

Introduction to American Literature, Summer 2009

"For We Shall Be Made A Story"

Professor Kirsten Wasson
328 Muller/274-1255/ Office Hours: T & R, 11:30-12:30
kwasson@ithaca.edu

In his sermon aboard the *Arbella*, the early 17th-century minister John Winthrop introduced the notion of the new world as "a city upon a hill" that would exemplify all things right and pure, a community the "Chosen" that would serve as a model for the rest of the world: "We shall be made a story," he said. Within nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature, national identity has elements of this grand and hopeful vision in its depiction of new beginnings and transformation. At the same time, it is infused with a consideration of what seems to be the necessity of disguise and deceit. "America is a land of masking jokers," commented Ralph Ellison. In this course we consider notions of masked identity as we explore literary representations of the "new world" narrative. As characters tell their stories—or have a narrative told about them, what emerges as the meaning of the life described? What is the "moral of the story," and how do we read the multiplicity of meanings? From Samuel Clemens' ambivalent journey of personal/political freedom on the Mississippi to Lee's vivisection of the life of a Korean immigrant spy, these narratives explore the new world story in several of its versions, revisions, and open endings.

TEXTS

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Samuel Clemens
Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, James Weldon Johnson
The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald
Darktown Strutters Wesley Brown
How the Garcia Girls, Julia Alvarez
Native Speaker

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Careful reading of assigned texts by the due date.
- 2) Response papers. One-page assignments will often be due at the beginning of class on a topic presented during the previous class. They will be graded with a check, check plus, or minus, and will contribute to your participation grade.
- 3) Two papers (5pp.), and a final exam that will address all material presented during lectures and in class discussion.
- 4) Attendance is required. More than two missed classes and your grade will descend by ½ a grade. More than six and you'll fail the course.
- 5) Zero tolerance for plagiarism—not one sentence from any source goes un-credited.

GRADES: Each essay and final exam 30%, participation 10%.

SCHEDULE

- June 29 Introduction to course/ *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- July 6: "Bartleby The Scrivener" /*Autobiography*/ *The Great Gatsby*/**First paper due on Friday, July 10**
- July 13: *The Great Gatsby*/ *Darktown Strutters*
- July 20: *Darktown/How The Garcia Girls*
- July 27 **Second Paper due on Monday, July 27**/*Native Speaker*/ **Exam**