

Asbury University
English Department
English 262
Spring 2023
TR 8:00-9:15



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American Literature II

1865 to Now

The American Civil War marks an important moment of rebirth for the fledgling nation. Lincoln's "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation" announces a renewed claim to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence after years of war.

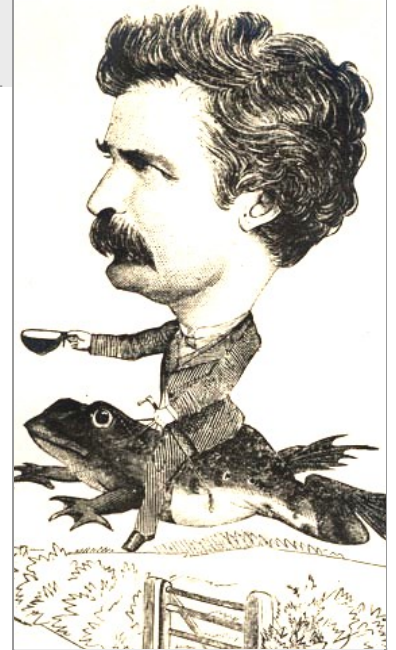
In our study of American literature from that revival to the present, we begin with two authors who challenge easy definitions of "the American writer": Henry James and James Baldwin reverse the path of early-American colonists, leaving their New York birthplace to become Europeans. James becomes a British subject out of protest when the US is slow to enter WWI, and Baldwin only returns to the States to take part in the Civil Rights movement, since he finds in Europe something that better resembles "the land of the free" than his native country. What do they see in their homeland from afar?

We then turn from those who fled American soil to those—Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Wendell Berry—who plant their work firmly in the American landscape to ground their understanding of American literary identity. But that ground is unstable, both physically and socially, and makes for a tumultuous foundation on which to construct an identity.

American literature is not, however, simply a matter of determining *where* the writer writes, but also *when*. In our final turn, W. E. B. Du Bois and Toni Morrison link the losses of the past (slavery, the Civil War, and much more) with the unfolding of the future. These themes enable us to read American literature as a series of conversations that link writers of different centuries and geographical settings—and that invite you to take part.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To hone our ability to close-read literature written in a variety of styles and from a range of American cultures, enabling us to evaluate the arguments and rhetorical techniques employed by these authors.
- To learn how American authors take part in a larger historical and cultural conversation, a conversation that affects the perspectives of the writers and the values reflected in their work.
- To form interpretive arguments about the literature we read, to support those arguments with sufficient evidence, and to articulate those arguments both clearly and convincingly through artifacts that reflect awareness of their cultural underpinnings.



REQUIRED BOOKS

James, Henry. *What Maisie Knew*. Oxford
9780199538591 (1897)

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Vintage
9780345806543 (1953)

Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying*. Vintage
9780679732259 (1930)

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*.
Dover 9780486280417
(1903)

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.
Vintage
9781400033416 (1987)

Additional readings will be made available on Discovery. Please access, print, read, and bring them to class when assigned.



SEEK HELP

I would discourage you from exchanging online plot summaries for the experience of reading the material carefully. The same goes for using Google as a replacement for bringing your questions to me or your classmates.

I have office hours listed at the top of the syllabus, and am happy to talk over any aspect of the class. Book an appointment! Book two! I'll answer questions by email, too, though it is usually fastest if you drop by my office so we can look at the problem together. Other resources are best thought of as sources of further reading if you find something that interests you.

ATTENDANCE

More than four unexcused absences will result in the loss of a letter grade, with another letter grade deducted for every three classes missed thereafter. The four unexcused absences give you the chance to stay home when you get sick or when your alarm clock fails to go off. If you are absent, you should drop me an email as a courtesy, contact one of your classmates to find out what you've missed, and stop by office hours if you'd like to go over material or pick up handouts.

Excused absences must be documented by the Registrar and submitted to me within two weeks of the missed class (with all in by the final day of classes), and make-up work should be arranged with me ahead of time. The main benefits of the

course emerge through class discussion, for which you must be both present and participatory. You do not get course credit simply for showing up, but not doing so will negatively affect your grade.

