

English 348: 20th Century American Literature

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Section W01: 11:30-12:20 MWF 106 Woodburn Hall

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Introduction:

What does George Saunders's *Pastoralia* (2000) have in common with Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)? What does the end of the gold standard have to do with the work of Zora Neale Hurston? What advice did Gertrude Stein give to Ernest Hemingway that dramatically shaped his writing style? Why didn't Ralph Ellison ever publish another novel after his first won the National Book Award in 1953? What can a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry born in Russia and raised in Belgium teach us about American literature and society in the late Twentieth Century?

In this class, you will learn the answers to these and many more questions. Along the way, you will pose your own questions to research independently as you spend the semester reading and writing—intensively—about 20th Century American literature.

Required Materials:

- *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Shorter Eighth Ed., Vol. 2
- Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*
- George Saunders, *Pastoralia*
- Jean Toomer, *Cane*
- August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

All of the above texts can be purchased at the WVU Bookstore.

Course Objectives:

- To become familiar with the development of American literary and social history over the course of the Twentieth Century
- To learn how to find, evaluate, lucidly summarize, and respond critically to relevant peer-reviewed scholarly sources
- To develop a thesis about a literary text that is informed by relevant research and support that thesis with evidence from appropriate sources
- To practice the conventions of standard written English and proper documentation style

English Major Program Goals:

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Four aspects of Goal 1 are especially important. A student should be able to:

- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
- Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity
- Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
- Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts

Not all English courses will address all three goals; some will focus particularly on one goal. However, the English major curriculum as a whole will provide multiple opportunities to address all of the goals.

Assignments:

Overview:

Each student enrolled in this course will write and revise three 4-6-page “Précis and Response” papers as well as produce a 10-15-page Final Research Essay. All four of these documents will comprise the final portfolio. Details about and suggestions for completing each of these assignments are outlined below.

“Précis and Response” Papers:

During the semester you will complete three “Précis and Response” papers of approximately 4-6 pages apiece. To complete these papers you must use the MLA bibliography in conjunction with online resources like JSTOR, Project MUSE, and/or EBSCOHost to find, read, summarize, and analyze a scholarly essay **on a topic pertaining to any one of the texts we will have covered since the previous “Précis and Response” paper was due.** When I say “scholarly essay, I specifically mean *an article published in a peer-reviewed academic journal or an essay in a collection, not a biographical sketch, encyclopedia entry, or the like.* The subject of the essay you choose is up to you. Your paper should begin with a lucid characterization and summary of the argument made by the scholar whose work you found. This précis must then be followed by a critical response from you that engages with and responds to the author of the secondary source. Remember, you’re working toward constructing an argument of your own, so trashing the scholar for his or her writing style isn’t going to get you very far. Consider instead how you might respond as a scholar of equal caliber by asking and answering critical questions like: What are the implications of this scholar’s analysis? How has it influenced your reading of the text? What has he or she overlooked, in your opinion? Etc. The goal in the response is to *demonstrate* how the scholarly source influences your interpretation of the primary text that we read for class.

Finally, you must provide a bibliographic citation of the article you found in either MLA or Chicago format. Tentative grades and suggestions for revision and/or further inquiry will be provided in response to each paper.

Final Research Essay:

By the time you get to this assignment you will have spent the entire semester honing your researching skills, making arguable assertions with appropriate rigor and scope, and responding critically to literary scholars. The Final Research Essay is the place to put all these skills together. The end result will be an original 10-15-page essay on an author, text, subject, or theme relevant to the course reading that is supported with material drawn from appropriate primary and secondary sources. It should be your crowning achievement in this course. You are strongly encouraged but by no means required to draw from one or more of your “Précis and Response” papers when putting together this essay. That’s what building an archive is for: so you can use it! This may mean developing one of your most successful “Précis and Response” papers into a full-blown formal essay. Or it may mean building an entirely new essay from scratch. In other words, if you decide as the semester is coming to a close that you want to take your Final Research Essay in a different direction from your “Précis and Response” papers, that’s perfectly fine. You are also strongly encouraged to meet with me and discuss your paper earlier rather than later. **No fewer than five secondary sources are required.**

Portfolio Contents and Grading:

Final grades will be primarily determined by portfolio. The portfolio you hand in at the end of the semester will contain **revised** copies of the three “Précis and Response” paper and the final draft of the Final Research Essay. What matters most, in the end, is the quality of the work contained in the portfolio. In other words, if you received a tentative grade of 75% on one of your “Précis and Response” paper, but you then clearly revised and improved upon the content and delivery of this essay in your portfolio, then your portfolio grade will reflect the improvement. **Note: you are strongly advised to make revisions to your “Précis and Response” paper as the semester progresses.** It is much easier to make minor changes along the way than wait until the last minute to make major changes at that time.

