

English 493 Folk Literature: 1700 – 2000
Fall 2005 Wed. 7:00 p.m. – 9:45 p.m. Blaustein 211

James Mulholland
Office: Blaustein 323
Office Phone: (860) 439-5211
Office Hours: Wednesday, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.
Email: james.mulholland@conncoll.edu

Course Description:

This course is structured primarily to do one thing. I would like us to do is pull apart the terms “folk” and “literature” and to investigate what these terms mean and how those meanings change depending upon the way that they are put back together. It is this various and changing relationship between the “folk” and “literature” that will preoccupy the course. Toward that end, we will be looking at literature from the last three hundred years, beginning in the eighteenth century and extending to the present. The idea of this class is not only to establish a basis of what the term “folk literature” means or to look at what we might typically think of as folk literature, but also to look at the various ways that folk literature has been reconceived historically toward certain literary ends and to capture certain literary effects. Thus, the syllabus is structured with as variety in mind. We will be reading material from eighteenth-century English fable writers, from canonical American writers like Mark Twain, from African American literature of the twentieth century, and from urban legends. I will be particularly interested in taking a comparative approach to the concept of folk literature, thinking intensely about not just what qualifies as folk literature and why, but how the idea of the folk has been used to serve literary ends.

Required Texts:

--Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro*

--Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*

--Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller*

(All texts are available at the Connecticut College bookstore.)

--“Folk Literature 1700-2000” Course packet (available at the Connecticut College print shop)

Course Policies and Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: This course is driven by your ideas about literature; therefore, coming to class prepared to discuss the readings is an essential part of this course. Please be sure to read all of the assigned material **multiple times** before you come to class. Students may be asked to read aloud and discuss the literature in class. **More than two absences may result in failing the course.** Excessive lateness or leaving early may be counted as absences, so please be

sure to come to class on time. If you are unable to attend class, please contact me before the class to let me know.

Papers: You will be required to write **one seminar-length (20 page) paper** for the course. The due date for this paper is not flexible and lateness will be penalized. There will be preliminary writing that contributes to this paper (e.g. a paper proposal) that will be discussed in greater length as the course progresses. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, for any reason, please contact me before the date that it is due. Each paper will be weighted equally for the grading criteria.

Oral Presentations:

Each student will be required to deliver one presentation to the class during the semester. This presentation should be approximately **8 to 10** minutes in length. The goal of these presentations will be to introduce the material to the class and to start the discussion. Therefore, presentations should consist of examples or moments that interest you and demand further discussion, connections with material from earlier classes and the themes of the course, and intelligent questions that advance our thinking about these themes. **Prepare for these presentations. What you highlight in the material and the questions that you ask should come from your familiarity with the reading.** These presentations should be substantial and well thought, and will be graded.

Grading: Your grade for the course will be calculated according to the following formula: **your written work will account for 50% of your grade, attendance and participation will account for 25% of your grade, and your oral presentation will account for 25% of your grade.** You must complete all of the work (paper and presentation) to receive a passing grade.

Syllabus

Most of the readings for the class are in the course packet. Readings that are not in the course packet have been highlighted with an asterisk (*). All reading should be completed for the day it appears on the syllabus.

9/7 Introduction and What is Folk Literature?

9/14 Theory

William Thoms, "Folklore" (1846)
Francis Utley, "Folk Literature: An Operational Definition" (1965)
Alan Dundes, "Who Are the Folk?" (1980)
Vladimir Propp, "Folklore and Literature" (1984)
E.A Robinson, "Richard Cory"
Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, "Richard Cory"
Hans Christen Anderson, "The Princess and the Pea"
Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues"

9/21 The Fable

Selections from *Aesop's Fables*

John Gay, selections from *Fables* (1727, 1738):
"Introduction. The Shepherd and the Philosopher"
X. "The Elephant and the Bookseller"
XI. "The Peacock, the Turkey, and Goose"
XV. "The Philosopher and the Pheasants"
XVI. "The Pin and the Needle"
XVII. "The Shepherd's Dog and the Wolf"
XXII. "The Goat without a Beard"
XXXI. "The Universal Apparition"
XXXVIII. "The Turkey and the Ant"
XLIX. "The Man and the Flea"
L. "The Hare and many Friends"

Anne Finch, selected poems:

"Mercury and the Elephant: A Prefatory Fable"
"The Critick and the Fable-Writer"
"The Atheist and the Acorn"
"A Tale of the Miser and the Poet"
"The Goute and Spider"

