

TEXT & KEY:

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women. W.W. Norton, 1985 (NALW)

OPTIONAL TEXTS:

Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Bantam.
Jane Rule, Desert of the Heart. Naiad.
Sheila Ortiz Taylor, Faultline. Naiad.
Alice Walker, The Color Purple. Washington Square Press.
Marge Piercy, Breaking Camp. Wesleyan University Press.
Marge Piercy, Hard Loving. Wesleyan University Press.
Marge Piercy, Circles on the Water. A. Knopf.

GROUND RULES FOR THE COURSE:

1. Exchange phone numbers with 5 members of the class.
2. Use your discussion partner as much as possible to talk over both assigned discussion questions and other aspects of the readings.
3. You are responsible for all material presented in class, even if you are unavoidably absent.
4. Assignments are subject to change. If you miss a class, call a classmate right away to make certain you are doing the correct preparation.
5. Discussion questions may be the basis for unannounced 5-minute quizzes.
6. No single grade necessarily counts. If a student, at the end of the semester has 5 B's, 1 C, and 1 F, the F would probably be ignored in determining the final grade.
7. Papers and reports must be handed in on the date on which they are due. Penalties are attached to unexcused late papers.
8. All rules are subject to appeal. If you feel any assignments are unfair, let me know right away.
9. Extra copies of all handouts are placed in an envelope marked "L207" outside my office door (N424). If you lose a handout, or if you are absent, pick up another at anytime. I bring handouts to class only once.
10. I am available in my office (N424) at posted hours and by appointment for additional discussion and for any individual problems with the course. If something bothers you, see me right away. Don't waste time worrying.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Unit One: BLACK WOMEN

SEP 3 First Class Meeting. Anyone missing this class must listen to the tape in the library (on reserve).

SEP 8 Phyllis Wheatley, NALW, pp. 132-135.
Sojourner Truth, NALW, pp. 252-256.
Linda Brent, NALW, pp. 752-758.
Frances E.W. Harper, pp. 829-834.
Harriet E. Adams Wilson, NALW, pp. 834-839.
Zora Neale Hurston, NALW, pp. 1637-1653.

DISCUSSION:

1. Which two of the assigned readings did you find most interesting, and why?
2. Which two of the assigned readings did you like most, and why?
3. Which of the readings did you like least, and why?
4. The short introductions to each author are by Gilbert and Gubar. Did you find them helpful, useless, interesting, or what?

SEP 10 Margaret Walker, NALW, pp. 1824-1829.
Gwendolyn Brooks, NALW, pp. 1852-1861.
Maya Angelou, NALW, pp. 2001-2007.
Lorraine Hansberry, NALW, pp. 2056-2067.

DISCUSSION:

1. In Margaret Walker's "lineage," how does her use of the verse line fit the poem's message?
2. Which of Gwendolyn Brooks's poems did you like the best, and why?
3. To what extent do you sympathize with or identify with (a) the author and (b) Momma in the excerpt from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings?
4. What is the tone of the opening paragraph of Lorraine Hansberry's essay? What points does she make in the essay?

SEP 15 Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, NALW, pp. 2067-2119.

DISCUSSION:

1. The first three sections (pp. 2068-69) are set up in different type. What do those sections suggest about a young black girl's learning to read?
2. In the first paragraph of the italicized section on p. 2069, how does the narrator relate Pecola's baby to the marigolds?
3. What does the italicized section (2069-70) say about hope, fear, lust, love, and grief?

SEP 15 -- CONTINUED...

SEP 15 - CONTINUED

4. Is the first sentence of the section "Autumn" (p. 2070) a good sentence? Why, or why not?
5. From whose point of view is the "Autumn" section written? (pp. 2070-2084.)
6. On pp. 2084, 2087, & 2092, insets in capital letters or italics are followed by changes in point of view. Identify the narrator for each of those sections.
7. What interests you about the first paragraph on p. 2100? Is it a good paragraph to open a section entitled "Winter?" Would the second paragraph have been a better opening paragraph? Why did Morrison open with her first rather than her second paragraph?
8. What is the point of view for the opening of "Winter," and where does it change?
9. Make a list of the major characters and indicate what their relationships to each other are.

SEP 17 Morrison, NALW, pp. 2119-2127.

DISCUSSION:

10. Is spring, as described on p. 2119, a happy and hopeful season? Why, or why not?
11. What incidents described in today's assigned reading appear differently when viewed with adult eyes?

