *Passing* (part I-II, 7-81)
Tu Mar 23    Larsen, cont’d (part III, 85-114)

Week 11: Modernist Poetry
              “Evening,” “Sheltered Garden,” “Pygmalion,” “Eurydice” (ERes)
Tu Mar 30    Williams Carlos Williams, selected poems (Norton, 1933-1946); paper proposal
due

Week 12: Post-War Race and Masculinity
Th Apr 1     Ralph Ellison, Chapter 1 from *Invisible Man* (Norton, 2373-2384)
Tu Apr 6     Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (whole play) paper proposal
              returned
Th Apr 8     Williams cont’d

Week 13: Post-War Poetic Voices: Form, Gender, Sex, and Trauma
Tu Apr 13    Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish,” “At the Fishhouses,” “Sestina,” “In the Waiting
              Room,” “One Art” (Norton, 2648+); plus “The Map,” “Insomnia,” “Pink Dog”
              (ERes) and Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” (Norton, 2730-2740)
Th Apr 15    Ginsberg, “Supermarket in California” and Sylvia Plath, selected poems, (Norton,
              2776-2784), plus “Tulips,” “Cut,” “You’re” (ERes)

Week 14: Post-War and Postmodern Fiction
Tu Apr 20    Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy” (Norton, 2521-2532) and Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”
              (Norton, 2455-2470); final version of paper due
Th Apr 22    Morrison cont’d and Louise Erdrich, “Fleur,” (Norton, 2597-2607)

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, April 29, 8-11 AM