

**ENGLISH 2313: AMERICAN LITERATURE II, SPRING 2013**

9:25-10:40 TTh (CRN 23581) —Irby 303

12:15-1:30 TTh (CRN 23558)—Irby 303

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Office Hours: 10:00 am-12:00 pm MWF; 11:00 am-12 pm, 2:30-3:30 pm TTh; and by appointment

**TEXT:** *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, eighth edition, volumes C, D, & E (boxed together as package 2)

**COURSE FOCUS:**

Literature provides "a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but . . . a momentary stay against confusion."—Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes"

"Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality . . . enabling us to encounter, in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within our problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us."—Chinua Achebe, "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?"

"It's the function of creative people to disturb the peace. Some people ask me, 'Why don't you write plays that I know exactly what the specific answer to the question you're raising is by the end of the play?' And I always have to answer these people by saying that I find I can ask an awful lot more interesting questions if I don't have to supply the answers to them. If I limited the content of my plays to what I could give specific answers to, I think I'd write very dull plays. . . . If people would go into the theater realizing it's an arena of engagement, rather than escape, and if people would go to the theater to be upset and disturbed rather than merely being pacified and having their values reaffirmed, then on Broadway each year you'd have more than one or two half-way decent plays surviving. People have got to realize that art isn't easy, and the audience must bring to the art at least part of the responsibility that the perpetrator brought to it."—Edward Albee, interviewed in *The Spectator*, by Studs Terkel

"In art as in science there is no delight without the detail, and it is on detail that I have tried to fix the reader's attention. Let me repeat that unless these are thoroughly understood and remembered, all 'general ideas' (so easily acquired, so profitably resold) must necessarily remain but worn passports allowing their bearers shortcuts from one area of ignorance to another."—Vladimir Nabokov

**READINGS** (organized by thematic focus):

Weeks 1-2—Realism	"American Literature 1865-1914"—pp. 3-16, volume C William D. Howells, "Novel Writing and Novel Reading"—905-07, C Howells, "Editha"—376-85, C Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat"—990-1006, C
Week 3—Naturalism	Frank Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction"—913-16, C Jack London, "The Law of Life"—1043-47, C
Weeks 4-5—Modernism	"American Literature 1914-45"—3-20, D Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect"—341-43, D T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—372-75, D "The Waste Land"—378-91, D

### Essay 1 due at end of week 5 (Thursday, February 14)

Weeks 6-7—Post-Modernism	“American Literature since 1945”—3-15, E A. R. Ammons, “A Poem Is a Walk”—415-17, E Wallace Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West”—293-94, D Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California,” “Sunflower Sutra”— 500-03, E
Weeks 8-9—Realism	Sarah Orne Jewett, “A White Heron”—526-33, C Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, “The Revolt of ‘Mother’”—662-72, C Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine”—699-706,

### Midterm due at beginning of week 9 (Tuesday, March 12)

Weeks 10-11—Modernism	Ralph Ellison, “Prologue” and Chapter I of <i>Invisible Man</i> —208-24, E Robert Frost, “Design,” “Desert Places,” “Out, Out—,” “Home Burial”—237-46, D
Week 12-14—Post-Modernism	Alice Walker, “Everyday Use”—921-27, E Louise Erdrich, “Fleur”—1143-52, E James Merrill, “The Broken Home,” “Family Week at Oracle Ranch”—474-76, 477-83, E Rudolfo Anaya, “Bless Me, Ultima”—715-23, E

### Essay 2 due at beginning of week 13 (Tuesday, April 16)

Tuesday, April 30	FINAL EXAM FOR 9:25 SECTION—8-10 AM FINAL EXAM FOR 12:15 SECTION—11 AM-1PM
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**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance—**on time**—is mandatory. Four or more absences will lower your class participation grade, as will recurrent late arrival. If you miss six classes, you'll have one week after the last absence to see me with a believable excuse and a promise to sin no more; if you don't make this deadline, you'll be dropped from the course with a WF grade. And if you miss a seventh class following our conference about the six absences, you'll likewise be dropped with a WF. **Important note: “Attendance” in this class is defined as being present mentally as well as physically. If you spend the greater part of a class period sleeping, chatting with those around you, doing homework for another class, or in any other way failing to engage with the class discussion, you’ll be marked absent for that period. All materials not essential to your participation in the class must remain in your backpack during class; this includes cell phones and other communication devices, books and notebooks for other classes, newspapers, etc.**

**EXAMS:** We'll have two exams; the midterm will be take-home and the final will be written during our assigned exam period. Our midterm will cover the course material through Thursday, March 7, and you'll hand it in on Tuesday, March 12. The final exam, which you'll hand in at our scheduled exam period—Tuesday, April 30—will have one section covering the course material from March 12 to the end of the semester and then a second section taking in the whole course, asking you to make connections between the various works and periods we've studied.

