

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# AMERICAN LITERATURE

Robert F Sayre, PhD

## Description

American Literature provides a broad view of American literature from earliest Indian oral traditions through the twentieth century. The course traces movements and the formation of narratives that reflected a growing, evolving society, along with multiple encounters and collisions of multiple cultures and peoples.

## About the Professor

Robert F. Sayre is a professor emeritus of University of Iowa. An acknowledged and distinguished scholar, Dr. Sayre is widely published in the field of American Literature and autobiography and memoirs, and his essays, articles, and anthologies have received positive reviews.

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**General Instructions:** The course is divided into five chronological units, each of which has three weeks of readings. For each unit, there is a short Overview that supplements the introductory material in the texts. Read both carefully and refer to them often as you read the assigned literature. Each unit ends with a short essay on one of three suggested topics. In the sixteenth and final week you will write a longer essay. As you read, consider all the questions you might write on. Keeping careful notes and/or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay.

**Instructions for the Short Essays:** They should be 1,250 to 1,500 words, responding to one of the suggested topics or questions, which are designed to help you compare, contrast, and better understand the readings and the general themes, concepts, and ideas in them. Send each essay to your instructor before proceeding to the next unit. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send the finished essay.

**Instructions for the Final Essay:** It should be 5,000 words, responding to one of the three final questions, which are designed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature you have read. As with the shorter essays, you may again send an outline and drafts to your instructor first.

## Required Texts:

*Bedford Anthology of American Literature: Volume One, Beginnings to 1865.* Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

*Bedford Anthology of American Literature: Volume Two, 1865 to the Present.* Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Unit essays**

#### **Unit 1 – Beginnings to 1830s**

Contrasting world views: Indian and Colonists'

Contrasting moralities: Puritan, Quaker, and Enlightenment

Contrasting philosophies: Sentimental and Romantic / Irving and Emerson

#### **Unit II -- The American Renaissance**

One of the subjects in the writing of the American Renaissance that was comparatively new to world literature was the subject of work. Previously, most great literature was about love, war, religion, statecraft, and related subjects of morals and manners. Not so in American slave narratives and in the novels and stories of Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and the poems of Walt Whitman. Describe the many kinds of work that these writers write about and their many different attitudes towards it. Why is writing about work an important subject in America?

Thoreau's essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," and Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," illustrate not only radically different forms of protest but also radically different faces of the romantic movement in America. Compare and contrast them and explain why they are both romantic.

Contrast the poems of Emily Dickinson with the prose writings of the other women read in this section of the course. What does Dickinson have in common with them? How is she also different?

#### **Unit III – American Realism**

Regional writing is sometimes treated as inferior. Do you think it is or is not? Answer by comparing two regional stories with three other assigned stories in this unit. What are your ultimate criteria for successful and important fiction?

The autobiographical writings assigned in Week 9 are all concerned with the complexities of race and ethnicity in America, whereas the fiction assigned in Weeks 7 and 8 is often concerned with social and economic class. Why is this? Is an author more inclined to be personal and refer to his or her own experience when writing about gender and race? Is class a more subtle subject that is better treated in fiction? Or are there other reasons? Discuss these issues as they appear in two or more works of each kind.

Many of the readings in this unit are protests against the social and economic conditions of the period. But it is often said that "protest literature" is not real literature – that it is simplistic, shrill, didactic, and has limited appeal. Is this true of some of the things you have read? If so, which ones? Are there other stories and poems which do make social criticisms and protests but which are also better literature – better written, more entertaining and instructive and with a greater human appeal? Discuss at least five works.

#### **Unit IV – Modernism**

Compare and contrast the modernism of two white poets or short story writers with two black writers or poets. What is "modernism" for each and how concerned are they with it? Do they have other concerns like race, region, manners, and study of character that mean more?

Compare and contrast the modernism of two male writers and two female writers, looking at their choices of subject, their styles, and their sympathies.

The early Twentieth Century brought a Southern literary renaissance. Porter, Hurston, Toomer, Faulkner, Wright, and Welty were all southerners, and their subject matter was mainly the South. Write a portrait of the South and Southern characters and concerns as they collectively describe them.

### **Unit V – Post-Modernism, 1945 to the Present**

As the producer of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Edward Albee must have thought highly of it. How different and how similar is it to Albee's surreal or absurdist play *The Sandbox*? Which is closer in style to Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*?

Discuss the similarities and differences among three of the writers read in this unit –one American Indian, one Afro-American, and one Mexican-American. What are their attitudes towards race and racial prejudice? What use do they make of their race's history.

Autobiography and protest are prominent in a lot of the poetry in this unit – in the poems of Roethke, Bishop, Lowell, Ginsberg, Rich, Plath, and Harjo, to name seven. Choose four of these poets and try to rank them according to how much you identify with the experiences they describe and how powerful or effective you think their protests are.

### **Final Essay**

Describe the development of American tales / short stories from Washington Irving to Raymond Carver. Since you have read stories by many authors, it is impossible to cover them all. But Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Mark Twain, James, Jewett, Freeman, Crane, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Porter, Welty, Malamud, O'Connor, and Carver are generally believed to be the greatest. They tell engaging stories that grip the reader's attention. The stories can be "read in one sitting" (one of Poe's standards). And each, in his or her own way, adds a new dimension to the genre – in subject matter, character, teller and narrative technique, language, or other formal elements. Choose at least six writers from list above and show what each has added to the genre. For instance, what do we mean when we say a story is "a Poe story" or "a Hemingway story." What makes "a James story" or "a Fitzgerald story"?

The terms "raw" and "cooked" were used in distinguishing between two schools post-modern American poetry. But they may also be useful in describing more American poets. "Raw" is poetry that seems spontaneous, direct, discursive, and usually more easily read. It seems to have come right out of the ground, without fancy preparation. "Cooked" poetry seems more studied, formal, complex, and written by some one who has spent more time, if not in the kitchen, certainly in the library. Which poets or poems that we have read seem to you "raw" and which "cooked"? And which do you like better? Answer by discussing the work of at least six poets in the anthology. (It is o.k. to like some of each.)

