



*Survey of American Literature, 1865-  
Present: English 361W.01  
Summer 1, 2008-3 Credit Hours*

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**Class Meets:** 10:00-11:50, Monday-Friday, in Evans 356

**Texts:** Bedford Anthology of American Literature, Vol 2, ed. Belasco and Johnson  
Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain  
In Our Time, Ernest Hemingway  
The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien  
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Gibaldi  
**Electronic reserve password:**

### **Introductory Thoughts:**

By definition, a literature "survey course" such as this one is meant to be inclusive—a daunting task when one considers the number of books published in the United States since the end of the Civil War. This class will not succeed in climbing the mountain of inclusiveness, though it will demand that students read a large number of literary works. However, it will cover a lot of territory on that mountain, and it will seek to encourage students to see and form connections--as well as question connections that others have claimed as "obvious."

### **Course Description and Prerequisites**

In short, though it will be primarily a reading course, it will require a great deal of thought, and each student needs to think of himself or herself as an intellectual. To help us get started in the process of connecting, the course will undertake to define the four major periods or styles or literary movements often used to describe American writing since 1865: Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. These broad headings will be challenged and redefined as we consider not just the canonical texts that generally fit these terms but also texts by ethnic minorities, women, and others

sometimes considered as less or even non-literary. By the end of the term, students should have a good grasp of these terms as well as be able to explain questions of their validity.

At the same time, since it is a “reading” course, this one will also stress the need to be analytical of the reading process itself, asking questions such as: what happens when a person reads? why do some people find one meaning and some another? what is the effect of reading? how does a text encourage and discourage particular readings? To answer these questions, students will need a good critical vocabulary, and throughout the course, I will stress the need to use accurately terms such as “image,” “plot,” “symbol,” “novel,” “poem,” and “essay.” By the end of the term, students should have a good grasp of literary vocabulary – or at least know where to learn such terms.

In addition, this course will include a component designed to make students more aware of the discussion of literary works that goes on, largely unnoticed, all the time. This involves becoming aware of the theoretical and critical commentaries that exist concerning literature. By the end of the term, students should be able to read a literary work and know how to seek out the discussion that the work has generated.

Of course, the ability to do this successfully depends on students coming to the class prepared with some skills. These include the ability to write argumentative prose essays related to literature and knowledge of basic literary elements and terminology. Consequently, it is important that all students meet the prerequisites for the course: 9 hours (3 classes) of English study.

### Course Objectives

In summary then, the course presents these three goals:

- To broaden and deepen each student’s knowledge of American literature and its major historical movements.
- To improve and hone the analysis skills of each student as they apply to literature.
- To enable students to access the academic conversation about literature.
- To engage students in debates about interpretations of specific works of American literature.

### Grading:

Of course, you’re probably wondering, “How am I going to earn my grade for this class?” The best answer is by working hard, reading constantly, coming to class prepared, checking the MLA Handbook, and asking questions, questions, questions. However, the answer you are looking for is detailed below:

### Exams

The course will have two exams. One will occur around mid-term and the other will take place near the end of the term. THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM. These exams will include: 1) short answer/identification questions to test students’ comprehension of assigned readings and of class lecture/discussion; 2) an essay question to test students’ ability to write coherently and think creatively about the readings assigned for the course. Collectively, these exams will determine **one third** of the grade for this course.

### Annotated bibliographic entries

Students are required to write **three** annotated bibliographic entries. These entries will be over **two of the three** essays listed below:

- “‘There’s More Honor’: Reinterpreting Tom and the Evasion in Huckleberry Finn” by Kevin Michael Scott (this essay is available via a link on electronic reserve for this course)
- “The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience: Nick Adams as Author of In Our Time” by Deborah Moddelmog (this essay is available using a link found on electronic reserve)
- “The Solace of Bad Form: Tim O’Brien’s Postmodernist Revisions of Vietnam in ‘Speaking of Courage’” by Michael Kaufmann (this is available through electronic reserve)

A complete description of this assignment is attached to this syllabus, but students should note that the annotated bibliographic entries each have a different due date. They should also note that these entries are graded more on correct MLA style for the bibliographic entries and on following my directions than on content. If a student elects to do all three of the annotations, I will drop the lowest grade of the three and count only the best two towards the course grade. However, a student may elect to only do two of the three assignments. Together these bibliographic entries will determine **one sixth** of the grade for this course.

