

ENGLISH 263: AMERICAN LITERATURE

Term: Fall 2018

Section Number: 32636D

Meeting Time: TR 12:30-1:50

Location: THH 117

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Findeisen

Office: THH 402H

Office Hours: TR 2:00 - 3:00

Email: cfindeis@usc.edu

Course Description and Objectives

English 263 is a survey of significant texts in American literature from its beginnings until the present day. We will study texts written in a wide variety of modes and genres, paying close attention to the formal strategies writers represent, resist, shape, and respond to the world around them. Topics covered will include (among others): historical origins and myth-making; transcendentalism and romantic individualism; slavery and its impact on constructions of race, gender, and identity; economic mobility and the American Dream; and the category of the literary *vis-à-vis* popular/mass culture.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- engage in an ongoing critical conversation by producing well-supported interpretations of literary texts that go beyond mere summary and explication.
- define rhetorical devices and literary genres, including (but not limited to) slave narrative, gothic, pastiche, and parataxis;
- historicize literary innovations and identify aesthetic tropes as they persist over time;
- collaborate to share competing/complimentary ideas in group settings;
- articulate the value of literary study to themselves and to the world.

Required Texts:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 9th edition, **volumes A and B**.

Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. ISBN-10: 0553213555

Reed, Ishmael. *Flight to Canada*. ISBN-10: 0684847507

Selections from Blackboard.

In addition to the above materials, at the end of the semester we will read one contemporary novel chosen by the class.

Attendance and Class Participation

It is expected that we will attend all class meetings. This course thrives on discussion and interaction with other people, which requires robust participation. Everyone will be called upon to enter discussion, contribute ideas, and otherwise join in class activities. We will utilize the daily quizzes

and reading responses as the starting point for our discussion. After four absences, your participation grade will begin to decline.

Assignments

Reading Responses: Because ENGL 263 is not a lecture course, we cannot achieve our goals without first completing the assigned readings. Our classmates expect everyone comes to class prepared for discussion, which means we will have completed the responses up to our own high standards and are prepared to ask questions and respond to one another.

The reading responses are short (**one, full page**) and located directly on the syllabus. They must demonstrate that we have sufficiently read the assignment and have thought about the prompt. They will often ask to engage in sophisticated analysis of the course material, which means *quoting the assigned texts is necessary*. Print out responses and bring them every day. A few students will read their responses at the beginning of class.

Short Papers: Short papers (five to seven pages) will test our ability to grapple with and “solve” literary problems through critical interpretation. We want to utilize class concepts to analyze the ways in which texts work to create their meanings. We will be evaluated on our ability to write clearly and respond directly to the prompt, employ textual evidence, define concepts, and sustain an original argument.

Quizzes: In order to ensure that we are utilizing knowledge over the course of the semester, we use quizzes to help guide our reading and prepare for the exams. Quizzes are not punitive and are instead designed to reinforce specific concepts we should keep in mind as we move forward. For the most they will ask you to either define or identify a concept we’ve covered in class the previous day, although I will also ask questions about past ideas/reading to ensure you are retaining essential information.

Exams: This course utilizes both a mid-term and a cumulative final exam. Both exams contain four areas: terms and definitions, authors and works, short answers, and analysis. Everything covered in class is fair game, so I strongly suggest **taking notes** while listening to lectures and presentations, as well as **while you’re reading**.

Grading Policy:

Quizzes (15%)
Midterm (15%)
Final Exam (20%)

Participation (10%)
Papers (40%)

Plagiarism: Your papers will not require outside research. If you decide to do research, however, make sure to document *all* borrowed ideas, expressions (phrases, sentences), and observations with information including: the author, title of work, publisher, date of publication, and precise page numbers. It is okay to use the Internet to situate your ideas in a broader conversation so long as you cite absolutely *all* information you use (give websites and links). *You must document each idea, phrase, or quotation within the sentence in which your borrowing appears*, not at the end of a paragraph of several quotations.

Additional Policies

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (see <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>).

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (at <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (see <http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (see <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* provides 24/7 confidential support (see <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm>), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see sarc@usc.edu).

Support Systems:

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>).

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations (http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html).

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see <http://emergency.usc.edu/>).

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: Course Introduction

Tuesday August 21: Introduction; Survey of Interests;

(In class): What do we want out of the next 16 weeks? What are our goals? What does the study of English do for us, and how can we make this class achieve its possibilities? What were some of your best educational experiences, and what were your worst? Assuming some of our interests, tastes, learning styles, and backgrounds differ, what can we do to create a classroom environment that works for all of us?

Thursday August 23: Dickinson, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" (1263); Stevens, "The Snow Man" (777); Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1201); Brooks, "We Real Cool" (1303).

Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Is beauty something that a reader personally experiences, like a sensation? Is beauty a property of an object, like its weight or its color? What is "the literary"? What distinguishes literary language from "ordinary language"? In what ways would it make sense to call some set of texts "beautiful" or "literary" and not others?

Week 2: Theories of Narrative

Tuesday August 28: "The Iroquois Creation Story" (32-35); John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (93-104).

What is mythology? Do contemporary Americans have a mythology? What makes a mythological narrative different from any other kind of narrative?

Thursday August 30: J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur *Letters from an American Farmer* "What Is an American?" (323-332); Selections of early republic novels (Blackboard).

Week 3: Novels and Moral Education

Tuesday September 4: James Madison, "Federalist No. 10" (365-370); *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (431-450).

"Federalist No. 10" and *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* are both about protecting "the little guy," although each text makes its appeal in a different way. How does each text convince you of its premise? What's effective or ineffective about the way each text works?

Thursday September 6: Charles Brockden Brown, *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (450-474).

Week 4: Novels and Moral Education

Tuesday September 11: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (838-861).

Thursday September 13: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (879-901).

Both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are stories about the evils of slavery written by women based in fact, but one of those stories is “fiction” while the other is “memoir.” What difference does it make? How does that information change your understanding of the stories?

Week 5: American Romanticism

Tuesday September 18: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Custom-House” (Blackboard).

How does Hawthorne understand history, imagination, and truth? What is the purpose of the “The Custom-House” as an introduction? What does it introduce? Given the themes we have covered earlier in the semester, why is the origin of the manuscript important to Hawthorne’s artistic project? How does “The Custom-House” relate to the novels of the early republic?

Thursday September 20: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” (668-678); Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Artist of the Beautiful” (Blackboard).

Week 6: American Romanticism

Tuesday September 25: Edgar Allan Poe, “Philosophy of Composition” (790-798); “The Raven” (735-738)

Thursday September 27: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (749-762).

Think back to our conversations about *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*. How does this story enact the genre of the gothic? Compare the narrators of each story -- what differences can you see in Poe’s version of the gothic? What do you think those differences mean?

Week 7: Realism

Tuesday October 2: Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses” (Blackboard); “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (104).

Paper 1 Due

Thursday October 4: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper” (511); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wall-paper” (523).

What’s so “real” about “The Yellow Wall-paper”? Does it conform to Twain’s concept of realism? Read “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wall-paper” and consider what “realism” means to a woman like Gillman.

Week 8: Realism

Tuesday October 9: Frank Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (586); Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.

Thursday October 11: Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.

How does Crane understand human agency and how does he represent it? What does it mean for a character to have agency? Does Maggie have agency? Where and how? Why or why not?

Week 9: Review

Tuesday October 16: Midterm Review; Midterm Student Survey

Thursday October 18: **Midterm**

Week 10: Modernism

Tuesday October 23: Modernist Manifestos (803-816);

Thursday October 25: Earnest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (1032); William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (1009).

Compare the Modernist Manifestos we read last time to these stories. In what sense do these stories enact the imperatives of modernism. Where do we see epistemological uncertainty being worked out?

Week 11: Modernism

Tuesday November 1: Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (Blackboard).

At the level of the sentence, Stein's use of language is far different than either Hemingway's or Faulkner's. How would you describe it? How can you see its difference? Does it achieve the same effect as the other modernists? Why or why not?

Thursday November 3: "The making of 'Tender Buttons': Gertrude Stein's Subjects, Objects, and the Illegible". (Blackboard)

Week 12: Postmodernism

Tuesday November 6: John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion"; Donald Barthelme, "The Balloon" (Blackboard); "Indian Uprising" (Blackboard).

What the heck is going on here? How does “Indian Uprising” connect to History, Romance, Truth, and Fiction? What kinds of truth does a story like this reveal? What kinds of assumptions does a story like this need to function?

Thursday November 8: Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*.

Week 13: Postmodernism

Tuesday November 13: Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*.

Thursday November 15: Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*.

Come to class with some thoughts on Paper 2 – write an introductory and body paragraph in which you lay out your claim and evidence.

Paper 2 Due

Week 14: Contemporary

Tuesday November 20: Class Choice

Thursday November 22: **Thanksgiving**

Week 15: Contemporary

Tuesday November 27: Class Choice

Thursday November 29: Class Choice

Consider the periods we covered—from Native American myths to the contemporary novel—and jot down some themes that seem most compelling. Retell this version of American literature in your own words. What were its main challenges, triumphs, and tragedies? What parts of that story are most relevant today and why? What are you still confused about? What kinds of final exam questions would help you tell that story in the most convincing way?

Week 16: Exam Prep

Tuesday Study Week

Thursday Study Week: Exam Review (optional).