Prof. Moustafa Bayoumi
Office Hours: Mondays. 3.30 p.m. -5:30 p.m., or by appt.
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Seminar in American Authors
ENGL 4107 / AMST 4001
Fall 2025
Mondays, 6:30 pm – 9:15 pm
Online

The Zoom Link for this class is: **https://brooklyn-cuny-edu.zoom.us/j/87388518805?pwd=RXpEUEd0Z1Z4TFlaVmVNbVNJRGsxZz09**

As per CUNY policy, you are required to have your cameras on during class. Students who keep their cameras off or who show up excessively late will be considered absent. Excessive absences can result in failing the class.

Course Description
ENGL 4107 (and AMST 4001) is an upper division seminar devoted to the study of an author or authors in Anglophone literature of the Americas. The course emphasizes intensive writing, critical analysis, and research methodologies. This semester, we will be examining the work of **Mark Twain** (born Samuel Longhorne Clemens), who lived from 1835-1910. Twain's work continues to be relevant to American literature. Ernest Hemingway once wrote that "[a]ll modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." Twain wrote often in the American vernacular, inspired generations of writers after him, and examined some of the nation's most difficult social and political questions in his own instantly recognizable style. The progenitor of American satire, he was a noted journalist, an accomplished essayist, a famed public speaker, a celebrated novelist, and late in life a fierce critic of American imperialism. In this course, we will be reading Twain *contrapuntally*, that is to say we will read texts written by Twain and texts that are in some ways inspired by Twain's texts, subjecting all to critical scrutiny and close analysis. In that way, we will transcend Twain's own description of a classic which he characterized as "a book which people praise and don't read." We, on the other hand, will read several books over the semester and decide where and when praise or criticism is due.

Texts

1. Mark Twain & Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (Excerpts provided)
2. Donald Antrim, *Elect Mr. Robinson for a Better World* (Vintage)
3. Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* https://books.apple.com/us/book/puddnhead-wilson/id6474994664
4. Toni Morrison, *Playing In the Dark* (Vintage)
5. Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (Riverhead)
6. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* https://books.apple.com/us/book/adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/id1478296672
7. Percival Everett, *James* (Doubleday)
8. Mark Twain, essays on imperialism (provided)
9. John Sayles, *Amigo* (film, link provided)

Course Objectives
At the end of this course you should be able to:

- develop ability to understand and analyze literary texts
- develop understanding of literature in its interdisciplinary contexts (e.g., cultural, social, historical, scientific, psychological, and political)
- understand and use literary terms
- learn to appreciate literary complexity, ambiguity, and paradox
- develop ability to understand and apply literary/critical theory
- be able to reason, think critically, evaluate, use evidence, and make judgments
- use appropriate conventions of language, including correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation
- develop listening skills
- develop ability to speak effectively
- learn to be self-reflecting
- engage in civil debate
- develop respect for both intellectual and cultural diversity

Requirements:
The requirements for this course are 3 in-class writing responding to the readings, a mid-term essay (5-6 pages in length), and a final podcast project. More information will be forthcoming regarding the design of the final project. *Late papers will lose one grade point (A to A-) for each class session after the due date. Essays will be submitted via Blackboard. Please do not email me your essays unless otherwise instructed. (**No Google Docs, please.**)*

The in-class writing comprises 30% of your grade (10% each); the essay comprises 30% of your grade, as does the final project. Ten percent of your grade is reserved for participation. Thus, the breakdown is as follows:

Response papers (3 @ 10% each):	30%	
Mid-term essay	30%	
Final project	30%	
Participation	10%	
Total		100%

Plagiarism
Every year there are instances in which students attempt to submit the work of other people as their own. Plagiarism is one of the most serious offenses a student can commit at Brooklyn College; it is punishable by suspension or dismissal from the university.

Several varieties of plagiarism are:

1. **Submitting of essays, or portions of essays, written by other people or by a computer or other device (i.e. ChatGPT) as one's own;**
2. Failing to acknowledge, through footnotes and bibliographical entries, the source of ideas essentially not one's own;
3. Failing to indicate paraphrases or ideas or verbatim expressions not one's own through proper use of quotations and footnotes;
4. Submitting an essay written for one course to a second course without having sought prior permission from both instructors.

