

English 242

Katy Ryan, ENGL 242, Spring 2002, American Literature II

ENG 242 American Literature: 1865 - present

Katy Ryan

Stansbury Hall 354

MWF 1:30-2:20

In this course, we will read a variety of American writers from 1865 to the present, focusing on literary forms (short stories, speeches, poems, plays, autobiographies), stylistic innovations, as well as political and social issues (racial and sexual liberation struggles, class conflicts, immigration, and national identities). We will begin with Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize Speech that celebrates the participatory character of storytelling and conclude with Malcolm X's speech "The Ballot or the Bullet." In between, we will read literary texts by Mark Twain, Henry James, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Pauline Hopkins, Gertrude Stein, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, Thomas Pynchon, Anne Sexton, Audre Lorde, and several others. As we read, we will discuss the shifting political landscape in the United States and modernist / postmodernist movements.

Words on a page are meaningful only in collaboration with a thinking reader. Everyone will be expected to think. The goals of the course are

- to strengthen your ability to analyze literary texts
- to learn to write thoughtful, critical essays in your own voice
- to develop and articulate your ideas in class discussion

Required Text

Paul Lauter, ed. *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Vol. 2. 3rd edition.

Work Requirements

Two essays (4-6 pages) 30%

Final exam 25%

Class participation 20%

Midterm exam 15%

One-page responses 10%

One-Page Responses

By the end of the semester, you will have written six, one-page responses to the readings. These informal, typed responses will be due every other week and will consist of your initial thoughts about a text, or group of texts. Your response should be handed in on the day that we *begin* discussion of the work(s) that you've chosen. Late responses will not be accepted, unless there is a clear emergency.

I'm asking you to write these responses for very practical reasons: it is easier to talk about literature after you have thought about it on your own, and writing often facilitates thinking. These responses will also help you come up with ideas for the longer essays and prepare for the midterm and final exam. Feel free to be creative and experimental in your writing. The first-person pronoun is always welcome (in your longer essays as well).

You can structure the written responses however you want. You might focus on one character in a story, explaining why you were intrigued or bothered by this creation. You might analyze the language of a short story or poem, investigating a recurring metaphor or unusual point of view. Your response might provide an overview of several

readings. For instance, you could compare Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" with Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"; Larsen's *Passing* with Hurston's "Sweat"; Jordan's "Poem about my Rights" with Ginsberg's *Howl*.

Class Schedule

1865-1910: Realism and the Woman Question

Tues Jan 9: Introductions

Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize Lecture

Thurs Jan 11: Kate Chopin, "Story of an Hour"

"Bradwell v. Illinois" (handout)

Read pp. 3-34

Tues Jan 16: Mark Twain, "The War Prayer"

William Dean Howells, "Editha"

Thurs Jan 18: Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "Sister Josepha"

Pauline Hopkins, "General Washington: A Christmas Story"

Tues Jan 23: Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), from *The School Days of an Indian Girl*

Mary Antin, from *The Promised Land*

Thurs Jan 25: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper"

Tues Jan 30: Henry James, *Daisy Miller*

1910-1945: Modernism and the Making of American Identities

Thurs Feb 1: "New Explorations of an 'American' Self," 824-825

Abraham Cahan, from *Yekl*

Tues Feb 6: W.E.B. DuBois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*

Thurs Feb 8: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Same," "The English,"
"Johannesburg Mines," "I, Too," "Harlem"

Tues Feb 13: Jean Toomer, from *Cane*

Thurs Feb 15: *Cane*

Edith Wharton "Roman Fever"

First essay due

Tues Feb 20: Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"

T. S. Eliot "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Thurs Feb 22: **Midterm exam**

Tues Feb 27: Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," "The Pasture," "Desert Places," "Out, Out—"

Thurs Mar 1: Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Spring," "Dirge without Music," "Justice Denied in Massachusetts"

Tues Mar 6: Djuna Barnes, "Smoke"

Thurs Mar 8: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"

Tues Mar 13: Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"; "The Snow Man"

Thurs Mar 15: William Faulkner, "Barn Burning"

Tues Mar 20: Zora Neale Hurston, "Sweat"

1945-2000: Postmodernism, Power, and Protest

Thurs Mar 22: Read pp. 2012-2017

Thomas Pynchon, from *The Crying of Lot 49*

Second essay due

Spring Break Mar 23-Mar 31

Tues April 3: Tillie Olsen, "Tell Me A Riddle" 2267-2281

Thurs April 5: Tillie Olsen, "Tell Me A Riddle"

Tues April 10: James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

Thurs April 12: Anne Sexton, "Her Kind," "Housewife," "Somewhere in Africa"

Tues April 17: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "I Am Waiting"; Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*; June Jordan, "Poem about my Rights"

Thurs April 19: Audre Lorde, "Power," "Walking over Boundaries," "The Art of Response," "Stations"

Tues April 24: Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Thurs April 26: Preparation for final

Final examination Friday May 4, 11:00-1:00