

ENGLISH 152: WRITERS IN CONVERSATION

FALL 2011

Prof. Bergoffen

Office hours: Johnson Chapel 13, Wednesdays 2-3 and by appointment

Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-1:50, McGuire Life Sciences 230

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Course Description

In this course, we will examine literary relationships by focusing on selective works of American literature written between 1880 and 1930. One of our goals will be to investigate the types of conversations taking place between these writers and their texts, especially as they relate to content and form. We will place these conversations in historical context: new roles and expectations for women; conceptions of race in the Jim Crow era; the relationship of science to literature; mass immigration and assimilation; and anxieties about city life, passing, and changing values. Although we will look closely at texts written at the turning of the century, and at quite a number of works associated with Realism, we will be less concerned with defining the period or a genre than with honing our awareness as readers. We, too, participate in literary conversations. Therefore, another goal will be to consider the changing perspectives in literary criticism over the last hundred years and how such shifts influence how we read and what we read in English courses. What is at the heart of the discipline if critics do not agree on the object of investigation? Do literature courses focus on “texts,” “authors,” “readers,” “cultural contexts,” or “interpretive communities”? These considerations intersect with others regarding literary value and canonicity. Why do tastes change, and how do such changes affect what professors teach and students read in English courses?

Required Texts available at AMHERST BOOKS.

Edith Wharton, The Custom of the Country

Stephen Crane, Maggie, A Girl of the Streets

Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson

Pauline Hopkins, Of One Blood

Abraham Cahan, Yekl

F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

Nella Larsen, Quicksand and Passing

Course Packet (CP) of additional REQUIRED readings.

Available in the English Department office.

Coursework and Requirements

Six (6) Inquiry Papers	30%
Two (2) Essays, written in drafts	40%
Discussion Leader	10%
In-class writing, active participation, attendance	10%
Reflective Review	10%

READING AND WRITING SCHEDULE

Introductions

- W 9/7 Reading, Writing, and American Literary Studies
David Shumway, "The Literary in America, 1890-1920" (CP)
David Richter, "How We Read: Interpretive Communities and Literary Meaning" (CP)

Gender at Century's End; Debating the "Habit of Reading"

- M 9/12 Edith Wharton, The Custom of the Country (21-221)
W 9/14 Wharton, The Custom of the Country (222-300)
- M 9/19 Wharton, The Custom of the Country (301-finish)
W 9/21 Henry James, "Daisy Miller, A Study" (CP)
Selections on the "Habit of Reading" and Wharton, "The Vice of Reading" (CP)

M 9/26 The Role of Critics and Criticism in the 20th Century

- Guest Lecture, Professor Pritchard**
Literary friendship: Wharton and James
W 9/28 Stephen Crane, Maggie, A Girl of the Street
Reviews of 1893 Maggie (CP)

Racial Genealogies and Legacies; Recovering Stories

- M 10/3 Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson (finish)
W 10/5 Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson

- M 10/10 FALL BREAK
W 10/12 Pauline Hopkins, Of One Blood (finish)

- M 10/17 Hopkins, Of One Blood
W 10/19 Reading Twain and Hopkins as Detective/Crime Fiction

American Literature and Sciences of the Brain

- M 10/24 **American Literary Realism and Sciences of the Brain**
Guest Lecture, Professor Knoper
W 10/26 William Dean Howells, "A Case of Metaphantasmia" (CP)
Kate Chopin, "A Mental Suggestion" (CP)
Henry James, "The Jolly Corner" (CP)
Literary friendship: Howells and James
Excerpts from Letters, Fictions, Lives (CP)

Adopting the Nation; Embracing its Idiom

- M 10/31 Abraham Cahan, Yekl (finish)
W 11/2 Cahan, Yekl
Literary mentoring: Howells on Cahan and Crane
Daniel Aaron, "Howell's Maggie" (CP)
R 11/3 **DRAFT OF ESSAY 1 DUE**

- M 11/7 CONFERENCES SCHEDULED
W 11/9 CONFERENCES SCHEDULED

Passing for the Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance

- M 11/14 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (1-96)
Werner Sollors, "Passing" (CP)
T 11/15 **ESSAY 1 DUE**
W 11/16 Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (finish)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- M 11/28 Nella Larsen, Passing (143-210)
W 11/30 Larsen, Passing (finish)

- M 12/5 CONFERENCES SCHEDULED
W 12/7 CONFERENCES SCHEDULED

- M 12/12 Greg Jay, "The Discipline of the Syllabus" (CP)
W 12/14 Final conversations

- M 12/19 **ESSAY 2 DUE with REFLECTIVE REVIEW by NOON in my mailbox**

College courses are sites for learning, and learning cannot take place unless you feel you can express your thoughts, ideas, and experiences in a safe environment and to a respectful audience. Thoughtful, intellectual debate is welcome. I will not tolerate malicious, defamatory, or hurtful speech/behavior.