### Papers

Students are required to write one paper approximately five pages in length. Topics and instructions for this paper are located on the pages titled “Paper Assignment” that are part of this syllabus. This paper is due on **Monday, June 23**. The grade on the paper will determine **one third** of the student’s course grade.

### Quizzes and participation

Each student is required to take a quiz over the contents of this syllabus. The quiz may be done with the syllabus in hand. It will be passed out when the syllabus is distributed or printed off of blackboard. It should be turned in for evaluation on **Thursday, June 5**. Other quizzes will be given on most class days throughout the course, and they will be based on readings for the day of the quiz. Most quizzes will be worth a maximum of 10 points. Also, students may, from time to time, accept “participation assignments” given out orally in class. These assignments will also be worth a maximum of 10 points each. At the end of the term, I will add up the points each student has earned on quizzes and participation assignments. The total number will determine a quiz/participation grade based on a 100 point-scale (90-100+ = A; 80-89 = B; etc.) The collective quiz/participation grade will determine **one sixth** of the grade for this course.

### Attendance Policy

To help insure everyone gets a leg up on the exams, I offer a positive inducement for attendance. Everyday a student attends a **complete** class session, that student earns one extra credit point that is added to his or her next exam. At the same time, students should realize that failure to attend class will have negative results. Excessive absences

will not be tolerated. They discourage other students and me. Anyone missing more than three days of class will see a lowering of their course grade by a minimum of one letter.

### **Missed Exams / Late Paper Policy**

Students who miss an exam for any reason should contact the instructor immediately. In cases involving illness or family crises, I will ask the student to have the reason for the absence verified by the Dean of Student Life Office before rescheduling an exam. In other cases – weather, car problems, stupidity, etc. – I will do my best to accommodate students, but all such cases are matters of grace and mercy, not right.

My general policy is not to accept late papers unless encouraged to do so by the Dean of Student Life office. However, I define late as anytime after 5 p.m. on the day the paper is due, and students may e-mail me a Microsoft Word attachment of their paper before that deadline – with a hard copy given to me later – in order to meet the deadline. Again, students are always welcome to discuss specific issues with me, but they need to realize I will refer all rulings on the validity of excuses to the Dean of Student Life office.

**Please note: any student who has major problems fulfilling the requirements of the course (family crisis; unexpected health issues; severe emotional turmoil) should contact the office of Frank Parker, the Assoc. V.P. for Student Services and Dean of Student Life. His phone number is 936-294-1785. This office will help you deal with all your instructors and makes it unnecessary for you to bring me documentation concerning such crises.**

### **Legal Matters the University Requires Me to Include:**

These are policies that cover the University as a whole. For a more detailed discussion of the items below, go to this link: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>.

- **Academic Dishonesty:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

In this course, students are encouraged to work together to increase their understanding and insight into our readings. However, two particular forms of academic dishonesty will result in a student earning a grade of “F” on the projects involved. These two forms are: (1) cheating on exams by taking answers from notes or other students; (2) plagiarism. This involves taking the writing – either words and/or ideas – of another person – fellow student, published author, or paper seller--and passing them off as one’s own. Students should carefully read the section in the MLA Handbook on plagiarism and how to avoid it.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. All requests for accommodation must be initialed by the student.
- **Religious Holidays:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.
- **Visitors in the Classroom:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.
- **Instructor Evaluations:** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.
- **Classroom Rules of Conduct:** The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline is found at the following link:  
<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>. I expect students to show respect for everyone in the classroom – the instructor, students, guests – through both words and actions. I ask students not to do other work during class, to place cell phones on silent mode, and to put away other distractions: ipods, newspapers, etc. If something else needs your attention during class time, don't come to class.

