**SPRING TERM SYLLABUS: AMERICAN STUDIES (FARRELL)**

**THE YEAR OF THE CORONAVIRUS (2019-20)**

**WEEK ONE (3-27)**

**CLASS #1 (30\*): POETRY OF E. E. CUMMINGS.**

* “Buffalo Bill's”
* “next to of course god America”
* “i sing of Olaf glad and big”

[**https://poets.org/poems/e-e-cummings**](https://poets.org/poems/e-e-cummings)

[**https://sites.google.com/site/theliteratureofpoetry/3**](https://sites.google.com/site/theliteratureofpoetry/3)

**WEEK TWO (3-30)**

**CLASS #1 (50\*): THE GREAT GATSBY (FITZGERALD) (CHS. 1-3).**  How does the epigraph relate to the story? What makes Nick a good narrator; why do we feel he's a reliable source of information? What has been Nick's response to his "Eastern" experience? How does Nick feel about Gatsby? why? How does East Egg differ from West Egg? Be prepared to discuss the main characters introduced in the opening chapters—Tom, Buchanan, Daisy, Jordan, and Gatsby. What is the "valley of ashes" presided over by Dr. T.J. Eckleburg? significance?

[**https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-great-gatsby.pdf**](https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/the-great-gatsby.pdf)

**CLASS #2 (50\*): THE GREAT GATSBY (CHS. 4-6).** What is the significance of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock? Who is Jay Gatsby? What is his real background? his cover story? why? his mentor? his role models? Be prepared to discuss his relationship with Daisy in detail considering the following: what characterized his relationships with women before Daisy? why did he want Daisy so badly? does she meet his expectations after five years? what does he want from her? what is it that he's trying to recover? What basic conflict is built into his dream?

**CLASS #3 (50\*): THE GREAT GATSBY (CHS. 7-9).** Under what false pretenses did Gatsby pursue Daisy? Why couldn't he come home from the War? Why did Daisy marry Tom? What did Gatsby have to do to achieve his dream? Was the price too high? Did he relinquish his dream in the end? Why does Nick choose Gatsby, a man for whom he has unaffected scorn, over the others? Read the conclusion carefully.

**WEEK THREE (4-6)**

**CLASS #1 (50): THE GREAT GATSBY (FINAL DISCUSSION).** What is Fitzgerald's message about the American Dream? Why had the Dream lost some of its luster by the 20th century? How is Gatsby a stereotypical American hero? How does he compare with previous heroes we've read about? Though all of the story occurs in the East, how is this a story about the frontier in many ways?

**CLASS #2 (50): POETRY OF LANGSTON HUGHES**. Please read the following closely: (1) "Theme for English B"; (2) "Harlem"; (3) "Let America Be America Again"; (4) "Mother to Son"; (5) "I, Too"; (6) Note on Commercial Theatre"; (7) "Democracy". What does it mean to Langston Hughes to be an American? What is Hughes' vision of the American Dream for African-Americans? How does it compare with Fitzgerald's? What is the cost of a dream denied in America? connections to today? comparison with Ta-Nehisi Coates?

[**https://www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes/poems/**](https://www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes/poems/)

**CLASS #3 (50): DEATH OF A SALESMAN (ARTHUR MILLER) (ACT I).** What information does the set communicate? Be prepared to analyze Willy's character in detail: symbolism of name? of occupation? relationship with father? with Brother Ben? with wife? with sons? with Charlie? What are his values and where do they come from? What is his attitude toward the American Dream? comparisons to Gatsby? to Langston Hughes? Characterize Happy and Biff: How is each like and unlike his father? What is the source of Willy's conflict with his sons? How does Act I end on an upbeat note for each character?

**<http://www.pelister.org/literature/ArthurMiller/Miller_Salesman.pdf>**

**WEEK FOUR (4-13) (LW)**

**CLASS #1 (50): DEATH OF A SALESMAN (ACT II & REQUIEM).** What is the symbolism of the recording machine? How does it contrast with flute of Act I? Why did Willy decide to be a salesman? How is it the quintessential American job? Why has Biff chosen to be a failure? Is he justified in punishing his father so severely? Why does Willy commit suicide in the end? How do the other characters respond to Willy's death? Whose analysis of Willy's life do you find most compelling and accurate?

