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Course Proposal for Summer 2023  
Stanford University English Department

English 12 — Introduction to English III: Curating 20th Century U.S. Literature

Course Description

This course thoroughly and rigorously surveys 20th century U.S. literary history through *anthologies*, literary volumes collecting work from multiple different authors. Throughout the 20th century, authors and editors consistently attempted to select, compile, publish and distribute what they saw as the best or most interesting elements of U.S. literature in their time. Often, the anthology would be employed not only by young and ambitious aspiring writers eager to establish themselves on the U.S. literary field, but also by groups of writers who had been marginalized as a result of their race, gender, and/or sexuality. With the help of the anthology, these authors established themselves and members of their communities as major voices in U.S. literary history. As a result, the anthology became important to the development of a wide range of major 20th century U.S. authors, including Edna St. Vincent Millay, William Stanley Braithwaite, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, H.D., Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Richard Wright, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, Amiri Baraka, Frank O’Hara, Jack Kerouac, Audre Lorde, Carlos Bulosan, Frank Chin, Gloria Anzaldúa, Bernadette Mayer, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Dave Eggers, Michael Chabon, and many many others. This course’s students will read all of these authors and more, and in doing so will construct a concrete, comprehensive, and chronological conception of how U.S. literature developed over the course of the 20th century.

In the first decade of the 1900s, an increasing abundance of poetry and fiction was published by growing number of U.S. magazines, newspapers, and journals. The contents of the century’s earliest anthologies were selected and compiled from these periodicals. In the early 1910s, these compilations resulted in anthologies such as the earliest volumes of the *Best American* and *O Henry* series of competitive anthologies (both of which still exist today), as well as William Stanley Braithwaite’s influential *Anthology of Magazine Verse* series. The 1910s also gave rise to influential collections of avant-garde poetry such as *Des Imagistes*, *Some Imagist Poets* and Ezra Pound’s *Catholic Anthology*, each of which captures important moments in the early maturation of U.S. modernist poetry. The 1920s saw important developments in the early establishment of modern African-American literature, through collections such as *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (edited by James Weldon Johnson), Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, and, in the 1930s, a massive collection called *Negro*. The 1930s also gave rise to a new development in avant-garde poetry, embodied in *An “Objectivists” Anthology*, which appeared just as the U.S. was plunging into the Great Depression. In an effort to keep literature alive through the long years of the Depression, the Works Progress Administration published *American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writers Project*, including contributions from Richard Wright, the poet Kenneth Rexroth, and others. The most influential anthologies shaping U.S. students’ conception of literature during and after World War II were doubtless the textbooks *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Poetry*, edited by the New Critics, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. However, the New Critics’ academically influential approach to literature competed with mass-market genre fiction such as the sci-fi collected in *Adventures in Time and Space* (1946). Nevertheless, the influence of the New Critics is still present in 1957’s *The New Poets of England and America*. While the latter anthology published relatively young U.S. poets who had grown popular in the post-war years, including Robert Lowell and Adrienne Rich, it appeared quite traditional and conservative, when compared to the counter-cultural classic that followed it three years later: *The New*
American Poetry 1945-1960. The latter included excerpts from Allen Ginsberg’s Howl as well as poetry by Frank O’Hara, Denise Levertov, Amiri Baraka, and many others. Baraka would follow this collection up with an anthology of experimental prose, The Moderns, which included avant-garde fiction from Jack Kerouac, Hubert Selby Jr., and Diane Di Prima. In 1968, Amiri Baraka went on to co-edit, with Larry Neal, Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing, which compiled poetry, fiction, drama, and essays from affiliates of the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School, the central institution of the Black Arts movement, which developed in relation to the Black Power movement articulated by figures such as Kwame Ture and James Boggs, both of whom contribute essays to Black Fire. The latter anthology influenced many subsequent anthologies of the 1970s, which were organized in part around social terms such as race and gender, including The Black Woman, Aiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers, Nuyorican Poets, and No More Masks! An Anthology of Poems by Women. The identities and communities that took literary form in these anthologies reconfigured themselves somewhat, in 1981, with the publication of This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, which included some of Audre Lorde’s most important essays, alongside informative contributions from Toni Cade, Gloria Anzaldúa, Merle Woo, and others. Two years later, in 1983, women of North America’s First Nations compiled their writing in A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection of Writing and Art by North American Indian Women, which itself was followed, in 1998, by Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writing of North America. Meanwhile, the avant-garde “L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E” poets compiled their experiments in 1986’s In the American Tree. Finally, the 20th century comes to an end and, in the post-9/11 world of the very early 21st century, influential authors of postmodern U.S. fiction of the “Y2K” era, namely Dave Eggers and Michael Chabon (alongside their many collaborators), attempted to reunite with the pleasures of mass market genre fiction in McSweeney’s Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales and The Best American Non-Required Reading.

