

En 431: Major American Authors
Willa Cather and William Faulkner: The Agrarian Epic

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Course Description: Detailed reading and analysis of the works of one to four significant American authors in their cultural context. These authors, whose merit has been well established, may excel in fiction poetry, essays, drama, or any combination of those genres. Authors selected for the course will vary according to the instructor. They include but are not limited to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and Flannery O'Connor.

Rationale: Willa Cather and William Faulkner were born in the post-Civil War South, and their twentieth-century works frequently reflect the agrarian nature of their childhood environment. In this course we will explore several of their major works in an attempt to understand the cultural forces that shaped their writing, as well as the connections among the novels and short stories of these two authors. Each created a largely rural setting for many of their novels—Cather's *Red Cloud*, NE and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, MS—wherein they documented and commented on the rapid economical and societal change from agrarian/rural to industrial/urban that the United States was undergoing. In addition to these cultural concerns, we will also discuss the notion that Cather's and Faulkner's agrarian works also adopt the genre of epic, and we will analyze the possible reasons for and the effects of this adoption.

Required Texts: Cather, *O Pioneers!* (1913) Norton edition (2008)

My Antonia (1918)

A Lost Lady (1923) Vintage ed. (1990)

The Professor's House (1925) Vintage ed. (1990)

Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) Vintage ed. (1990)

Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) Vintage ed. (1964)

The Sound and the Fury (1929) Norton ed. (1994)

Absalom Absalom! (1936) Vintage ed. (1990)

The Hamlet (1931) Vintage ed. (1956)

Course Requirements and grade distribution: Weekly 600-700 word responses 15%
1500-1800 word Cather paper 15%
1500-1800 word Faulkner paper 15%
3000-3500 word final paper 20%
Class participation 20%
Take Home Final Exam 15%

Weekly Responses: Our pace will be about a novel a week, though we'll take up to two weeks on some of the more challenging and lengthier novels. Once a week you'll compose a response to that week's work. These responses will usually be due on Friday, and should address some aspect of that week's work or scholarly criticism that interests you. Please do not restate class discussion; you may use it as a starting point, but try to add additional insight.

Papers: For each author I will ask you to write a paper on a topic of your own choosing. Perhaps one or two of your weekly responses will offer you ideas. You will not use outside sources for this paper, just the primary text(s). Ideally you will choose one of these shorter papers to lengthen into your final paper, which will include secondary sources. All of these papers should be in MLA format. I will say more about these papers as the semester progresses. You will submit these three papers to turnitin.com before bringing your hard copy to me. The class id is 2558354 and the password is will.

Attendance and Class Participation: Regular attendance and participation in discussion are required. Excused absences must be officially documented. An excused absence is an absence for a MVC activity, and you must notify me prior to your absence. **Illnesses do not count as excused, even with a doctor's note.** According to College policy, a student is dropped from the course after being absent from two consecutive weeks of class. In this class, after your fifth unexcused absence, 3 percentage points will be deducted from your final grade for each additional absence. Because the success of this course depends on your active engagement, interest, and effort, you must attend class and keep up with the reading. You will receive a grade for your participation, which is above and beyond merely showing up for class (your attendance). Participation means contributing frequently and thoughtfully to class discussion.

Late work: I will not accept late work. Exams, papers, and responses are due on the day listed on the schedule.

Plagiarism: Plagiarized work is unacceptable for a passing grade and earns 0 points. Instances of plagiarism are reported to the Chief Academic Officer. The first instance results in a failing grade on the writing assignment. A second instance results in a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action by the College, up to expulsion.

MVC ADA Statement

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact me immediately. After proper documentation, reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your special needs. On campus, Jamie Gold at ext. 4170 is your resource for this documentation and other ADA assistance. Her office is in Baity 206.

Goals and Competencies (DESE codes follow):

1. To trace the meaning and importance of the works of major American authors in their historical, social, cultural, and intellectual milieu. **PI:** discussion, papers, and examinations. (**MSSC** 3.2, 3.7; **SSSC** 3.2, 3.7)
2. To identify key passages, motifs, and themes of particular works (Standards 1,2,5,8,10)—**PI:** discussions, oral presentation, exams, and paper.
3. To write a critical research essay with documentation according to the accepted **MLA** format. **P.I.:** research paper (E-SSC 3.4, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4) (M-SSC 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7) (S-SSC 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9)
4. To write critically and interpretatively. **PI:** papers. (**MSSC** 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.4; **SSSC** 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.3)

Sampling of References (I will be offering you several more during the semester):

Acocella, Joan. *Willa Cather & the Politics of Criticism*. (2000). On library reserve.
Brown, E.K. *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography*. (1953)

Cather Studies

Lee, Hermione. *Willa Cather: Double Lives*. (1989)

Skaggs, Merrill Maguire. *Axes: Willa Cather and William Faulkner* (2007). On library reserve.