SEP 22 Morrison, NALW, pp. 2127-2183.

DISCUSSION:

12. How important is style in the novel as a whole? What aspects of Morrison's style appeal to you?
13. What is the significance of the title of the novel?
14. What role does nature play in the novel? What role do the seasons play?
15. To what degree are the characters of the novel interesting or engaging?
16. Is there anything about the novel that you feel is memorable? Explain.

SEP 24 PAPER #1 To be assigned.

- SEP 29 Alice Dunbar-Nelson, NALW, pp. 1336-37.
Audre Lorde, NALW, pp. 2249-2255.
Lucille Clifton, NALW, pp. 2255-2260.
Toni Cade Bambara, NALW, pp. 2307-2312.
Alice Walker, NALW, pp. 2365-2382.

DISCUSSION:

1. How do the figures of diamond and coal operate in Audre Lorde's poem "Coal?"
2. Which poem of Audre Lorde's do you like the best, and why?
3. How does the Generation Gap operate in Toni Cade Bambara's "My Man Bovane?"
4. Make a list of the characters in Bambara's story. Using a scale of 0-5, indicate the degree to which the reader is expected to sympathize with each character. 0 indicates no sympathy and 5, the most sympathy.
5. Judging from "My Man Bovane," what would you say is the author's attitude toward the black power movement?
6. From whose point of view is Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" told? Was it a good choice? Explain.
7. What attitudes do the different characters in the Walker story exhibit toward quilts?
8. Is "Everyday Use" a good story? Why, or why not?

COME PREPARED TO STATE WHICH BOOK YOU HAVE CHOSEN FOR YOUR BOOK REPORT.

Unit Two: LESBIAN WRITERS

Note: The definition of "lesbian" is far from cut-and-dry. It varies considerably with the definers. For the purpose of L207, writers involved in "Boston marriages" are classified as lesbian. Unless the writer herself claims that label (as did Radclyffe Hall, Adrienne Rich, Judy Grahn and others), we should be conscious of its somewhat tenuous nature. Also note that Anais Nin, who freely writes about sexual relationships with other women, would probably not classify herself as lesbian.

- OCT 1 Sarah Orne Jewet, NALW, "The Town Poor," pp. 980-991.

DISCUSSION:

1. From what point of view is the story told?
2. How does the story raise the question of social responsibility?
3. Who is responsible for the Brays, and why?

- OCT 6 Willa Cather, "Coming Aphrodite!" NALW, pp. 1256-90.
Amy Lowell, NALW, pp. 1295-1304.
Anais Nin, From "The Diary of Anais Nin," NALW, pp. 1686-1694.

DISCUSSION:

1. Keep track of the points of view in all the fiction you read.
2. In "Coming Aphrodite!" what was Hedger's message in the story he told--as it becomes evident to Eden Bower on p. 1282?
3. Does Cather use Caesar's point of view effectively on p. 1284?
4. Is the generalization that opens section VI on p. 1284 true or not?
5. On p. 1285, two points of view are played off against each other. What are the two points of view, and how effective is Cather's device?
6. What is the meaning of the comment, "One doesn't like to have been an utter fool, even at twenty" on p. 1290?
7. What do the metaphors say in the final paragraph of Cather's story? Why does Cather use symbolism rather than direct statement?
8. What is Caesar's function in the story?
9. What is Cather's story about (its subject matter)?
10. What does Cather's story say (its meaning)?
11. Does "Coming, Aphrodite!" have universality?
12. Of Amy Lowell's four love poems written to Ada Russell ("The Letter, "Venus Transiens," "Madonna of the Evening Flowers," and "Opal,"), which do you find the most artful and why? Which do you like the most, and why?
13. How are the ideas structured in Lowell's poem "The Sisters?"
14. Are you surprised, disappointed, pleased, indignant, thrilled or what to see Amy Lowell grouped with other lesbian writers? Explain.
15. Why does Anais Nin have such differing impressions of June Miller in the former's diary entries?
16. Notice how Nin uses lists--of adjectives, nouns, or other syntactical elements. Be prepared to give at least two examples, and to explain whether or not each list is effective. If it is, what makes it effective? If it isn't, why isn't it?
17. Is Nin's encounter with June on pp. 1690-92 convincing as an account of two people in love? Explain.
18. What are Nin's ideas about gender and creativity, and to what degree to you disagree with her?
19. Is Nin in your view a powerful writer? Why, or why not?