**PAPERS:** We'll write two out-of-class essay assignments, due on Thursday, February 14, and Tuesday, April 16. I'll hand out a detailed explanation of each one several weeks before it's due. I'll discuss specific grading criteria in class, but note from the outset that although your essay's content is the most important factor in determining your grade, how well you write (i.e., thesis, organization, style, coherence, grammar, etc.) will affect this grade as well, since even the best ideas in the world aren't really useful if you can't communicate them intelligibly to a reader. You have the option to rewrite one of these essays, with the revision grade averaged in with the original to produce the final grade for that paper; you may turn in this

rewrite at any time through 5 pm Friday, May 3. All essays are due at the beginning of class on the date assigned. I'll accept a paper late, but it will lose one letter grade for every class meeting it's late. **Note:** You must submit all required written work to receive a grade other than F for the course. Please type or print out your essay on non-erasable paper, and use only a paper clip to fasten your pages, not staples or plastic binders or any other form of attachment. The form and documentation techniques you employ in the essays should follow the guidelines specified in the *MLA* (Modern Language Association) *Handbook*, which can also be found, in condensed form, at the English Department website link <http://uca.edu/english/mla-formatting/>.

**JOURNALS:** Each student must keep a journal of his or her thoughts on the assigned readings, with one entry devoted to each reading before we discuss it in class. Ordinarily, I'll pose a question for you to respond to in each entry, with that response consisting of at least three paragraphs, but beyond that requirement you're also free to write as much more as you wish about whatever intrigues you, inspires you, confuses you, or upsets you about the work in question, and about this work's relationship to other works you've read and its relevance to human life in general and your own life in particular. There are two goals to this assignment, both of which you're probably already aware of. First, the act of writing stimulates thinking: even if at the outset you feel you have nothing at all to say about a given work, you'll find that putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard will bring ideas forth; if you do have some ideas to start with you'll find that writing them down will cause you to extend and refine them. Second, as is obvious from what's just been said, these entries will provide a rich source of class discussion and exam topics.

You'll submit these journals by e-mail to the address listed for me at the top of the syllabus. Each entry must reach me no later than 24 hours prior to the first class meeting during which we'll discuss that work; I'll provide specific due dates for each after-discussion. I won't accept a journal entry after the due date, but you are allowed to miss one journal with no penalty. I'll grade you for each submission: if your entry shows an honest, thoughtful effort to come to grips with the work, you'll get somewhere from 8 to 10; if it shows a solid but not all that insightful effort, you'll get somewhere from 4 to 7; if you don't do the entry, or if you blow it off with superficial comments, or if you just crib ideas from critics and label them as your own, you'll get somewhere from 0 to 3. This does not mean that you're forbidden to read criticism to get your ideas going; you're welcome to do so, and to address critics' ideas in your journal, as long as you clearly identify which ideas are the critic's and which are your own in response to what that critic has to say. At the end of the semester, I'll figure your final journal grade by taking the ratio of the total points you've earned to the total points possible. If we do twelve journals, for instance, then the total possible score will be 120; if you earn 100, then your percentage is 84, which means a B for your final journal grade. (My grading scale is 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, below 60=F.)

**GRADES:** Your final grade will come from the following percentages:

Attendance/Participation:	20%
Journal:	20%
Midterm Exam:	15%
Final Exam:	15%
First Essay:	15%
Second Essay:	15%

**COURSE EVALUATIONS** (in which *you* get to grade *me*): Student evaluations of a course and its professor are a crucial element in helping faculty achieve excellence in the classroom and the institution in demonstrating that students are gaining knowledge. Students may evaluate courses they are taking starting on the Monday of the twelfth week of instruction—Monday, April 9—through the end of finals week by logging in to myUCA and clicking on the Evals button on the top right.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Knowingly presenting someone else's work as your own, whether in an exam, journal, or any other format, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism carries serious penalties, from failure on a particular assignment to failure for the course. If you ever have any questions on this subject, please feel free to ask me about them, without fear of embarrassment, and/or consult this file for more information: <http://uca.edu/academicaffairs/files/2012/08/Plagiarism.pdf>

**Here is UCA's official policy statement regarding academic integrity:** The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university

community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

**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.

### Some Critical Approaches to the Study of Literature

The eminent literary critic Louis Menand argues that we have three basic ways of approaching a story: 1) as "an autotelic [having a purpose within itself] verbal construction, a work of art"; 2) as "a participant in the dialogics [the multiple independent voices] of literary history, a commentary on the tradition to which it belongs"; and 3) as "a window on its time, an artifact." Encompassed within these three basic approaches, a number of methods of reading critically have arisen; the following is a list of some of the most common ones:

**Formalist (New Critical)**—looks at the work in and of itself, as a self-contained work of art. Looks at the way the author uses formal devices to develop ideas within the text—handling of point of view, setting, character development, patterns of imagery, other linguistic strategies, etc. The assumption here is that a work of art contains stable, objective truth, essentially unaffected by historical or cultural context, that we as readers simply discover. An old approach, supposedly supplanted by the others, but actually, almost all of them employ its basic technique of closely reading and analyzing a text to reach their goals. Produces an appreciation of individual artistry, but lacking context, can ignore author's intention or ignore or misinterpret then-current references.

