

## **Growing-Up Literature: Fantasies of Property in American Literature**

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Office hours TBD in consultation with students

Tutorial Description: What do you get when you grow up? What do you lose? In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the marriage plot helped writers think through shifting ideas about how property should be regulated. One narrative held that first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a manorial estate. But immediately, it was clear that this narrative was not true to everyone. For example, what does growing up look like for someone who is enslaved and therefore legally classified as property? For someone who, like many women in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, is no more allowed to own property as an adult than as a child? For someone who, like many Indigenous people, experiences eviction instead of legally inheriting family lands?

Although this is a course about “growing-up literature,” we will not encounter very many works situated squarely within the genre of the “bildungsroman.” Rather, we will seek immediately to trouble this category and the very idea of a standard development by examining works by and about people who do not stand to age easily into riches or political power. The course crosses the Atlantic but will focus on American literature, for which property is an especially important and vexed concept. We will read a range of works, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to today, in which the bourgeois narrative of “growing up” fails to account for the properties literary figures acquire and lose as they move from childhood to adulthood. We will not pursue a historical narrative of how “growing up” develops over time. Rather, we will consider 1) how texts about growing up engage iteratively with older literary and legal ideas about property, and 2) how reading “backward” to older texts through the lens of newer texts helps us to uncover fresh interpretations. Queer theory, critical race studies, and ecocritical approaches will be our primary guides throughout the semester. Critical Indigenous theory will emerge as a lens that often draws on all these approaches and is particularly invested in critiquing the idea of American property. We will learn how to work with this theoretical toolkit as we identify and imagine alternatives to the bourgeois “growing up” narrative all the way back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Tutorial Goals: This semester we will

- define and redefine “growing up” in American literature
- learn what it means to center works that are often at the edges of literary study
- gain a deeper understanding of the role property plays in a variety of American experiences

Reading and Writing Goals: When you leave this junior tutorial, you will have

- designed and investigated a research question based on your scholarly interest
- developed an annotated critical bibliography that helps you to answer that question in conversation with a wide range of thinkers
- produced a 20-25 page research paper that draws on your critical bibliography to mount an argument about a primary text or texts
- honed your research and writing skills in preparation for producing a senior thesis and writing beyond Harvard

Assignments:

- **Short Essay (10%):** 5 pages, due Week 5. This essay should be driven by a central claim. It should focus on **one** of the primary readings from Weeks 1-4, but it should place this reading in conversation with one other reading (primary or secondary) that we have read so far.
- **Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography (10%):** Due Week 8. This should be a single document including
  - a 1-2 page prospectus that describes your idea for your final paper, your plan for conducting research and writing your paper, and major challenges you anticipate facing.
  - an annotated bibliography with 8-10 secondary sources that you intend to use. Each source's annotation should be approximately 100-250 words. It should briefly describe the source's argument and should also describe how the source's thesis will play into your project.
- **Junior Essay Draft (15%):** Due Week 11. Please bring a draft of at least 15 pages to our class meeting. This page minimum is non-negotiable. Week 11 does not have any reading to enable you to focus on drafting; we will have an in-class draft workshop in lieu of regular discussion that week.
- **Junior Essay (40%):** Due date TBA by the English Department. This research paper of 20-25 pages should grow out of the work you do in the course. I strongly recommend that you plan ahead to allow yourself buffer time for last-minute revisions, technological difficulties, etc.
- **Participation and Preparation (25%):** Ongoing. In a class this small, it is more vital than ever that you show up to class prepared and ready to both talk and listen. To that end, each week *except* for weeks when another writing assignment is due, please come to class with a journal entry of 1-2 pages in response to the week's reading. These do not have to be formal, but they should be okay to share – we may use them from time to time during discussion.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**UNIT 0: The Pursuit of Property**

*In this introductory unit, we will read an assortment of 18<sup>th</sup> century materials to discuss how marriage and other legal and/or social arrangements are used to pursue and manage wealth in its various and evolving forms during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Some key terms and ideas to consider as you read these materials: landed wealth, monetary wealth, feme covert/feme sole, orphanhood*

## Week 1: The Pursuit of Property

## Introductory Packet:

Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I: Introduction, "Of the Division of Labour," "Of the Principle Which Gives Occasion to the Division of Labour," "Of the Origin and Use of Money," "Of the Wages of Labour" (1776)

