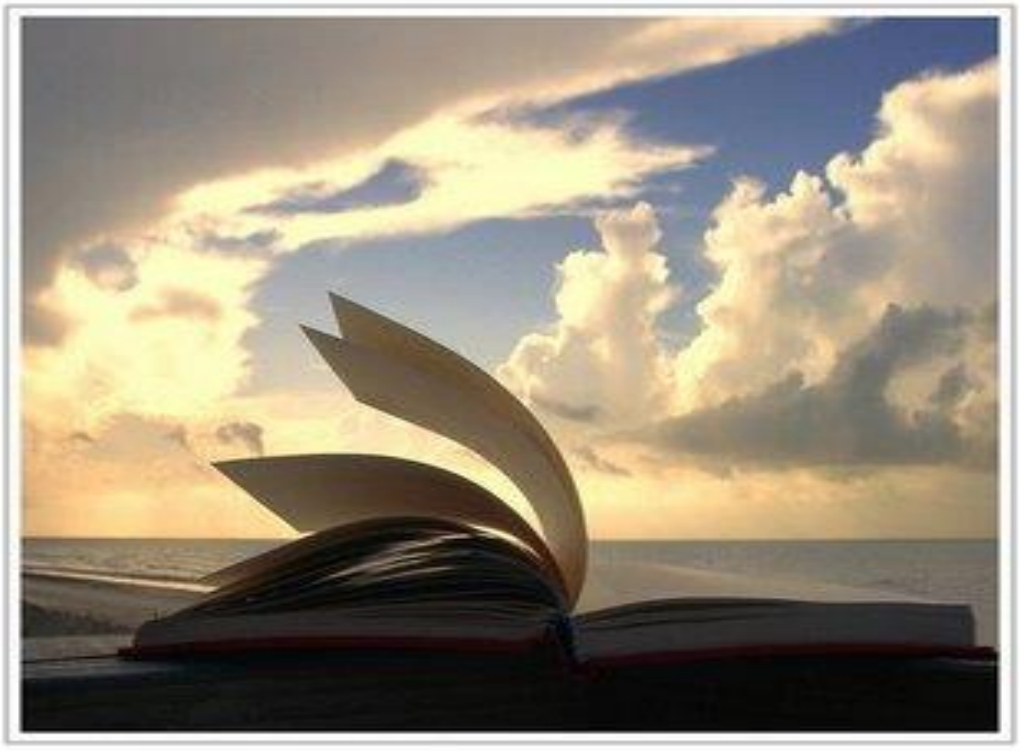
King Faisal University

Deanship of E-Learning & Distance Education

Department of English Language



Course: Introduction to American literature (EL 487)

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Course Contents: Additional Material

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American literature

American literature is literature in English produced in what is now the United States of America.

Colonial Literature

American writing began with the work of English adventurers and colonists in the New World chiefly for the benefit of readers in the mother country. Some of these early works reached the level of literature, as in the robust and perhaps truthful account of his adventures by Captain John Smith and the moderate, argumentative journalistic histories of John Winthrop and William Bradford in New England. From the beginning, however, the literature of New England was also directed to the enlightenment and instruction of the colonists themselves, intended to direct them in the ways of the godly.

The first work published in the Puritan colonies was the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), and the whole effort of the divines who wrote furiously to set forth their views—among them Roger Williams and Thomas Hooker—was to defend and promote visions of the religious state.

A New Nation and a New Literature

The approach of the American Revolution and the achievement of the actual independence of the United States was a time of intellectual activity as well as social and economic change. The men who were the chief molders of the new state included excellent writers, among them Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. They were well supported by others such as Philip Freneau, the first American lyric poet of distinction and an able journalist.

The variously gifted Benjamin Franklin forwarded American literature not only through his own writing but also by founding and promoting newspapers and periodicals. The first American novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), by William Hill Brown, only shortly preceded the Gothic romance, *Wieland* (1799), by the first professional American novelist, Charles Brockden Brown.

Recognition in Europe, and especially in England, was coveted by every aspiring American writer and was first achieved by two men from New York: Washington Irving, who first won attention by presenting American folk stories, and James Fenimore Cooper, who wrote enduring tales of adventure on the frontier and at sea.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau stood at the center of transcendentalism, a movement that made a deep impression upon their native land and upon Europe. High-mindedness, moral earnestness, the desire to reform society and education, the assertion of a philosophy of the individual as superior to tradition and society.