**Literary-historical**—assumes that different periods are marked by general assumptions about life and art, seeks to identify how individual works help create and reflect those assumptions. In American Literature, these periods are generally denoted as Rationalism, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, Post-Modernism. This approach helps to make sense of large periods of literature, but it can be restrictive, ignoring works that don't partake of those assumptions.

**Psychoanalytic**—applies principles of psychology--Freudian, Jungian, Lacanian, etc.—to characters and plots to produce interpretation, e.g., the idea that Hamlet suffers from an Oedipus complex, which is supposedly Shakespeare's displacement of his own Oedipal feelings. Such analysis can be very illuminating and provocative, but psychological theories can be questionable or questionably applied by the critic.

**Reader-response**—points out that in many ways readers create or at least complete the meaning of a text when they interpret it, undermining the assumption that a text carries a single correct meaning in and of itself. As such, it's the opposite of formalism, with its positing of objective truth to be found in works of art. Questions how much we get strictly from the work itself and how much we supply ourselves as we read it, and by what standards we create that interpretation. Does literature actually exist in the words of the book or in our minds when we read it? For example, critics in different eras have read Hamlets very differently—he was seen as a man of action in the Renaissance, as a man of deep sensitivity in the Romantic era, as Oedipally tormented in the modern Freudian era.

**Deconstruction**—takes the reader-response argument further, asserting that a text has no meaning until it's interpreted, and that any interpretation is inevitably subjective, a product of its readers' particular cultural assumptions, etc. Argues that any text is a construct, not an organic reality, as is any interpretation; to

reveal this fact is to deconstruct it. Thus, this approach values works that call attention to their constructed nature, such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in all of which the author keeps reminding the reader that the characters and story are things the author is consciously creating. Conversely, it devalues many Realistic and Naturalistic works, in which authors tend to obscure their own roles and supposedly try to create the illusion that the work is simply unfolding without being consciously composed.

Feminist—seeks to point out ways in which traditionally valued literature reflects male ideology and to find other categories of value by which to appropriately appreciate lit by and about women. Can be very illuminating about societal assumptions and value systems, and has recovered many previously under-appreciated works by women, such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper," but feminist critics can be as simplistic and dogmatic as their most doctrinaire male counterparts.

New Historical—seeks to place works in the social, historical, cultural context of the period in which they were written as opposed to the period in which they're set—e.g., *The Scarlet Letter* is about sexual and social mores in Nathaniel Hawthorne's own Victorian world rather than about those matters in the Puritan world in which the story takes place. This approach can give very useful contextual readings, but may ignore what's in the text in favor of where the text came from.

Cultural—like New Historicism, looks at the work in relation to the ideology of the culture that produced it, but doesn't limit itself to works of "literature"; it looks at those alongside what are traditionally considered "lower" forms—popular magazines, pulp fiction, TV shows and commercials, etc. This approach can be very illuminating about societal assumptions underlying works, but it can devalue serious artistry in favor of obviousness, since it's easier to perceive such assumptions in intellectually impoverished forms such as romance novels, soap operas, reality shows, and sitcoms than it is in more complex and challenging novels, poems, and plays.

Queer Theory—looks at depictions of homosexual, lesbian, and heterosexual characters in literature, usually with a view to arguing that such labels are culturally constructed rather than ordained by God or nature. E.g., much has been written in recent years about the precise significance of the homoerotic elements in Shakespeare's sonnets, Walt Whitman's poems, and Herman Melville's novels. Did the cultures that produced those works define and view various manifestations of sexuality in the same ways as we do in the twenty-first century?

Ecological Criticism—looks at attitudes works of literature express toward the environment. E.g., James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* were long most highly regarded for the character of Natty Bumppo as the archetypal American hero, whereas now they're often most valued for their focus on exploitative versus sustainable development of the American wilderness; Willa Cather's *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* have long been highly regarded for their formal virtues and their celebration of the lives of small farmers, whereas now critics frequently point out that the kind of farming Cather's characters are engaged in is highly detrimental to the land; and contemporary critics have looked more sharply at the environmental impact of whaling than Melville himself seems interested in doing in *Moby-Dick*.

Postcolonial Criticism—considers the ways in which literature has been used, whether directly or indirectly, as a means of repression of native culture by colonizing European powers, and, concomitantly, as a means of resistance by the people being colonized. Compare, for example, what European imperialists say about the people they colonized in a work such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with what the colonized people say about themselves and their masters in a work such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Though originally applied to British colonization of "the other" in Africa and India, Postcolonial studies now encompasses countries in Asia, the Caribbean, North and South America colonized by other European and western countries—France, Spain, the United States.

"If it is not realistic to expect a nonpolitical criticism, one can still wish for and sometimes get a *sophisticated* criticism—one that, while indebted to a certain politics, can balance that concern with a sustained attention to what the artist is saying."—Joan Acocella

For further reading:

Bedford /St. Martin's Critical Casebook and Cultural Editions of many American literary works

Joan Acocella, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*