Henry Fielding, selections from *Tom Jones* (1749)

William Hogarth, *Marriage A-la-Mode* (painted about 1743)  
 Daniel Defoe, selections from *Moll Flanders* (1722)  
*Baron and Feme: A Treatise of the Common Law Concerning Husbands and Wives*  
 (1700)

Cheryl Nixon, *The Orphan in Eighteenth-Century Law and Literature*, Chapter 1  
 Eva König, “*Moll Flanders and Fluid Identity*”

\*Optional: Henry Abelove, “Some Speculations on the History of Sexual Intercourse during the Long Eighteenth Century in England”

### UNIT 1: Material Properties

*In this unit, we will consider multiple ways of “having” some of the forms of wealth we discussed in Unit 0. The traditional marriage plot and bildungsroman often expect fully realized adults to attain these forms of wealth in the eyes of the law. The material “properties” we will consider include land and children. At the end of the unit, we will consider how self-possession, the ultimate goal of many of these narratives, is related to material possession of one’s own body. Each week’s secondary readings will cluster around one or two theoretical approaches that probe the limits of what it means to “have” that property.*

#### Week 2: Having Land

*Key Approach(es): Ecocriticism, Critical Indigenous Theory*

Paul G. Zolbrod, *Dine Bahane’: The Navajo Creation Story* (1984)  
 Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (1981)  
 John Locke, “Of Property” (1689)

Christine Wilson, “Delinquent Housekeeping: Transforming the Regulations of Keeping House”

Jodi Byrd, Introduction to *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*

#### Week 3: Having Children

*Key Approach(es): Queer Theory*

Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)  
 Benjamin Franklin, “The Speech of Miss Polly Baker” (1747)  
 John Locke, “Of Paternal Power” (1689)

Alexis Lothian, “Afrofuturist Entanglements of Gender, Eugenics, and Queer Possibility” in *Old Futures*

Kathryn Bond Stockton, Introduction to *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*

#### Week 4: Having Oneself

*Key Approach(es): Critical Race Theory*

Harriet Wilson, *Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859)  
 John Locke, “Of Paternal, Political, and Despotical Power, Considered Together,” “Of Slavery” (1689)

Barbara A. White, “‘Our Nig’ and the She-Devil: New Information about Harriet Wilson and the ‘Bellmont’ Family”  
 Stephen Best, Introduction to *The Fugitive’s Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession*

Week 5: Library Visit/Research Orientation

\*\*\*short paper due\*\*\*

Week 6: Wildcard Week

*Students may propose that we move readings from a later week into week 6. This is to enable you to begin thinking about a text that you think you will want to use for your junior essay. Should we choose this option, the reading schedule will shift one week later until we catch up to the readings that we pulled up to week 6. Assignments will be unaffected.*

### **UNIT 2: Immaterial Properties**

*In this unit, we will continue to pursue the idea of “self-possession” exploring each week one facet of what developing ownership over oneself might require or enable. Furthermore, we will inquire about the conditions under which self-possession can be stolen or surrendered, and we will ask whether there are ways in which it can be stolen back. Secondary readings will continue to build on key ideas and methods introduced in Unit 1.*

Week 6: Having Rights

*Key Approach(es): Queer Theory, Cultural Studies*

Mary Kathryn Nagle, *Sovereignty* (2020)  
 Supreme Court Case: “Cherokee Nation vs. the State of Georgia” (1831)  
 Declaration of Independence (1776)

Mary Zaboriskis, “Sexual Orphanings”  
 Lauren Berlant, “The Infantile Citizen”  
 Jay Fliegelman, “George Washington and Reconstituted Family” in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*

Week 7: Having Identity

*Key Approach(es): Critical Indigenous Theory, Critical Race Theory*

Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929)  
 Lydia Maria Child, “Willie Wharton” (1863)

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* Letter XII: “Distresses of a Frontier Man” (1782)

Philip Deloria, introduction and chapter 1 in *Playing Indian*  
Emily Bernard, “Unlike Many Others: Exceptional White Characters in Harlem Renaissance Fiction”

