

American Literary Realism

English 4355.001 | 5355.001 || FALL 2023

FACULTY: Dr. Anett Jessop
SCHEDULE: M 6:00-8:45pm
CLASSROOM: CAS 158
OFFICE: CAS 248
OFFICE HOURS: M 8:45-9:45pm; T 3:30-4:30pm;
W 3:00-4:00pm & by appointment
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George Bellows

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Welcome! In this course, we will study a selection of later-19th- and early-20th-century American fiction representing American Literary Realism. Historically, this period (c. 1865-1920) spans important transitions in the development of U.S. nationhood, including post-Civil War Reconstruction, The Gilded Age, and The Progressive Era, as well as continuing westward expansion, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. Pressured by a developing capitalist economy, this period faced sweeping social changes, to include labor disputes, race and class struggle, and women's suffrage movements.

The American Realist movement was an aesthetic response that redefined literature as well as the visual arts, music, and journalism. Literary Realism was a reaction and response to romantic and sentimental modes of the past and its writers experimented with new approaches for representing cultural changes, to include genre choice, subject matter, new characterizations of different social classes, language differences and dialects, and expanded regional representation beyond New England. Many of the topics and struggles represented in the literature are familiar to present-day Americans, such as issues of race, gender, economic and social class, immigration, and regional dominance. We will investigate how this literary movement interpreted the 'realities' of its historical moment—and to what explicit and implicit goals and outcomes.

Pedagogically, I am committed to your appreciation and enriched understanding of the aesthetic and cultural contexts for this body of literature as well as to your further development as sophisticated readers, critical thinkers, and writers about literary texts. In written assignments, you will practice close reading skills as well as synthesize and interpret patterns and themes toward developing strong thesis claims and polished essays. As you are an advanced body of readers and writers, this class will function like a seminar wherein you will be assisting in leading discussions (both online and in class) and thereby practicing your abilities to analyze a text and to present it to peers in an organized format.

Content-Based

- ◆ Students will become familiar with the works of a range of American realist writers from diverse backgrounds with an emphasis upon fiction;
- ◆ Students will learn to situate Literary Realism within the larger context of American literature, as well as to better understand the cultural pressures and developments during this period in U.S. history;
- ◆ Students will deepen their thinking about the relationships between and among history, culture, and literature as well as the relationships between identities (individual, regional, national, international) and historically shifting ideas about difference (gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, immigration status);
- ◆ Students will improve their critical thinking skills with regard to the rhetorics of gender, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and national origin.

Skills-Based

- ◆ Students will engage—in both written and oral expressions—in close readings of complex literary and theoretical texts and, as a result, hone skills in nuanced analysis, research, cogent writing, and thoughtful discussion and debate;
- ◆ Students will demonstrate the ability to formulate a thesis related to American realist literary studies and to support the thesis with evidence and argumentation;
- ◆ Students will practice both personal and learning community responsibility as borne out in meeting deadlines, respectfully engaging with peers and faculty, and working to highest academic standards.

These outcomes will be demonstrated through class and online discussions, discussion leadership, reflection essays, analytical essays, and creative variations, all aimed to elicit objective analysis and substantive oral and written responses.

REQUIRED READING (alphabetical order with original publication dates in brackets)

- Barrish, Phillip, ed. **Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism**. Cambridge UP, 2011. ISBN: 978-0521050104
- Chopin, Kate. **The Awakening and Selected Stories**. [1899] Penguin Classics, 2003. ISBN: 9780142437322
- Hopkins, Pauline E. **Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South**. [1900] Oxford UP, 1991. ISBN-13: 9780195067859
- Howells, William Dean. **A Hazard of New Fortunes**. [1890] Penguin Classics, 2001. ISBN-13: 9780140439236
- Jewett, Sarah Orne. **The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories**. [1896] Signet Classics, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0451531445
- London, Jack. **The Sea-Wolf**. [1904] SeaWolf Press, 2017. ISBN-13: 9781948132350
- Paredes, Americo. **George Washington Gomez: A Mexicotexan Novel**. [1936-1940] Arte Publico Pr, 1990. ISBN-13: 9781558850125
- Wharton, Edith. **The House of Mirth**. [1905] Penguin Classics. ISBN 9780140187298