- **Study Tips:** The best way to succeed in this course is to attend regularly having read the assigned work for that day. Ask questions – particularly about terminology and approaches that are unclear. Schedule a time to meet with the professor at some point in the term – preferably early in order to get a better sense of his personality. If you need help with reading, writing, or other study assistance, you may want to take advantage the resources listed below:



## **Needing Help Other than the Professor? Try these:**

### **The SAM Center**

The Student Advising and Mentoring Center, also known as the SAM Center, offers a wide variety of services for the students of Sam Houston State University. We offer academic advisement and enrichment services to all undergraduate and graduate students. The SAM Center is a resource dedicated to helping students adjust to academic life at Sam Houston State University. Services available include career testing, aid with time management, and study skills. The center has grown rapidly since we've been open and with new programs being offered, our students are taking more advantage of our resources. With a great faculty and staff, all students are encouraged to look into any of the programs we have available. The SAM Center is located in Academic Building 4 (AB4) on the second floor, room 210. AB4 is located on the corner of Bowers Blvd. and Ave. I. For more information, go to [http://www.shsu.edu/~sam\\_www/index.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~sam_www/index.html). Or call one of the numbers listed below:

Toll Free: (866) 364-5211

Houston Area: (281) 657-6432

Phone: (936) 294-4444

### **SHSU Reading Center - Farrington Bdg, Suite 109**

The SHSU Reading Center seeks to promote the acquisition of and use of reading strategies and to promote independent learning which will motivate learners to value literacy throughout their lives. The primary goal of the instructors is to empower all students with effective reading strategies and the confidence to excel in their classes. The SHSU Reading Center is staffed and equipped to assist students with their expository reading in a variety of learning environments, such as: individual tutoring sessions, small group tutoring sessions, and computer assisted tutoring sessions. Call the center at 936 294-3114

Summer Hours of Operation

Monday - Thursday 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Friday 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

### **SHSU Writing Center - Farrington Bdg, Suite 111**

The Sam Houston Writing Center helps SHSU students, staff, and faculty and community members. Our goal is to help people become better writers and so develop more confidence in their writing abilities. To this end, Writing Center tutors provide one-on-one and small group writing instruction. We also offer one-session workshops on various topics relating to writing throughout the school year. Students may come in with any type of writing. We help writers on assignments ranging from English composition essays to science lab reports, résumés, scholarship and job application letters, even M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations. We do not offer simply an editing or proofreading service. That is, Writing Center tutors will not merely correct a student's writing. Instead, we will help students learn prewriting, revising, and editing skills by working with them on the writing tasks they bring in. The Writing Center is located in Farrington 111. For more information, go to the Writing Center web page: <http://www.shsu.edu/~wctr/>. Or call 936-294-3680. For e-mail contact, use this address: [wctr@shsu.edu](mailto:wctr@shsu.edu). The summer hours are:

Monday -                    8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Friday