If you come in late, you will be responsible for checking with me at the end of class to ensure that you're marked as present, since I cannot stop class in the middle of our discussion to modify attendance. If you do not check in, you may well be marked as absent, a mark that cannot be changed at a later time.

All class cancellations due to weather or illness will be announced by email to your Asbury address, so keep an eye on it!

show up and speak up

PARTICIPATION

You will get some historical and cultural background to the reading through short lectures and class presentations, but much of our investigation of the texts will take place through group discussion. Because discussion is such an important part of this course, all electronic devices should remain off and stowed away during class; no audio or video recording is allowed. Requests to use computers for note-taking will be considered as a special accommodation, but they are not allowed without explicit permission from me. They are distracting to your classmates and a hindrance to engaged conversation.

You should:

- 1) bring your textbook and print-outs of supplementary reading to class
- 2) complete the assigned reading and accompanying commonplaces
- 3) take part in the conversation during class, whether by asking questions, reading aloud when asked, or proposing interpretations
- 4) arrive promptly (yes, by 8am) and offer classmates your full attention.

Extroverts, don't dominate the conversation; instead, focus on fostering a discussion, whether by asking questions, suggesting ideas, or attending to and commenting on your peers' contributions. If you are naturally quiet and find it difficult to participate, please see me so we can discuss ways for you to contribute to class discussions that draw on your strengths. You might consider volunteering some of your commonplace material (see next page) or bringing to class (or, sending to me to distribute via email) historical or cultural information that would supplement our discussion of the literature. There are many ways to contribute to our conversation, and I suggest that you explore a great number of them.



COMMONPLACE BOOK (30%)

To encourage focused preparation for our class discussions and pre-writing material for our papers, you will be required to write a response every time there is assigned reading. To give some shape to these responses, you will be following a practice with a history dating back to the Renaissance: commonplacing. To make a commonplace book, compile and organize excerpts from your reading. Take note of passages of text—short or long—that catch your eye, either because the passages are interesting in themselves, or because they spark a connection to some other reading or problem you have been thinking about. Find such a passage, and then copy it over into your commonplace book. Copying helps to fix the passage in memory by associating what the eye has seen with what the hand does.

A commonplace book is a resource: it holds those parts of the book that you think you may want to use again, to quote, to imitate, to criticize, or to analyze. When you choose an excerpt, you may pick anything that catches your attention as particularly significant, suggestive, difficult, infuriating or otherwise interesting. Note passages *as* you read. Knowing you have to prepare these responses gives you a stake in your reading: an opportunity to engage what you are reading rather than letting your eyes simply pass over the page.

You can include as many passages as you would like in each commonplace submission, but **you must include at least two**. **Write out** the chosen passages, and then offer a **response** to the text you have provided. You can use the quoted passages to frame a question or series of questions about the text, investigate a particular literary style evident in the passages, or simply affirm some of the aspects of the reading that you liked most—sometimes explaining *why* you like something is far more challenging than explaining why you might *not* like it.

We will use commonplaces as launching pads for our discussion, and I will ask you to submit your commonplace entry ten times throughout the semester, so please have it written on paper you can hand over in class if I ask (a small journal, printer paper, or a piece of loose-leaf). If you are absent, you will need to submit your commonplace by the start of your first class back. I cannot give commonplace credit for late submissions, or for commonplaces on readings other than those assigned on collection day: our goal is to use our commonplace to be in readiness for that class's discussion. As you might have guessed, the quality of your commonplaces factors into your grade, so take care to articulate your responses fully on paper and in class when asked.

INTRODUCTIONS TO

POETRY (10%)

Modern American poetry is an incredible trove that's not to be missed. But occasionally I hear, "I'm afraid of poetry!" or "I don't know what to *do* with poetry!" Here's your chance to tackle such hesitation head-on—with help.

Each member of the class will pick a modern American poem (1865-present) to **memorize, recite, and teach to the class**. Don't let the memorization scare you away from longer poems; you may memorize a shorter section of a longer work.

We will begin most of our class periods with one student's 10-15-minute poetry presentation. You will need to bring enough copies of the poem for the members of the class and supply whatever background information you think would help us analyze the poem together.

