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ENLT 225.01: American Literature Since 1865

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Autumn 2000

English 225L: American Literature Since 1865

Texts:

Nelson, Cary. Ed. *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*. Oxford University Press.
James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. Penguin.
Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Penguin.
Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. Penguin.
Cather, Willa. *My Ántonia*. Penguin.
Nabokov, Vladimir. *Pnin*. Vintage.

English Department's Required Texts:

Hacker, Diana, *A Pocket Style Manual*. Bedford/St. Martin's.
Ross, Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*.
Bedford/St. Martin's.

Plan:

The aim of this course is to introduce the student to a representative selection of American literature from the point beginning in the shadow of the Civil War up until the present. It is a lengthy period, rich with literary achievement, and we will, unfortunately, not have time enough to read all the writers, in this period, whose work demands our attention. Still, the writers whom we will read (e.g., Dickinson, Frost, James, Eliot, Stevens and so forth) are each considered of major importance; and it will be the aim of our discussions not only to make us more cognizant about what they have achieved but also to enhance our understanding of how these writers stand in relation to one another, as well as how they stand in relation to the aesthetic and social concerns of their day.

In the course of this particular semester, our focus will be rather strictly on two genres: poetry and fiction. We will begin the course reading the poetry of first Emily Dickinson and then Robert Frost, two poets most identified with New England consciousness. Then, on September 26th, we will shift our attention to the late 19th-century, early twentieth-century novel, beginning with Henry James's 1881 masterpiece *The Portrait of a Lady*. With this novel, we will be introducing ourselves to a key theme at this time, that of the New Woman; and we will follow this theme as it manifests itself

also in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918).

The mid-term examination will follow these several readings, after which we will turn our attention, once again, to poetry, this time to the modernists poets, working in the aftermath of World War I. We will attend principally to the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore, with perhaps further readings in poets such as Mina Loy, H. D., and Hart Crane, should time allow.

The discussion of the modernists will be followed by a brief return to the novel, with a reading of Vladimir Nabokov's poignant book from the mid-1950s *Invitation of a Small Evening*. Then, in the remaining weeks of the semester, we will attend to the principal figures of post-World War II poetry, including such poets as Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery, Adrienne Rich, and Sylvia Plath.

The final examination, testing the student on our readings from the point of the mid-term onward will be on Wednesday, December 20th, between the hours of 10:10 – 12:10.

Requirements:

Participation in class discussions is expected and attendance is mandatory. You can anticipate numerous quizzes upon the readings, including readings that may be named at a later date. Missed quizzes cannot be made up. Your grade, meanwhile, will be based upon the following: a ten-page term paper (30%), to be assigned at the semester's mid-point and to be due late in the semester, a mid-term examination (25%), a final examination (25%), and attendance and participation (quiz grades included; also your participation in a group presentation) (20%). Regarding attendance, you are permitted three absences without penalty; each subsequent absence will result in a subtraction of five points from the twenty points allocated to the participation and attendance portion of your grade (e.g., 20% to 15% for the fourth absence, 15% to 10% for the fifth absence and so forth). Late arrivals are more than frowned upon, and if you need, for some good reason, to leave class early, you are required to notify me ahead of time; otherwise, an early departure will count as an absence from class.

Grading Criteria

A Paper: Perhaps the principle characteristic of the A paper is its rich content. Some people describe that content as “meaty,” others as “dense,” still others as “packed.” Whatever, the information delivered is such that one feels significantly taught by the author, sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph. The A paper is also marked by stylistic finesse; the title and opening paragraph are engaging; the transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight, fresh, and highly specific; the sentence structure is varied; the tone enhances the purpose of the paper. Finally, the A paper, because of its careful organization and development, imparts a feeling of wholeness and unusual clarity. Not surprisingly, then, it leaves the reader feeling bright, thoroughly satisfied, and eager to reread the piece.

B Paper It is significantly more than competent. Besides being almost free of mechanical errors, the B paper delivers substantial information—that is, substantial in both quantity and interest-value. Its specific points are logically ordered, well developed, and unified around a clear organizing principle that is apparent early in the paper. The opening paragraph draws the reader in; the closing paragraph is both conclusive and thematically related to the opening. The transitions between paragraphs are for the most part smooth, the sentence structures pleasingly varied. The direction of the B paper is typically much more concise and precise than that found in the C paper. Occasionally, it even shows distinctiveness—i.e., finesse and memorability. On the whole, then, a B paper makes the reading experience a pleasurable one, for it offers substantial information with few distractions.

C Paper It is generally competent—it meets the assignment, has few mechanical errors, and is reasonably well organized and developed. The actual information it delivers, however, seems thin and commonplace. One reason for that impression is that the ideas are typically cast in the form of vague generalities—generalities that prompt the confused reader to ask marginally: “In every case?” “Exactly how large?” “Why?” “But how many?” Stylistically, the C paper has other shortcomings as well: the opening paragraph does little to draw the reader in; the final paragraph offers only a perfunctory wrap-up; the transitions between the paragraphs are bumpy; the sentences, besides being a bit choppy, tend to follow a predictable (hence monotonous) subject-verb-object; and the diction is occasionally marred by unconscious repetitions, redundancy, and imprecision. The C paper, then, while it gets the job done, lacks both imagination and intellectual rigor, and hence does not invite a rereading.

D Paper: Its treatment and development of the subject are as yet only rudimentary. While organization is present, it is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are frequently awkward, ambiguous, and marred by serious mechanical errors. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty, if nonexistent. The whole piece, in fact, often gives the impression of having been conceived and written in haste.

E Paper: Its treatment of the subject is superficial; its theme lacks discernible organization; its prose is garbled or stylistically primitive. Mechanical errors are frequent. In short, the ideas, organization, and style fall far below what is acceptable in college writing.