In a series of lectures over the eight weeks of Summer quarter, 2023, I will expand on the very condensed history of 20th century U.S. literature supplied above, in large part by close reading many of the classic poems, stories, and essays included in these classic anthologies. Students will read substantial selections from each collection and author referred to above, and will acquire a rich, complex, robust knowledge of 20th century U.S. literature’s most characteristic and consequential developments. Through weekly written responses, two short papers, and a conference-length final paper, the students will critically analyze these texts, close-reading their contents, and crafting compelling arguments about their significance. In this way, this course’s students will concretely improve their skills in critical reading and persuasive writing, while enhancing their expertise in, and engagement with, 20th century U.S. literature in general.

Assignments

Readings:
Students will read all of the excerpts from the anthologies specified in the schedule below. I will highlight entries to focus on at the end of each lecture. Readings will be provided on Canvas or in printed and bound course readers. I encourage everyone to explore the entireties of the anthologies listed. All anthologies discussed will be placed on course reserve at the library, and some will be available at the Bookstore.

Writing Assignments:
Short Responses: 1 per lecture (2 per week)
Students write 50 words about an entry in an anthology assigned for each lecture. These responses should be correctly written, but can be casual and simple. Students should highlight a moment from a poem, story, or essay assigned for that day’s lecture, and explain why it caught
their attention. Please quote the assigned reading at least once, but quotations should not constitute more than half of the response.

Short Paper #1
2-3 pages close-reading a poem, story, or essay discussed in any previous lecture. Select a single entry from the literary anthologies discussed thus far, summarize its contents, and describe the manner in which its author presents them. What choices and formal elements of the text contribute to its general effect and meaning? Focus on the basic task of close reading, and on the technical elements of academic literary criticism. Students should be sure to employ correct grammar, accurately quote the primary text, and provide correctly styled citations. They should make convincing but not obvious observations, supported by attention to specific elements of the primary text, in support of understanding the primary text in their way.

Short Paper #2
Students prepare 3-4 page papers comparing two entries from a single anthology. Students should close read each entry and make the relation between them clear, formulating a single convincing observation about what these texts mean, together. Students should address and correct any issues that cropped up in Short Paper #1, and should now focus more on the structure and strategy of their argument. Try to introduce texts, quotations, and ideas clearly, and in a sequence that allows the reader to appreciate their significance and to share in your understanding of the texts at hand.

Final Paper
A 10-12 page conference paper that does any of the following:
A. Compares two texts (poems, stories, essays) drawn from two different anthologies by a single author. Do the differences between the texts reflect differences between the two anthologies? How do the anthologies highlight differing aspects of the author’s work? It might be helpful to refer to each anthology’s introduction and/or other paratextual elements in order to articulate your point.
B. Compares two texts (poems, stories, essays) by two different authors within a single anthology, drawing on the anthology’s introduction and paratextual elements in order to articulate how these texts either contradict or complement each other, and what they contribute to the anthology’s significance in general.
C. Compares two anthologies by discussing their respective introductions and close reading at least one entry (poem, story, or essay) from each. What movements from 20th century U.S. literary history might these represent? How do these movements relate to each other? And how does each text contradict or otherwise communicate with the others? Students should address and correct any issues that cropped up in the Short Papers, and should focus on making a convincing, well-evidenced, and well-structured argument about what readers can learn from these anthologies and their contents about 20th century U.S. literature.