Where is this poem in time and place? What techniques are in evidence, and, most importantly, what does the poet *accomplish through them*? You don't have to have it all figured out (we will be building interpretation as a class), but we do need your guidance.

Individually, this activity gives us a chance to develop performance, leadership, and collaboration skills. Collectively, we will all benefit from building readings together and gain confidence in our ability to read and *enjoy* modern poetry!

PLAGIARISM

All confirmed cases of plagiarism (appropriation of another's words or ideas without acknowledgment) will result in a zero for the assignment and a notice to the Academic Dean.

If you feel that you are not understanding the reading, please visit office hours so that we can talk it over; I can only help, however, if I can be confident that the work you submit truly reflects your own thinking.

PAPERS ONE (20%) AND TWO (40%)

One of the most valuable things I can do is to guide you through written engagements with the literature we are reading.

For the first paper, I will have you meet individually with me in my office so that you can lay out your paper proposal and walk me through the argument you intend to make. Please do come prepared to present a full-fledged paper. We will talk things over, you will submit a first draft, and, after receiving feedback, you will submit a final draft.

I will not require you to come to my office for the second paper, though I encourage you to meet with me, the tutors in the writing center, or your classmates, so that your ideas will be developed to their fullest before you wrestle with writing them down. Your second paper will be comprised of three linked activities.

Finished papers that are submitted without being preceded by an on-time, complete draft will be docked half a letter grade. Late papers will be docked half a letter grade each day.

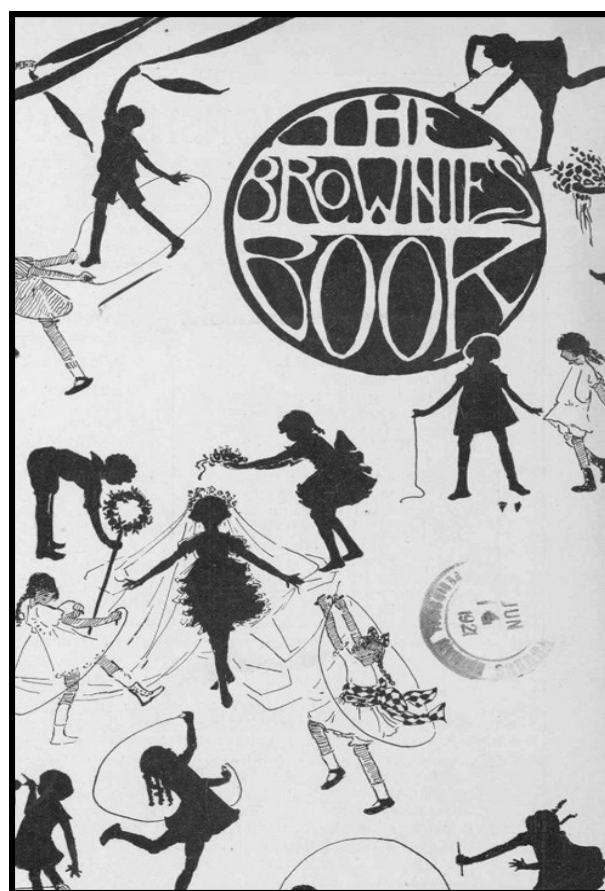
GRADE REVIEWS

If you think there has been a grading error, you can petition, in writing, for a grade review. I appreciate your help in ensuring that I've given you credit for all of the work you've submitted.

Grades will not be reconsidered, however, unless you offer compelling evidence that there has been an error. "Needing" a higher grade than you have received will not result in a grading review.

Error-correction aside, I do not change grades, beyond rounding to the nearest hundredth of a percent. The grades are visible throughout the semester on Discovery, with the exception of excessive-absence penalties, which are applied at the end of the term.

I do not offer extra credit, out of fairness to the class, and in recognition of the fact that grades are a composite of effort and mastery, rather than a test to see how many hoops you can jump through. The work required for the course is quite enough to do for one class in a semester.



GRADES

- A+ 97-100
- A 93-96.99
- A- 90-92.99
- B+ 87-89.99
- B 83-86.99
- B- 80-82.99
- C+ 77-79.99
- C 73-76.99
- C- 70-72.99
- D 60-69.99
- F 0-59.99



Grades are posted on Discovery and are updated throughout the term.