Autobiography, broadly defined, is a very common kind of American writing. Choose one autobiographer from each of the four units of the course in which autobiographies of some kind were assigned (for example, Unit I, Benjamin Franklin; Unit II, Frederick Douglass; Unit III, Mary Antin; and Unit V, Maxine Hong Kingston) and describe how this kind of writing has changed. Coming from very different historical periods, they have very different material. But how has the American character changed as well? What was "an American" in each period? How did each author define "an American" and how "American" did each think he or she was?

## Early American Literature : Colonial Literature

### Introduction

What is American literature? A generation ago the answer was, “the writing in English of people of European descent about their lives and experiences in North America.” It followed, you might say, from Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s answer to the question, “What is an American, this new man?” “He is either an European, or the descendant of an European...” (p. 433) Thus the earliest American literature was assumed to be by the explorers and settlers of Virginia like Captain John Smith and the Pilgrims and Puritans who settled Massachusetts, beginning in 1620. These writings, mainly diaries, sermons and histories, were followed by more obviously literary work like the poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor and various kinds of autobiographical writing: narratives of Indian captivity, travel narratives like Sarah Kemble Knight’s story of her month-long journey from Boston to New York, religious conversion narratives, and finally the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

Such, in brief, was the canon of early American literature.

Today that definition is inadequate. American literature is considered to include much that was not written in English, such as the writings of French and Italian and Spanish explorers and settlers, as well as the later writings of immigrants from elsewhere in the world. The definition must also embrace the oral literature of American Indians – tales and histories that originally were not *written* at all. So the definition might now be: the stories and expressions of the people of what is now the United States, reflecting their lives and beliefs and cultures in all of their languages, even though most of it is today read more than it is heard and, for the purposes of general availability and popularity, read in English. As a result, the canon of American literature, early and later, is much larger and correspondingly harder to encompass. One must try to understand, for example, the customs and conventions of oral story telling. And one must appreciate the experiences of people of many more cultures, customs, and backgrounds.

The student who can make these adjustments, however, will gain both a more comprehensive knowledge of literature and a deeper understanding of the varieties of races and cultures in North America in general and the United States in particular. In the Indian tales, for example, we learn some of the many different accounts of the origin of the world that were held by different tribes, some resembling the account in Genesis, most not. But what they have in common is something Scott Momaday says of his people, the Kiowas. When they “entered upon the Great Plains,” it was “stories [that enabled] them to appropriate an unknown and intimidating landscape to their experience” (p. 58). The story of the Kiowas’ being born out a log was analogous to their coming onto the plains from out of the Rocky Mountains. The story of seven sisters raised to the sky by a tree and becoming the seven stars in the Big Dipper made the night sky more familiar and benign. The Seneca story of the “Origin of Folk Stories” also tells us that Gaqka, the boy who learned the stories, won a beautiful bride and became “a great man,” a testimony to the power of story-tellers. They entertained, they interpreted the world, and they united people around a common world view, forming communities.

So the early Euro-Americans confronted a landscape that was all the more “unknown and intimidating,” to use Momaday’s words, because they did not have such native stories. The nearest that seventeenth-century English writers came to stories like the Kiowas’ are John Smith’s story of Pocahontas taking his head in her arms to save him from death (p. 117) and William Bradford’s story of Massasoit and Squanto befriending the Pilgrims (p. 143), because both suggest that these English newcomers were welcomed. But it was later writers and myth-makers who embellished these incidents. Smith’s account is only one sentence long, and Bradford’s is also short. The newcomers’ stories – like their cultures and religions, their customs and habits, tastes and tools – were all European. So to them the landscape was a wilderness – strange and dangerous, as we see in Cabeza de Vaca’s Narrative, William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* and many other writings of that time (and much later).

What the Europeans did have, however, was the Bible, which was not only the text from which they drew their faith and moral codes but also the glass through which they looked at America and interpreted their experience. This is particularly so of the Pilgrims like Bradford and the later New England Puritans. John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” is, you could say, the veritable constitution for the Christian commonwealth that he and his followers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony wished to establish. Every principle of behavior – mercy, forgiveness, lending, love, marriage, and more – is drawn from the Bible, with Winthrop giving chapter and verse to support it. The same goes for much of Anne Bradstreet’s poetry, although she does not document her sources so precisely and also includes references to Greek and Roman writers.

The Old Testament stories with which early Euro-Americans particularly identified were the stories of the creation and fall and of the exodus. All Puritans believed in original sin, stemming from the disobedience of Adam and Eve, and although they interpreted the story differently, they (and later American writers) could see many

precedents for their condition and experience in each and every part of it. In the Exodus story of the Jews fleeing from Egypt, wandering for years in the desert, and later coming upon the promised land they saw a foreshadowing of their leaving England and confronting the trials and privations of the wilderness in order to build what Winthrop called “a City upon a hill.” Leaders like Winthrop were their Moses. The Indians were the heathen tribes of non-believers whom missionaries tried to convert and also the foes whom God had provided to test them. The latter is vividly clear in Mary Rowlandson’s story of her capture by Indians in February, 1675, during King Phillip’s War, “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God.” Every kind of suffering and hardship is eventually explained for her by the verse from the book of Hebrews, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth.”

People in other colonies also saw and shaped their experiences along biblical lines, but chose different precedents and teachings. Elizabeth Ashbridge was raised a member of the Church of England, the state church that the Puritans wanted to reform, or “purify.” But she says she was wild and liked to sing and dance. Eventually, having

gone to Pennsylvania as an indentured servant, she became a Quaker, a sect the Puritans persecuted. Like Rowlandson, however, she believed that her afflictions were ultimately beneficial. The German Francis Daniel Pastorius, who emigrated to Pennsylvania after meeting William Penn, found biblical precedent for trying to convince his fellow German Quakers to oppose slavery, as did John Woolman with his neighbors and in his missionary activity in the South.