DIGITAL ARCHIVES & RESOURCES

Brief overviews: <http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/realism.htm>
<https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/howells/realism.htm>

Literary Research: Strategies and Sources: American Realism and Naturalism:
<https://libguides.du.edu/c.php?g=90360&p=581404>

American Literary Realism Study Guide: <https://americanliterature.com/realism-study-guide/>

Visual Art: <https://www.artsy.net/gene/american-realism>

Kanopy.com

This streaming service has over 30,000 award-winning films and documentaries. Public library patrons, university students and faculty are able to watch free-of-charge with their institution's library card. While the UTT Robert R. Muntz Library does not have a subscription, I was able to create an account with my Tyler Public Library card. Excellent international, indie, and Great Courses archive! There are a number of educational programming related to our topic.

GRADS: Search the University of Pennsylvania Call-For-Papers site to see current conversations that feature conferences and panels relevant to our field of study. If you are interested in submitting a conference proposal, I am happy to work with you. <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/category/all>

If you are interested in learning more about academic publishing, you might explore the submission guidelines for the following journals:

American Literary Realism: <https://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/?id=alr>

American Literary Realism: <https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/379>

| POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

PREPARATION, ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION: My teaching methods emphasize individual preparation, group discussion and collaborative learning. Class members will be expected to share insights and to encourage others to do so. This course is reading-, discussion-, and writing-intensive and students will engage in various writing assignments—both graded and ungraded—as a means to making discoveries and articulating insights about the literary and critical texts we read. Participation is crucial to your success in this class, which operates on the basis of a thoughtful interaction between teacher and student and among students.

Everyone is expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, turn off cellphones and laptops (unless you are working from a digital text) and store them in backpacks. **Attention to the cellphone instead of class and peers will be counted as an absence.** You will often work in small groups and are always expected to participate in discussions of the assignments. Please bring books under discussion to class as we will be reading from the texts during class time. Quizzes may be given at any time and may not be made up.

I will allow for **two** absences (equal to two weeks' attendance and participation: 1/7th of the course), excused or unexcused, during the semester, after which your participation grade will be compromised. **I will keep track of late arrivals and these will also affect your grade.** (A late arrival is defined as more than fifteen minutes after the beginning of the class time slot.) If you are late, assume you have been marked absent until you talk to me. If you are ill or have an emergency, please email me in order to turn in homework and to pick up the next assignment. Questions concerning grades, assignments, and paper drafts, however, should be addressed during my office hours rather than by email. I will be available by appointment in case of a time conflict.

COMMUNICATION POLICY: Emails will be answered within 24 hours during the school week and occur between 9am and 8pm. Feedback on written assignments will be within 2 weeks of submission.

DISCUSSION FORUM POLICY: Prompts, questions, and responses on the discussion board are to enable students to brainstorm about the readings and assignments. The postings on the discussion board must be focused on the assigned topic. All technical problems associated with Canvas, the Internet, or library databases, including passwords and user IDs, should be directed to the respective departments. The course instructor cannot answer technical questions.

COMMUNICATION & COLLEAGIALITY: We are all responsible for creating a seminar that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. We commit to doing so in a way that values diverse perspectives and experiences and encourages productive reflection and interaction. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be conscious of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom. All postings on the discussion board must meet academic and professional standards. Abuses in the forms of bullying and/or discriminatory comments on gender, sex, race, or ethnicity are not allowed and will be reported if the instructor's intervention does not see immediate changes in behavior.

CONVENTIONS OF ADDRESS: Speaking to a professor, administrator, staff member, employer, manager, or colleague is different (at least initially) from speaking/texting with a friend, family member, or other familiar relation. In a professional, intellectual context like the University, it is conventional to refer to faculty, administrators, staff, and others by their titles (Doctor, Professor, Instructor, Coach) unless explicitly instructed otherwise. You should also get into the habit of including greetings, salutations, and language appropriate to such contexts (not, for example, “Hey,”). I will respectfully refer to you according to your stated preferences and expect that you’ll reciprocate in kind.

HOMEWORK & PAPER FORMAT: Complete all assigned readings and assignments by the due date so that you can participate in online and classroom discussion and writing activities. All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, use normal margins and readable font. Paper headings should include your name, date, course title, and professor’s name. Each page should include page number and your last name. Use MLA documentation to cite sources and include a Works Cited page.

