

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
AML 3041
MWF 6

TUR 4214
392-0777, ext. 302

American Literature II

Required Texts (available at Goering's):

Jim Grimsley, Dream Boy
Paul Lauter, ed., The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2

Description

This course has two functions: to profile (rather than survey) American literature since 1865, and to help you improve your analytical and writing skills. It's impossible to survey adequately the developments in American literature and culture in a single semester, and so we will concentrate in class on both "classic" and less traditionally canonical writings which suggest the diversity of American life and thought in a period of tremendous social upheaval and transformation. My assumption is that you're already familiar with many canonical male writers, especially those of the nineteenth century (some of whom are technically pre-Civil War writers). Assignments are designed to encourage you to read additional selections in the anthology, and to explore your own interests. We may adjust our schedule to some degree, and if we do, I will notify you in advance of such changes. You will notice that the writing assignments are rather varied. Some ask you to perform close/comparative readings of literary texts, others to address criticism instead of literature. These will help you identify your own writing strengths and practice the different kinds of assignments you'll encounter in other courses. The exams will help you review the material we've covered and identify both the changes and continuities in literature from this period. There is no cumulative final, and you will take the second exam in the last week of class (before the reading period).

Although I will occasionally provide you with background material, for which you are responsible, we will conduct class as a seminar, which means that your participation is vital. Please come to class each day on time and having read the assigned text(s). Be ready to share your responses. We will generally meet as an entire class, but on occasion I may ask you to work in smaller groups. I dislike giving quizzes, and assume that you will arrive prepared and ready to participate as often as possible. If you take more than three hours of unexcused cuts from class, your final grade will be reduced one-third of a letter grade for each excess cut.

While I hope that you will talk, I do not grade on participation. Please ask questions and don't worry about sounding silly -- the whole point is to try out ideas. Sometimes we will give selections a great deal of scrutiny, and sometimes we won't, depending largely on our own energies and the complexity of the texts.

Assignments and Grading

Your final grade will be based on these percentages. Following is a detailed description of each assignment; see the reading schedule which follows for due dates. 60% of your grade comes from writing assignments, and 40% from two short exams. Because we have quite a lot to do in class, we won't devote much class time to writing issues. I will be very happy to read drafts of any or all of the writing assignments, however, and encourage you to come by during office hours whenever you like to discuss your progress.

Essay 1	10%	
Précis		15%

Essay 2		15%
Essay 3	20%	
Short exams		40% (20% each)

Essay 1. Reading Autoethnography. Why, what, when, and how do you read? Did reading play a formative role in your development as a child or teenager? Have reading and writing been therapeutic, helping you address personal and/or social issues? To what genres are you typically drawn -- science fiction, comic books, mystery, romance -- and why? Do you prefer fiction or non-fiction? Have your tastes changed? What might account for such shifts? Do you read for pleasure, knowledge, or distraction?

I don't usually ask students to write personal essays, and I do not expect this essay to sound like a confession. This is an exercise in reconstruction and speculation; you are both the ethnographer and the subject. Write a 3-5 double-spaced pp. analysis of your past and current reading practices. Attempt to organize your observations around themes or periods of your life. Obviously you can't address all of the above questions, so just answer the ones that seem useful. Think of your own memories and anecdotes as data to be collected and shared. You are welcome to experiment with format, as long as you chronicle your history as a reader in some accessible way. Try to emphasize one or two particularly significant experiences -- I call these literacy anecdotes. Be prepared to discuss this history in class (I will NOT ask you to reveal personal information).

I will assign a grade to this essay, but if you complete the assignment in good faith, and with relatively few errors, you will receive an "A."

Précis. There is a difference between a text's information and the strategy used to present it. A précis is a brief analysis of the structure, organization, and implications of an argument, as well as a summary of its chief points.

Compose a 1-2 single-spaced pp. précis summarizing and analyzing a scholarly article or book chapter which addresses some aspect of American literature or culture. In other words, you will be writing a short synopsis and critique of an article or book chapter that itself interprets some work(s) of literature. The original article must be at least 8 pages long; I'd prefer that it be longer. Refer to specific page numbers (even when paraphrasing) so that we can locate the ideas you're summarizing and discussing. Please follow the following set-up:

- 1) First summarize the article or book chapter in 5-8 sentences. Explain the author's overall focus and the main claims of the argument.
- 2) Describe that author's critical methodology and perspective(s): Is the essay informed by a feminist sensibility? Does the writer emphasize psychological themes, or provide useful historical contextualizations? Is there any attention to socioeconomic issues (i.e. use of Marxist criticism)? Or is it a more traditional "close reading" of a text's language and plot? Often writers rely on a variety of critical methodologies: if so, what approach seems dominant, and does that primary approach effectively organize secondary ones? If the writer's method doesn't seem easy to categorize, just describe that method -- how does s/he approach the topic?
- 3) Offer an analysis of the essay's rhetorical strategy (the way it's designed to affect the audience): why is it organized the way it is? What makes it effective (or not)? What sorts of logic patterns does the writer rely on? Are there appeals to emotion, and if so, are they appropriate and successful? What makes it (or keeps it from being) effective and convincing? What is the writer's ethos?
- 4) Speculate about the implications of the information, both for our understanding of the text and beyond. What's useful about the essay? How could you expand it? What questions does it raise about the story, author, reader, etc.? What, in other words, is the piece good for?

