

ENGL 2313: American Literature II

Fall 2009

TTh 12:15-1:30, Irby 304

Bane

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Hours: Daily 8:00-9:00; MWF 9:00-10:00
TTh 11:00-12:00 or by
appointment

Website: www.uca.edu/english/facultystaff/cbane.php

We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be.

—Kurt Vonnegut
1922-2007

Welcome to the single most exciting class you'll be taking this semester: ENGL 2313: American Lit II. I know it will be difficult, but please try to control your emotions. Not everyone gets a chance to take a class this exciting, this enthralling, this enlightening. In American Lit II we spell "fun" with a capital F-U. Now just because it will be fun doesn't mean that it will be easy. There will be a lot of hard work, but the work will be rewarding. I promise. I know you're curious as to just how a literature class can be everything I'm promising. I'm sure that this is just one of many questions you have. This syllabus is my attempt to answer at least some of those questions, so let's get started.

Course Description or "What is American Lit II?"

According to the official course description, ENGL 2313 is a "basic course requirement for majors and minors and, in series with American Literature I, a charting of the major forms and styles of American literature. The course traces the development of major figures in post-Civil War American Literature (such as Twain, James, and Crane) to major American writers between the First and Second World War (such as Hemingway, Stevens, Frost, and Faulkner). Lecture, discussion, writing."

ENGL 2313 is what is commonly known as a "survey" course. The general purpose of a survey course is to provide beginning students in a given field a survey or sampling of the basics in their chosen field. For you, future literary scholars, we will survey the literature of the time frame being considered, in this case, 1865 to present. This time frame covers four major divisions of American Literature: Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, and Post-Modernism. We will examine each of these movements, first defining the attributes of each movement and then reflecting on how the chosen texts are (or are not) characteristic of their time. And we'll do oodles of fun stuff along the way.

Course Clarification/Deconstruction or "What do you mean by 'American,' 'literature,' and 'major' writers, figures, forms, and styles?"

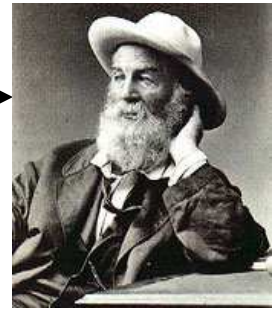
Good question. There are many "Americas": North, South, Central, Latin. North America includes the United States, Canada, and Mexico. But Mexico, along with most of South America and Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries, is also part of Latin America. Some linguists argue that since "Latin" America refers to any area where a romance language is spoken, Quebec, Louisiana, and French-speaking Caribbean countries should also be included. More on this later.

In the very literal sense, "literature" refers to any written material. Many people read any available "literature" about cars before deciding which one to buy. Usually, people use the word "literature" to apply to works of fiction, poetry, or drama. However, when we study "literature," we study creative writing of recognized artistic value, not works written primarily to entertain or "uplift" the reader. This does not mean that literature cannot entertain or uplift, but these are not the primary goals of the majority of the authors. In fact, some literature is deeply disturbing. Why?

Literature doesn't offer easy, cheerful answers, nor does it aim to reinforce our own worldviews or satisfy our expectations by giving us the easily digestible narrative formulas we have grown accustomed to from television. Literature makes us think and through thinking we can, as Mr. Wilde notes, "realise our perfection." Writers of literature explore the human condition and offer insights on how and why people think, feel, and act as they do.

Warning!

Literature is about language. Sometimes language, even poetic language, can be brutal. This does not mean that the language in question is obscene or pornographic, just brutal. For instance, when everyone's favorite dirty uncle, Walt Whitman writes of his "limitless jets" of hot, quivering love jelly, he isn't talking about the kind you slap on a PB&J.



The reason I'm bringing this up is not to shock you. It's simply to let you know what you might expect in this class. You should also know that language isn't the only thing that may be "uncomfortable" for some of you. We may also touch on certain topics that may raise eyebrows: abortion, infidelity, racism, etc. Again, this is not to shock you; it's simply to keep you informed. Through literature, we see both the differences and similarities between us and people of other ethnicities, time periods, genders, religions, and values. **If you know that you will have issues reading, hearing, and discussing certain words and topics, you need to drop the course now.**

Finally, what does the course description mean when it says "major"? Based on the representative examples—Twain, James, Crane, Hemingway, Stevens, Frost, and Faulkner—"major" apparently means dead white guys. This is an interesting notion, especially considering the geography lesson we had earlier. Are all of America's "major" writers direct descendents of Western European stock? Are there no "major" American female writers or writers of color? I hope that you realize that the answer to these questions is "NO." During this course, we *will* be looking at Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner, but we will also be looking at Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Jean Toomer, Toni Morrison, Li Young Lee, and Sherman Alexie. There are many Americas and many American voices. We will do our best to hear as many of these voices as possible in a fifteen week semester. What are they trying to tell us, these stories, these voices? Do we want to hear from them? How do they bear on our lives, our sense of language and literature, our sense of ourselves?