Is Willy a tragic hero worthy of our attention, or a nobody whom we can easily dismiss? How would this play be different if Linda were the main character? Is Willy Loman a victim of himself or the American Dream (remembering Nick's comment on Gatsby at the beginning of The Great Gatsby)? Did he have the wrong dream? Is he Everyman, or nobody? What is Miller telling us about the American Dream? capitalism? the American way of life? the American family? father/son relationships? comparisons w/ Alger? Fitzgerald? Coates?

**CLASS #2 (50): "THE COUNTRY HUSBAND" (JOHN CHEEVER) (ON-LINE):** What are the catalysts for Francis Weed's spiritual crisis? Why is he so affected by his plane crash and discovery of his World War II connection to the Farquarson's new maid? Why is he so dissatisfied by the response of his family and friends to these events? Why does Francis become smitten by his new babysitter, Anne Murchison? What effect does his "awakening" have upon his life; how is he transformed by his desire for her? What does his snubbing of Mrs. Wrightson make him realize about his life or about the environment in which he lives? As he finds his world disintegrating about him, why does he choose to see a psychiatrist to resolve his problem? Does Cheever suggest that Francis is defeated or rescued when he is successfully reintegrated into the community at the story's end? How do the cat and the dog (Jupiter) symbolically suggest Francis' predicament as an individual struggling to rebel against the predictable, conformist, repressive world of Shady Hill?

<http://vk.com/doc-36909385_123542260?dl=21680002c014c9ca88>

**WEEK FIVE (4-20)**

**CLASS #1 (50): "HOWL" (ALLEN GINSBERG) (PART I ONLY).** How does this countercultural, autobiographical poem speak for a generation of American youth largely disillusioned by the America they saw around them? What specifically does Ginsberg reject in the values of the Eisenhower years? What were the values espoused by the Beat generation?

[**https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl**](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl)

**CLASS #2 (50): SHORT CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT:** Write your own “Howl” on an issue or topic about which you have strong feelings, using the first section of Ginsberg’s poem as a model. The poems will be judged by how authentic the “howl” is (i.e., is it an actual emotional outpouring a la Ginsberg), the quality of the language/imagery, and how much effort you put into it (at least as perceived by me). Specifically, your howl should be very personal—a pouring forth of yourself—while also reflecting your generation, if possible. If you notice Ginsberg’s original, it is both quite personal to him, but he also voices the anguish and frustrations of the larger youth culture of the time (otherwise, it would not have had such resonance). You should closely follow Ginsberg’s structure, each new line beginning with “who” before it exhausts itself and returns as this will give the howl both shape and momentum. Also note Ginsberg does use punctuation to indicate pauses at the end of the line (where he regroups to again let out his howl), though he inconsistently punctuates within the poetic line.

**WEEK SIX (4-27)**

**CLASS #1 (50): "LULU'S BOYS” (LOUISE ERDRICH) (ON-LINE).** What is Beverley's attitude toward his Native American heritage? evidence? Why is he drawn to Elsa and repulsed, initially, by Lulu? significance of his job? Why has he returned to the reservation in 1957? symbolism? How does his choice of women symbolize his choice of identity? costs of either choice? Why does he choose Lulu? significance of title? How is Lulu almost more a mythological than a real character? comparisons with Gertrude Simmons Bonnin and her experience as a Native American?

[**HTTP://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/4335481**](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4335481)

**CLASS #2 (50): "THE ABORTION" (ALICE WALKER) (PDF).** What are the multiple "abortions" of this story? What is the difference between Imani's two actual abortions? Is her second abortion a political act? What is the paradox of abortion for a woman as portrayed in this story? What evidence is there of her political awareness? How feminist is she? Why has she emotionally disengaged herself from her relationship with her husband? What is the connection between Imani and Holly Monroe; why does she identify with her? message of story?

**CLASS #3 (50): "THE THINGS THEY CARRIED" (TIM O'BRIEN).** How is the reader to assess the "weight" of the "things" of the title? How has the individual been subordinated to the unit in this squad? What is the effect on the soldiers of Ted Lavender's death? How is Jimmy Cross's character defined by his evolving attitude toward Martha? How does this story compare with Bierce's portrayal of Chickamauga? w/ Hemingway's portrayal of World War I?

[**https://corysnow.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/ttc-full-text.pdf**](https://corysnow.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/ttc-full-text.pdf)

**VIETNAM FILM TRAILERS: Please watch all three trailers.**

* Platoon:[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KztP7SKe0uk**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KztP7SKe0uk)
* Full Metal Jacket**:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOpuEhyAq5U**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOpuEhyAq5U)
* Born on the 4th of July:[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwNNUVbdfzI**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwNNUVbdfzI)
* Ken Burns’ Vietnam: Episode 8

**MUSIC OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

* “Born in the USA”: Listen to the song and review the lyrics.

