

AML 2410 – The Objects & Material Cultures of American Literature (Class #10558), Fall 2018

Instructor Name: Srimayee Basu

Course meeting times & locations: MWF 8 & DAU 0342

Office Location and Hours: Turlington 4325/WF 7

Course website: Canvas

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Course Description:

French philosopher Andre Breton memorably declared “Nothing that surrounds us is object, all is subject,” reminding us that the animate and inanimate worlds are often more connected than what meets the eye. Literature is conventionally believed to be governed by characters and ideas rather than objects. But what happens to the way we understand literary texts and histories when we interpret them through the material objects represented in them? This course aims to introduce students to key works of American Literature where we find objects not as incidental components of narratives, but as rich signifiers of socioeconomic and cultural phenomena. Tracing the social history of things in the U.S. is an intellectually rewarding exercise since material cultures have always been central to American social life and literary production. For example, we shall study the expropriation of indigenous resources and lives in colonial America, the commodification of people in chattel slavery, industrial production defining American national character during the Gilded Age and the Cold War eras, the affective value of objects in diasporic cultures, and the impact of virtual reality on material cultures. Our attempt would be to understand how things have a social life of their own and often come to define individuals and cultural epochs.

General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) *or* Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university’s 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- Content: Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.

- Communication: Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- Critical Thinking: Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Required Texts:

- Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*
- Henry Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry "Box" Brown*
- Herman Melville, Selected sections from *Moby Dick*
- Henry James, *The American Scene*
- Flannery O' Connor, "Good Country People," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "The Life You Save May Be Our Own," "Parker's Back"
- Louise Erdrich, Selections from *The Red Convertible*
- Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
- Ernesto Quinonez, *Bodega Dreams*
- Selected episodes from the HBO television series *Westworld*

Assignments:

- Reading Quizzes (9 multiple choice quizzes; 100 points): Reading quizzes will be administered in class and will test your familiarity with the text's plot, narrative, and characters, as well as its key themes. These will be announced quizzes and their dates have been mentioned on the weekly schedule.
- In-class presentation (200 points): After the first week, students will select a text from the syllabus for an 8-10-minute class presentation. During the presentation you will share your research on the history and cultural significance of any one object/thing represented in the selected text which you feel is important to the narrative thematically. You will prepare 4-5 Power Point slides to supplement your presentation. Once everyone selects a text for presentation, I will create a schedule and post it on Canvas.
- 5 short reading responses (500 words; 20 points each): Short write-ups where you will reflect on any concept, idea, or claim that has been invoked in a text from the syllabus which aroused your intellectual curiosity. These are geared towards bringing about a fuller understanding of the reading and facilitating a better grasp over analytical thinking and writing. These will be self-paced but need to be submitted by the Friday of the week in which we wrap up our discussion of the particular texts you decide to work with.
- 2 critical thinking and research papers (2000 words each; 300 points each): These papers will consist of thematic analyses of any 2 texts we are reading for class. The essays will incorporate two critical sources that speak to similar issues and themes you are exploring in your texts. Consider the ways in which criticism can help you build your own original arguments on the text. I encourage you to consult with me before you begin the writing process.

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance*: Attendance is required. Each student is allowed four absences with no penalty. 50 points will be deducted from a student's final grade for each subsequent absence. If a student misses six periods during a semester, he or she will fail the entire course. Only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays will be

exempt from this policy. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed.

Students are responsible for keeping track of their own attendance record. Students who enter class after the start of class are late and are marked as tardy. Three instances of tardiness count as one absence. Additionally, if you arrive more than 15 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for that period. Tardiness disrupts the class so make it a habit to be in your seat when class begins.

3. *Paper Format & Submission*: Students will submit their essays through Canvas. Because I use the reviewing feature in Microsoft Word, papers must be saved in a Word-compatible format, generally .doc or .docx, or .rtf. You should save your papers using your last name and the assignment name as the filename. Submit through the assignment tab by attaching the document to the assignment page. If you are experiencing technical difficulty with the website, print a hard copy of the paper and bring to class and/or email me your assignment. However, you will still need to attach the assignment once the website is running again.
4. *Late Papers/Assignments*: Students should turn in essays on the day they are due—even if they cannot make it to class. Computer or email problems are not valid excuses for late work; save documents frequently and on multiple disks. Late work will not be accepted. Any other work that is not turned in by class time on the due date will not be accepted and will automatically count as a zero. Exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis and require documentation.
5. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
6. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/scct/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
7. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
8. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
9. *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
10. *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>.
11. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575 or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>.
12. Your policy on *classroom behavior and netiquette*: Common courtesy is mandatory in our classroom. Silence all cell phones, pagers, alarms, and so on when you enter the classroom; unexpected noises interrupt everyone's concentration. *If a student is found text messaging in class, he or she will be asked to leave and will receive an absence for the day.* Sleeping, holding private conversations, and reading other material are also inappropriate behaviors during class time.
13. *Laptop Policy*: Students will not need to use a laptop for this class for anything but assigned texts, so please put it away before class begins and take it out only for accessing Canvas or Course Reserves. E-readers will be allowed; this does not include cell phones, which must be put away and on silent during class. Other devices, such as laptops and tablets, will be allowed on a provisional basis.
14. *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty:

<http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>.

15. *Policy on environmental sustainability.* Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) annual book sale.)