Course Texts or "What do I have to buy?"

This is a college class, so you have to buy something. Fortunately for you, I myself know the woes of being a lowly (and broke) college student, so your texts are relatively inexpensive. The national average cost for a college textbook is \$102.44. The texts for this class can be purchased for as little as \$36.75—plus shipping and handling in some cases—if you're a smart shopper. They are available in the campus bookstore, the local textbook supply stores, all major bookshops (i.e. Barnes and Noble), and online (amazon.com, studentmarket.com, etc.). Shop smart...shop S-Mart.

The **required** texts for this class are:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Shorter 7th ed., Vol. 2
Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury* (Norton)

The texts are available as a package in the UCA bookstore. Though not required, I also recommend that you get yourself a good dictionary and the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook*, which, as English majors, should already occupy a space on your shelf next to Shakespeare, the Bible, and the *OED*.

You are required to purchase (or check out from a library) the texts for this course. This is a literature course, which means that the focus is on reading and textual analysis, not regurgitating lecture notes. **Students who routinely fail to bring the appropriate text to class will be counted absent.** See the attendance policy below for the consequences.

Course Requirements or "What do I have to do?"

Reading critically is hard work, and you are not going to become an expert in one semester. However, if you commit yourself to the process this semester with the goal of actually learning something, you will have a good start at becoming a serious and critical reader of literature and will develop the ability to express your views on paper. **What we read we shall read with passion, intensity, and critical awareness, all in keeping with the expectations of a college level course.** I'm not here to baby-sit, I'm here to teach. You're not here to kill time, you're here to learn. Both take hard work. Specific assignments and guidelines are outlined below.

Quizzes: Twelve times throughout the summer we will have vocabulary quizzes on literary terms. The literary term handout is on BlackBoard. You will be responsible for these terms not only for the quizzes but also for the mid-term and final exams (see below). At the end of the summer, I will drop your two lowest quiz scores.

Group Film Project: One aspect of American Literature we will be discussing this semester is the development and impact of film during this period. This project will consider the connection between literature and film by giving you the chance to *do something* with a text other than simply read, discuss, or write about it. This *something* will be a group project that is basically open-ended with a few guidelines. Each group will choose (from a select list) a work from this literary period and will try to answer the question, "What if this were a movie?" To answer this question, each group will:

1. Cast the film. What famous actor/actress will play which character?
2. Create the soundtrack. What songs will be in the film?
3. Take the novel from page to screen. How would narrative description translate into action?

During the final exam period, each group will give a 15-minute presentation that **must involve all members of the group**. During this presentation, each group will tell the class the answers to the above three questions focusing on the "Why?" of their choices. Be creative: costumes, make-up, effects, etc. are encouraged. The more original, engaging, and insightful the presentation, the better the grade. Feel free to run any ideas by me or ask for suggestions.

Exams: There will be a mid-term and a final. Both exams will be objective in nature, consisting of short-answer IDs about this historical period of American Literature (character names, titles of works, literary terms, dates, brief quotations, etc.) that reflect **the appropriate reading knowledge expected of an English major**. Any student who misses an exam will be allowed to make it up at my discretion. If a make-up exam is allowed, points will be deducted.

Essays: One of the primary objectives of the English Department at UCA is to foster critical writing skills in its students. As such, you will write three short, 2-3 page essays in this course. These essays will be explications or "close readings" of one or more of the works from a particular time period covered in the course. You will be given specific prompts to address about two weeks before each essay is due. **You are not to use any outside sources**. This is your chance to give your thoughts concerning a literary work. The essay should not be a rehashing of class discussion, but should be a thesis-oriented essay that develops your interpretation of the text. Be sure build your argument using claims, evidence, and analysis. A close analysis must be grounded in the text but relies on your informed opinions to make meaning.

I reserve the right to give reading quizzes if it becomes apparent that students aren't doing the reading.

Grade Distribution or "So, what's all this worth?"