Far removed from these humorists in spirit and style was Edgar Allan Poe, whose skilled and emotional poetry, clearly expressed aesthetic theories, and tales of mystery and horror won for him a more respectful audience in Europe than—originally, at least—in America. A number of seminal works of American literature were written during the 1850s. These include Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), depicting the gloomy atmosphere of early Puritanism; Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), which infused into an adventure tale of whaling days profound symbolic significance.

The Literature of a Split and a Reunited Nation

The rising conflict between the North and the South that ended in the Civil War was reflected in regional literature. While the Civil War was taking its unavoidable course, the case for reunion was set forth by President Abraham Lincoln in that purest and most exact statement of American political ideals, the Gettysburg Address.

Once the war was over, literature gradually regained a national identity amid expanding popularity, as writings of regional origin began to find a mass audience. The stories of the California gold fields by Bret Harte, the rustic novel (*The Hoosier Schoolmaster* ; 1871) of Edward Eggleston, the rhymes of James Whitcomb Riley, the New England genre stories of Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, the sketches of Louisiana by George W. Cable, even the romance of the Old South woven by the poetry of Henry Timrod and Sidney Lanier and the fiction of Thomas Nelson Page—all were seized eagerly by the readers of the reunited nation. The outstanding example of genius overcoming any regionalism in scene can be found in many of the works of MarkTwain, most notably in his *Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

Drama after the Civil War and into the 20th cent. continued to rely, as it had before, on spectacles, on the plays of Shakespeare, and on some of the works of English and Continental playwrights. A few popular plays such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Rip Van Winkle* were based on American fiction.

The Turn of the Century

Trends in American Fiction

The connection of American literature with writing in England and Europe was again stressed by William Dean Howells, who was not only an able novelist but an instructor in literary realism to other American writers. Though he himself had leanings toward social reform, Howells did encourage what has come to be called "genteel" writing, long dominant in American fiction. The mold for this sort of writing was broken by the American turned Englishman, Henry James, who wrote of people of the upper classes but with such psychological penetration, subtlety of narrative, and complex technical skill that he is recognized as one of the great masters of fiction. His influence was quickly reflected in the novels of Edith Wharton and others and continued to grow in strength in the 20th cent.

American Verse

Since the mid-19th cent. American poetry had tended to empty saccharine verse—with the startling exception of the Amherst recluse, Emily Dickinson, whose terse, precise, and enigmatic poems, published in 1890, after her death, placed her immediately in the ranks of major American poets. A revolution in poetry was announced with the founding in 1912 of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, edited by Harriet Monroe. It published the work of Ezra Pound and the proponents of imagism, John Gould Fletcher, and their English associates, all declaring against romantic poetry and in favor of the exact word.

Meanwhile, other poets moved along their own paths: Edwin Arlington Robinson, who wrote dark, brooding lines on humankind in the universe; Edgar Lee Masters, who used free verse for realistic biographies in *A Spoon River Anthology* (1915).

The Lost Generation and After

The years immediately after World War I brought a highly vocal rebellion against established social, sexual, and aesthetic conventions and a vigorous attempt to establish new values. Young artists flocked to Greenwich Village, Chicago, and San Francisco, determined to protest and intent on making a new art. Others went to Europe, living mostly in Paris as expatriates. They willingly accepted the name given them by Gertrude Stein: the lost generation. Out of their disillusion and rejection, the writers built a new literature, impressive in the glittering 1920s and the years that followed.

Romantic clichés were abandoned for extreme realism or for complex symbolism and created myth. Language grew so frank that there were bitter quarrels over censorship, as in the troubles about James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*(1919). Out of this highly active boiling of new ideas and new forms came writers of recognizable stature in the world, among them Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck,.

Eugene O'Neill came to be widely considered the greatest of the dramatists the United States has produced. Other writers also enriched the theater with comedies, social reform plays, and historical tragedies. The social drama and the symbolic play were further developed by Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams.

By the 1960s the influence of foreign movements was much felt with the development of "off-Broadway" theater. One of the new playwrights who gained special notice at the time was Edward Albee, whose later works again attracted attention in the 1990s.

Poetry after World War I was largely dominated by T. S. Eliot and his followers, who imposed intellectuality and a new sort of classical form that had been urged by his fellow expatriate Ezra Pound. Eliot was also highly influential as a literary critic and contributed to making the period 1920–60 one that was to some extent dominated by literary analysts and promoters of various warring schools.

In this period humor left far behind the broadness of George Ade's *Fables* (1899) for the acrid satire of Ring Lardnerand the highly polished style of Robert Benchley and James Thurber. The South still produced superb writers, notably Carson McCullers, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and Eudora Welty, whose works, while often grotesque, were also compassionate and humorous.

