The University of Texas at El Paso | Department of English

Introduction to American Fiction
English 2313 (CRN: 10871)
M/W 12:00 - 1:30 p.m., Hudspeth 100

Fall 2022

Office Hrs: M/W, 9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m (in person); and otherwise via Zoom

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"The use of literature is to afford us a platform from whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it."
--Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles" (1841)

In the epigraph above, Emerson offers an unusual cost/benefit analysis of reading—literature may "afford us" a "purchase," a means of leveraging our experience that has the potential to carry us beyond ourselves. Reading in this sense may thus offer two "uses" at once. To read literature critically is to gain a larger knowledge of cultural history; but reading also presents the opportunity for us to see how *we* understand our place in the world, both how our perspectives have developed to make us who we are, and how those perspectives may evolve in new directions.

This course offers an historical introduction to American fiction, spanning from 1820 to the end of the twentieth century. An important element of our work will be the investigation of the technical aspects of fictional representation (form, style, point of view, and so on), and understanding how evolutions in technique reflect wider trends in American literary history. But we will also read these stories and novels within their various material and historical contexts—as documents that both stage and record many of the central political, cultural, and philosophical issues that continue to inform our understanding of the American experience in the last two centuries. Throughout our time together, we will explore these and other topics by practicing several integrated approaches to literary studies, building a repertoire of interpretive, analytical, and writerly skills through exercises in close reading, lecture, open class discussion, and a series of formal writing assignments. Our goal is two-fold: on one hand, our work aims to deepen your personal experience of literature while expanding your knowledge of American literary history; on the other, this work will help you learn how to articulate your own ideas and present them in a clear and compelling manner to a community of fellow-readers and thinkers. Topics and themes to be addressed include: major literary periods (romanticism, realism, naturalism, modernism, postmodernism); national identity, the public sphere, and the profession of authorship; issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity; liberalism and the rise of individualism; industrialism, capitalism, and the changing face of labor; regionalism and nationalism; genre and literary historiography; aesthetics and literary form; interpretation and the politics of representation.

Required Texts (available at UTEP Bookstore):
Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (Penguin) 9780140187649
Arturo Islas, *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (University of New Mexico Press) 9780826317322
Joyce Carol Oates, *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories,* 2nd Ed (Oxford) 9780199744398
Tommy Orange, *There, There* (Knopf) 9780525436140
Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (Penguin) 9780140436518

Schedule of Readings (to be completed by corresponding date). As a matter of customary practice, please review the introductory matter in the anthology for each of the writers on the syllabus:

Lsn.	Date	Assignment
1	Aug. 22	Introductions. "America and its Fictions, Part 1/n: '(Re)Defining the American Dream'" (*New York Times* 8/21/22) Lorrie Moore, "How To Become a Writer" (handout)
	Fictional Case Studies of Early American Nationhood	
2	Aug. 24	**Problems of American Time** Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" (14-30); Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture" (Blackboard); [Recommended: William Austin, "Peter Rugg, the Missing Man" (31-60)]
3	Aug. 29	**Gothic Figures** Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Wives of the Dead" (59-66); Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (67-72)
4	Aug. 31	**Separate Spheres and Social Fantasies** Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" (85-106)
	Sep. 5	**LABOR DAY – UNIVERSITY CLOSED**
	American Geographies of Realism and Naturalism	
5	Sep. 7	**Gender Identity and the Ends of Innocence** Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (1862) (Intro.-102)
6	Sep. 12	**Sexuality, Selfhood, and Rebellion** Stoddard, *The Morgesons*, cont'd. (102-187)
7	Sep. 14	**Still Lives** Stoddard, *The Morgesons*, cont'd. (187-end)
8	Sep. 19	**Gender, Insanity, and Defiance** Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (191-207) ***PAPER #1 DUE via BLACKBOARD, 11:59 P.M.***
9	Sep. 21	**Natural Forces: Sexuality, Animality, and Human Economies** Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron" (136-146); Kate Chopin, "The Storm" (147-153)
10	Sep. 26	**"…Suspended in the Chamber of Consciousness": The Life of Art** Henry James, "The Middle Years"

11	Sep. 28	**Aesthetics *In Extremis*** Stephen Crane, "The Little Regiment" (219-237); Jack London, "In A Far Country" (267-282)
12	Oct. 3	**Slavery's Violent Legacies** Charles Chesnutt, "The Sheriff's Children" (173-190); Jean Toomer, "Blood-Burning Moon" (317-325)
	The Rise of Modernism: Form and the Interior Landscape	
13	Oct. 5	**The Art of the Unsaid** Sherwood Anderson, "The Strength of God" (259-266); Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (353-358)
14	Oct. 10	**MIDTERM**
15	Oct. 12	**The Idyll of Youth** Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, chapters 1-11 (1-69)
16	Oct. 17	**Ends of Innocence** *My Ántonia*, cont'd, chapter 12-end book II (70-191)
17	Oct. 19	***Optima dies prima fugit*** *My Ántonia*, cont'd, book III-end (195-273)
18	Oct. 24	**Southern Gothic** William Faulkner, "That Evening Sun" (335-352); Flannery O'Connor, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" (514-524) ***PAPER #2 DUE via BLACKBOARD, 11:59 P.M.***
19	Oct. 26	**Tragic Boyhood: Blackness and Masculinity** Richard Wright, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (365-377); Ralph Ellison, "Battle Royal" (441-456)
	Post-War American Fictions: Other Languages, Other Lands, Other Histories	
20	Oct. 31	**Other Lands** Paul Bowles, "A Distant Episode" (402-414); Ray Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains" (475-481)
21	Nov. 2	**Public Lotteries** Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" (464-474); Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried" (688-706)
22	Nov. 7	**Star-Crossed Love and Sadness in El Paso** Arturo Islas, *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (1-68)

