

Syllabus

Fall 2010
LLSL 2002

Room A510
M, w 10-11:40

American Literature 1865-1914
Nicholas Birns

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A. Description and Overview

This course will cover major literary movements of American Literature in the period stretching from the Civil War to the rise of Modernism, from 1860 and 1920. We will focus first on the contrast between New England and New York, and then look at Naturalism, the South, and the West. Authors included will be Edith Wharton, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Charles Chesnutt, Kate Chopin, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Mark Twain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sui Sin Far, Willa Cather.

This era is generally less heralded when compared to the “American Renaissance before it or the “Hemingway-Faulkner-Fitzgerald” era after it. But students of American literature have long known of the richness of this period, which saw the rise of a truly national print culture and the emergence of American literature as a serious competitor to British literature (which, we should remember, was generally far more popular in the US in the nineteenth century than the country’s ‘own’ writing). The 1865-1914 period is also the time when the US became defined as a multiethnic nation which both celebrated an overall unity but yet prized diversity of region and national background.

Because this period was less popular in the old, pre-theoretical paradigm, the metaphysical certainties of mid-century criticism colored it less. Thus scholars of the past generation have had less of the underbrush of old ways of thinking to clear out, and have reconceived and redefined some of our key terms such as ‘regionalism’ and ‘naturalism’. On our supplementary reading list, I have included a balance of the old scholarship and some of the newer modes of criticism.

B. CONDUCT OF THE CLASS

I. REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN

10% attendance and participation

30% each of three major papers, the first two 7-8 pages each, the third 9-10.

The first will be on some aspect of the contrast between James's Boston and Howells's New York, or Wharton's small-town worlds and the big cities portrayed in James and Howells; the second on considering London, Norris, and Crane in the light of 'realism' or 'naturalism', the third on community and belonging in the fiction of this period.

2. Atmosphere of the Class

The class will be conducted as a seminar, with everybody getting a chance to contribute. Inevitably, there will be times when the instructor will lecture in order to give basic exposition. But students should expect to hear their own voices and those of others frequently in the class. No one will be asked individual-specific questions unless the instructor feels the student has established a record of expertise/interest on a particular subject. Furthermore, no one will be compelled to talk, although the general expectation of the college is that students will freely and vocally participate in classes.

Students are expected to be respectful of each other's opinions and to understand that the class will be run, as far as possible, as a democratic polity and that the class's participants will be expected to exercise an appropriate sense of civic responsibility.

The class will start on time and end on time. I understand that, given the early hour of the class, transportation issues may impede students from coming on time, and will be lenient about lateness. Students may bring food or drink of any sort of class and consume it as long as it is not too distracting. Unless absolutely necessary, leaving the classroom during class period is strongly discouraged.

I will pass around a sign-in sheet each class as a means of taking attendance.

C. ORDER OF DISCUSSION

NEW ENGLAND AND NEW YORK

August 30 Introduction
September 1 Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*
September 6 Labor Day, no class
September 8 Edith Wharton, *Summer*
September 13 Wharton, *Age of Innocence*
September 15 Wharton, *Age of Innocence*
September 20 James, *Washington Square*
September 22 Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*
September 27 Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*
September 29 Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*

THE SOUTH

October 4 , Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*. Paper 1 due.
October 6, Kate Chopin *The Awakening*
October 11 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*
October 13 Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*

REALISM

October 18 Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*
October 20 Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*
October 25 Norris, *McTeague*
October 27 Norris, *McTeague*
November 1 London, *The Sea Wolf*
November 3 London, *The Sea Wolf*
November 8 London, *The Sea Wolf*

THE WEST

November 10 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*
November 15 Twain, *Tom Sawyer*
November 17 Twain Paper 2 due.
November 22 Gilman, *Herland*
November 29 Gilman *Herland*, Revisions of paper 2 due (if necessary)
December 1 Cather, *O Pioneers*
December 6 Cather, *O Pioneers*
December 8 Cather, *O Pioneers*
December 13 Cather, *O Pioneers*
December 15 Conclusion; paper 3 due.

D. REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED BOOKS

REQUIRED BOOKS

Sui Sin Far *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* And Other Writings U of Illinois Press 0252021134
Wharton *Age of Innocence* Oxford 978-0199540013
Howells *A Hazard of New Fortunes* Modern Library 0375759271
Chopin *The Awakening* Penguin 0142437322
Wharton, *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*, Modern Library, 978-0375757280
Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, Dover, 978-0486431635
London *The Sea Wolf* 0451529367 Signet
Cather, *O Pioneers* 0679743626 Vintage
Twain *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
Gilman *Herland* Penguin 0141180625
Crane *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* 0375756892 Modern Library
Norris, *McTeague*, ed. Donald Pizer. Norton. 0-393-97013-2
Imaes *Washington Square* 978-0486404318 Dover

If you have another edition already, that is fine. Also, most if not all of these books are available free on the Internet; however, you should always bring a copy of the text to class.