Poetry

T S Eliot

Eliot was born an American, moved to the United Kingdom in 1914 (at the age of 25), and became a British subject in 1927 at the age of 39.

The Waste Land

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (November 5, 1850 – October 30, 1919) was an American author and poet. Her best-known work was *Poems of Passion*. Her most enduring work was "Solitude", which contains the lines, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone". Her autobiography, *The Worlds and I*, was published in 1918, a year before her death.

Love Is Enough

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Love is enough. Let us not ask for gold.
Wealth breeds false aims, and pride and selfishness;
In those serene, Arcadian days of old
Men gave no thought to princely homes and dress.
The gods who dwelt on fair Olympia's height
Lived only for dear love and love's delight.
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we care for fame?
Ambition is a most unpleasant guest:
It lures us with the glory of a name
Far from the happy haunts of peace and rest.
Let us stay here in this secluded place
Made beautiful by love's endearing grace!
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we strive for power?
It brings men only envy and distrust.
The poor world's homage pleases but an hour,
And earthly honours vanish in the dust.
The grandest lives are ofttimes desolate;
Let me be loved, and let who will be great.
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we ask for more?
What greater gift have gods vouchsafed to men?
What better boon of all their precious store
Than our fond hearts that love and love again?
Old love may die; new love is just as sweet;
And life is fair and all the world complete:
Love is enough!

Drama

Edward Albee

Born on March 12, 1928, in Washington, D.C., **Edward Albee** was adopted as an infant by Reed Albee, the son of Edward Franklin Albee, a powerful American Vaudeville producer. Brought up in an atmosphere of great affluence, he clashed early with the strong-minded Mrs. Albee who attempted to mold him into a respectable member of the Larchmont, New York social scene. But the young Albee refused to be bent to his mother's will, choosing instead to associate with artists and intellectuals whom she found, at the very least, objectionable.

At the age of twenty, Albee moved to New York's Greenwich Village where he held a variety of odd jobs including office boy, record salesman, and messenger for Western Union before finally hitting it big with his 1959 play, *The Zoo Story*, the story of a drifter who acts out his own murder with the unwitting aid of an upper-middle-class editor. Along with other early works such as The Sandbox (1959) and The American Dream (1960), The Zoo Story effectively gave birth to American absurdist drama. Albee was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and labeled as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Eugene O'Neill. He is, however, probably more closely related to the likes of such European playwrights as Beckett and Harold Pinter. Although they may seem at first glance to be realistic, the surreal nature of Albee's plays is never far from the surface. His best known play is *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

Albee describes his work as "an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against the fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen."

The Sandbox

by Edward Albee

A Brief Play, in Memory of My Grandmother (1876-1959)

Players:

The Young Man, 25, a good-looking, well-built boy in a bathing suit

Mommy, 55, a well-dressed, imposing woman

Daddy, 60, a small man; gray, thin

Grandma, 86, a tiny, wizened woman with bright eyes

The Musician, no particular age, but young would be nice

Note. When, in the course of the play, Mommy and Daddy call each other by these names, there should be no suggestion of regionalism. These names are of empty affection and point up the pre-senility and vacuity of their characters.

Scene. A bare stage, with only the following: Near the footlights, far stage right, two simple chairs set side by side, facing the audience; near the footlights, far stage left, a chair facing stage right with a music stand before it; farther back, and stage center, slightly elevated and raked, a large child's sandbox with a toy pail and shovel; the background is the key, which alters from brightest day to deepest night.

At the beginning, it is brightest day; the Young Man is alone on stage to the rear of the sandbox, and to one side. He is doing calisthenics; he does calisthenics until quite at the very end of the play. These calisthenics, employing the arms only, should suggest the beating and fluttering of wings. The Young Man is, after all, the Angel of Death.

Mommy and Daddy enter from stage left, Mommy first.

Mommy Well, here we are; this is the beach.

Daddy (whining) I'm cold.

Mommy (dismissing him with a little laugh) Don't be silly; it's as warm as toast. Look at that nice young man over there: he doesn't think it's cold (waves to the Young Man) Hello.

Young Man (with an endearing smile) Hi!

Mommy (looking about) This will do perfectly…don't you think so, Daddy? There's sand there…and the water beyond. What do you think, Daddy?

Daddy (vaguely) Whatever you say, Mommy.

Mommy (with a little laugh) Well, of course…whatever I say, Then it's settled, is it?

Daddy (shrugs) She's ***your*** mother, not mine.