Russell Edson, "Ape" (1976)

"A Performance at Hog Theater" (1976)
"The Toy-Maker" (1976)

9/28 Prehistory of the Folk: Bards and Ballads

Abrams, "Ballad" and "Ode" in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1999)
Anon., "Chevy Chase"
Anon., "Barbara Allen"
Thomas Gray, "The Bard" (1757); "The Fatal Sisters" (1761)
Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, nos. 70, 85 (1713)
Multiple paintings of *The Bard* (1757-1820) *
Susan Stewart, "Scandals of the Ballad" from *Crimes of Writing* (1991) *

10/5 Scotland and Romance

William Collins, "Ode to a Friend on his Return &c." (1750)
James Macpherson, selections from the *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, nos. I-V (1760)
Samuel Johnson, selections from *A Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (pgs. 48, 51-52, 62-66, 113-114, 116-119, 151-152) (1775)
James Boswell, selections from *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (pgs. 208, 222, 252, 303-305) (1785)
Robert Burns, "Tam o' Shanter" (1791)

10/12 Grimm Brothers and Contemporary Adaptation

Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Circular Concerning the Collection of Folk Poetry"; "Ashputtle (Cinderella)," "Rapunzel," "Brier Rose," "Little Red Cap" from *Grimm's Tales, for Young and Old* (1812-1815, 1822, 1857)
James Thurber, "The Little Girl and the Wolf" from *Fables in Our Time and Famous Poems Illustrated by James Thurber* (1940)
Anne Sexton, "Cinderella"; "Rapunzel," "Briar Rose," "Red Riding Hood" from *Transformations* (1971)
Angela Carter, "Wolf Alice," "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," "The Werewolf," "The Company of Wolves" from *The Bloody Chamber* (1990)

10/19 Making a Nation: Folk in Nineteenth-Century America

Washington Irving, "Rip van Winkle"; "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819)
Mark Twain, "Jim Smiley and his Jumping Frog" (1865), "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1875), Letters to Joel Chandler Harris and the advertisement for the *Prince and the Pauper* in the Atlanta Constitution (1881-1883)
Joel Chandler Harris, "Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy," "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story," "How Mr. Rabbit was too Sharp for Mr. Fox," "The Story of the Deluge, and How it Came About," "Why the Negro is Black" from *Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings* (1880)

10/26 African-American Folk Literature I

- W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Forethought," "Chapter XIV: The Sorrow Songs" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
- Alain Locke, ed., selections from *The New Negro* (1925): Locke, "Foreword"; "The Negro Spirituals"; Arthur Huff Fauset, "American Negro Folk Literature"; Countee Cullen, "Heritage"; please glance at Willis Richardson, "Compromise (A Folk Play)" *
- Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues" (1926); selections from *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927)
- Sterling Brown, "Ma Rainey"; "Slim Greer"; "Slim in Atlanta"; "Slim in Hell"; "Strange Legacies" (1932)
- Sterling Brown, "The Blues as Folk Poetry" *The Book of American Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1958)

11/2 African-American Folk Literature II

- Zora Neale Hurston, *The Eatonville Anthology* (1926); "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934); "Foreword," Introduction," "Chapter I," "Chapter VII" from *Mules and Men* (1935); "West Hell" from *The Florida Negro* (1938); Chapter X "Research" (p. 687-699) from *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi." (1960); "the last quatrain of the ballad of Emmett Till" (1960); "the ballad of the light-eyed girl" (1963)

11/9 Native American Folk Literature I

- Carolyn Dunn, "I am the Real Hollywood Indian" (1995)
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller* (1989), 1-139 *
- Paula Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Indian Perspective on American Indian Literature" (1975)

11/16 Native American Folk Literature II

- Anon. "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" from *Native American Women's Writing, 1800-1900* (transcription circa 1907)
- Paula Gunn Allen, "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" (1989)
- Joy Harjo, "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky" (1996)
- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller* (1989), 140-278 *

11/23 Thanksgiving, no class

11/30 Storytelling: Contemporary Narration and the Folk I

- Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (1936)
- Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* (2001) *

12/7 Storytelling: Contemporary Narration and the Folk II

Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller* (2001) *

12/14 Urban Legends, Postmodern Folk?

Jan Harold Brunvand, selections from *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981)

We will also see representations and uses of urban legends in some recent popular movies such as *Urban Legend*, *Scream*, and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*

Final Paper due in class