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Please pay close attention to these rules. If you have any doubt, please ask me *before* handing in your essay.

Schedule of Classes and Readings

1.	Monday, September 8	Introduction Mark Twain's Get Rich Quick Schemes https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/10/25/mark-twains-get-rich-quick-schemes/ https://vimeo.com/197701676
2.	Monday, September 15	Twain, *The Gilded Age* (excerpts)
	(Monday, September 22	*** No Class ***)
3.	Monday, September 29	Donald Antrim, *Elect Mr. Robinson for a Better World*
4.	Monday, October 6	Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*
	(Monday, October 13	*** No Class ***)
5.	**Tuesday, October 14**	**Toni Morrison, *Playing In the Dark***
	(Monday, October 20	*** No Class ***)
6.	**Friday, October 24**	**Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (part 1)**
7.	Monday, October 27	Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (part 2 & 3)
8.	Monday, November 3	Twain, *Huckleberry Finn,* Chapts. 1-15
9.	Monday, November 10	Percival Everett, *James* (Chapts. 1-12) **Essay Due**
10.	Monday, November 17	Twain, *Huckleberry Finn,* chapters. 15-30
11.	Monday, November 24	Percival Everett, James (read to the end of Part Two)
12.	Monday, December 1	Twain, *Huckleberry Finn,* chapters. 30-end Perceival Everett, *James* (Part Three)
13.	Monday, December 8	Twain on Imperialism (essays provided) *Amigo*: https://vimeo.com/639801941
14.	Monday, December 15	Presentations and Conclusions

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Evaluation criteria for written work and presentations:
From a list by Lewis Hyde, edited by Sue Lonoff, with thanks to Richard Marius's writing handbook.

The Unsatisfactory Paper.

The D or F paper either has no thesis or else it has one that is strikingly vague, broad, or uninteresting. There is little indication that the writer understands the material being presented. The paragraphs do not hold together; ideas do not develop from sentence to sentence. This paper usually repeats the same thoughts again and again, perhaps in slightly different language but often in the same words. The D or F paper is filled with mechanical faults, errors in grammar, and errors in spelling.

The C Paper.

The C paper has a thesis, but it is vague and broad, or else it is uninteresting or obvious. It does not advance an argument that anyone might care to debate. "Henry James wrote some interesting novels." "Modern cities are interesting places."

The thesis in the C paper often hangs on some personal opinion. If the writer is a recognized authority, such an expression of personal taste may be noteworthy, but writers gain authority not merely by expressing their tastes but by justifying them. Personal opinion is often the engine that drives an argument, but opinion by itself is never sufficient. It must be defended.

The C paper rarely uses evidence well; sometimes it does not use evidence at all. Even if it has a clear and interesting thesis, a paper with insufficient supporting evidence is a C paper.

The C paper often has mechanical faults, errors in grammar and spelling, but please note: a paper without such flaws may still be a C paper.

The B Paper.

The reader of a B paper knows exactly what the author wants to say. It is well organized, it presents a worthwhile and interesting idea, and the idea is supported by sound evidence presented in a neat and orderly way. Some of the sentences may not be elegant, but they are clear, and in them thought follows naturally on thought. The paragraphs may be unwieldy now and then, but they are organized around one main idea. The reader does not have to read a paragraph two or three times to get the thought that the writer is trying to convey.

The B paper is always mechanically correct. The spelling is good, and the punctuation is accurate. Above all, the paper makes sense throughout. It has a thesis that is limited and worth arguing. It does not contain unexpected digressions, and it ends by keeping the promise to argue and inform that the writer makes in the beginning.

The A Paper.

The A paper has all the good qualities of the B paper, but in addition it is lively, well paced, interesting, even exciting. The paper has style. Everything in it seems to fit the thesis exactly. It may have a proofreading error or two, or even a misspelled word, but the reader feels that these errors are the consequence of the normal accidents all good writers encounter. Reading the paper, we can feel a mind at work. We are convinced that the writer cares for his or her ideas, and about the language that carries them.

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