Mommy I know she's my mother. What do you take me for? (a pause) All right, now; let's get on with it. (She shouts into the wings, stage-left) You! Out there! You can come in now (The Musician enters, seats himself in the chair, stage-left, places music on the music stand, is ready to play. Mommy nods approvingly.) Very nice; very nice. Are you ready, Daddy? Let's go get Grandma.

Daddy Whatever you say, Mommy.

Mommy (leading the way out, stage-left) Of course, whatever I say. (To the Musician) You can begin now. (The Musician begins playing; Mommy and Daddy exit; the Musician, all the while playing, nods to the Young Man.)

Young Man (with the same endearing smile) Hi! (After a moment, Mommy and Daddy re-enter, carrying Grandma. She is borne in by their hands under her armpits; she is quite rigid; her legs are drawn up; her feet do not touch the ground; the expression on her ancient face is that of puzzlement and fear.)

Daddy Where do we put her?

Mommy (with a little laugh) Wherever I say, of course. Let me see…well…all right, over there…in the sandbox. (pause) Well, what are you waiting for, Daddy? … The sandbox! (Together they carry Grandma over to the sandbox and more or less dump her in.)

Grandma (righting herself to a sitting position; her voice a cross between a baby's laugh and cry) Ahhhhhh! Graaaaa!

Daddy What do we do now?

Mommy (to the Musician) You can stop now. (the Musician stops.) (Back to Daddy) What do you mean, what do we do now? We go over there and sit down, of course. (to the Young Man) Hello there.

Young Man (smiling) Hi! (Mommy and Daddy move to the chairs, stage-right, and sit down)

Grandma (same as before) Ahhhhh! Ah-haaaaaaa! Graaaaaa!

Daddy Do you think…do you think she's…comfortable?

Mommy (impatiently) How would I know?

Daddy What do we do now?

Mommy We…wait. We…sit here…and we wait…that's what we do.

Daddy Shall we talk to each other?

Mommy Well, ***you*** can talk, if you want to…if you can think of anything to say…if you can think of anything new.

Daddy (thinks) No…I suppose not.

Mommy (with a triumphant laugh) Of course not!

Grandma (banging the toy shovel against the pail) Haaaaa! Ah-haaaaaa!

Mommy Be quiet, Grandma…just be quiet, and wait. (Grandma throws a shovelful of sand at Mommy.) She's throwing sand at me! You stop that, Grandma; you stop throwing sand at Mommy! (to Daddy) She's throwing sand at me. (Daddy looks around at Grandma, who screams at him.)

Grandma GRAAAAAA!

Mommy Don't look at her. Just …sit here…be very still…and wait. (to the Musician) You…uh…you can go ahead and do whatever it is you do (The Musician plays. Mommy and Daddy are fixed, staring out beyond the audience. Grandma looks at them, looks at the Musician, looks at the sandbox, throws down the shovel.)

Grandma Ah-haaaaaa! Graaaaaaa! (Looks for reaction; gets none. Now…she speaks directly to the audience) Honestly! What a way to treat an old woman! Drag her out of the house…stick her in a car….bring her out here from the city….dump her in a pile of sand…and leave her here to set. I'm eighty-six years old! I was married when I was seventeen. To a farmer. He died when I was thirty. (To the Musician) Will you stop that, please? (The Musician stops playing). I'm a feeble old woman…how do you expect anybody to hear me over that peep! Peep! Peep! (to herself) There's no respect around here. (to the Young Man)There's no respect around here!

Young Man (smiles) Hi!

Grandma (continues to the audience) My husband died when I was thirty, and I had to raise that big cow over there (indicates mommy) all by my lonesome. You can imagine what ***that*** was like. Lordy! (to the Young Man) Where'd they get ***you***?

Young Man Oh…I've been around for a while.

Grandma I'll bet you have! Heh, heh, heh. Will you look at you!

Young Man (flexing his muscles) Isn't that something?

Grandma Boy, oh boy; I'll say. Pretty good.

Young Man (sweetly) I'll say.

Grandma Where ya from?

Young Man Southern California.

Grandma Figgers; figgers. What's your name, honey?

Young Man I don't know…

Grandma (to the audience) Bright, too!

Young Man I mean…I mean, they haven't given me one yet…the studio…

Grandma (giving him the once-over) You don't say…you don't say. Well…uh, I've got to talk some more…don't you go 'way.

Young Man Oh, no.

Grandma (turning her attention to the audience) Fine; fine. (then back once more to the Young Man) You're…you're an actor, huh?

Young Man (beaming) Yes, I am.