T. S. Eliot



Langston Hughes



Flannery O'Connor





## Schedule of Assigned Readings:

BELOW IS THE DAILY CALENDAR FOR READINGS AND WORK  
STUDENTS SHOULD PREPARE AND BRING TO CLASS

Tuesday 6/3	Welcome to Class; the Syllabus; Realism Clemens, "Feminore Cooper's Literary Offenses" (handout)
Wednesday 6/4	Clemens, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" Clemens, <u>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</u> (chapters 1-10)
Thursday 6/5	<b>Syllabus Quiz due</b> Clemens, <u>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</u> (chapters 11-23)
Friday 6/6	Clemens, <u>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</u> (chapters 24-end)
Monday 6/9	James, "The Real Thing" Jewett, "The Foreigner" available at <a href="http://www.public.coe.edu/~theller/soj/una/foreign.htm">http://www.public.coe.edu/~theller/soj/una/foreign.htm</a>
Tuesday 6/10	Chesnutt, "The Passing of Grandison" Hopkins, "'As the Lord Lives, He is One of Our Mother's Children'" Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask" Dunbar, "An Ante-Bellum Sermon" <b>Annotation of article about <u>Huck Finn</u> is due</b>
Wednesday 6/11	Crane, "The Open Boat" Dreiser, "Butcher Rogaum's Door"
Thursday 6/12	<b>Modernism</b> Frost, "The Pasture" (blackboard) Robinson, "Richard Cory" Robinson, "Mr. Flood's Party" Frost, "Mending Wall" Frost, "Home Burial" Frost, "'Out, Out—'" Pound, excerpt from "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" Pound, "A Pact" Pound, "The Rest" Pound, "In a Station of the Metro" (both versions)
Friday 6/13	Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" Eliot, "The Journey of the Magi" Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar" Stevens, "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry"



Monday 6/16	<b>Exam One</b>
Tuesday 6/17	Hemingway, <u>In Our Time</u> (the first half)
Wednesday 6/18	Hemingway, <u>In Our Time</u> (the second half)
Thursday 6/19	Faulkner, "That Evening Sun" Faulkner, "Barn Burning"
Friday 6/20	Hughes, All Poems in Bedford text Wright, "Almos' a Man" <b>Annotation of article on <u>In Our Time</u> is due</b>
Monday 6/23	<b>Major Paper due</b> Welty, "The Petrified Man" available at: <a href="http://www.mondowendell.com/petrify.htm">http://www.mondowendell.com/petrify.htm</a> O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" Barthelme, "Some of Us Have Been Threatening Our Friend Colby" available at: <a href="http://www.jessamyn.com/barth/colby.html">http://www.jessamyn.com/barth/colby.html</a>
Tuesday 6/24	Bishop, "The Fish" available at: <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-fish/">http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-fish/</a> Bishop, "In the Waiting Room" Lowell, "Memories of West Street and Lepke" Plath, "Daddy" Collins, "Forgetfulness" available at: <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/forgetfulness/">http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/forgetfulness/</a> Collins, "Tuesday, June 4, 1991" (available on blackboard) Collins, "I Chop Some Parsley While Listening To Art Blakey's Version Of "Three Blind Mice" available at: <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/i-chop-some-parsley-while-listening-to-art-blake/">http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/i-chop-some-parsley-while-listening-to-art-blake/</a>
Wednesday 6/25	O'Brien, <u>The Things They Carried</u> (first half)
Thursday 6/26	O'Brien, <u>The Things They Carried</u> (second half) <b>Annotation of article on <u>The Things They Carried</u> is due</b>
Friday 6/27	<b>Exam Two</b>

**Never put off until tomorrow what  
you can do the day after tomorrow.**

**~Mark Twain**





## *Annotated Bibliography Assignment*

An annotated bibliography is simply a list of critical texts containing:

- a complete bibliographic entry for each critical/scholarly essay (students must use MLA style)
- a paragraph briefly summarizing the major arguments and ideas in the critical/scholarly essay
- a paragraph that responds to and evaluates the arguments and ideas in the critical/scholarly essay in light of the reader's interpretation of the literary work discussed by the critical/scholarly essay.