By the 1720’s, however, much of the religious dedication of the previous century had begun to wane. The colonies were more prosperous and secure, and divine guidance and protection did not seem so necessary. The result, as has happened several times since, was a religious revival. Two of its leaders were Jonathan Edwards, the eloquent Congregational minister of Northampton, Massachusetts, and George Whitefield, the English associate of John Wesley. Whitefield had come from England to spread the gospel of Methodism throughout the American colonies, and together they had a enormous impact. Edwards was the more scholarly, as can be seen in his “Images and Shadows of Divine Things,” a dissertation which is not as well known as his frightening sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” or his “Personal Narrative,” but which is very important as a precursor of modern American symbolism.

Aside from the writings of Jonathan Edwards, the Great Awakening had little impact on later American literature. It was soon followed by the arrival of the writings of the European Enlightenment, which had a profound impact on Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and other leaders of the American Revolution. Their interests were more secular and practical— in business, like Franklin; science and mechanics like Franklin and Jefferson; and in politics, geography, and theories of government (all three). The differences between the writers of the Seventeenth Century and the Eighteenth Century are remarkable, and others are due to more than changes in religion and philosophy. Washington Irving and his contemporaries wrote to entertain. They wrote the first American short stories (though called tales), novels, and plays, trying to imitate the English writers whom they admired and so prove that Americans, too, could be cultivated and tasteful.

But other voices are also heard in the Eighteenth Century. Samson Occom’s *A Short Narrative of My Life* is the first Native American autobiography. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* in the first African American one.

The early Nineteenth Century brought more efforts at writing that was self-consciously literary, by authors who wrote for money, like Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper, and who tried at the same time to establish a new national literature, answering the call from literary patriots for a literature that celebrated what Emerson called “our incomparable materials.... Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations...the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing...” It also brought new fiction by women, such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s novels and stories. Even more surprising, to literary traditionalists, it produced Jane Johnson Schoolcraft’s transcriptions of Chippewa tales and legends, like “Mishosha, of the Magician and His Daughters.”

Below are the reading assignments for each week, followed by suggested paper topics. Be sure to read each assignment carefully and to make use of both the comments above and the assigned introductions to each period and author that are given in the anthology.

### *Readings*

Introduction, pp. 2-33

“A Tale of the Foundation of the Great Island,...” pp. 37-40

Cherokee story, pp. 40-43

Momaday, 54-59  
“Explorations...,” Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, pp. 61-85  
Colonial Settlements, 93-106  
John Smith, pp. 106-9, 116-7  
William Bradford, “Of Plymouth Plantation,” 124-146  
John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” pp. 153-166  
Anne Bradstreet, “The Prologue,” 166-71, “The Author to Her Book,” p. 181  
Mary Rowlandson, “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God,” pp. 190-228  
Francis Daniel Pastorius, pp. 244-51  
Jonathan Edwards, pp. 276-8, “Images and Shadows...,” pp. 303-5

[182 pp.]

Introduction, pp. 311-33  
Franklin, from *The Autobiography of...*, pp. 335-71  
Elizabeth Ashbridge, “Some Account of the Fore Part...,” pp. 376-89  
John Woolman, from *The Journal...*, pp. 390-401  
Samson Occom, from *A Short Narrative*, pp. 401-09  
Olaudah Equiano, from *The Interesting Narrative...*, pp. 414-26  
Crevecoeur, from *Letters from an American Farmer*, pp. 427-32  
John and Abigail Adams, Letters, pp. 442-45  
Thomas Jefferson, Draft of the Declaration... and from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, pp. 446-57  
Washington Irving, pp. 520-42  
Catharine Maria Sedgwick, pp. 543-55  
Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, pp. 577-86

[166 pp.]

Introduction, pp. 587-616  
Emerson, pp. 653-724

[101 pp.]

### *Questions*

Contrasting world views: Indian and Colonists’

Contrasting moralities: Puritan, Quaker, and Enlightenment

Contrasting philosophies: Sentimental and Romantic / Irving and Emerson

## Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century American literature : The American Renaissance

### Introduction

*The American Renaissance* was the title of a 1941 book by the critic F.O. Matthiessen on the amazing achievements of American authors of the 1840s and '50s. (See the chronology on pages 591-3 of the *Bedford Anthology* for a list of some of their works.) In these works such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Walden*, and *Leaves of Grass*, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman showed little influence from English forbearers. They chose American materials and handled them in unprecedented new ways. Consciously (in the case of Thoreau and Whitman), they had picked up Emerson's challenge to learn not from the "courtly muses of Europe" but directly from nature, the past, and action. And while less influenced by Emerson, indeed, by in some ways rebelling against him, Hawthorne and Melville also followed their own independent geniuses. Hawthorne spent years reading and absorbing early New England history, and spending his summers exploring its countryside. His imaginative treatments of this material were the basis of his "tales," or what we now call his short stories, and his classic novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and the *House of Seven Gables*. Melville's whaling voyage to the Pacific gave him the material for his early fictionalized travel books, *Typee* and *Omoo* and later *Moby Dick*, the first great American novel.

But the American Renaissance was marked by much more than the achievements of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville. The growing anti-slavery movement resulted in the publication of over a hundred book-length autobiographies and biographies of escaped slaves, as well as a thousand shorter accounts in magazines and newspapers. These stories of the many horrors of slavery, of rebellion, escape, and eventual freedom were, it can be argued, the most completely original American literary form, for no other country was so divided by race and region. Harriet Beecher Stowe drew on them and on her own observations while living in Cincinnati, just across the Ohio River from Kentucky, in writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the first great American best-seller and, as Lincoln later told its author, the book that started the Civil War.

As noted in the *Anthology* Overview (pp. 607-18) other reform movements, notably Women's Suffrage and the early Labor Movement, led to further literary development. Stowe's sister Catherine Beecher was an advocate for women's right to work. Margaret Fuller was an advocate for women's intellectual freedom and equality. Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" was a powerful protest against dreary and demeaning factory life, as was Herman Melville's story, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids."

