



Instructor: Geoff Hamilton

~ geoffrey.hamilton@utoronto.ca

Course Number: ENG436H5S

Course Title: Group 3: Contemporary American Literature

Course Description: This seminar engages selected works on a single topic, ideas of autonomy in American literature, over a large historical period. We begin with a (brief) consideration of the birth and roots of the concept of individual autonomy in ancient Greece. We then turn to the evolution of the autonomous individual in American literature, beginning with the transplantation of individual autonomy onto American mythic soil in the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson, its ripening in certain Transcendentalist celebrations of the individual and in the rugged mythology of frontier heroes during the early to mid-nineteenth century, and finally its rank over-ripeness – hyper-autonomy, the undearth of autonomy – in the various ‘psychopathic types’ of contemporary American authors.

Required Reading: Selections from *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, Notes on the State of Virginia, *Flint’s* Boone biographies, Emerson’s essays, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Whitman’s poetry; Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Mailer’s “The White Negro” and An American Dream, Lish’s *Dear Mr. Capote*

First Authors to be Studied: Homer, Jefferson, Flint

Method of Instruction: Lecture/Discussion

Method of Evaluation Two essays, presentation, participation