**All the components must** be on double-spaced, typed pages, with the bibliographic entry at the top of the page.

For this course, students are required to prepare **three** annotated bibliographical entries for specific critical/scholarly articles available either directly from electronic reserve or through links found on electronic reserve. These articles are discussions of literary works assigned for this class, and the two annotations have different due dates appropriate to when the literary works are being read in the course. I give you four essays to work with, but students should only select three of these. If a student does do all four, I will only take the grades on the three highest submissions. The choices are:

- In connection with Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Kevin Michael Scott's essay, "There's More Honor': Reinterpreting Tom and the Evasion in Huckleberry Finn" by Kevin Michael Scott. This submission is due on Tuesday, June 10. This submission must follow the MLA form titled, "The Basic Entry: An Article in a Scholarly Journal with Continuous Pagination" – section 5.7.1 in The MLA Handbook.
- In connection with In Our Time, Debra A. Muddlemug's essay "The Unifying Consciousness of a Divided Conscience: Nick Adams as Author of In Our Time." This submission is due on Friday, June 20. This submission must follow the MLA form titled, "The Basic Entry: An Article in a Scholarly Journal with Continuous Pagination" – section 5.7.1 in The MLA Handbook.
- In connection with The Things They Carried, Michael Kaufmann's essay, "The Solace of Bad Form: Tim O'Brien's Postmodernist Revisions of Vietnam in 'Speaking of Courage.'" This submission is due on Thursday,



\*analyzes Wilson as a "foil" to Tom--the man unconcerned with possession.

\*analyzes Roxy and observes that when she acts of desire for money she causes harm but when she acts out of love, she becomes a sympathetic figure.

\*analyzes Judge Driscoll and notes the same pattern of satire/praise seen in the case of Roxy--though it is less love than his adherence to his code that makes him sympathetic..

\*notes that the Twins show how money leads to slavery in their presentation of their past.

\*\*concludes the book is related to Twain's biographical financial problems and is definitely consistent, coherent and unified.

### **Step 3: Develop these main ideas into a coherent summary.**

In the paragraph below, you will see how I formed the notes listed above into a coherent paragraph. By "coherent," I don't mean that I managed to put every note into the paragraph. Rather, I arranged the notes so that the overall sense of what the article was trying to communicate is made clear. **Also, you will notice that each time I mention something specifically mentioned in the article, I cite the article parenthetically.** I use citations when I quote as well as when I simply refer to ideas found in the article.

Spangler argues that despite criticism labeling Pudd'nhead Wilson as a flawed work focusing on the issues of either race or "environmental determinism" (28), the novel is in fact a highly unified and consistent work concerning "obsession with property" and "the moral and spiritual consequences of this obsession" (29). Spangler supports this assertion by noting how property issues (the theft of money and Tom being sold by creditors) frame the novel and by an analysis of the novel's major characters. He comments that "Tom makes sense only as a nearly allegorical figure of the obsession with property to the exclusion of all other human concerns" (31), and he shows that Wilson serves as Tom's "foil" (32) or negative image. In addition, he shows that Roxy and Judge Driscoll reflect both obsession and rejection of property, though each becomes sympathetic only when she/he opts to act by some motive other than financial gain: love in the case of Roxy and his aristocratic code in the case of the Judge (34-36). He even, quite briefly, notes that the Twins' story of their youth demonstrates "slavery to property, to economic motives . . . reduces one to property, to slavery" (37)--exactly the consequence Tom suffers.

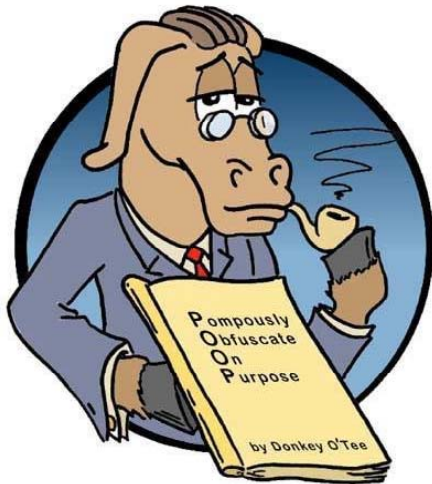
### **Step 4: Evaluate the article's ideas in light of your own interpretation of the literary text. It helps to have finished reading the text before trying to do this.**

In the paragraph below, you will find my "evaluation" of the article. While this begins with my initial response, I don't make my "feelings" the centerpiece of my evaluation. Rather, I try to confront or deal with the article's ideas. You may note that I make reference to another article I've read. You probably will not have that resource, but you can bring to bear the knowledge and insights that have been covered in lectures and discussions in class. The key to a successful evaluation is for you to show that you know **both** the primary text and the article extremely well. You want your knowledge of both these to shine, not the power of your thumb to point up or down.

