

English 254: Survey of American Literature

Winter 2015

T/Th 2:00-3:50, FAB 171

Prof. Sarah Ensor

Neuberger Hall M420

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:00-12:30 and by appointment



Winslow Homer, "Waiting for an Answer" (1872), Jean-Michel Basquiat, "untitled" (1984), Margaret Bourke-White, "At the Time of the Louisville Flood" (1937)

Course Description:

In this course, we will read American Literature from the Civil War to the present with an emphasis on matters of temporality. As we study a young nation trying to make sense of what it means to have a (violent, fraught, and complex) history, we will confront the complicated dialectic between tradition and custom, on the one hand, and ferment and innovation, on the other. The texts we read will engage these dialectics – and their related questions of race, gender, class, and nationalism – both thematically and formally; one of our main concerns will involve how these works play structurally with time in the way they unfold. Some of the questions that will concern us along the way include: How do forms of collective memory (and collective amnesia) help to constitute America – and Americanness – in these years? How do technological developments, the rise of industrialization, and shifting patterns of population affect how Americans experience and understand the passage of time? What does it mean when American writers look backward? And what emotions do they (and we) feel when – at various moments, from various junctures, and in various voices – they look ahead? How is community defined – and performed – by writers of this period? Relatedly, how are questions of national and literary tradition embroiled in questions of identity, (in)equality, and power? Who determines, in other words, which stories matter, and which stories are told? As we discuss such questions, we will also develop and practice the skills necessary for effective literary analysis.

Required Texts:

Norton Anthology of American Literature (Eighth Edition): Package Two, Volumes C, D, and E
ISBN-13: 978-0393913101

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*
ISBN-13: 978-1559362313

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation	15%
In-class writing assignments	20%
Two midterm exams (weeks 4 and 7)	35%
Final exam	30%

Exams: You will have three exams for this course: two midterm exams, on **January 27** and **February 17**, and a final exam on **March 16**. Further information about the format of these exams – which may include sections of quotation identification as well as short answer and essay questions – will follow closer to the date.

In-class writing: On a regular basis, we will begin class with a writing assignment. These will be based on a focused prompt, and are designed both to help you practice your skills of literary analysis and to jumpstart your thinking for class discussion. I will collect, evaluate, and respond to these assignments. Your performance on these pieces over the course of the quarter will constitute 20% of your final grade.

Participation: Even though we are a fairly large group, I very much want this to be a class predicated on conversation, and built around our collective voices. Therefore, class participation makes up 15% of your grade. I expect you to come to class every day prepared to participate. This means, among other things, being on time, bringing your books with you, reflecting on the readings in advance, having specific quotations (and their page numbers) marked and/or written down, being ready with some questions – however big or small – that the text prompted in you, listening attentively to what others have to say, and engaging respectfully with your peers. This also means *not* doing certain things during class time (texting, using a computer, talking to your neighbor, doing other reading or work, etc.). In other words, participation – in my mind at least – is about not only what you say (and how you say it) but also what you do – and how you demonstrate that you’re engaged – when you are not speaking. *If you are someone who does not feel comfortable participating in class discussion, please come speak with me in office hours as soon as possible.*

Course Policies

Academic Integrity: I take academic integrity so seriously that I was tempted to make this section the cover page of the syllabus. It is not only the value upon which the academic enterprise is built, but also the governing principle of the work we do together.

In basic terms, academic integrity means this:

Do not submit any work in your name that is not entirely your own in both conception and execution.

In slightly more nuanced terms:

You are responsible for understanding and abiding by the sections of the PSU Code of Conduct related to academic integrity (<http://pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct#GeneralPolicy>):

“(1) Academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is the act of knowingly or intentionally seeking to claim credit for the work or effort of another person or participation in such acts. This includes, but is not limited to: (a) cheating, (b) fraud, (c) plagiarism, such as word for word copying, using borrowed words or phrases from original text into new patterns without attribution, or paraphrasing another writer's ideas; (d) The buying or selling of all or any portion of course assignments and research papers; (e) Performing academic assignments (including tests and examinations) for other persons; (f) Unauthorized

disclosure or receipt of academic information; (g) Falsification of research data; and (h) Unauthorized collaboration.

(2) Academic negligence. Academic negligence is unknowingly or unintentionally claiming credit for the work or effort of another person.”

If you violate this policy, you will fail the course, and will also be subject to further sanctioning (potentially suspension or expulsion) from the university. Please do not plagiarize: the end result won't be pleasant for either of us.

More information about plagiarism is available at <http://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm>. Please read this site and complete the tutorial at the end. If, after completing this task and reviewing the PSU code of conduct, you have any questions about what constitutes academic integrity, please ask. It is much better to talk about these matters in advance than when it's too late.