Week 8: Having Innocence

*Key Approach(es): Critical Race Theory, Critical Childhood Studies*

\*\*\* prospectus due\*\*\*

Richard Wright, selections from *Black Boy* (1945)  
William Wordsworth, “We Are Seven,” (1798) “Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1807)

Robin Bernstein, introduction to *Racial Innocence*  
Karen Sánchez-Eppler, “The Death of a Child and the Replication of an Image” in *Dependent States*

Week 9: Having Literature

*Key Approach(es): Queer Theory, Critical Indigenous Theory, Ecocriticism*

Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie* (1935)  
Zitkala-Ša, *American Indian Stories* (1921)

Bethany Schneider, “A Modest Proposal: Laura Ingalls Wilder Ate Zitkala-Ša”  
Jace Weaver, “Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism” in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*  
Donna Haraway, selections from *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*

### **UNIT 3: Beyond Property?**

*In this unit, we will consider portrayals of growing up that explicitly reject the idea that property can or should be reliably obtained by anyone. We will discuss the urgency of imagining a world that is not organized around property. Furthermore, we will discuss whether it is possible to move beyond property, and we will look for alternative ways of imagining a world that is more inclusive of those who have historically been kept from inheriting property.*

Week 10: Opening Space and Time

*Key Approach(es): Critical Indigenous Theory, Queer Theory*

Thomas King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993)

Thomas King, “Godzilla vs. Postcolonial”  
Patricia Linton, “‘And Here’s How It Happened’: Trickster Discourse in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*”

Mark Rifkin, selections from *Beyond Settler Time*

\*Optional: Lisa Brooks, “Envisioning New England as Native Space,” in *The Common Pot*

Week 11: Draft workshop

Week 12: Imagining Worlds

*Key Approach(es): Critical Race Theory, Ecocriticism*

Alaya Dawn Johnson, *The Summer Prince* (2013)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” (2014)

Lawrence Buell, “The World, the Text, and the Ecocritic” in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*

Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, “Notes toward a Black Fantastic: Black Atlantic Flights Beyond Afrofuturism in Young Adult Literature”

Week 13: Conclusions

Student-selected readings

\*\*\*Final paper due\*\*\*

### Course Policies:

**Inclusion:** This tutorial will be whatever we, as a community of scholars, make of it. It will likely be challenging, surprising, and provocative at points. It *must* always be respectful of those in and out of the room. With the understanding that we are all learning and growing, we will strive at all points for anti-racist, anti-discriminatory discussions. In the event that a comment or dynamic arises that you feel runs counter to these commitments, please communicate with me about it during or after class so that we can address the situation.

**Accommodations for disabled students:** Here is Harvard’s policy on accommodations: “*Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office \(AEO\)](#) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head’s inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.*” I am happy to meet with you to work out a system that will allow you to meet the course’s learning objectives on your own terms. Please do get in touch with me *and* with the AEO so that we can do our best to make sure that the accommodations we come to are equitable.

**Academic Honesty:** Your junior tutorial gives you the opportunity to enter into the scholarly community even more deeply than you have in your prior coursework. This community is at its best when we respect our own and others’ work as the true labor that it is. Plagiarism is unacceptable and frankly not worth it – it’s always better to turn in an assignment late than to

steal someone's work or do a shoddy job of citing. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS's Honor Code: "*Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.*"

**Attendance:** This is not a class where your absence will go unremarked. The conversation will change dramatically if you are not in the room; missing more than one meeting except in the case of medical or family emergencies is very bad form. Please let me know in advance if possible if you will be absent. More than 1 unexcused absence will negatively affect your participation grade, and more absences may jeopardize your eligibility to receive credit for the course. It can also be quite disruptive for you to show up late, especially when we don't know whether or not to wait for you to get the discussion started. Two instances of lateness beyond 5 minutes = one absence. Get in touch with me ASAP if extenuating circumstances will make you late on a regular basis.

**Extensions and Late Penalties:** Late assignments will go down by 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. an A- becomes a B+ if it is one day late, a B if it is 2 days late, etc.). I can grant extensions on a case-by-case basis on any assignments *except* for the final paper and the final paper draft. The final paper deadline is set by the English department, and the draft deadline is tied to our in-class workshop. Other assignments can be extended up to a week, depending on when you ask. All extensions must be requested at least 24 hours ahead of the due date and will be more likely to be granted the earlier you ask.