On first reading, Spangler's argument struck me as convincing. Everything he says is well-supported and reasonable, leading to the conclusion that he is right to direct readers away from attempts to understand the novel only in terms of race or environmental determinism. However, subsequent readings and thought lead me to notice two things. First, there is great deal of the novel with Spangler ignores. In focusing on character and

plot, he tends to ignore the novel's language and humor, and, as Marvin Fisher and Michael Elliott point out in their article, "Pudd'nhead Wilson: Half a Dog Is Worse than None," language and humor in the novel create an impression at least as strong as its plot and characters. Second, race and the role of environment in determining personality are not issues that can just be tossed aside for a focus on property. Both play key roles in the novel. And while they may not create or sustain the novel's unity, to ignore them would be about as useful as ignoring an elephant in a living room when one attempts to describe that room's decor. Even if Spangler is correct that a focus on property is what guided the writing of the novel, its use of race and environmental determinism inevitably draws readers' interest. While Spangler's arguments should not be ignored, I can't help wishing he had found ways to accommodate these two key issues in his analysis.

To help you, on the next page is a second example of a biographic entry and annotation. The source is, as with the essays you will be assigned, an article in a scholarly journal. With the addition of an MLA-style heading, it looks much as I expect your submissions to me to look:



**If you need help with this project, particularly with the bibliographic entry, you need only ask. I will be happy to assist you. However, it is also essential that you consult a 6<sup>th</sup> edition MLA Handbook. Guessing about MLA style will kill your grade!**

[On the next page is a sample entry; your submission should look like this though the article annotated will be different.]

Joe Blow

Professor Donahoo

English 361w.02

25 August 2005

Dunleavy, Linda. "Sanctuary, Sexual Difference, and the Problem of Rape." Studies in American Fiction 24 (1996): 171-191.

Dunleavy analyzes Faulkner's novel Sanctuary from the perspective of gender to discover what the novel says about rape. Her discovery is that, while criticism has tended to view women in the novel as "inherently rapable" (171), the novel actually shows that rape is an act of violence resulting not from biological weakness in women but from social "configurations of power" (172). By this phrase, Dunleavy means that rape occurs as women are made to appear socially powerless. Thus Temple Drake does not cause or invite rape by being sexy but by being in a position of weakness. Moreover, Popeye does not rape Temple because he is attracted to her but because he wants to demonstrate or claim a power over her. Thus the famous physical rape in the novel actually mirrors other relationships of domination in the novel--particularly that of Horace and his wife and that of Temple and her father.

The attractiveness of this argument is that it de-sensationalizes the novel. It helps readers to see that the rape is not there to shock or attract readers but to emphasize a social aspect of Southern life during the 1920s. It makes "rape" a metaphor for the avid use of power Faulkner constantly displays in the novel. The problem with it is that it may intellectualize for some readers, particularly males, an act that is reprehensible. In other words, this article, though powerful, does not totally convince me that Faulkner has made a good choice in using rape as a metaphor for power relationships in the American South. Moreover, Temple is hardly powerless. Her social status and family (Faulkner 54) confer a great deal of power, but she fails to recognize it or use it until after she is victimized.