You may also want to comment on what's ignored or devalued in the analysis: is the writer overlooking something which complicates (or even undermines) her argument? Does his or her commitment to a particular critical methodology rule out other interpretations?

Please attach a photocopy of your article/chapter to your précis.

Essay 2. Write a 4 d-s pp. formal analysis/"close reading" of a short story, novel excerpt, essay, or poem of your choice from the anthology. You must select a reading we are not addressing in class. Your essay should demonstrate your ability to read closely and understand how formal elements of the text (plot, narration, point of view, imagery, figures of speech, connotation/denotation, etc.) are central to the selection as a whole. In other words, this essay demands no biographical information or secondary readings; just focus on the structural elements of the text. Your thesis should explain how some aspect(s) of the selection's form relates to the its central theme(s). I'd concentrate on one or two significant formal elements, and perhaps their interaction. Audience: fellow classmates and those interested in literary study.

Essay 3. Write a 5 d-s pp. essay on the literary topic of your choice. You may use any approach you like, provided you support your argument textually. You may also work with any post-1865 text(s), in any genre. The only restriction is that it must be American in origin. You may, if you like, return in more detail to readings we've examined in class. I expect thoughtful engagement with text and context, rather than right answers. If you want to use theory and criticism, that's fine, provided you 1) document your sources in a works cited page (MLA style), and 2) keep the focus on the literary selection(s). This essay does not have to be a "close reading" (as did Essay 2), but you must support your claims. Audience: same as Essay 2.

I give A's to essays using an original and spirited argument to illuminate complexities of language and theme. I give B+'s to well-organized, well-developed, relatively error-free essays with sparks of originality or daring, and B's to competent essays needing more complex development and/or clearer focus. Lower grades mean greater problems with development, structure, and grammar. Recurrent grammatical errors lowers the grade; occasional spelling errors and typos don't. The best essays sustain complex and or audacious arguments; a good B essay capably summarizes and compares themes.

Short exams. You will take two exams, the second of which is not cumulative. In other words, there is no final. Each exam will include short answer questions and several passage identifications, and can be comfortably finished in one class period. There is no essay component. The exams will emphasize information I've given you and material we discussed in class, but you are still responsible for all of the assigned reading, and I may ask basic content questions about readings we didn't cover in class.

Please let me know if you have questions about these assignments. Except in the case of emergencies, work should be turned in on time. I may agree to accept late work under special circumstances, but not without penalty.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 (8/24-28) *You Better Work*

Introductions. Late Nineteenth Century (3-34); Developments in Women's Writing (35-6); Davis (42-70); Alcott (70-83).

Week 2 (8/31-9/4) *Speaking in Tongues*

Regional Voices, National Voices (247-8). African-American Folktales (249-267); Harris (335-340); Twain, "Sociable Jimmy" (274-6); "Corn-Pone Opinions" (303-5). 9/4 **Essay 1 due.**

Week 3 (9/7-11) *Shocking Chopin*

All Chopin selections (527-553). Begin James, if time permits.

Week 4 (9/14-18) *Men are from Mars*

All James selections (449-527).

Week 5 (9/21-25) *Touched by an Angel*

Hopkins (191-206); Harper (687-705).

Week 6 (9/28-10/2) *Native Visions*

Issues and Visions in Post-Civil War America (649-50). Standing Bear; Ghost Dance Songs; Eastman; Winnemucca (650-681); and Bonnin (859-873). 10/2 **Essay 2 due.**

Week 7 (10/5-9) *The Rest Cure*

Gilman (723-44).

Week 8 (10/12-16) *Urban Outfitters*

Toward the Modern Age (915-6). Sinclair (780-801). 10/16 **Exam 1.**

Week 9 (10/19-23) *The "Color Line"*

Washington and DuBois (all selections; 916-67); Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1612).

Week 10 (10/26-30) *The Harlem Renaissance*

Locke (1581-92); Hurston (1670-88); Larsen (1697-1712); Hughes, "Harlem" (1619). 10/30 **Précis due.**

Week 11 (11/2-6) *(and miles to go before we sleep)*

Frost, all selections (1146-64). Stevens, all selections (1533-1543).

Week 12 (11/9)

Stevens continued. "The Emperor of Ice Cream" (to be distributed).

Week 13 (11/16-20) *Culture Wars*

Ginsberg (2441-54); Herr (3024-3032).

Week 14 (11/23-25) *I'm a Barbie Girl, in a Barbie World*

Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (2583-86). Selections from Denise Duhamel's Kinky (to be distributed). 11/23 **Essay 3 due**.

Week 15 (11/30-12/4) *Still Haunted (after all these years)*

Poetry cont.; Grimsley, Dream Boy.

Week 16 (12/7-9)

Catch-up on 12/7. 12/9 **Exam 2**.