Not all the literature of this period was focused on reform, however. As explained in the *Anthology* Introduction on "Technology, Transportation, and the Growth of the Literary Marketplace" (pp. 594-97), there were also great improvements in printing and distribution that led to many more newspapers and magazines, with much larger and wider circulations that in turn created a larger reading public and more writers of popular poetry and fiction. Two of the most famous writers were Edgar Allan Poe and Fanny Fern. Poe was himself a brilliant magazine editor with a keen sense of what would appeal to a mass audience, and the result, in his own writing, were tales of suspense and fantasy that made him a founder of what we now call the detective story and science fiction. He also attempted to define the short story, writing that it should be readable in one sitting and be carefully designed to have the unity and intensity of effect of a lyric poem. Fanny Fern's fame did not last so well, although she was once the best paid writer in the country. A writer of popular newspaper columns and popular novels, she was one of the women Hawthorne called a "damned mob of scribbling women" and who were later scorned by male (and female) critics as conventional and sentimental. (Her flowery name, a pen name, did not help.) But contemporary critics have realized that she was actually very witty, colorful, and outspoken.

Emily Dickinson is, in many respects, the most distinctive of all these writers. Though her poems are the antithesis of Whitman's in form and point of view, they are fully as original. They are also equally different from the popular poetry of the period, as the student can see by looking at the selections in the *Anthology* under "The American Muse: Poetry at Midcentury," (pp. 1202-1235). They too are a part of this miraculous period.

### Readings

Introductions, pp. 607-18

Margaret Fuller, pp. 725-33

Harriet Beecher Stowe, pp. 747-52

Harriet Jacobs, pp. 763-68

Henry David Thoreau, 792-854

Frederick Douglass, pp. 855-922

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Nathaniel Hawthorne, pp. 966-1017  
Edgar Allen Poe, pp. 1018-9, 1030-43  
Fanny Fern, pp. 1062-1071  
Herman Melville, 1072-1118  
Rebecca Harding Davis, pp. 1149-1177

[161 pp.]

Walt Whitman, pp. 1236-1313  
Emily Dickinson, pp. 1314-1346

[100 pp.]

### *Questions*

One of the subjects in the writing of the American Renaissance that was comparatively new to world literature was the subject of work. Previously, most great literature was about love, war, religion, statecraft, and related subjects of morals and manners. Not so in American slave narratives and in the novels and stories of Herman Melville and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and the poems of Walt Whitman. Describe the many kinds of work that these writers write about and their many different attitudes towards it. Why is writing about work an important subject in America?

Thoreau's essay, "Resistance to Civil Government," and Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," illustrate not only radically different forms of protest but also radically different faces of the romantic movement in America. Compare and contrast them and explain why they are both romantic.

Contrast the poems of Emily Dickinson with the prose writings of the other women read in this section of the course. What does Dickinson have in common with them? How is she also different?



## Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Literature : American Realism

### Introduction

As explained in the “Introduction” to the second volume of the *Bedford Anthology*, the Civil War brought tremendous change to the United States. Not only were the slaves now nominally free, the South was now defeated and the North free to proceed to expand its capitalist-industrial might. Transcontinental railroads were built. The West was further explored and settled. Immigrants began to come in ever-increasing numbers. Enormous new fortunes were made, creating a huge gap between the very rich and the millions of farmers, miners, and laborers who worked in the new factories and laid the track for the new railroads. At the same time, many other Americans reached new levels of middle class success and prosperity, with leisure in which to read and travel.

All these changes and developments are reflected in the new literature of this period, roughly the fifty years from the end of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I. But literature does more than reflect historical events. It attempts to reflect the changes in people and their surroundings – in nature and society and the character and beliefs of individuals – that cause and are caused by the historical events. This is especially so of the literature of this period, known in literary histories and anthologies as the Age of Realism. The pre-Civil War writers are called romantic because they wished to inspire themselves and their readers to higher, nobler lives, like Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, or to show extremes of heroism, introspection, suffering, isolation, and horror, like Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. Realists, to use a figure of the French realistic novelist Stendhal, wanted their novels to be like a mirror carried down a highway, reflecting everything from the sky above to the dirt and puddles below. American realists, at least initially, showed less of the dirt and puddles than did their European contemporaries. As William Dean Howells wrote, “our novelists concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life.” Their audience and subject matter was generally the middle and upper middle class. But they nevertheless wanted, in another famous phrase, to show life as it is in the world that is.

A good example of an American realistic novel of the 1870s is Henry James’s *Daisy Miller*. Daisy is an upper-middleclass American girl traveling in Europe with her mother and little brother, while her father is back in Schenectady making money. She is independent, curious and high-spirited, reflecting the confidence and optimism of her country, while her little brother Randolph is bored with Europe and thinks everything American is better – which also reflects some Americans’ attitudes. The crisis comes when Daisy takes up with an Italian man in Rome and refuses to abide by the cautions given her by elders. The novel was James’s first big popular success, creating quite a controversy over whether Daisy was or was not a reliable portrait of the new American girl.

Mark Twain’s greatest novel is *Huckleberry Finn*, which is unforgettable for its poetic descriptions of the Mississippi River and the life on its shores in small towns and plantations in the decades before the Civil War, all as seen through the eyes of a poor and barely schooled, but very observant boy. *Old Times on the Mississippi* is an interesting companion to it because it has the same setting but is autobiographical. Moreover, Twain’s account of the differences between a passenger’s and a pilot’s views of the river are almost an essay on the differences between romantic and realistic writing, as he saw them. However, a reader should not be misled by the words “realism” and “realistic.” James’s clever short story, “The Real Thing,” can also be read as a kind of critical essay, subtly making the point that art and reality are still and always decidedly different.