**WEEK SEVEN (5-4) (LW)**

**CLASS #1 (50): “CATHEDRAL” (RAYMOND CARVER)** Not everyone in America achieves the American Dream, nor is everyone wealthy. In fact, many live below the poverty line or lead lives extremely limited by their incomes and environments. In this 1983 Carver short story, he shows how even a down-and-out man struggling with his life and marriage can have a moment of redemption. How is the blind man able to get the narrator to confront his isolation and loneliness, and how does he enable him to see the power of faith in something greater than the self?

<http://www.giuliotortello.it/ebook/cathedral.pdf>

**MUSIC OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

* “Born To Run”
* “The River”
* “My Hometown”

**CLASS #2 (50): “TERRITORY” (DAVID LEAVITT).** How does Neil feel about bringing home his first gay lover to meet his Mom? How is his mother depicted? What kind of woman is she? How sympathetic is he to his mother? How did his mother respond to his “coming out”? What is his mother's attitude toward his adult sexuality? why? Had she accepted his sexuality too easily without fully realizing how challenging it would be for her? How does Neil feel about his mother's response? Why does the visit prove painful for both mother and son? How free are gays/lesbians in 1980's America—or even today—to express their love and sexuality publicly? to reveal their gay lover to their family? Is there a happy ending to the story? If so, what is it? What is the meaning of the title?

* [**https://issuu.com/bloomsbury/docs/family\_dancing\_excerpt**](https://issuu.com/bloomsbury/docs/family_dancing_excerpt)

**PAINTINGS OF DAVID WOJNAROWICCZ**

* “One Day This Kid…” (1990-91)
* “History Keeps Me Awake At Night” (1986)

**WEEK EIGHT (5-11)**

**CLASS #1 (50): “PRAYER IN THE FURNACE” from REDEPLOYMENT (PHIL KLAY) (PDF).** What advantage does Klay gain by having this Iraq war story narrated by the chaplain? What does the chaplain learn from Rodgriguez about his fellow soldiers? his response? yours? Why does he feel that Iraq may be even “holier than back home”: what does he mean? What is the real cost of war for those who do the fighting? Should democracies have a professional military, or should soldiers always be drafted to ensure soldiers are not sacrificed without a strong basis of support and involvement at home? Can we justify our distance from our fellow citizens dying in war? comparisons with O’Brien’s depiction of Viet Nam?

* Trailer for American Sniper: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99k3u9ay1gs>
* Trailer for The Hurt Locker: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIbFvqFYRT4&t=5s>

**CLASS #2 (50)/CLASS #3 (50): DISGRACED (AYAD AKHTAR) (SCENES ONE & TWO/ SCENES THREE & FOUR).** How does tribal identity—race, religion, gender— influence/determine the values/outlook for each of the four characters: an ex-Muslim, an African-American, a Jew, a WASP? How honest is each character with himself/herself? Are they as liberal and tolerant as they imagine, or, if you peel away the layers, is everyone prejudiced? Are you?How secure is each character in his/her identity?

How would you describe Amir’s complicated relationship with Islam? with his Pakistani roots? with his white American wife? What sacrifices has he made to be successful/accepted in America? Has he betrayed himself? How do Amir and Emily each sustain the other’s illusions about their careers? Is Emily engaging in cultural appropriation to promote her artistic career? What is the significance of her choice of painting Velazquez’s *Portrait of Juan de Pareja* using Amir as her model?

What has been the impact of 9-11 on Muslim life in America? How have radical Islam and the terrorism it inspires affected public discourse on the issue of race and especially religion? Why did Amir feel ambivalent about 9-11? What does our own response to this play tell us about ourselves? Do we all harbor tribal tendencies as the playwright suggests? Are we a post-racial or post-tribal nation as we like to believe (or at least until Donald Trump ran for President)? How does the title apply to the play?