Participation:

You are expected and required to keep up with the reading and come to class prepared to discuss the reading due for each class meeting. Be sure to give yourself enough time to wade through the material before coming to class. Inasmuch as class discussion is concerned, venturesome claims and critical observations about the course texts are always welcome, but participation may also include asking questions about the form, content, or significance of what you’ve read on any given day. If you found a passage confusing or a narrative technique obfuscating, undoubtedly others will have shared your experience and will appreciate any questions you ask about them.

Grading System:

Final Portfolio:	80%
Participation:	20%

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale with grade ranges as follows:

+	100-98	+	89-88	+	79-78	+	69-68		
A	97-92	B	87-82	C	77-72	D	67-62	F	59-0
-	91-90	-	81-80	-	71-70	-	61-60		

Evaluation Criteria for Portfolio:

A (90-100): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio demonstrates perceptive and thoughtful responses to the assignments. They are well organized with excellent development of ideas, and they reflect the writer’s command of appropriate rhetorical strategies. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of academic writing.

B (80-89): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment and shows evidence of clear thought and good planning. Each essay is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics that do not interfere with reading.

C (70-79): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills the assignment. The writing of each essay is adequately developed, clear, and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish above-average work.

D (60-69): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio fulfills its respective assignment but exhibits major problems in writing. Each essay may have difficulty with the presentation of ideas (e.g., lack of a clear thesis, weak organization, poor development of ideas, or inappropriate diction, poor spelling) or be marred by enough errors in the mechanics of writing to seriously distract the reader.

F (59 or below): Each of the documents contained in the portfolio is so poorly presented that it fails to fulfill the assignment. Each essay fails to present basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic conventions of standard academic usage.

0: Any one of the documents contained in the portfolio represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing that are clearly not one’s own work. Refer to the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog for the University policy on Academic Dishonesty.

Attendance Policy:

Because participation counts for 20% of your grade you have to show up and contribute. After all, you can’t participate in the discussion if you aren’t here. Also bear in mind that some days (e.g., workshop days) count more than other days since your classmates will depend on you more to help them fulfill their assignments. You can miss up to five non-workshop, non-assignment-due dates without penalty. Choose your five days judiciously. Subsequent absences will drop

your attendance and participation grade one letter grade per day. A failing grade for the course will be recorded for any student with ten or more absences. **If you are more than five minutes late for class, you will be counted absent.**

Plagiarism Statement:

Plagiarism is the (mis)representation of someone else's work as your own. It may be direct (e.g., not documenting a quoted source) or indirect (paraphrasing ideas, thoughts, etc. without due credit). In either case, neglecting to acknowledge sources for outside material is a serious offence and may result in failure for the assignment and possibly the course. Please see me if you are not sure about how to use or acknowledge certain materials.

Academic Integrity Statement:

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code at <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me *before* the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Intellectual Property Statement:

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other materials provided to students for this course are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the Campus Student Code.

Inclusivity Statement:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Additional Resources:

The Eberly Writing Studio in G02 Colson Hall is committed to helping students become better writers. For more information about the Writing Studio, including its hours, how to make appointments, and additional resources, visit their webpage at <http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>. You can also follow them on Twitter @SWStudioG02

The Downtown Library also hosts a term paper clinic throughout the semester. Scheduling details TBA.

Contact Information:

If you have questions about the course or concerns you would like to share privately with me, please contact me via email at Michael.Germana@mail.wvu.edu. **But please do not write to ask me for lecture notes or to request a summary of what you missed on any given day.** If you miss class and need class notes, ask one of your classmates.

You are also invited—but not required—to follow me on Twitter at @michael_germana. **When I tweet or re-tweet something relevant to this course, I will use the hashtag #ENGL348W. You can and should do likewise if you would like to share something with the class that pertains to our readings and/or discussions.** You may also message me through Twitter at your convenience.