“A New England Nun” and the short stories and poetry assigned in Week 8 introduce two other schools or types of writing in this very productive and contentious period, regionalism and naturalism. Sometimes treated as evolutions of realism, sometimes as distinctly different, they are fascinating to compare. Regionalism, as the name suggests, is rooted in place. It evokes the character of a small town or countryside and how it has become a powerful force in the values and behavior of the residents. Louisa Ellis’s 15-year engagement to Joe Dagget, while he has been in Australia seeking his fortune, has given her the opportunity to become deeply and happily habituated to her single life. Her garden, her house, her daily rituals and tastes in food and clothing all suit her perfectly and give her calm and tact and dignity. Marriage would destroy them. Similarly, Sylvia in “A White Heron” has identified with the heron and the other birds of the ponds and woods around her grandmother’s farm. Both of these stories, and other regionalist fiction, show that by this time New Englanders like Mary Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett had developed a sense of place comparable to that of the Native Americans whose tales were read earlier. But there is also something universal to these stories. Though they celebrate the manners and values of rural Massachusetts and Maine, they are not just about those places.

A different image of New England emerges in Edward Arlington Robinson’s poems. His characters like Richard Cory and Miniver Cheevy are also solitary and, in their way, independent. The difference is that they are lonely and desperate. Life has passed them by, as it had by that time also deserted the little towns and villages of New England. They are victims of time or fate or just their own habits and illusions, which illustrates a primary

condition of the characters in literary naturalism. Where the major characters in realistic writing are roughly equal to or reflective of their surroundings, and the major characters in regionalism are embodiments of them, the characters in naturalistic literature are inferior to their surroundings. They have been or are being overcome by it and so are usually the victims of it. Robinson might be called both a regionalist and naturalist.

The stories by Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London are examples of a purer American naturalism, but with some interesting additions. Crane's "The Open Boat," is based on his own experience, after a shipwreck off the coast of Florida, a condition in which the ocean is vastly superior in power to the four men. Some have greater strength and experience than others, but that makes little difference. Survival is mostly a matter of luck. Frank Norris's "A Deal in Wheat," however, introduces two levels of character: Sam Lewiston, the Kansas wheat farmer who is a helpless victim of the fluctuations of the market, and the two speculators, Hornung and Truslow, who compete with each other to make enormous sums of money by manipulating prices. They are two supermen, as superior to poor Lewiston as the ocean was to Crane's four sailors. Hornung, by his clever deception, finally outdoes Truslow, but both go on, as Norris says, "jovial, contented, enthroned, and unassailable." As manipulators of the price of wheat, the staff of life, they are, in a perverse way, superior to nature. The figure of a Nietzschean superman intrigued and even obsessed naturalists like Norris, Dreiser, and London. They sought, to use the title of London's short story, "The Law of Life." Dreiser later wrote two novels, *The Financier* and *The Titan* based on the life of the millionaire Charles T. Yerkes, who built the Chicago Loop. If "nature" was a force to which most creatures were inferior, then there must be a few who by embodying nature are the superiors of all others.

The readings in Week 9 are autobiographical writing by contemporaries of the authors of realism, regionalism, and naturalism that does not easily fit into any of these styles. They demonstrate, for one thing, how no single literary or artistic style ever dominates an era. Further, they, along with the stories of Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and other feminists, demonstrate how the issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and immigration took new form and continued to trouble the country. Is the United States a "Melting Pot," as illustrated in Israel Zangwill's popular play of 1908? Or is it "a salad," where different ingredients toss against one another but never break down? Or is it something else?

### *Readings*

Introduction, pp. 2-39

Howells, pp. 51-4

Mark Twain, "Jim Smiley and his Jumping Frog," pp. 61-7

"Old Times on the Mississippi," 71-93

Ambrose Bierce, pp. 122-29

Henry James, from "The Art of Fiction," pp. 47-9

*Daisy Miller*, pp. 130-73

"The Real Thing," pp. 173-93

Sarah Orne Jewett, "A White Heron," pp. 193-202

Mary Wilkins Freeman, "A New England Nun," pp. 202-13

Kate Chopin, "At the Cadian Ball" and "The Storm...," pp. 213-42

Pauline E. Hopkins, "As the Lord Lives..." pp. 241-50

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," pp. 251-65

Edith Wharton, "The Other Two," pp. 279-95

Sui Sin Far, "In the Land of the Free," pp. 296-305

Mary Austin, "The Basket Maker," pp. 305-13

Edward Arlington Robinson, poems, pp. 313-23

Frank Norris, "A Deal in Wheat," pp. 323-33

Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," pp. 334-53

Theodore Dreiser, "Butcher Rogaum's Door," pp. 359-72

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poems, pp. 372-78

Willa Cather, "A Wagner Matinee," pp. 378-87

Jack London, "The Law of Life," pp. 388-94

"Writing 'American' Lives," pp. 397-497 (Jose Marti, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Zitkala-Sa, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Henry Adams, Mary Antin)

### *Questions*

Regional writing is sometimes treated as inferior. Do you think it is or is not? Answer by comparing two regional stories with three other assigned stories in this unit. What are your ultimate criteria for successful and important fiction?

The autobiographical writings assigned in Week 9 are all concerned with the complexities of race and ethnicity in America, whereas the fiction assigned in Weeks 7 and 8 is often concerned with social and economic class. Why is this? Is an author more inclined to be personal and refer to his or her own experience when writing about gender and race? Is class a more subtle subject that is better treated in fiction? Or are there other reasons? Discuss these issues as they appear in two or more works of each kind.

Many of the readings in this unit are protests against the social and economic conditions of the period. But it is often said that “protest literature” is not real literature – that it is simplistic, shrill, didactic, and has limited appeal. Is this true of some of the things you have read? If so, which ones? Are there other stories and poems which do make social criticisms and protests but which are also better literature – better written, more entertaining and instructive and with a greater human appeal? Discuss at least five works.

## Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Literature : Modernism

### Introduction

Modernism in American literature took so many forms that it is hard to define. It was, at least initially, an attempt to break clear of what a new generation called Victorian sentimentality – especially the poetry that was didactic and aimed to be inspiring and heroic. In fiction it generally aimed at greater realism and economy, by being nearer to everyday speech and experience. In drama it sought the same, as opposed to the histrionics of Victorian melodrama and the stale humor of music halls. For all of these new values American writers had European models, such as Rameau and Baudelaire in poetry; Flaubert, Proust, and Joyce in fiction; and Chekhov, Ibsen, and Strindberg in drama.