DUE DATE POLICY: Assignments must be submitted through Canvas on or before the due date (unless otherwise requested). Work turned in late without a compelling reason will be lowered one-third of a grade per day.

ASSIGNMENTS & PROJECTS

Readings & Discussions (Both Online & In-Class)

⌘ **ASSIGNED READINGS:** Complete all literary and critical assigned readings by the due date so that you can participate in classroom discussion and learning activities.

⌘ **DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP POSTING IN CANVAS:** Across the semester, each student will be responsible for initiating online and follow-up in-class discussions of the assigned readings. You will be assigned to summarize and comment on the current chapter in the Barrish text (*Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*) and, during a different week, on the selected reading in the current novel. I’ve made initial assignments; please let me know if you have a conflict with that date.

The designated discussion leaders for each week will post before or by **SUNDAY (midnight)** in preparation for our Monday evening class discussion. Discussion leaders should be prepared to facilitate a discussion on your post during our on-campus meeting.

📄 For Barrish’s *Introduction to American Literary Realism*: Briefly summarize the chapter’s main points as to literary trends, historical context, as well as highlighted authors and works. You might choose to point to novels under review in the class and/or contrast American Realism with other movements and works you have studied. You might comment from your 21st-century vantage point on the aims of literary Realism and the issues of the historical period. Conclude with meaningful discussion questions and prompts for the class. **Posts should be at least 300+ words.**

📄 For the **NOVELS**: Briefly summarize the plot arc for the week’s reading and then deepen the discussion by considering the ways in which the novel illustrates Realist techniques, subjects, and goals. Consider the novel’s historical context as you evaluate the protagonists’ opportunities and challenges. It is often effective to offer the class a passage to dissect in a close reading. Feel free to make connections across our critical and literary readings up to that point. Follow your summary with a number of questions and prompts for the class to discuss. **Posts should be at least 300+ words.**

Discussion leadership postings will be **letter-graded** according to the concision of the summary, the depth and thoughtfulness of the discussion prompts and questions, and the grammatical correctness and polish of the prose.

You are welcome to consult with me as you draft your posting!

CLASS WEEKLY DISCUSSION RESPONSES: Each class member is responsible for a response of **100+ words in length** to each discussant's posting. Once you've posted for the week, feel free to respond more briefly to colleagues' comments. **POST responses by SATURDAY (midnight) of the calendar week.**

****NOTE**** The English major Senior Portfolio requires examples of the student's ability to give evidence of "extended written critical debate with classmates in interactive forums on larger thematic topics when prompted." Keep copies of posts that you are particularly proud of as you prepare material for your graduation portfolio!

Analytic & Creative Writing

⌘ **TIMED REFLECTION WRITING:** At the start of most class periods I will set out a question or prompt related to the week's required readings (open book) for your consideration and response; the class will have about **15** minutes to respond. I am looking for evidence of your active preparation for class and formulation of new insights, connections across texts, and research questions as we move forward in our studies. Written responses will be graded on a rising 1-4 point scale. If you arrive late to class you will not be given additional time. Responses cannot be made up. Hopefully the writing and brainstorming you generate will offer ideas that might be of use in prospectuses and the final paper.

⌘ **PROSPECTUS // Research Paper Abstract:** There will be 2 "prospectus" assignments for which students will map out an abstract for a research paper, to include a working thesis argument paragraph followed by a set of supporting passages (both creative and critical-scholarly sources) and a rationale statement for how these would be used to support the thesis. You are free to choose your own topic of analysis as you explore more deeply your insights about works under review during the period of the semester leading up to the due date. Include the questions you are using to help guide your research; the specific novel/s you hope to examine; and difficulties, questions, or problems you anticipate. You will get feedback, so ask any other questions as well.

Word count should be a minimum of 500+ words and no more than 1200, including the bibliography. More information is posted in Canvas.

