ENGLISH 175C
LITERATURE AND CULTURE OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE
Professor Adena Spingarn

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Note: This course fulfills WAY-A-II, WAY-ED, GER-DBHum, GER-EC-AmerCul

From the “discovery” of the New World to recent literature on ecological disaster, the American landscape has long been foundational to the nation’s literature. This course will examine a wide range of American literature’s engagements with nature in genres including fiction, essay, and poetry. We will explore the many ways that American writers have portrayed the nation’s landscape: as a determinant of national character and destiny, as a source of spiritual, sexual, and moral revitalization, as a battleground for the survival of races and ethnicities, as a molding mechanism of citizenship and of gender, as the basis of a national art and culture, and as a resource for exploitation or preservation. Course readings will include explicitly environmentalist literature as well as a variety of works that imagine the American landscape as a site of cultural and political formations.

COURSE TEXTS

** Readings on Coursework
Mary Austin, The Land of Little Rain (Modern Library, 978-0812968521)
Willa Cather, My Ántonia (Penguin, 978-0140187649)
Frederick Douglass, The Heroic Slave (Frederick Douglass, 978-1434441218)
Henry David Thoreau, Walden and Civil Disobedience (Signet, 978-0451532169)
Jean Toomer, Cane (Liverlight, 978-0871402103)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class attendance and participation - 20%
Weekly discussion questions - 15%
Once a week, by midnight the night before class, you must post to Coursework one well-thought-out discussion question relevant to the following day’s readings, along with a suggested citation from the text that will help us answer it. You must submit 8 sets of discussion questions total, which means that after the first week you may miss 1 week without penalty.

Two short diagnostic writing assignments – 5%
Week 2: Why is nature important
Week 3: Literary analysis

Informal literary analysis and presentation – 10%
You will sign up to write and present to the class a 500-word literary analysis or gloss on a short passage (about 100 words from the reading) twice during the term.

Short essay (4-5 pages) – 20%
This paper will explore the relationship between the “literal” and the “metaphorical” use of the key term you will choose at the start of the quarter in one or two texts. Rather than arguing for the predominance of one or the other of these two modes, the paper should begin with an assumption that the writer is committed to both literal description and metaphor. Questions you might address include: what are the proportions of the metaphorical and literal uses of your term? Do these two dimensions seem harmonious, at odds, or perhaps some of both? How do these metaphorical and literal deployments of your term contribute to broader formal and rhetorical aspects of the text?

At some point in your paper, you should include a detailed discussion (at least 250-300 words) of a passage using the literary analysis methods we have discussed in class, paying careful attention to the formal features of the language. This reading should focus on a few sentences or a paragraph from the text, and no more than a page, that particularly exemplifies your argument. You should type up this passage and include it as an appendix (it will not count toward your page/word count) at the end of your paper.

Take-home final project (7-8 pages) – 30%

Your final assignment purposefully diverges from the traditional literary paper, requiring 2-3 pages of creative writing and 5-6 pages of analytical writing. You will (1) select an image of the American landscape, (2) write three separate responses to the image in the voice of three authors or texts from our syllabus, and (3) write a reflection on your formal and rhetorical choices in composing these three responses. Further details and instructions will be distributed in class.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Wilderness and Civilization**

**Monday, January 5:** Beginnings

Week 1

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* “Manufacturers” (1787)
Thomas Morton, excerpt from *New English Canaan* (1637)

**Wednesday, January 7**

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, “Advertisement and Dedication” and “Letter I: Introduction,” from *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)

* Today, students will select the key term they will follow through the first half of the quarter.

**Monday, January 12**

Week 2

William Apess, *A Son of the Forest* (excerpt) (1829)
Black Hawk, “Black Hawk’s Tower,” from *Autobiography of Ma-Ka-Tai-Me-She-Kia-Kiak, or Black Hawk* (1833)
Lydia Huntley Sigourney, “Indian Names” (1849)

** Informal writing 1: “Why is nature important?” (Further instructions will be distributed in class.)

**Wednesday, January 14**

Frederick Douglass, “The Heroic Slave” (1852)
NO CLASS Monday, January 19  
Continue reading Walden.

Week 3

Wednesday, January 21
Henry David Thoreau, Walden (1854): Ch. 3-18

** Informal writing 2: Literary analysis (Further instructions will be distributed in class.)

Introspection and Observation

Monday, January 26  Week 4
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature (1836)
Emily Dickinson, selected poems

**Workshop on the Writing Process

Wednesday, January 28
Gary Snyder, selected poems

Monday, February 2  Week 5
Mary Austin, The Land of Little Rain (1903), Ch. 1-7

** Short paper (4-5 pages) drafts due. Peer editing

Wednesday, February 4
Mary Austin, The Land of Little Rain (1903), Ch. 8-14

Expansion and Encroachment

Monday, February 9  Week 6
Walt Whitman, “Pioneers! O Pioneers!” from Leaves of Grass (1865)
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)
Maxine Hong Kingston, “The Grandfather of the Sierra Mountains”

** Revised short papers (4-5 pages) due

Wednesday, February 11

NO CLASS Monday, February 16  Week 7
Begin reading Willa Cather My Ántonia (1918)

Wednesday, February 18
Willa Cather My Ántonia (1918)

Monday, February 23  Week 8
Willa Cather My Ántonia (1918)
Creation and Destruction

Wednesday, February 25

Monday, March 2
Jean Toomer, Cane

Wednesday, March 4
Jean Toomer, Cane

Monday, March 9
** Reading(s) for this week will be determined by the class.

Wednesday, March 11
** Reading(s) for this week will be determined by the class.

**Final project due: Friday, March 20 by midnight