As the anthology suggests, the poets were perhaps the first American modernists. They were less dependent on the marketplace – there being a very small market – and they had Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell as outspoken, flamboyant leaders and Harriet Monroe as a creative publisher. Pound in the early 1900's was also very eclectic in his tastes, with a genius for spotting many different talents and then promoting them. So universal was his influence and presence, in both Europe and America, that the critic, Richard Ellman, titled his great biography of him *The Pound Era*. Pound was also very eclectic in his reading and the choices of the poets and poetry he imitated and experimented with – from parodies of his English contemporaries to imitations of Latin, Greek, French, Japanese and Chinese. He even made his “Pact” with Walt Whitman and later, despite his infamous fascism and anti-Semitism, won homage from Allen Ginsburg. The title of his essays, *Make It New* (borrowed, paradoxically from Confucius), became like a slogan of the entire modernist movement.

And new came in many different styles, forms, and subjects

Amy Lowell's “Imagism” was one of the first new movements to become popular, though it was later treated as rather silly and passé.

Robert Frost took Edward Arlington Robinson's New England and gave it a wholly new harshness, severity, and universality, by using the understatement and indirection of rural speech, while employing traditional forms and meters.

Pound's closer friend and fellow ex-patriot, “Tom” Eliot, as Pound called him, was also both new and traditional, but in very different ways. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” was the interior monologue (a “love song” never sung) not of a colorful Renaissance Italian like the speakers in Browning's dramatic monologues but of a meek and sensitive modern urbanite. It also shocked the reader with its opening lines comparing the evening to “a patient etherized upon a table.” But it was “The Waste Land” for which Eliot suddenly became most famous – a poem whose title seemed to sum up the cultural condition of Europe and America after the Great War. Its implicit and explicit allusions to other poems invited the reader to compare the dry, infertile, and demeaning present with a more vibrant past. Such references also displayed its debt to English and classical traditions. As Eliot later wrote in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” he believed that a poet should write with all of his literary tradition at his finger tips.

A third friend of Pound's, though rival of Eliot's, was William Carlos Williams, who spent most of his life as a general practitioner in Paterson, New Jersey, while also staying very close to most of the avant garde movements of his time.

Other poets were modern in different ways. Edna St. Vincent Millay epitomized the rebelliousness of witty and outspoken modern women. Carl Sandburg's “Chicago” celebrated the raw energy and power of that “Freight Handler to the Nation” in lines that updated Walt Whitman. E.E. Cummings surprised with his unorthodox typography, pacifism, and resistance to cant. Wallace Stevens's verbal elegance celebrated the power of poetry itself to summon new worlds and orders. Claude McKay mixed the traditional language and form of the sonnet with tributes to Africa and protests against the treatment of Afro-Americans. Langston Hughes used jazz rhythms and vocabulary, in praise of black people and in bitter reflections on their mistreatment.

Modern American fiction represented less of a break with the past, at least initially. Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser were still writing after the Great War and were much admired by the new generation, she for *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and he for *An American Tragedy* (1925). The most radical new writer was Gertrude Stein, who attempted to break up sentences by repetition and contradiction as Picasso and the cubists had broken up pictorial painting. At the same time she imitated the patterns of common speech. This influenced Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway, as readers can realize in turning from “Ada” to the stories from Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Hemingway's “Big Two-Hearted River.” What is further important in Anderson is his gentle

sympathy for his small-town characters, his “grotesques.” Unlike earlier naturalists, he does not treat them as victims, but finds their distortions “amusing, some almost beautiful.” (p. 862)

The influence of Anderson can be felt in both Hemingway and Faulkner, though they accepted it differently and moved on independently. Hemingway used his short sentences and simple vocabulary in order to recover beauty and order and meaning in the post-war wasteland. His heroes also attempted to live by the basic masculine codes of good hunters and fishermen. Faulkner sometimes kept his sentences short and simple, as in “That Evening Sun,” but introduced more dialogue. At other times, as in “Barn Burning” and his later novels, his sentences became as long and complex as uninterrupted, entangled thoughts and feelings.

For all of them, as for Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Hurston, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter and most of their contemporaries, the novel was the most important medium. But they also excelled in short stories. Mass circulation magazines paid extremely well, and little magazines and some monthlies like the *Atlantic* had prestige and encouraged experimentation. Porter’s “Flowering Judas” and Wright’s “Almos’ a Man” are tense and intensely absorbing short stories. Fitzgerald’s “The Ice Palace” is at once very readable popular fiction and a realistic study of character and manners. Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston give us two very different studies of Southern rural character, the one of a determined, heroic elderly Negro lady and the other of affectionate, happy Negro lovers. Jean Toomer’s *Cane* is, like Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, a combination of novel and stories.

Serious modern American drama was dominated by Eugene O’Neill, whose work is too extensive and varied to be represented by just one play. He experimented with all the modern dramatic styles and also tried to adapt classic Greek drama. *The Emperor Jones* is generally described as one of his experiments with symbolic expressionism, in which dream and reality are combined. But it is also a study of ego-maniacal character and underlying fear and insecurity. Susan Glaspell’s *Trifles* is interesting to read with it. Although Glaspell and O’Neill worked together in the Provincetown Players, it is a very different play – realistic, more subtle in its action and clues, and distinctly feminist in its sympathies. From one point of view, it is just a short detective drama. But the irony is that the detectives – male – all strut around, patronize the women, miss the right clues, and end up wrong. It is the two women who slowly put the evidence together. But do they really get to the bottom of the case?

