English 346 – American Fiction
T Th 1:00-2:30, RCH 209

Instructor: Kevin McGuirk
Office hours: T Th 2:30-3:30, and by appointment
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Preferred method of contact: office hours, after class, etc.

Course description:
This is not a survey of American fiction. But students should glean some sense of a set of distinctive American concerns starting with the early classic, The Scarlet Letter. Novels by Edith Wharton and Willa Cather together mark a shift from Victorian to modern preoccupations and forms of narration, from the tightly plotted “realist” novel to more exploratory forms of narration and topics associated with modernism. Kerouac, Pynchon, and Morrison exemplify some tendencies in postmodern fiction. Our approach to the novels will be eclectic in that we will range from close reading of words, sentences, and paragraphs; to reflection on narrative technique and narrative theory (point of view, genre, etc.); to considerations of contextual matters like culture, social history, and politics.

What I want you to get from the course:
An enriched sense of what the novel is as a material and social phenomenon.
The ability to respond with increased understanding to the formal and rhetorical dimensions of fiction.
Increased ability to identify areas of interest and ambiguity in fiction and to pose clarifying questions.
Knowledge of the basic tendencies and themes of American fiction.
Enhanced appreciation for relations between literary form and social history.
The ability to write more effectively and imaginatively about literature in general.

What I want you to do in the course:
Read every page of the works assigned.
Write about and discuss fiction frequently; formally, in tests, essays, and a presentation.
Ask questions in class: participate; listen to and engage with your peers.
Read out loud.
Take notes and make sure you grasp the major concerns of the course, as well as the distinctive work of each novel or writer; write tests demonstrating this grasp.
Write essays based on careful reflection, analysis, and revision.

Texts:
Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, Dover
Toni Morrison, Beloved, Vintage
Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence, Dover
Willa Cather, The Professor’s House, Vintage
Jack Kerouac, On the Road, Penguin
Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49, Harper Perennial
Brief readings in theory - online
Schedule:

**ALWAYS BRING YOUR TEXT TO CLASS!**

May 5, 7 introductions, *The Scarlet Letter* chs. 1 to 3 (we will not read “The Custom-House”)
May 12, 14 *The Scarlet Letter*
May 19, 21 *The Scarlet Letter, Beloved*
May 26, 28 *Beloved*
June 2, 4 **TEST Tuesday, *The Age of Innocence***
June 9, 11 *The Age of Innocence*
June 16, 18 *The Professor’s House*

June 23, 25 *The Professor’s House*
June 30, July 2 **TEST Tuesday, *On the Road***
July 7, 9 *One the Road, The Crying of Lot 49*
July 14, 16 *The Crying of Lot 49*
July 21, 23 *The Crying of Lot 49, TEST Thursday*
July 28 *follows a Wednesday schedule: no class*

ESSAY 1 Due Thursday, June 18

ESSAY 2 Due Tuesday, July 28

Assignments and Values:

1. **Three 60-minute tests: 15% each.** Each test will consist of two essay questions, one on each novel under consideration. Questions will be posted on Learn two days before the test so that you can prepare your essays ahead of time.

2. **Essay 1 (750 words): 10%.** A close reading. Topics will be assigned. Details to follow. Due Thursday, June 18 in class.

3. **Essay 2 (1500-2000 words): 30%.** A discussion of thematic, stylistic, and/or contextual matters. Topics will be assigned. Details to follow. Due Tuesday, July 28.

4. **In-class work: 15%.** In-class work includes i) attendance and evident preparedness; ii) participation; and iii) a brief presentation.

   i) You are expected to attend every class, to keep up with the reading, and always to have your text in front of you in class.

   ii) Participation means, in addition to regular attendance and preparedness, comments and questions. *This includes responding to your classmates’ presentations.* The primary mode of the class will be lecture/discussion. I will use Learn only for sending messages to the class concerning test preparation, schedule updates, and so on. The class is small enough for everyone to participate to some extent. I will frequently ask you for your views and I will invite questions from you about any aspect of the fiction we’re studying.

   iii) Everyone will give a presentation, with a partner or solo. Sign up on Thursday, May 7th. The presentation should be **5 to 10 minutes (10 minutes maximum!) in length.** You should choose a word (or pair of words) or *phrase*, an *object*, or a brief passage — from the novel under discussion — that *interests* you and explain to the class what is interesting about the word, object, or passage. Draw our attention to the relevant page, read the passage out loud if it’s helpful, and highlight what is arresting, edifying, stylistically striking, etc. **End your presentation with a question.** Note that expressive appreciation is not enough: you must explain your interest *analytically.* Although your presentation will not be marked separately (it will be considered holistically as part of your in-class mark), I will give you a written response taking into account Delivery, Argument, and Insight. **Please let me know what you plan to do ahead of time (after class or by email).**
Policies:
Contact: I would rather see you during office hours or after class than hear from you by email. Please feel free to see me to discuss anything related to the course. My office hours are for you.
Late papers: An extension of a day or two can be negotiated in conversation with me ahead of the due date. A request for an extension longer than a few days will have to be supported by appropriate documentation.
Plagiarism: Outside the university, plagiarism is “actionable.” That is, you can be sued for it. Educate yourself about plagiarism and don’t commit plagiarism. It is a serious offence, ethically and legally. See UW Policy 71 and the Notes below.
Devices: Laptops: I strongly discourage you from using a laptop in class. It is simply too easy to click to email, facebook, or other sites during class. Anyone would be tempted. And when you do things other than notetaking with your laptop, you’re not the only student mentally checking out: everyone around you will be distracted. Finally, the screen itself is a barrier between you and the class and therefore a barrier to participation. If you choose to use a laptop, I may require you to sit immediately in front of me or, if you appear to be surfing the internet, to close the laptop for the remainder of the course. Texting: Do not text in class.

Notes from the Faculty of Arts
Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.
Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline.
Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4.
Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals.
Other sources of information for students:
Academic Integrity website (Arts) Academic Integrity Office (UWaterloo)

Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Services office, located in Needles Hall Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.