Course Calendar:

January:

- 11 M Introduction/s
- 13 W Jack London, “To Build a Fire” (pp. 628-639)
- 15 F Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), “The Soft-Hearted Sioux” (pp. 647-651) + Sui Sin Far (Edith Maud Eaton), “Mrs. Spring Fragrance” (pp. 522-530)
- 18 M **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—class does not meet**
- 20 W Robert Frost, “Mowing” (pp. 728-729) + “Mending Wall” (pp. 729-730) + “After Apple-Picking” (p. 734) + “The Road Not Taken” (pp. 735-736) + “Nothing Gold Can Stay” (p. 738) + “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (p. 739)
- 22 F Gertrude Stein, from *Tender Buttons*: “Objects” (pp. 716-726)
- 25 M **Library Database Information Session—class meets in 136 of the Downtown Library**
- 27 W Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* “The Book of the Grotesque” + “Hands” + “Paper Pills” + “Mother” + “The Philosopher” + “Nobody Knows”
- 29 F *Winesburg, Ohio* “Godliness”

February:

- 1 M *Winesburg, Ohio* “A Man of Ideas” + “Adventure” + “Respectability” + “The Thinker”
- 3 W *Winesburg, Ohio* “Tandy” + “The Strength of God” + “The Teacher” + “Loneliness” + “An Awakening” + “ ‘Queer’ ”

- 5 F *Winesburg, Ohio* “The Untold Lie” + “Drink” + “Death” + “Sophistication” + “Departure”
- 8 M **Précis and Response One Due**
- 10 W Carl Sandburg, “Fog” (p. 765) + Wallace Stevens, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” (p. 769) + William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (p. 784) + “This Is Just to Say” (p. 784) + Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro” (p. 790)
- 12 F Jean Toomer, *Cane* “Karintha” through “Blood-Burning Moon” (pp. 5-37)
- 15 M *Cane* “Seventh Street” through “Bona and Paul” (pp. 41-78)
- 17 W *Cane* “Kabnis” (pp. 81-115)
- 19 F Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (p. 928) + Countee Cullen, “Yet Do I Marvel” (pp. 1056-1057) + “Heritage” (pp. 1057-1060) + Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (pp. 1038-1039)
- 22 M Zora Neale Hurston, “The Gilded Six Bits” (pp. 943-951)
- 24 W Ernest Hemingway, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (pp. 1021-1037)
- 26 F Ralph Ellison, Chapter I of *Invisible Man* (pp. 1211-1221)
- 29 M Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” (pp. 1356-1363) + “Footnote to Howl” (pp. 1363-1364) + “A Supermarket in California” (pp. 1364-1365)

March:

- 2 W **Précis and Response Two Due**
- 4 F Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People” (pp. 1340-1353)
- 7 M Theodore Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz” (p. 1090) + Anne Sexton, “Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely Woman” (pp. 1377-1379) + Sylvia Plath, “Daddy” (pp. 1421-1423)
- 9 W Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (pp. 1403-1416)
- 11 F Raymond Carver, “Cathedral” (pp. 1495-1505)
- 14 M August Wilson, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* Act I
- 16 W *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* Act II
- 18 F Junot Díaz, “Drown” (pp. 1666-1673)
- Spring Recess---**
- 28 M Art Spiegelman, from *Maus* (pp. 1552-1568)
- 30 W George Saunders, *Pastoralia* “Pastoralia”

April:

- 1 F *Pastoralia* “Winky” + “Sea Oak”
- 4 M *Pastoralia* “The End of FIRPO in the World” + “The Barber’s Unhappiness” + “The Falls”
- 6 W **Précis and Response Three Due**
- 8 F **Research Day—class meets in the Downtown Library**
- 11 M **Research Day—class meets in the Downtown Library**
- 13 W **Draft of Final Research Essay Introduction Due**
- 15 F **Student Conferences—class does not meet**
- 18 M **Student Conferences—class does not meet**
- 20 W **Student Conferences—class does not meet**
- 22 F **Workshop: Peer Review of Final Research Essay Introduction—Draft of Revised Introduction Due**
- 25 M **Workshop: Peer Review of Final Research Essay—Complete Draft of Final Research Essay Due**
- 27 W **Workshop: Peer Review of Final Portfolio**

29 F **Final Portfolios Due** + course evaluations