THE REBEL
(ENGLISH 108F, WINTER 1997)

Through the history of literature, the "rebellious," confrontational, dissenting acts (and attitudes) of both authors and their literary characters have become an important site of literary research for both students and critics of the Novel. That is, at the core of most plots, and at the emotional core of the characters that frequent those plots, one finds essential conflict between humans and their social or natural environments; one finds interpersonal struggle between members of a family, a community, a culture, or, between cultures, as a whole; one finds internal, personal, psychological strife; one finds that the novel (or story) itself, in its structure, story-telling techniques, visual presentation, and so on, stands in a subversive, "rebellious" relation to more established literary traditions. In short, one finds "friction," conflict, contrast, and so on, across, potentially, a variety of principle elements within the literary work; and very often these novels emerge as both an exploration and a working out of those essential conflicts. So within this crucial feature of the literary text there thematically emerges the figure of the "rebel."

A student of mine on their final term paper for this course wrote, "[t]he rebel label comes with certain stereotypes such as always going against society, always [being] vocal and expressive, always looking to better society through change, and never accepting." Despite the awkward construction of the idea, he points, I think, to an important distinction (if not a general maxim) for our course. The figure of the rebel in both literature and society often lends itself to overly generalized, vague, and (as the student suggests) "stereotypical" constructions of an otherwise difficult and complicated character. I assume that many of you enter our course with a certain conception of: who you think the rebel is? what you think the rebel does? how you think the rebel acts? and so on. A large part of our task within this course is to expand, refine, "blow apart," re-shape, re-model, re-think, etc. this figure of the rebel, asking the questions that you might believe seem easy enough to answer on the surface but trying to discover whether or not those definitions or even those "stereotypes" hold up under scrutiny and the weight of various textual constructions of this complex literary and social figure.

This course focuses its attention specifically on those characters (and authors) that seem to initiate, to be submerged in, and to propel conflict in (and through) the novel. We will subsequently explore the greater value and implications of their actions (or circumstances) within society, literature and the actual novel itself.
We will read the following texts (in the order given):

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience"
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*
Henry Miller, *Tropic Of Cancer*
George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*
Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*
Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing The Cherry*

*(As well, throughout the term I will introduce a variety of individual "rebel" types/figures drawn from politics, philosophy, literature, myth, and current events. You will be responsible on your exams and papers for knowing the issues discussed in class pertaining to these "rebel" figures.)*

***(We will begin with the Thoreau text, after a week's introduction, beginning Wednesday January 15; depending on your interest, we will spend roughly 3 classes on each work. I would like for our class to be as much discussion based as possible and composed of both lecture material and group work.)*

**Course Work:**

1.) Summary Cards: 35% (See next two pages for details)
2.) Term Test: 20% (To be held on last day of classes)
3.) Paper Proposal: 10% (Due the first week in March)
4.) Either, a comparative 6-8 page final Essay (topics will be distributed in mid-February) or a Journal of at least 8 pages that explores personal reactions to 4 of the texts and/or figures discussed in class: 25% (both due on, or before, April 20).
5.) Participation/Group Work mark: 10%.

(Note: Certain works on this reading list are graphic and profane: if this concerns you, be forewarned! This may not be your ideal class.)