RECOMEMNDED BACKGROUND BOOKS

1. Literary background

Jay Martin, *Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914*
Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds*
Alfred Habegger, *Henry James and the "Woman Business"*.
Walter Benn Michaels *The Gold Standard and the Logic of naturalism*
Jennifer Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*
Amanda Claybaugh *The Novel of Purpose: Literature And Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*
Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*.
Andrew Hoffman, *Inventing Mark Twain*
Robert Spiller et al *Literary History of the United States*
Annette White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far: A Literary Biography*
Carl Dawson and Susan Goodman, *William Dean Howells: a Writers Life*

2. Historical Background

Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Gilded Age: Or the Hazard of New Functions*
Ray Giniger, *The Age of Excess*
John A. Garraty, *The New Commonwealth, 1877-1890*.
Ronald A. Takaki: *A Different Mirror' Multicultural History of the United States*.
Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: America in the Gilded Age*

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E. Outcomes

1. This course features major American writers whose texts provide a composite portrait of a crucial period in American literary and cultural history. We will discuss and understand terms such as ‘regionalism’, ‘naturalism’, ‘national novel’, ‘novel of manners’ and ‘Gilded Age’. **The first outcome of this class is to understand the culture of the US from 1865 to 1914 as reflected in its literature.**

2. Often, American university educators assume American literature is ‘easier’ for students because, for the most part it is their own culture. This may be true, but I would also add that American literature can also be ‘harder’, because of the intrinsic difficulty of any high literary form, because we sometimes do not know ourselves as well as we think we do, and because there are so many different ‘Americas’ in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, region, lifestyle, theoretical self-conceptualization. **The second outcome of the course is to be aware of the contested and plural nature of American identity.**

3. Literary criticism is broader than merely book reviews and extends beyond literary journalism to include kinds of writing closer to philosophy and history than to a simple ‘book report’. Literary criticism shows the sensibility of the individual critic intensely scrutinizing the meaning of a work of literature. **The third outcome of the class will be a sense of how to write literary criticism.**

4. Literary criticism is not only close to other disciplines, but often operates in their territory. Writers such as Twain, Howells, and Sui Sin Far are incomprehensible without some sense not only of ‘historical background’ but of the influence of other disciplines on the shape of their thinking and the subsequent interpretation of that thinking. **The fourth outcome of this course is to sharpen critical thinking skills across the curriculum.**

F. IMPORTANT COLLEGE POLICIES

Policy on Attendance and Lateness

- Absences justify some grade reduction and a total of four absences mandate a reduction of one letter grade for the course.
- More than four absences mandate a failing grade for the course, unless there are extenuating circumstances, such as the following:
 - an extended illness requiring hospitalization or visit to a physician (with documentation)
 - a family emergency, e.g. serious illness (with written explanation)
 - observance of a religious holiday

The attendance and lateness policies are enforced as of the first day of classes for all registered students. If registered during the first week of the add/drop period, the student is responsible for any missed assignments and coursework. For significant lateness, the instructor may consider the tardiness as an absence for the day. Students failing a course due to attendance should consult with an academic advisor to discuss options.

Some instructors might stipulate different guidelines for attendance based on the nature of the course assignments (such as studios, laboratories, workshops) or the course schedule (half-semester classes, classes meeting once a week). For additional information about attendance and lateness, please refer to the syllabus.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's work as one's own in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, etc. This includes the purchase or "outsourcing" of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. Procedures concerning allegations of plagiarism and penalties are set forth in the Lang catalog.

Disabilities

In keeping with the University's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student requesting accommodations must first meet with Student Disability Services. Jason Luchs or a designee from that office will meet with students requesting accommodations and related services, and if appropriate, provide an Academic Adjustment Notice for the student to provide to his or her instructors. The instructor is required to review the letter with the student and discuss the accommodations, provided the student brings the letter to the attention of the instructor. This letter is necessary in order for classroom accommodations to be provided. Student Disability Services is located at 79 Fifth Avenue - 5th Floor. The phone number is (212) 229-5626. Students and faculty are expected to review the Student Disability Services webpage. The webpage can be found at <http://www.newschool.edu/studentaffairs/disability/> and the office is available to answer any questions or concerns.