Attendance Policy: You are allowed two absences, no questions asked. After that, absences (and tardiness) will begin to hurt your grade. At first, this means that your participation grade will suffer. However, if you miss more than four classes, your overall course grade will go down a complete letter (e.g. from a B+ to a C+). If you miss more than six, you will fail the course. Exceptions may be made for a documented emergency, in which case you would be expected to complete an additional assignment to make up for the classes that you could not attend.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability that you believe may affect your performance in the course, please get in touch with me as soon as possible so that we can speak privately about this. If you have not already contacted PSU's Disability Resource Center to discuss accommodations for which you may be eligible, I encourage you to do so immediately. Their website is <http://www.drc.pdx.edu>, and their phone number is (503) 725-4150.

Writing Center: PSU's writing center is located in Cramer Hall 188. I strongly encourage you to visit the writing center if you need assistance with any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to organization to revision. Consultants will meet with you individually, and focus on the aspects of the assignment with which you need the most help. For more information, see <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu>

Technology: Please do not use your laptop or e-reader or phone during class time. In my experience, the presence of these devices in a classroom impedes conversation. If you feel that using a laptop is absolutely essential to your education, please contact me as soon as possible.

Office Hours: My office hours are Mondays, 11:00-12:30 in NH M420. Please come! Conversations in office hours are the best way for me to get to know you, and for us to discuss material from the course in more depth. If you are not available during my scheduled hours, send me an email and we will make an appointment.

Graded Work: Please get a folder in which you keep all written work that I return to you.

Please note: Your decision to stay in this class connotes agreement with the policies outlined above. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with them, and to contact me as soon as possible with any questions.

Schedule of Assignments (subject to change):

In addition to carefully reading (and annotating) the selections below by the date on which they are assigned, please read all headnotes and footnotes that accompany the readings.

Week 1: January 6-8

T: Introductions

Th: Whitman, “Song of Myself” (20-67); read all but focus on sections 1-17; 21-24; 31-32; 46-52
Complete student questionnaire and academic integrity tutorial

Week 2: January 13-15

T: Emily Dickinson, selected poems (89-109)

Th: Dickinson, “Much Madness is divinest Sense –” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper” and “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wall-paper?’” (1892; 790-804)

Week 3: January 20-22

T: Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” (1895; 555-557)

Th: Henry Adams, from *The Education of Henry Adams* (1903; 387-397); Frederick Jackson Turner, from *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893; 1133-1137); Jane Addams, from *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910; 1156-1161)

Week 4: January 27-29

T: **EXAM 1**

Th: Booker T. Washington, from *Up From Slavery* (1900-1901; 675-697); W.E.B. DuBois, from *The Souls of Black Folk* (“The Forethought” and Chapter I) (1903; 883-901)

Week 5: February 3-5

T: WWI & Its Aftermath (214-229); William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (1923; 309), “Spring and All” (1923; 306-307), and “This is Just to Say” (1934; 310); Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro” (1913/1916; 318) and “A Pact” (1912)

Th: Claude McKay, selected poems (482-484); Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921/1926; 871), “Mother to Son” (1922/1926; 871-872), “I, Too” (1925/1929; 872), “The Weary Blues” (1925; 872-873), “Mulatto” (1927; 873-874), and “Theme for English B” (1949; 880); Countee Cullen, “Yet Do I Marvel” (1925; 893), “Incident” (1925; 893-894), “Heritage” (1925; 894-896), and “From the Dark Tower” (1927; 897); Langston Hughes, from “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926; 348-350)

Week 6: February 10-12

T: William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930; 698-738)

Th: Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, continued (739-793)

Week 7: February 17-19

T: Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (1956; 492-499), “Footnote to Howl” (1956/1959; 500), and “A Supermarket in California” (1956; 500-501); **EXAM 2**

Th: *Howl*, continued

Week 8: February 24-26

T: John Cheever, “The Swimmer” (1964; 157-165)

Th: *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993) – *Part One: Millennium Approaches*

Week 9: March 3-5

T: *Angels in America – Part Two: Perestroika*

Th: *Angels*, continued

Week 10: March 10-12

T: Sherman Alexie, “The Exaggeration of Despair” (1996; 1211-1212) and “This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” (1993; 1213-1222); Yusef Komunyakaa, “My Father’s Love Letters” (1992; 1044-1045)

Th: Sandra Cisneros, “Woman Hollering Creek” (1991; 1131-1139); Edwidge Danticat, from *Brother, I’m Dying* (2007; 1198-1200); Jhumpa Lahiri, “Sexy” (1999; 1223-1239)

FINAL EXAM: MONDAY, MARCH 16, 10:10-12:05