- OCT 8 PAPER #2 To be assigned

- OCT 13 Gertrude Stein, "The Gentle Lena," NALW, pp. 1307-1332.
"Picasso" & "Ada," pp. 1332-1336.
Radclyffe Hall, "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself," NALW, pp. 1442-1457.
May Sarton, Poems, NALW, pp. 1771-1777.
Joanna Russ, "When It Changed," NALW, pp. 2261-2269.

DISCUSSION:

1. Make a list of the unconventional uses of language and style that you find in "The Gentle Lena."
2. Does the style change as "The Gentle Lena" progresses?
3. What effects do you think Stein is aiming at, and does she achieve them in the story?
4. How would you describe Stein's essay "Picasso" to someone who hasn't read it?
5. Lesbians of Gertrude Stein's day often wrote in code. Do you find any coded references to her lesbianism in "Ada?"
6. Do you find any examples of sex-role stereotyping in "Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself" on p. 1445?
7. What do you make of Miss Ogilvy's comment, "My God! If only I were a man!" on p. 1446?
8. How do you feel about the character Miss Ogilvy? Is she interesting, attractive, unattractive, someone you would like to know, or what?
9. What is Radclyffe Hall's story about (its subject matter)?
10. What is the meaning of Hall's story?
11. Analyze the thought-structure of Sarton's "My Sisters, O My Sisters."
12. What is the role of silence in "The Muse as Medusa?"
13. In Joanna Russ's story, what are the ways in which Whileaway differs from Earth?
14. What do you find attractive and what unattractive about life on Whileaway?
15. What points is Russ's story making about contemporary life?

- OCT 15 ALL MUST ATTEND: MIDTERM EXAM WILL BE DESCRIBED

Judy Grahn, NALW pp. 2335-37.

DISCUSSION:

1. How much do you learn about Ella in the 23 lines of verse Grahn gives her? Is the poem a good portrait? Do you feel a prose description would have been fuller or better? Explain.
2. How "common" is Nadine? Is Grahn's simile "as common as a nail" appropriate? Explain.

OCT 20 Adriene Rich, NALW, pp. 2023-2056.

DISCUSSION:

1. Which poems are written from the view-point of a fictitious persona, and which poems are autobiographical?
2. Does Rich prefer her early or her later poems, and why?
3. Do you agree with Rich's evaluations of her poems, both in general and in specific?
4. Was it a good idea, in your view, for Rich to use herself as a specific example of a woman writer? What was she trying to illustrate, and did she succeed? Explain.
5. Which poems do you like the best, and why?
6. Which poems do you like the least, and why?

OCT 22 MIDTERM EXAMINATION. ALL MUST ATTEND. OPEN BOOK.
Don't forget to bring your text!

Unit Three: Nineteenth Century and Early Modern Writers

OCT 27 Margaret Fuller, from Woman in the Nineteenth Century, NALW, pp. 293-309.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Minister's Housekeeper," NALW, pp. 333-343.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, NALW, pp. 343-347.

Elizabeth Drew Stoddard, "Lermorne versus Huell," NALW, pp. 814-829.

Emily Dickinson

"There's a certain Slant of light," p. 844.

"I felt a Funeral in my Brain," p. 845.

"After great pain, a formal feeling comes," p. 847.

"The Soul has Bandaged moments," p. 852.

"I dwell in Possibility," p. 856.

"A narrow Fellow in the Grass," p. 861.

"Tell all the Truth but tell it slant," p. 862.

Letter # 268, p. 872.

DISCUSSION:

1. Make a list of the issues presented by Margaret Fuller that you feel are relevant today.
2. What advantages does Stowe enjoy by having her story told through the eyes of Sam Lawson? What disadvantages?
3. Does Stowe use dialect effectively? Illustrate.
4. What valid points do you feel Stanton makes in her "Address...?"
5. What adjectives would you use to describe the conversation on p. 827? Does the story prepare you for that conversation?
6. In what ways(s) do you find the ending of Stoddard's story ironic? Is the ending well executed?
7. Emily Dickinson was far ahead of her time in her use of language. She is, indeed, the first modernist in the English language. In reading her poems, pick out a few examples of words or ideas used in unusual ways.

OCT 29 Louisa May Alcott, from Work, NALW, pp. 935-947.