Summer Quarter
Monday June 26 – Thursday August 17

Week 1/Monday June 26 – Friday June 30
Introduction: Anthologizing 20th Century U.S. Literature
The Lyric Year (1912)
“The Lyric Year Prizes” and “Note by the Editor” by Ferdinand Earle
“Renascence” by Edna St. Vincent Millay
“The Whisper of Earth” by Edward J. O’Brien
Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1913
“Introduction” by William Stanley Braithwaite
“Of Moira Up the Glen” by Edward J. O’Brien

Des Imagistes (1914)
“Choricos” and “Au Vieux Jardin,” by Richard Aldington
Poems by H.D.
“In a Garden” by Amy Lowell
“Postlude” by William Carlos Williams
“I Hear an Army” by James Joyce
“[Doria]” and “After Ch’u Yuan” by Ezra Pound

The Best Short Stories of 1915
“Introduction” by Edward J. O’Brien
“Life” by Ben Hecht
“T.B.” Fanny Hurst
“The Whale and the Grasshopper” by Seumus O’Brien
“Zelig” by Benjamin Rosenblatt

Some Imagist Poets (1916)
“Preface” (Authorship uncertain—Richard Aldington?)
“Epigrams” by Richard Aldington
Poems by H.D.
“Illicit” by D.H. Lawrence
“Venus Transiens,” “Grotesque,” and “The Bombardment” by Amy Lowell

Week 2/Mon. July 3 – Fri. July 7
Collection and Creation: Establishing African-American Literature
The Book of American Negro Poetry (1922)
“Preface,” “O Black and Unknown Bards,” and “The Creation,” by James Weldon Johnson
Poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar
“A Litany of Atlanta” by W. E. B. Du Bois
“Turn Me To My Yellow Leaves,” “Ironic: LL. D.,” “Scintilla,” “Sic Vita,” “Rhapsody,” by William Stanley Braithwaite
Poems by Georgia Douglas Johnson
Poems by Claude McKay
Poems by Ann Spencer
“Sonnet” by Alice Dunbar-Nelson

The New Negro
“Foreword,” “The New Negro,” “Negro Youth Speaks,” “Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” by Alain Locke
“The Negro in American Literature” by William Stanley Braithwaite
Excerpts from Cane by Jean Toomer
“Spunk” by Zora Neale Hurston
All poetry: Countée Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Anne Spencer, Angelina Grimke, Lewis Alexander

Week 3/Mon. July 10 – Fri. July 14
A New Deal for U.S. Literature?
An “Objectivists” Anthology (1932)
Poems by by Frances Fletcher, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff. Skim poetry and collaborations by Kenneth Rexroth and Louis Zukofsky

Negro (1934)
“Foreword” by Nancy Cunard
“Characteristics of Negro Expression” and “The Sermon” by Zora Neale Hurston
“Black America” by W. E. B. Du Bois
“The Negro in the Present Appalling Trade Depression” by the editors of Opportunity
“Communism and the Negro” by James W. Ford
Poetry by Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, Georgia Douglas Johnson

American Stuff: An Anthology of Prose and Verse by Members of the Federal Writers Project (1937)
“Foreword” by Henry G. Alsberg
“The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” by Richard Wright,
Poetry by Kenneth Rexroth, Claude McKay
“Americana” by Harris Dickson
“Gertrude Stein and the Solid World” by Dorothy Van Ghent

Week 4/Mon. July 17 – Fri. July 21
Short Paper #1 Due Mon. July 17 at 5pm
Understanding Understanding: The New Critics vs. New Literature
Selections from Understanding Poetry (1938), TBD
Selections from Understanding Fiction (1943), TBD
Selections from Adventures in Time and Space (1946), TBD

Week 5/Mon. July 24 – Fri. July 28
Paperback Poetries and Mass-Market Modernism
The New Poets of England and America (1957)
“Editors’ Introduction” by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson
“Introduction: Maturity No Object” by Robert Frost
Poems by Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, and Philip Larkin

“Preface” by Don Allen
“Projective Verse” and “The Kingfishers” by Charles Olson
Poems by Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Guest, Frank O’Hara, John Ashbury, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, and Amiri Baraka