Grandma (to audience again) I'm smart that way. Anyhow, I had to raise … ***that*** over there all by my lonesome; and what's next to her there…that's what she married. Rich? I tell you…money, money, money. They took me off the farm…which was real decent of them…and they moved me into the big town house with ***them***…fixed a nice place for me under the stove…gave me an army blanket…and my own dish…my very own dish! So, what have I got to complain about? Nothing, of course! I'm not complaining. (She looks up at the sky, shouts to someone off stage) Shouldn't it be getting dark now, dear? (the lights dim; night comes on. The musician begins to play; it becomes deepest night. There are spotlights on all the players, including the Young Man, who is, of course, continuing his calisthenics.)

Daddy. It's nighttime.

Mommy Shhhhh. Be still…wait.

Daddy (whining) It's so hot.

Mommy Shhhhhhh. Be still….wait.

Grandma (to herself) That's better. Night. (to the musician) Honey, do you play all through this part? (the musician nods). Well, kept it nice and soft; that's a good boy. That's nice.

Daddy (starting) What was that?

Mommy (beginning to weep) It was nothing.

Daddy It was….it was…thunder…or a wave breaking…or something.

Mommy (whispering, through her tears) It was an off-stage rumble,…and you know what ***that*** means.

Daddy I forget…

Mommy (barely able to talk) It means the time has come for poor Grandma … and I can't bear it!

Daddy I…I suppose you've got to be brave.

Grandma (mocking) That's right, kid; be brave. You'll bear up; you'll get over it. (offstage: another rumble…louder)

Mommy Ohhhhhhhhhh…poor Grandma….poor Grandma…

Grandma (to mommy) I'm fine! I'm all right! It hasn't happened yet! (offstage: violent rumble; all lights go out, save the spot on the young Man; musician stops playing)

Mommy Ohhhhhhhh. . . Ohhhhhhhhhhh……. (silence)

Grandma Don't put the lights up yet…I'm not ready; I'm not quite ready. (silence) All right, dear…I'm about done. (the lights come up again, to the brightest day; the musician begins to play. Grandma is discovered, still in the sandbox, lying on her side, propped up on an elbow, half covered, busily shoveling sand over herself.)

Grandma (muttering) I don't know how I'm supposed to do anything with this god-damn toy shovel…

Daddy Mommy! It's daylight!

Mommy (brightly) It is! Well! Our long night is over. We must put away our tears, take off our mourning…and face the future. It's our duty.

Grandma (still shoveling; mimicking) …take off our mourning…face the future….Lordy! (Mommy and Daddy rise, stretch. Mommy waves to the Young Man.)

Young Man (with a smile) Hi! (Grandma plays dead. Mommy and daddy go over to look at her; she is little more than half buried in the sand; the toy shovel is in her hands which are crossed on her breast.)

Mommy (before the sandbox; shaking her head) Lovely! It's….it's hard to be sad…she looks…so happy. (with pride and conviction) It pays to do things well. (to the Musician) All right, you can stop now, if you want to. I mean, stay around for a swim, or something; it's all right with us. (she sighs heavily) Well, Daddy…off we go.

Daddy Brave Mommy!

Mommy Brave Daddy! (they exit, stage-left)

Grandma It pays to do things well…Boy, oh boy! (she tries to sit up) … well, kids…I …I can't get up. I … I can't move… (The Young Man stops his calisthenics, nods to the Musician, walks over to Grandma, kneels down by the sandbox.)

Grandma I….can't move….

Young Man Shhhh…be very still….

Grandma I … I can't move…

Young Man Uh…ma'am; I…I have a line here.

Grandma Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie; you go right ahead.

Young Man I am …uh…

Grandma Take your time, dear.

Young Man I am the Angel of Death. I am…uh…I am come for you.

Grandma What…wha (then, with resignation)…ohhhhh….ohhhhh, I see. (The Young Man bends over, kisses Grandma gently on the forehead.)

Grandma (her eyes closed, her hands folded on her breast again, the shovel between her hands, a sweet smile on her face) Well….that was very nice, dear…

Young Man (still kneeling) Shhhhh…be still….

Grandma What I meant was…you did that very well, dear…

Young Man (blushing) …oh…

Grandma No; I mean it. You've got that….you've got a quality.

Young Man (with an endearing smile) Oh…thank you; thank you very much…ma'am.

Grandma (slowly; softly—as the Young Man puts his hands on top of Grandma's hands) You're….you're welcome….dear.

The Musician continues to play as the curtain comes down.

Source:

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Without hope the heart would break

Best wishes

Designed by: أم رغد 2012