

English 4375: The Automobile in American Literature and Culture
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We shall read and discuss literature primarily, but not exclusively, from a cultural perspective, which means that we examine literature not only as a critique of the culture(s) about which it is written but even more as a repository of the very cultural values, behaviors, etc. it critiques. Our focus in this course will be the ways in which United States literature, against a foreground and background of other cultural media, represents the automobile as a vehicle of personal, cultural, social, and economic mobility and identity and the experience of space/place. Inarguably, the automobile affected twentieth century life as the computer, the Internet, and social media have already dramatically overhauled twenty-first century life. What is so interesting (and aggravating) is America's conflicted attitude about the automobile, the love/hate relationship with the car that has existed from its introduction. What is this attitude's genesis and progress? We shall look at the cultural representation of the car in terms of issues such as mobility, art, technology, gender, race, and environment. There will be segments on "the road," history, auto racing, and culturally iconic figures associated with the automobile. Close reading of texts is always a practice.

The course will require extensive online (and some library) research. The agenda of written assignments and exams has not been determined.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students participating responsibly will become acquainted with some of the major issues of automobile history and American culture as they intersect with literature.
2. Students participating responsibly will learn how to discuss those issues in terms of American cultural media, including and especially literature.
3. Students participating responsibly will develop their close reading, research, writing, and critical thinking skills.

Tentative Required Texts

Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons*

Cather, *One of Ours*

Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*

Kerouac, *On the Road*

King, *Christine*

Gaines, "A Long Day in November" (from *Bloodline*)

Erdrich, "The Red Convertible" (from *Love Machine*)