The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America (1963)
“Introduction,” “The Screamers,” and “Hypocrites” by Amiri Baraka
“The Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” by Jack Kerouac
“The Cut-Up Method” by William Burroughs
Stories by Diane Di Prima

New Negro Poetry, U.S.A. (1964)
“Foreword” by Gwendolyn Brooks
Poems by Amiri Baraka, Audre Lorde, Ray Durem, and Mari Evans

New American Story (1965)
“Ordinary Men and Women” by William Burroughs
“October in the Railroad Earth” by Jack Kerouac
Stories by John Rechy and Hubert Selby, Jr.

Week 6/Mon. July 31 – Fri. August 4
**Short Paper #2 Due Fri. August 4 at 5pm**

Getting Together: Collecting Collectives

“Foreword” by Amiri Baraka
“The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist” by James T. Stewart
“Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American” by Harold Cruse
“Toward Black Liberation” by Kwame Ture
“Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come” by James Boggs
“Sinner man where you gonna run to?” By Larry Neal
“Life with Red Top” by Ronald L. Fair
Poems by Amiri Baraka, James Stewart, Sun Ra, K. William Kgositile, Odaro, Victor Hernandez Cruz, Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Simmons

*The Black Woman* (1970)
“Preface,” “On the Issue of Roles,” and “The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?” by Toni Cade
“One day I fell off the roof (a view of the Black university)” by Nikki Giovanni
“Motherhood” by Joanna Clark
“Black Revolution in America” by Grace Lee Boggs
“Diary of an African Nun” by Alice Walker
Poems by Nikki Giovanni and Audre Lorde

*No More Masks: An Anthology of Poems by Women* (1973)
“Foreword” and “Introduction” by Florence Howe
Poems by Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde, Diane Di Prima, Sonia Sanchez, and Sandra McPherson

“Introduction: Fifty Years of Our Whole Voice” by Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Hsu Wong, and S.E. Solberg
“From America is in the Heart” by Carlos Bulosan
“Act I of Chickencoop Chinaman” by Frank Chin
“Yoneko’s Earthquake” by Hisaye Yamamoto
“From The Frontiers of Love” by Diana Chang
“From No-no Boy” by John Okada

*Nuyorican Poetry* (1975)
“Introduction: Nuyorican Language” and section prefaces by Miguel Algarín
Poems by Miguel Algarín, Miguel Piñero, TC Garcia, Jesús Papolote Meléndez, Sandra Maria Esteves, Amina Muñoz, and Pedro Pietri

Week 7/Mon. Aug 7 – Fri. Aug 11

To Bridge and To Breach: Women of Color on the U.S. Literary Field

*This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981)
“Speaking in Tongues: a Letter to Third World Women Writers” by Gloria Anzaldúa
“A Black Feminist Statement” by the Combahee River Collective
“An Open Letter to Mary Daly” and “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” by Audre Lorde
“Letter to Ma” by Merle Woo
“Foreword” by Toni Cade
“The Bridge Poem” by Kate Rushin

_A Gathering of Spirit_ (1983)
selections TBD

_In the American Tree_ (1986)
“Preface” by Ron Silliman
“On Speech” by Robert Grenier
Poems by Kit Robinson, Robert Grenier, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Ron Silliman, Rae Armantrout, Bernadette Mayer

_Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America_ (1998)
“Introduction” by Joy Harmony and Gloria Bird
“Angelita La Escapia Explains Engels and Marx” and “When Sun Came to River Woman” by Leslie Mormon Silko
“The World’s Greatest Fishermen” and “Fooling God” Louise Erdrich

Week 8/Mon. Aug 14 – Thursday Aug 17
  Reading...for Fun??
_McSweeney’s Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales_ (2002)
“The Editor’s Notebook” and “The Martian Agent” by Michael Chabon
“Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly” by Dave Eggers

_The Best American Non-Required Reading_ (2002), selections TBD

[Friday Aug 18 - Exams]

10-12 pp. Final Paper Due: Mon. Aug. 21, 5pm

Grades Due: Tues. Aug. 29