### Reading

#### Poetry

Introduction and critical statements: pp. 538-40; Pound, 542-4; Lowell, 544-8; Eliot, 548-52; Johnson, 553-4; Hughes, 557-61; Frost, 564-6; Williams, 566-9 [26 pp]

Lowell, 575-80

Frost, 581-94

Sandburg, 598-604

Stevens, 605-18

Williams, 626-40

Pound, 641-50

Eliot, 669-97

McKay, 704-9

Millay, 710-6

Cummings, 716-26

Hughes, 752-65

#### Fiction

Introduction and critical statements: pp. 819-27; Anderson, 828-30; Stein, 830-3; Hurston, 839-41; Wright, 843-46 [21 pp]

Stein, “Ada,” 847-51;

Anderson, “The Book of the Grotesque,” “Hands,” “Paper Pills,” 857-68

Porter, “Flowering Judas,” 869-80

Hurston, “The Gilded Six-Bits,” 880-91

Toomer, “Portrait in Georgia,” “Blood-Burning Moon,” “Seventh Street,” 905-15

Fitzgerald, “The Ice Palace,” 915-36

Dos Passos, “Two Portraits,” “Vag,” 937-948

Faulkner, "That Evening Sun," "Barn Burning," 948-76  
Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River," 976-92  
Wright, "Almos' a Man," 1008-20  
Welty, "A Worn Path," 1021-9

#### Drama

Introduction, pp. 773-9  
Glaspell, "Trifles," 780-92  
O'Neill, "Emperor Jones," 792-817

#### *Questions*

Compare and contrast the modernism of two white poets or short story writers with two black writers or poets. What is "modernism" for each and how concerned are they with it? Do they have other concerns like race, region, manners, and study of character that mean more?

Compare and contrast the modernism of two male writers and two female writers, looking at their choices of subject, their styles, and their sympathies.

The early Twentieth Century brought a Southern literary renaissance. Porter, Hurston, Toomer, Faulkner, Wright, and Welty were all southerners, and their subject matter was mainly the South. Write a portrait of the South and Southern characters and concerns as they collectively describe them.

## Late 20<sup>th</sup> century American Literature : Post-Modernism

Defining post-modernism is even more difficult than defining modernism. The number and variety of authors, movements and styles are greater, and many authors and their works break down the previous barriers between the experimental and new (the “elite”) and the popular. Many authors also wrote in two or more genres. Sylvia Plath, for instance, wrote both poetry and autobiographical fiction, both of which later sold widely, although after her death. Norman Mailer, one of the most prominent and controversial authors of the whole period, wrote both best-selling fiction, like *The Naked and the Dead*, his first novel, about World War II, and best-selling non-fiction, like *The Armies of the Night*, his account of the huge October, 1967, peace march on Washington. James Baldwin wrote in three genres – fiction, essays, and drama. All three of these authors, like many others, also are identified with one or more of the social and cultural movements of their time – feminism and the women’s movement, the anti-war movement, civil rights, and gay liberation. As the anthology’s very useful Introductions explain, the paperback revolution that started in the 1940s cut the cost of books and made them more widely available, with the result that literature could become a part of popular culture, although the latter was increasingly dominated by sports, television, films, and the music industry. Any kind of “serious literature,” as it was sometimes called, was likely to be a literature that was culturally critical or that asserted the values of previously unrepresented groups.

Reflective of all this, the final section of *The Bedford Anthology* is not divided by either periods or genres. Instead, it gives us selections from a total of 40 authors in the order of their years of birth, followed by 6 more in a section subtitled “The Contemporary Memoir,” although it is also difficult to define modern memoirs. They could have been included with the others. Thus, we shall study them in roughly the same order, although to make some connections and comparisons, we must also skip around.

One early movement in the poetry of the first post-war decades was called “the new formalism,” in recognition of the fact that poets like Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, and Robert Lowell turned away from the so-called “free verse” of their predecessors and wrote in rhyme, with more attention to conventional meters and greater use of traditional forms like the sonnet, sestina, and villanelle. But their subjects were not so traditional. Roethke wrote the delightful “My Papa’s Waltz” and many more poems about his father and his father’s greenhouse business. Bishop evoked “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” praised “The Armadillo,” and recalled pictures she saw in a *National Geographic* in a dentist’s waiting room, in 1918. Berryman’s *Dream Songs* were, he said, about the musings and reverses of an unheroic “white American in early middle age.” (p. 1129) Robert Lowell, although associated with the new formalists, also became much more autobiographical and political in the 1960s, beginning with *Life Studies*, which contained a prose autobiographical piece, “91 Revere Street.”

Robert Hayden’s “Middle Passage” is not an example of “new formalism.” Nor is it autobiographical. Rather, it illustrates the tendency of black poets and novelists and other minority authors to search their people’s history for better understanding of their suffering, their heroism, and thus the present. It is also interesting that thirty-five years after Hayden’s poem, the story of the revolt on the *Amistad* was made into a movie.

An equal or greater contrast with formalism is Allen Ginsburg’s *Howl*, which seemed in 1955 to be so different that some people began to speak of it as poetry “raw” rather than “cooked.” Ginsburg seemed as revolutionary as Whitman once had. He was also a mystic, like his friend Gary Snyder. But there is order to *Howl* – in its long repetitions of the opening words of lines and in the ways in which lines correspond to the rhythms of speech. It is a poem to be read aloud and as a kind of chant and incantation.

The 1950s are often regarded as a time of complacency, contentment, and conformity. College students of the time were said to belong to “the silent generation.” But a surprising amount of the literature of the late 1940s and ‘50s is, like *Howl*, full of anger and protest. Tillie Olsen’s “I Stand Here Ironing” (1956) is an interior monologue of a woman oppressed by poverty, domesticity, children, and the frustrations trying to find time to write. Ralph Ellison’s story, “The Invisible Man” (1947), an early chapter from his great novel of the same title, tells of the cruel humiliations of young black men at a white men’s smoker. Arthur Miller’s *The Death of a Salesman* (1949) has become a classic tale of the delusions of the middle class businessman. Bernard Malamud’s “The First Seven Years” (1950) is the sad story of an immigrant Jewish shoemaker who wants his daughter to marry “Max the college boy.” James Baldwin’s “Notes of a Native Son” (1955), about his father and his relations with him, ends with his resolution to hold in his mind two conflicting ideas. He must accept the fact that life is unjust, but he must fight injustices “with all one’s strength.” Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” (1953) is a frightening vision of a world in which an ordinary family’s vacation trip ends in an overturned car and senseless murders.