Quizzes (10 points each)	10%	Group Film Project	15%
First Essay	10%	Second and Third Essay	15% each
Mid-Term Exam	15%	Final Exam	20%
			Total: 100%

Dire warnings, final thoughts, etc. or "How do I stay on your good side?"

Come to class. According to the UCA Handbook, "students are expected to attend all class meetings," therefore regular attendance is essential. *Attendance* in this class is defined as being present, engaged, and alert the entire **75 minutes of class**. Being tardy, leaving early, or routinely failing to bring the appropriate text(s) and attitude to class will all be penalized as an absence. Disruptive behavior—that is, any behavior which impedes another student's learning process—will be penalized as an absence; seriously disruptive behavior may result in expulsion from the course. Students with six absences will be asked to drop the class or will be dropped with a WF. The five allowed absences include "excused" absences, so there is no need to contact me to explain why you were/will be absent. **When absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from either a classmate—preferably—or me.**

You are in college. Act like it. Be considerate of your classmates and the instructor. Do nothing that distracts the instructor or disrupts a colleague's concentration. Visit the restroom before coming to class. Turn off all beepers, watch alarms, and—above all—**cell phones** before entering the classroom. Conduct private conversations, read the newspaper, do homework, eat snacks, and catch up on sleep outside the classroom.

Do not ask for extra credit. The assignments outlined above are adequate to assess your performance in the class. Engagement with the course materials and ideas is the most important prerequisite to a good grade. Decide from the outset of the term either to take the course seriously or to drop it. Take notes, mark significant passages in your textbooks for easy reference, and make certain that you clearly understand the major ideas of the course. It's time to take off the training wheels and lose the security blanket. Take an active role in your education, not a passive one.

READ! The single most effective strategy to success in a college course, especially a literature course, is to read the assigned material. The student handbook “suggests a minimum of two hours preparation on the part of the student” for each credit hour taken. That means a class worth three hours of credit requires six hours of preparation per week. Since the average reader can read 150-200 words per minute, you should expect to read approximately 60-80 pages for a TTh class.

Participate. Simply put, this means being an active college student. Be prepared for class and show that preparation through participation. I place a great deal of importance on dialogue. College is an active, communal—rather than a solitary, passive—activity. Therefore, you should prepare well before coming to class and exhibit that preparation verbally. The more actively you participate, the more you will benefit from what the course offers. In short, do the reading diligently, mark significant passages, and speak up in class. Let’s hear more voices than just mine. The course is designed to improve your reading skills and sharpen your ability to critically examine and analyze difficult texts. This will not happen without active participation on your part. This facet of your performance will be used to determine whether borderline grades go up or down. After the final average is figured, that grade will be adjusted to reflect outstanding participation and engagement with the course as well as excessive absences/tardies and/or disruptive behavior.

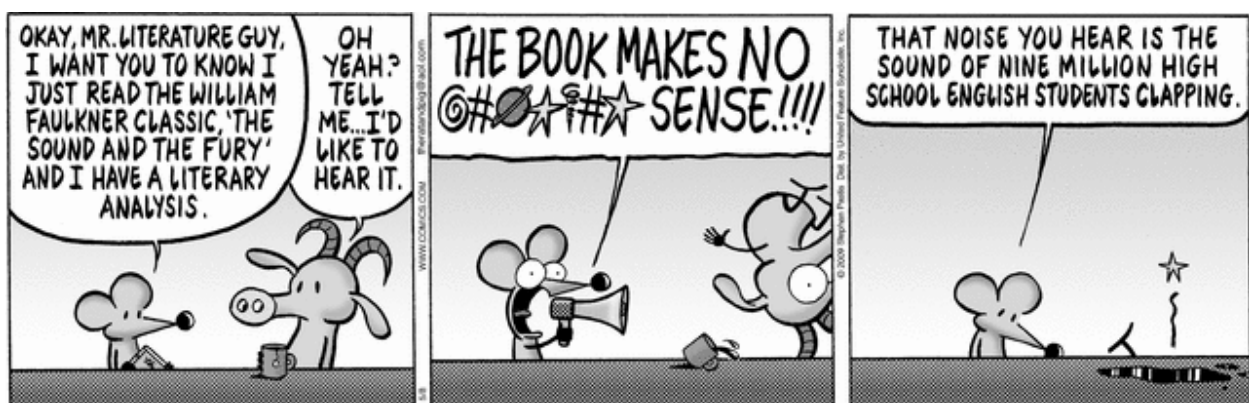
University Policies or The Fine Print

The university’s two academic bulletins – the University of Central Arkansas *Undergraduate Bulletin* and *Graduate Bulletin* – are the official publications for all academic programs and policies. Students are urged to study these bulletins. In addition, students should familiarize themselves with the various policies in the *Student Handbook*, some of which are outlined below. The *Handbook* may be accessed online at http://www.uca.edu/student/dean/student_handbook.php.