## *Paper Assignment: Analyzing a Literary Text*

As one third of their grade for this course, students are asked to write a paper involving one of the following literary works available in our Bedford Anthology textbook unless otherwise noted. The options are:

- "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It" by Mark Twain
- "A New England Nun" by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
- "The Mill" by E. A. Robinson
- "Big Boy Leaves Home" by Richard Wright (not in textbook)
- "Tract" by William Carlos Williams
- "Ma Rainey" by Sterling Brown
- The Emperor Jones by Eugene O'Neill
- "The Ice Palace" by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- "Brazil, January 1, 1502" by Elizabeth Bishop
- "Recitatif" by Toni Morrison
- "Are These Actual Miles?" by Raymond Carver

While these works vary in length, literary time period, and genre, all present students with approximately the same level of difficulty. Students should select the one of most interest to them, and follow the plan of action listed below:

- 1) Read the work carefully, making notes about major literary elements obvious to you as you read. Literary elements should include but not be limited to: plot, character, setting, symbols, image patterns, allusions.
- 2) Go the library and locate **at least three non-internet sources of information and criticism** about your work or its author. Good sources for students to use are single-author books that focus on your author; scholarly essays in book collections focused on your author/work; scholarly journal articles focused on your particular work. **DO NOT focus on biographical data about the author or the publication of the work; DO** focus on ideas seen at work in the literary piece and on any literary elements that you might have missed in your own reading.
- 3) Armed with the additional information gained from the library, ask yourself this question about your selected work: what claims (try to find 3-5) does this literary work make about America/Americans? It doesn't matter whether the claims are positive or negative, true or false. Select the claim that you feel is the most interesting and surprising. Be sure that it is NOT the most obvious. Be **ESPECIALLY SURE** that it is NOT the most simplistic.
- 4) Formulate a thesis that clearly states the claim you see the literary work making about America/Americans. A thesis that merely states, "Faulkner' story makes a claim about America" is NOT ACCEPTABLE. Instead, your thesis should read something like this: "Faulkner's story claims that America is a highly moralistic country that tends to crush individuals who seek to live by variant moral systems, thereby impoverishing our experience and knowledge."
- 5) Once your thesis is written, look back over your library research to be you're your reading seems sound. You need not agree with the research; you may think its conclusions are wrong. But it should be clear that you and the professional



critics are reading the same work. For instance, if all the professional critics suggest Faulkner's story is about why the British lost the war of 1812 while you think it is about candy-grams, the vast difference should encourage you to check your understanding of the story.

- 6) Begin to write your paper. Be sure the thesis shows up at the end of the introduction, and organize your paper by explaining how you know the story makes the claim you claim it makes. Be sure you **DO NOT** summarize the plot or retell the story. **DO** draw on your research and on your interpretations of various literary elements as reasons your thesis is an accurate reading of the story.
- 7) Be bold and interesting. I'll be reading several papers on the same works. Be sure yours is the one I remember because of the originality of its ideas and interpretation – not for its stupidly humorous mechanical mistakes.
- 8) Be sure to cite specific evidence from the literary work to support **EVERY** claim you make about it.
- 9) Mechanically, be aware of the following:
  - All quotations from the literary work **MUST** be parenthetically documented according to MLA style.
  - All quotations from the literary work must be treated correctly – check the MLA Handbook!
  - All quotations and ideas borrowed from research must be documented. Do not make claims without documented support!
  - Use strong topic sentences to make visible your argument in the paper and to show each paragraph is connected to the thesis.

**This paper is due for evaluation on Monday, June 23.**

In grading the paper, I will use the following criteria:

- Does the paper state a complex claim about America/Americans made by the selected literary work?
- Does the paper follow the thesis, using topic sentences that argue for the accuracy of the thesis in a logical way?
- Has the student used valid research and follow MLA style concerning the incorporation and documentation of research?
- Does the paper follow MLA paper format? **If your paper does not look like the sample on pages 320 and 321 of the MLA Handbook, it cannot earn a grade higher than a "C."**
- Is the paper free of mechanical/grammatical errors?

Have fun and be sure to talk with me about any questions or problems.



*Ernest Hemingway  
"Papa"*

**THERE IS NOTHING TO WRITING. ALL YOU DO IS SIT DOWN AT A TYPEWRITER AND BLEED. -- ERNEST HEMINGWAY**