Woodress, James. *WC: A Literary Life*. (1987)

Blotner, Joseph. *Faulkner: A Biography*. 2 vols. (1974)

Porter, Carolyn. *William Faulkner*. (2007)

Towner, Theresa M., ed. *The Cambridge introduction to William Faulkner*. (2008)

Weinstein, Philip, ed. *Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*. (1995)

Faulkner Journal

Faulkner Studies

Schedule of Assignments: Changes to this schedule may be necessary. You are responsible for announcements made during class, even if you are absent.

Jan 9: Introduction to course; *The Road is All*

Week 1

Mon Jan 12: Cather Chronology (in *O Pioneers!* 453-56); "The Sculptor's Funeral" (handout)

Wed Jan 14: "The Marriage of Phaedra," "Paul's Case" (handouts)

Fri Jan 16: *O Pioneers!* (3-78); weekly response due

Week 2

Mon Jan 19: No class

Wed Jan 21: *O Pioneers!* (79-125)

Fri Jan 23: "My First Novels" (178-80), "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" (285-88); Stouck, "Willa Cather and the Epic" (366-73); other articles on epic TBA; weekly response due

Week 3

Mon Jan 26: *My Antonia* (intro and Book I)

Wed Jan 28: *My Antonia* (Books II and III)

Fri Jan 30: *My Antonia* (Books IV and V); weekly response due

Week 4

Mon Feb 2: *A Lost Lady* (Part I)

Wed Feb 4: *A Lost Lady* (Part II)

Fri Feb 6: *The Professor's House* (1-60); weekly response due

Week 5

Feb 9: *The Professor's House* (61-123); reading day

Feb 11: *The Professor's House* (124-184)

Feb 13: *The Professor's House* (184-258); weekly response due

Week 6

Feb 16: scholarship essays TBA

Feb 18: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (through Book II)

Feb 20: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Book III and IV); weekly response due

Week 7

Feb 23: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Book V-VII); reading day

Feb 25: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Book VIII-IX)
Feb 27: **Cather paper due**; intro to Faulkner

Week 8

Mar 2: intro to Faulkner: "Faulkner's America" (in *TSTF* 255-61)
Mar 4: *The Sound and the Fury* (3-48)
Mar 6: *TSTF* (48-113); weekly response due

Week 9

Mar 9: **Midterm Grades Due**, *TSTF* (113-65)
Mar 11: *TSTF* (165-99), Appendix (203-17)
Mar 13: *TSTF* Faulkner's "Introduction" (228-32), Jehlen, "Faulkner's Fiction and Southern Society" (317-24), Skaggs, Ch 4 of *Axes*, "The Sounds Become Fury" (a revised reprinting of "Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*." *Faulkner Journal* 13.1-2 (Fall 1997): 89-99.); weekly response due

March 15-21: Spring Break

Week 10

Mar 23: *Absalom* (3-45)
Mar 25: *Absalom* (46-106)
Mar 27: *Absalom* (107-75); weekly response due

Week 11

Mar 30: *Absalom* (176-234)
April 1: *Absalom* (235-303)
April 3: *The Hamlet* (Book I); weekly response due

Week 12

April 6: *The Hamlet* (Book II)
April 8: *The Hamlet* (Book III); weekly response due
April 10: Good Friday, No Class

Week 13

April 13: *The Hamlet* (Book IV)
April 15: *As I Lay Dying* (pgs 1-64); reading day
April 17: **Faulkner paper due**

Week 14

April 20: *As I Lay Dying* (65-120)
April 22: *As I Lay Dying* (121-184)
April 24: *As I Lay Dying* (185-250); weekly response due

Week 15

April 27: work on paper
April 29: work on paper
May 1: **final paper due**

Final Exam: take home essays due Fri, May 8 at 10am.