* **Optional: Bill Maher Show Debate on Muslims & American Culture:** [**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60)

**WEEK NINE (5-18)**

**CLASS #1 (50): NO CLASS. Complete first half of reading for Class #2.**

**CLASS #2: *NETHERLAND* (JOSEPH O'NEILL) (3-131).** As you read O’Neill’s novel, please consider the following: how is New York City a metaphor for America, and how is the Hans-Chuck Ramkissoon relationship a recreation of the Nick Carraway-Jay Gatsby relationship in Fitzgerald’s novel? How is Chuck more “American” than Hans? Why is cricket so important to Hans and Chuck, and how does it serve as a cultural metaphor? What is the effect upon Hans of being introduced by Chuck to a diverse New York of immigrants and strivers from all over the world? Is the American Dream still alive in these people, or has it long faded as Hans’ tiredness suggests? Why is a steady fusion of new immigrants critical for America? Why has Hans’ marriage disintegrated, and what effect did 9-11 have on it?

Why does Hans begin playing cricket again after a long layoff? What is "brash ice," and how does it trigger rare homesickness in Hans (memory of skating with mother?) (75-77) What was his experience like playing for the Walker Park team? What is the significance of his experience visiting restaurants with his food critic friend Vinay? What more do we learn of Chuck? What is the significance of the gift Chuck gives him? What is the importance of getting an American license for Hans?

How does Hans respond to the news of the death of his mother in May 2000? How does he respond to his English wife's vehement anti-American outbursts? What do we further learn about why his marriage disintegrated (125-28) (\*139) Why does he want a photo album from Eliza?

**CLASS #3 (50): DISCUSSION OF NETHERLAND. CONTINUE READING.**

**WEEK TEN (5-25) (MEMORIAL DAY)**

**CLASS #1 (50): *NETHERLAND* (131-219).** What is the danger of his brief fling with Anglo-Jamaican Danielle? Why was he drawn to Chuck? What is so compelling about his life story? How does cricket serve as a cultural metaphor for Hans? How/why does cricket assume more and more importance for him? What is the significance of his contrast of London with New York for theme of novel? What is the significance of Cardozo's Portuguese ancestry to the novel? What advice does Chuck give him when Hans reveals Rachel is having an affair? What is the significance of the visit to Chadwick's grave? What is the significance of his visit to the Indian casino outside Phoenix after he witnesses Chuck and Abelsky beating up man in office?

**CLASS #2 (50): *NETHERLAND* (219-256).** Why do Hans and Rachel get back together? How does Hans respond to the news of Chuck's death? What is the significance of Chuck using Google Earth to zero in on Chuck's cricket field after his death? What is the significance of the trip on the London Eye and the memory of being on the Staten Island ferry at sunset observing the Twin Towers with his mother? How is this novel a re-writing of *The Great Gatsby* for our own era? How is Chuck a Caribbean Gatsby? How does O’Neill connect us back to the beginning of our course and Winthrop’s “city upon a hill”? What does this novel tell us about the allure and dangers of the American dream? What does it tell us about immigration and assimilation?

**WEEK ELEVEN (6-1)**

**CLASS #1 (50): PAINTINGS: NORMAN ROCKWELL**

* Rosie the Riveter (1943)
* Homecoming Marine (1945)
* Going and Coming (1947)
* Christmas Homecoming (1948)
* Shuffleton’s Barbershop (1950)
* Saying Grace (1951)
* Breaking Home Ties (1954)
* Marriage License (1955)
* Mad Magazine Parody:
* The Runaway (1958)
* The Runaway (parody) (Richard Williams) (2015)
* Boy in a Dining Car (1946)
* The Problem We All Live With (1964)
* Murder in Mississippi (1965)
* New Kids in the Neighborhood (1967)

**CLASS #2 (50): PAINTINGS OF EDWARD HOPPER**

* Automat (1927)
* Early Sunday Morning (1930)
* New York Movie (1939)
* House by the Railroad (1925)
* Office at Night (1940)
* Gas (1940)
* Nighthawks (1942)
* Boulevard of Broken Dreams (1987) (Gottfried Helnwein)
* Summertime (1943)
* Summer Evening (1947)
* High Noon (1949)
* Cape Cod Morning (1950)
* Morning Sun (1952)
* Hotel by a Railroad (1952)
* The Four Lane Road (1956)

**CLASS #3 (50): AMERICAN STUDIES FINAL ESSAY DUE (details in class).**

**ART OF ANDY WARHOL**

* Coca-Cola (3) (1962)
* Green Coca-Cola Bottles (1962)
* Brillo Box (Soap Pads) 1964
* 32 Campbell Soup Cans (1962)
* Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can (1962)
* Gold Marilyn Monroe (1962)
* Birmingham Race Riot (1964)

**RECOMMENDED FILM: *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles) (1941)**