⌘ **FINAL RESEARCH PAPER:** For the end-of-term project, expand upon and/or revise one of the prospectus assignments already submitted OR design a new paper topic that explores a set of propositions that constellate creative and critical texts into significant conversations. *If a final paper is not submitted, the student will fail the course.*

In a minimum of 2000 words (undergraduate) and 2750 words (graduate) including Works Cited, engage the creative and critical works we've discussed and deploy arguments highlighted throughout the semester in order to offer a literary-critical examination and focused reading. The paper should include a minimum of three outside scholarly sources. Feel free to draw from the criticism we've read over the semester. Your essay must be typed and formatted according to the "Homework & Paper Format" description above. Use MLA documentation to cite sources. Submit the final paper through Canvas in a Word document.

Success Tip! *As you are conceptualizing your prospectuses and final papers, I recommend that students meet with me during office hours or through email exchanges, as well as consult your humanities librarian, Vandy Dubre. Visit the Writing Center for support in drafting and revising the paper.*

⌘ **E-SYMPOSIUM:** Seminar paper abstracts will be posted during the final week of the semester in a mini-conference format. Feel free to use this forum for brainstorming and requesting suggestions and feedback from your colleagues to help you during your final paper drafting process.

⌘ **CREATIVE VARIATION & EXPLICATION:**

PART I: To test your engagement with this literary movement, you will write an original **creative work** (for example, a dialogue exchange, scene/setting vignette, a character portrait, short-short fiction) inspired by American Realist authors. **This effort will not be letter-graded.**

PART II: In an attached **explication (500+ words)**, explain the premises for your creative work and discuss the ways in which you engage the literary-critical categories and/or patterns of literary realism **This explication will be graded.**

⌘ **ALTERNATIVE SYLLABUS (GRADS):** This assignment offers graduate students the opportunity to design a syllabus for a different configuration (thematic, topical, generic) of creative and theoretical readings and emphases for an American literary realism course to be offered at a high school, community college, or university. *More information will be handed out in class.*

GRADES & FINAL EVALUATION

Final course grades will be based on the weighted average grades based on the following percentages. The final grade will include my assessment of your overall contribution and progress in the class. Feel free to communicate with me at any time about your grades.

UNDERGRADUATES:

Attendance & In-Class/Online Participation	20%
Reflection Responses	10%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Prospecti (2)	30%
Creative Variation	10%
Final Paper and E-Symposium	20%

GRADUATES:

Attendance & In-Class/Online Participation	10%
Reflection Responses	10%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Prospecti (2)	20%
Creative Variation	10%
Alternative Syllabus	10%
Final Paper	30%

PAPER GRADING STANDARDS:

Excellent (A) papers have clear theses and soundly organized arguments that reflect detailed, nuanced understanding of the text. They are precisely and concisely written and have few if any mechanical problems—even minor ones. They weave quotations into their arguments smoothly and forcefully. A vital, graceful voice animates such essays; they say something compelling in a compelling way.

Good (B) papers have clear theses and are thoughtfully and reasonably organized. They may be marred by a few infelicities (inappropriateness) of style, but they will have no major mechanical problems—and not many minor ones either. These are solid, disciplined papers that make a definite point in a logical, coherent manner

to a definite audience.

Satisfactory (C) papers have a thesis supported by evidence. The writing is clean and properly proofed, but not always compelling; it may be marred by some minor mechanical problems and one or two major ones (like fragments or run-ons). While their arguments may not be particularly cogent, these papers do say something interesting, and they say it in a comprehensible and responsible way.

Poor (D) papers, while giving evidence of effort on the part of the writer, lack a thesis, have major mechanical problems, poor organization, betray serious misreadings of the text, and show little sense of subject or audience.

Failing (F) papers have weaknesses even graver than those indicated for poor papers. They usually betray a lack of effort on the part of the writer. Any evidence of plagiarism (intentional or otherwise) will result in a failing grade—and referral to the Academic Conduct Committee.

UT TYLER WRITING CENTER: Located in CAS 212, the Writing Center at The University of Texas is a place for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff to work on their writing projects and writing skills. If you have a writing project underway, we recommend you make an appointment with one of our qualified consultants. We can assist with a variety of concerns at almost any level. Beyond individual projects, we also can visit classrooms to assist with any kind of writing work. We can create customized workshops to deal with any kind of writing issue for groups of any size. For more information, see <https://www.uttyler.edu/writing-center/>



Martin Lewis, *Shadow Dance*, dry point and sand-ground, 1930