Syllabus			
Wk	Day	Reading/Viewing Material	Due
1	8/22	Introduction and Syllabus Review Discussion on <i>A History of the World in 1000 Objects</i> http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-08/two-million-years-of-human-history-national-museum-canberra/7826960	
	8/24	Discussing key pages from <i>ThingStor: A Material Culture Database</i> , an interactive database that curates and puts into dialogue material objects referenced in literary texts and the visual arts published in America between 1688 and 1914.	
2	8/27	Mary Rowlandson, <i>The Sovereignty and Goodness of God</i>	
	8/29	Rowlandson continued	
	8/31	“Forum: Early Modern Women and Material Culture” www.jstor.org/stable/23541574 Workshop on writing Reading Responses	Quiz 1
3	9/3	Holiday	
	9/5	Henry Brown, <i>Narrative of the Life of Henry “Box” Brown</i>	
	9/7	Brown continued	Quiz 2
4	9/10	Viewing & discussion based on the “Material Culture” segment of the Yale Slavery and Abolition Portal	
	9/12	Herman Melville, Selected sections from <i>Moby Dick</i>	

	9/14	Melville continued	Quiz 3
5	9/17	“Material Culture” from <i>Documenting Maritime Folklife: An Introductory Guide</i> (The Library of Congress)	
	9/19	Henry James, <i>The American Scene</i>	
	9/21	James continued	Quiz 4 Reading Response 1 due
6	9/24	James continued	
	9/26	“Grotesque Encounters in the Travel Writing of Henry James” Peter Rawlings www.jstor.org/stable/3509492	
	9/28	Workshop on writing Critical Thinking & Research papers	
7	10/1	Flannery O’ Connor, “Good Country People,” “The Lame Shall Enter First,”	
	10/3	“The Life You Save May Be Our Own,”	
	10/5	“Parker’s Back” Viewing “The Material Culture of the Southern Landscape” from the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture (University of Delaware)	Quiz 5 Critical Thinking & Research Paper 1 due
8	10/8	Workshop on choosing and incorporating secondary sources in academic writing	
	10/10	Louise Erdrich, “The Red Convertible”	
	10/12	“The Blue Velvet Box,” “Knives”	Quiz 6

9	10/15	Class trip to Matheson History Museum & Historic Matheson House	
	10/17	Octavia Butler, <i>Kindred</i>	
	10/19	Butler continued	Quiz 7
10	10/22	Butler continued	
	10/24	Excerpts from Tiya Miles' <i>Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era</i> (uploaded on Canvas)	
	10/26	Workshop on editing for rhetorical, factual, and argumentative accuracy in academic writing	Reading Response 2 due
11	10/29	Ernesto Quinonez, <i>Bodega Dreams</i>	
	10/31	Quinonez continued	
	11/2	Holiday	
12	11/5	"Dreams of Place and Housing Struggles" from <i>Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City</i> , Arlene Davila (uploaded of Canvas)	Quiz 8
	11/7	Guided reading from "Material Culture of the American Household" (Online History Research Guide by Boston University Students)	
	11/9	"Material Culture of the American Household" continued Marsha Bryant, "From slag to swag: The story of Earl Tupper's fantastic plastics" http://theconversation.com/from-slag-to-swag-the-story-of-earl-tuppers-fantastic-plastics-100564	

13	11/12	Holiday	
	11/14	Selected episodes from the HBO television series <i>Westworld</i> (Students will watch the assigned episodes at home, the class discussion will incorporate short clips as discussion catalysts) Season 1, Episodes 1 & 3	
	11/16	<i>Westworld</i> continued Season 1, Episodes 5 & 8	Reading Response 3 due
14	11/19	<i>Westworld</i> continued	
	11/21	Holiday	
	11/23	Holiday	
15	11/26	““Westworld,” Race, and the Western.” Aaron Bady (<i>The New Yorker</i>)	Quiz 9
	11/28	“Can the Sofa Speak? A Look at Thing Theory” John Plotz (uploaded on Canvas)	
	11/30	“Art and Material Culture” (Finding/Using Images at Duke) Duke University Libraries website	Last day for making class Presentations & Response paper 4 & 5 due
16	12/3	“The Social Life of Maps in America 1750-1860” Center for Material Culture Studies (University of Delaware)	

	12/5	Wrap-up and course review	Critical Thinking & Research Paper 2 Due
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Grading/Assessment Rubric:

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	GPA	Percentage (Point %)
A	4.0	93–100
A-	3.67	90–92
B+	3.33	87–89
B	3.0	83–86
B-	2.67	80–82
C+	2.33	77–79
C	2.0	73–76
C-	1.67	70–72
D+	1.33	67–69
D	1.0	63–66
D-	0.67	60–62
E	0.00	0–59

Grade Meanings

A Student did what the assignment asked at a superior level, meeting all the composition objectives required of the assignment. Additionally, his or her work shows originality, creativity, and demonstrates that the student took extra steps to be original or creative in developing content, solving a problem, or developing a style. Since careful editing and proofreading are essential in writing, papers in the A range must be free of typos and grammatical or mechanical errors.

B Student did what the assignment asked at a quality level, meeting most of the composition objectives required of the assignment. Work in this range needs revision; however, it is complete in content, is organized well, and shows special attention to style.

C Student did what the assignment asked but overlooked some of the composition objectives. Work in this range needs significant revision, but it is complete in content and the organization is logical. The style is straightforward but unremarkable.

D Student neglected some basic requirements of the assignment and completed it at a poor-quality level. Work in this range needs significant revision. The content is often incomplete, and the organization is hard to discern. Attention to style is often nonexistent or chaotic.

E An E is usually reserved for students who do not do the work or do not come to class.

However, if a student's work is shoddy, shows little understanding of the needs of the assignment, and/or an inability to meet the composition objectives, he or she will receive a failing grade.