

Counterfeit Identities

ENGL 3300.001 Fall 2013 Syllabus
TR 12:30 – 1:50 p.m. Trimble 21
Prof. Neill Matheson
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Course Description:

This course explores narratives of impersonation and racial passing, featuring people who cross social boundaries of race, ethnicity, class, or gender, disguising or abandoning their original identity to seek a better life. American self-fashioning has often been celebrated as evidence of a society defined by freedom and opportunity, open to enterprising individuals who make their own way in the world, pursuing self-interest. But the democratic promise of social mobility embodied in the self-made American individual is shadowed by more negatively valued ideas about self-invention, involving “bad subjects” who refuse to stay in their proper place or play by the established rules, who succeed through guile, charm, or deception. Examining the stories of imposters, tricksters, con men and artful women, we will consider why some forms of social mobility are devalued, even stigmatized, while others are privileged as fundamentally American.

We will also read some historical accounts of boundary-crossers and impersonators, such as, about the white scientist Clarence King, who lived a “double life” as the married black Pullman porter James Todd. In addition to course readings, we will watch several films.

Course texts:

Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask*
Charles Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*
Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing*
Martha Sandweiss, *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception Across the Color Line*
Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Films:

Imitation of Life (dir. Sirk, 1959)
Chameleon Street (dir. Harris, 1989)
Gattaca (dir. Niccol, 1997)
The Imposter (dir. Layton, 2012)

Note: Films will not be shown in class, so you will need to purchase or rent them. They must be viewed before the class in which they are discussed. All of these films are available for rental through Netflix, and most of them can be rented through Blockbuster or other sources. You can also buy them online from Amazon.com or another vendor.

Course Requirements:

1. Two papers (4-6 and 8-12 pages). Papers should be turned in on the assigned day in class. I will only accept emailed papers under extraordinary circumstances; you should then turn in a hard copy at the first opportunity. If you submit a paper outside of class (including via email, with permission), it is your responsibility to confirm that I received it.
2. Midterm.
3. Final exam.
4. Quizzes. Because these quizzes are part of the daily work of the course, a measure of your preparation and participation, make-ups will not be offered if you miss class on the day a quiz is given.
5. Participation in class discussion.

Note: All major assignments (i.e., both papers, midterm, and final) must be completed in order to pass the course.

Course Grade:

First paper	20%
Second paper	25%
Midterm	20%
Final	25%
Participation (incl. quizzes)	10%

Attendance, Participation, Preparation:

Student participation is an extremely important part of this course. The course will primarily be organized around discussion of the readings, rather than lectures; student interests will play a major role in shaping our discussions. I expect you to come to class having carefully read the texts for each day's meeting, prepared with questions, ideas, enthusiasms, or objections.

Because this course depends on your full involvement, regular attendance is also essential for its success. More than three absences will have a significant impact on your grade for the course. More than eight absences may result in failure for the course. Late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive, and a pattern of tardiness will also affect your grade.

Policy on Electronic Devices:

Please turn off and stow away all cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices at the start of each class.

UTA Drop Policy:

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops

can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. Contact the Financial Aid Office for more information.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students should be able to:

- Demonstrate critical understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course, and identify connections synthetically between these texts.
- Demonstrate knowledge of major themes and issues relevant to course literature, particularly the topic of “passing” and impersonation.
- Demonstrate a complex understanding of the relationship between literary texts and significant historical and cultural contexts, including analyzing the relevance of important historical events or topics to specific works.
- Explain and make use of analytical and theoretical concepts and literary critical terminology covered in the course.
- Express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing.
- Express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and respond substantially and respectfully to the ideas of other students.

Academic Integrity:

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. “Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts” (*Regents Rules and Regulations*).

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero. No rewrites are allowed for plagiarized papers. All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the UTA Office of Student Conduct.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

Student Support Services Available:

The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals to resources for any reason, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources for more information.

Electronic Communication Policy:

The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University “MavMail” address as the sole official means of communication with students. MavMail is used to remind students of important deadlines, advertise events and activities, and permit the University to conduct official transactions exclusively by electronic means. For example, important information concerning registration, financial aid, payment of bills, and graduation are now sent to students through the MavMail system. All students are assigned a MavMail account. *Students are responsible for checking their MavMail regularly.* Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/email/>. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, and it remains active even after they graduate from UT Arlington.

To obtain your NetID or for logon assistance, visit <https://webapps.uta.edu/oit/selfservice/>. If you are unable to resolve your issue from the Self-Service website, contact the Helpdesk at helpdesk@uta.edu.

I will use your UTA email address for course handouts and announcements, as well as to contact you individually if necessary. So be sure to check your MavMail account frequently.

Course Schedule:

This schedule is provisional: I may make substitutions in readings or changes in the dates of assignments if necessary.

Aug. 22 Introduction: Self-Making and Cross-Dressing; or, Benjamin Franklin and Fanny Fern

Aug. 27 Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, Part One

Aug. 29 Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, Part Two

Sept. 3 Alcott, *Behind a Mask*

Sept. 5 *Behind a Mask*

Sept. 10 Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Sept. 12 *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Sept. 17 *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Sept. 19 *Chameleon Street* (film); **first paper due**

Sept. 24 Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*

Sept. 26 *The House Behind the Cedars*

Oct. 1 *The House Behind the Cedars*

Oct. 3 *The House Behind the Cedars*

Oct. 8 *Imitation of Life* (film)

Oct. 10 **Midterm**

Oct. 15 Larsen, *Passing*

Oct. 17 *Passing*

Oct. 22 Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black"; Gates, "The Passing of Anatole Broyard"

Oct. 24 Sandweiss, *Passing Strange* (selections)

Oct. 29 *Passing Strange*

Oct. 30 **Last day to drop classes**

Oct. 31 *Passing Strange*

Nov. 5 *Gattaca* (film)

Nov. 7 Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Nov. 12 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Nov. 14 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Nov. 19 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Nov. 21 *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Nov. 26 *The Imposter* (film); David Grann, "The Chameleon"

Nov. 28 **Thanksgiving; no class!**

Dec. 3 Last class; **final paper due**

Final exam: Thursday Dec. 12 11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. (in our usual classroom)