23	Nov. 9	**Code-Switching and the Cinematic Imagination** Islas, cont'd (69-134)
24	Nov. 14	**I Want to Believe (I)** Islas, cont'd (135-199)
25	Nov. 16	**Immigration Stories** Ha Jin, "Children as Enemies" (797-805); Jhumpa Lahiri, "Hell-Heaven" (835-855)
26	Nov. 21	**Indigenous Histories** Tommy Orange, *There There* (1-117)
27	Nov. 23	**Diasporic Belonging and Unbelonging** Orange, *There There*, cont'd (118-196)
	Nov. 24	**THANKSGIVING**
28	Nov. 28	**Memory, Sacrifice, and Communion: I Want to Believe (II)** Orange, *There There*, cont'd (196-end)
29	Nov. 30	Final Reckonings
	Dec. 2	Final Papers Due via Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.
	Fri. May 6	**Final Papers Due via Blackboard, 11:59 p.m.**

A Final Exam will be held on Thursday, Dec. 13th, between 1:00 and 3:45 p.m..

Course Requirements:

Reading of required texts. The reading load for this course is substantial; it is therefore important that you stay current in your work. Additionally, many of these texts can be quite challenging to read; to really understand them, you will need to read them more than once. As Thoreau said, reading "in a high sense" is "not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tiptoe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours to" (*Walden*, "Reading"). Let us be readers on Thoreau's model. Practically speaking, this means re-reading, underlining, making marginal notes, writing provocative questions and observations to bring with you to class, and actively connecting ideas and techniques between the texts we read.

Attendance and Participation (10%): Although I will offer short lectures frequently, this is a discussion-oriented class; your ongoing participation is encouraged and, indeed, expected. Come to our sessions prepared to share your questions and observations. The more involved you are on a daily basis, the more you will learn and enjoy. Faithful and on-time attendance is an important component of this, and is expected as well. Please be advised that, upon your sixth unexcused absence, you will fail the course (i.e., after the University drop deadline of Oct. 31st. If you accumulate six absences prior to that date, you would be wise to drop; do NOT assume that I will drop you automatically). Following standard policy, absences are excusable only in cases of documented medical or family emergency.

Short Papers (30%): Over the course of the semester, students will produce two short essays of critical interpretation on texts from the syllabus (4-5 pages, counting 15% each), which will be due on September 19th, and October 24th, respectively. For these two shorter papers, outside critical sources are discouraged; the text(s) you write about will be up to you. More details to follow.

Final Paper (30%): A longer Term Paper (6-8 pages) will be due on Friday, December 7th. This deadline is firm. I will provide more information on this as the class unfolds, but you may write on any topic that bears relevantly on our work in the course. I will also have suggestions for you, depending on your interests. Please feel free to come talk to me during my office hours to help develop ideas. MLA bibliographical guidelines are to be followed.

Midterm & Final Examinations (15%; 15%): Details on both to follow.

Plagiarism. This is a form of academic fraud, and I take it very seriously. You will not receive credit for any work that has been plagiarized; moreover, any work suspected of plagiarism will be forwarded, as a matter of official University Policy, to the Office of the Dean of Students for adjudication. The consequences of plagiarism can be very serious, resulting in reduced course grades, course failures, and sometimes in academic suspension. I understand, though, that citing sources properly can be confusing at times; if you're ever in doubt, just ask me.

Policy on Cell Phones and Electronic Devices:
Smartphones and ill-used electronic devices provide unwelcome distractions to you, me, and your classmates. Out of respect for others, cell phones are to be turned off or silenced during class. Although some of you may have electronic text editions of titles from the syllabus on, say, a kindle app, I ask you to recognize that cell phones are woefully inadequate reading devices for serious intellectual work in a classroom setting. If I see you looking at your phone or texting, or using a tablet or laptop for anything other than legitimate class purposes (e.g., facebook, twitter, instagram, and so on), I may ask you to leave and will mark you as absent for that day. If you have reason to expect an emergency phone call, please inform me of this before class begins and leave your phone on vibrate.

UTEP Land Acknowledgment Statement:
As members of the University of Texas at El Paso community, we acknowledge that we are meeting on unceded Indigenous land. We would like to recognize and pay our respects to the Indigenous people with long ties to the immediate region: Lipan Apache, Mescalero Apache, Piro, Manso, Suma, Jumano, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe of the Pueblo of San Juan de Guadalupe, and Tortugas Pueblo. We also acknowledge the nations whose territories include present day Texas: the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and the peoples of Chihuahua and northern Mexico from whom most/many of our students descend, such as the Rarámuri, Tepehuan, Wixarrika and Nahuatlaca peoples. Finally, we recognize all of the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories here in Paso del Norte, on Turtle Island. The University of Texas at El Paso honors your history and cultures and we seek greater awareness of the myriad ways in which your legacy can guide us in fruitful partnerships and mutually fulfilling relationships.