Academic Misconduct/Plagiarism. Any student deemed guilty of an act of academic misconduct may fail the course, be placed on probation or suspended from the university for a specific period of time, or be expelled from the university (*Student Handbook* 32-34).

Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment by any faculty member, staff member, or student is a violation of both law and university policy and will not be tolerated at the University of Central Arkansas. Sexual harassment of employees is prohibited under Section 703 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and sexual harassment of students may constitute discrimination under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (*Student Handbook* 95-99).

Americans with Disabilities Act. The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, please contact the UCA Office of Disability Services, 450-3135.



Semester Breakdown

Following is a tentative outline for the course. We will adjust as necessary to cover as much of the material as possible. Assigned texts should be completed by the date listed.

August 20—Intro to Course: Scope, Syllabus, and Schedule

What is “American” Literature?: Native American Literature, Slave Narratives, Captivity Narratives, Early American Folktales, Short Stories, Novels, Poetry and the American Renaissance.

1. Week of August 25
 - 25—Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Ch. I-XVI, pgs. 101-167
 - 27—Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Ch. XVII-XXVIII, pgs. 167-228
2. Week of September 1
 - 1—Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Ch. XXIX-End, pgs. 228-287
 - 3—James, “The Beast in the Jungle,” pgs. 374-403
3. Week of September 8
 - 8—Chopin, “Désirée’s Baby”; Chesnutt, “The Wife of his Youth,” pgs. 439-443 & 464-472
 - 10—Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-paper,” pgs. 508-519
4. Week of September 15
 - 15—Wharton, “The Other Two” and “Roman Fever,” pgs. 521-544
 - 17—Crane, “The Blue Hotel,” pgs. 619-638
5. Week of September 22
 - 22—Cather, “Neighbour Rosicky,” pgs. 727-747
 - 24—Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” “Out, Out—,” “Desert Places,” and “Design”; Stevens, “Idea of Order at Key West” and “Of Modern Poetry,” pgs. 784-788 & 823-825
6. Week of September 29
 - 29—Williams, “Portrait of a Lady,” “The Red Wheelbarrow,” & “This Is Just to Say” & Pound, “Portrait d’une Femme,” “A Pact,” & “In a Station of the Metro,” pgs. 833-849
 - 1—Eliot, “Portrait of a Lady” (Handout) & “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” pgs. 863-867
7. Week of October 6
 - 6—O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, pgs. 892-967
 - 8—Mid-term
8. Week of October 13
 - 13—Hurston, “How it Feels to Be Colored Me,” pgs. 982-985 & Toomer, from *Cane*(Handout)
 - 15—Fall Break
9. Week of October 20
 - 20—Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, “April Seventh, 1928,” pgs. 3-48
 - 22—Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, “June Second, 1910,” pgs. 48-113
10. Week of October 27
 - 27—Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, “April Sixth, 1928,” pgs. 113-165
 - 29—Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, “April Eighth, 1928,” pgs. 165-199
11. Week of November 3
 - 3—Hemingway, “A Very Short Story” (Handout) & “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” pgs. 1067-1083
 - 5—Chaplin, *Modern Times* (in class film)
12. Week of November 10
 - 10—Hughes, “I, Too,” “Mulatto,” “Song for a Dark Girl;” Ellison, “Battle Royal,” pgs. 1090-1092 & 1254-1264
 - 12—O’Connor, “Good Country People,” 1393-1407
13. Week of November 17
 - 17—Morrison, “Recitatif,” pgs. 1462-1475
 - 19—Sexton, “The Starry Night” and “Sylvia’s Death”; Plath, “Lady Lazarus” and “Daddy,” pgs. 1439-1441 & 1478-1482
14. Week of November 24
 - 24—Alexie, “This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” (Handout) & “Do Not Go Gentle,” pgs. 1678-1681 [*Smoke Signals*]
 - 26—Thanksgiving
15. Week of December 1
 - 1—Lee, “Persimmons,” “Eating Alone,” “Eating Together,” & “This Room and Everything in It,” pgs. 1670-1674
 - 3—Lahiri, “Sexy,” pgs. 1682-1698
16. **Finals Week**
 - Final Exam – Thursday, Dec. 10, 2:00-4:00**
 - Group Presentations**