DISCUSSION:

1. What does Christie learn from Hepsey?
2. How does irony function in the excerpt from Work?

NOV 3 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," 1146-1161.
Kate Chopin, The Awakening, I-XVI, pp. 991-1039.

DISCUSSION (Gilman):

1. What are the limitations of the narrator, and do they become more or less pronounced as the story unfolds?
2. Are you more sympathetic to John or to his wife, and why?
3. How artfully does Gilman handle the figure of wallpaper in the story?
4. Why is the choice of such a narrator an unlikely one? Would you have told the story from another point of view? Would your story have been as good as Gilman's?
5. Is the story told economically? That is, is there anything in the story that could have been omitted?

DISCUSSION (Chopin):

1. Describe Mr. Pontellier's character from I-II. From III.
2. How is self-centeredness an issue in II and III?
3. Do the Pontelliers have a good marriage in I-III?
4. Why does Mrs. Pontellier cry in III?
5. What differences between Mr. & Mrs. Pontellier are introduced in IV, and are they important?
6. Describe Mrs. Pontellier's character in I-IV.
7. What happens in VI?
8. What is the point of view in VI? Is it the same for the other sections? How would you describe the TONE of VI?
9. What kind of mother is Mrs. Pontellier in I-VII?
10. Do you detect a playful tone anywhere in the novel?
11. How is swimming significant for Edna in X?
12. What happens in XI?
13. What happens in XII?
14. How does Robert's leaving effect Edna?

NOV 5 Chopin, XVII-XX, pp. 1039-1050.

DISCUSSION:

15. How does Edna find life in New Orleans in XVII?
16. Why does Edna think so much about Robert in XVIII?
17. What happens in XIX? Why does Mr. Pontellier fail to see that Edna "was becoming herself...?"

NOV 10 Chopin, XXI-XXXIX, pp. 1050-1102.

DISCUSSION:

18. To what extent do you sympathize with each of the major characters in the novel?
19. How do you interpret the ending of the novel?
20. What is the meaning of the novel's title, and how does it relate to the ending?
21. What are the functions of Madame and Monsieur Ratignolle in the novel?
22. How significant is the novel for a contemporary audience?
23. To what degree do you think the novel will be memorable in your lifetime?

NOV 12 PAPER #3 TO BE ASSIGNED.

NOV 17 Edith Wharton, "The Other Two," NALW, pp. 1167-70, 1184-1199.
Anna Hempstead Branch, Sonnets, NALW, pp. 1337-1339.
Edna St. Vincent Millay, Poems, pp. 1553-1569.

Unit Four: Moderns and Contemporaries

NOV 19 Meridel Le Seur, "Annunciation," pp. 1627-1637.
Dorothy Parker, Verse and "You Were Perfectly Fine," pp. 1599-1606.

NOV 24 Attendance required.

Elinor Wylie, pp. 1407-08.
"The Eagle and the Mole," pp. 1408-09.
"Let No Charitable Hope," p. 1412.
H.D., pp. 1457-65; "Helen," pp. 1467-68.
Louise Bogan, pp. 1609-1613 (top).
Muriel Rukeyser, pp. 1778-1788.
Denise Levertov, pp. 1941-1947.
Anne Sexton, pp. 1991-2001.

Be prepared to comment on at least three poems--in any way you choose.

NOV 26 REPORTS DUE

DEC 1 Susan Glaspell, Trifles, NALW, pp. 1388-1399.
Lillian Hellman, from Pentimento, NALW, pp. 1704-1710.
Grace Paley, "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute," NALW, pp. 1918-1931.
Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman," pp. 2337-2347.

WRITE OUT a few sentences on each of these works (to read in class) stating what you feel is important about each. Not to hand in, but recitations will be graded. NOTE: STATEMENTS SHOULD BE CONCISE. Volubility will count against you.

DEC 3 Susan Griffin, "I Like to Think of Harriet Tubman," pp. 2363-2365.
Marge Piercy, Poems, pp. 2258-2261.
Margaret Atwood, Poems, pp. 2291-2299.

DEC 8 LAST CLASS. All must attend. All missing work due.

Tille Olsen, "Tell Me a Riddle," pp. 1788-1820.

Anzia Yezierska, "Fat of the Land," pp. 1423-1442.

DEC 17 10 A.M. - 12 NOON FINAL EXAMINATION