The 1950s were followed by the peace movements and civil rights movements of the 1960s, which produced an outpouring of powerful literature of all kinds. In 1964 Amiri Baraka (then called LeRoi Jones) published his angry play, *The Dutchman*, about a fatal encounter between a young black man and a white woman on a New York subway. Its producer was Edward Albee, author of the absurdist play, *The Sandbox*, and it was staged with a play by Samuel Beckett, one of Albee's models, but its racial rage was radically different from the theater of the absurd. Two years later Alex Haley published *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1966), the electrifying story of how Malcolm Little, a small-time Boston hustler, converted to the Black Muslims while in prison, and became the most prominent of its ministers. It and Baraka's plays, poems, and essays, along with Ellison's *Invisible Man* and the works of James Baldwin soon became part of many college literature courses. White students and their professors sought to understand black experience. Colleges were admitting more black students, and they wished to read more works by black authors.

The example of the black civil rights movement inspired white and black women to probe their experience more deeply, to write about it, and to identify with other women writers, old and new. One of the "new" was Sylvia Plath, who had committed suicide in London in February, 1963. Her first book had been published in 1960, but the poems posthumously published in *Ariel*, like "Daddy," comparing her father to Nazis and herself to "a Jew," seemed to express many women's previously suppressed feelings of rejection and rage.

The poems of Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde are not difficult to read and understand. They are not "obscure," to use the word often applied to earlier twentieth-century poetry. But they do often introduce and develop violent metaphors and associations. Rich's "Trying to Talk with a Man" is set on an atomic testing site in the desert. In "Diving into the Wreck" the poet is a scuba-diver exploring the "wreckage" of old history and mythology.

The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
And the treasures that prevail.

In "Coal" Lorde compares herself to "the total black / being spoken / from the earth's inside." In "Stations" she writes "Some women wait for the right / train in the wrong station" and ends

Some women wait for something  
to change and nothing  
does change  
so they change  
themselves.

Feminist and minority literature was often criticized as inferior to the classics of the older canon. It was being read and taught, traditionalists said, just to be "politically correct." But literary canons change over time, as anyone can see by looking at anthologies of fifty or one hundred years ago. They change with changes in audience, because all people need to read literature by writers like themselves as well as different from themselves. They change as new writers write from new experiences, needs, and desires. And they change with changes in social, economic, and cultural history. John Updike's "A & P" catches the language and values of a super-market checkout boy. David Mamet's short memoir, "The Rake: A Few Scenes from My Childhood," is a scene from late twentieth-century suburbia, not a pretty one, but certainly a believable one. Annie Dillard's childhood was obviously more pleasant, but it is also important to know that her first book, *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*, was a celebration of the common but little seen natural world in Virginia's Roanoke Valley, where she went to college. It was a new kind of nature book. Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" is about soldiers in the Vietnam War. Raymond Carver's short story "Are These the Actual Miles?" is about a couple selling their car, a common enough experience. But Carver's very spare "minimalist" treatment mixes suspicion with loss, making both harder to bear.

But it is perhaps from the later feminist and minority writers that we get the widest views of late twentieth-century America. Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" is not racial protest but racial celebration, like some of the poems of earlier black poets. Leslie Silko, Joy Harjo, and Scott Momaday provide us with more insight into contemporary American Indian life. After recounting miraculous survivals of all kinds, from glaciers and earthquakes to recent shootings, Harjo concisely sums up one of the ironies of Indian life and history in the last stanza of "Anchorage,"

Everyone laughed at the impossibility of it,



but also the truth. Because who would believe  
the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival!  
Those who were never meant

to survive?

Maxine Hong Kingston beguilingly fuses her own experience with traditional Chinese stories. Gary Soto, as a third-generation Mexican-American, describes his courtship of his future wife, a second-generation Mexican-American.

Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" is on the one hand a "post-racial" story because, as the anthology says, "it is never revealed which of the two main characters is black and which is white." On the other hand, because Morrison is black and some of the subject matter is racial, we want to know, and the energy we expend trying to tell may be a sign of how obsessed by race we still are.

### *Readings*

Introduction, pp. 1067-78

Roethke, 1079-87

Bishop, 1088-98

Hayden, 1111-18

Tillie Olsen, 1119-26

Berryman, 1127-33

Ellison, 1134-46

Malamud, 1147-56

Miller, 1174-1252

Lowell, 1250-65

Brooks, 1266-73

Baldwin, 1284-1301

O'Connor, 1301-15

Ginsburg, 1315-27

Ashbery, 1327-32

Albee, 1332-42

Rich, 1342-49

Le Guin, 1349-53

Snyder, 1353-60

Morrison, 1364-80

Plath, 1380-90

Updike, 1390-97

Baraka, 1397-1414

Lorde, 1415-20

DeLillo, 1421-26

Harper, 1427-33

Carver, 1433-41

Anzaldua, 1441-48

Walker, 1448-57

O'Brien, 1457-71

Silko, 1472-81

Hartjo, 1481-87

Dove, 1487-92

Cisneros, 1492-96

Momaday, 1521-28

Kingston, 1528-33

Dillard, 1534-39

Mamet, 1539-43

### *Questions*

As the producer of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Edward Albee must have thought highly of it. How different and how similar is it to Albee's surreal or absurdist play *The Sandbox*? Which is closer in style to Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*?

Discuss the similarities and differences among three of the writers read in this unit –one American Indian, one Afro-American, and one Mexican-American. What are their attitudes towards race and racial prejudice? What use do they make of their race's history.

Autobiography and protest are prominent in a lot of the poetry in this unit – in the poems of Roethke, Bishop, Lowell, Ginsberg, Rich, Plath, and Harjo, to name seven. Choose four of these poets and try to rank them according to how much you identify with the experiences they describe and how powerful or effective you think their protests are.