

English 265-01: American Fiction of the Gilded Age

CRN 14530

Professor J. Brady
Palmer 305 (office)
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Fall, 2013
MWF 9:00-9:50
in Palmer 210

Required Texts:

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*
Edith Wharton, *Three Novels of New York*
Theodore Dreiser, *Jennie Gerhardt*
Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier*
Frank Norris, *The Pit*
Frederick Townsend Martin, *The Passing of the Idle Rich* (excerpts)
Joan Didion, "The Seacoast of Despair" in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Office Hours:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:00-10:30
Tuesday, Thursday: 11:00-12:00, or by appointment throughout the week

Course Description:

This course focuses on the rich body of literature produced in and about the Gilded Age, a period of intensive industrialization and urbanization that became celebrated for vast disparities in income and in living conditions. The famous phrases, 'keeping up with the Joneses' and 'how the other half lives' and 'conspicuous consumption' are all markers of this era. The class will read representative fiction by Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. We begin with Thorstein Veblen's trenchant critique of the excesses of predatory American capitalism in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. In this course, we consider such topics as the rise of the luxury hotel in large American cities, the modern city itself as protagonist, the often stark representation of the lives of the urban poor, the rise of the entrepreneurial American financier, and the volatility of the American stock market in the period. We will also focus on gender relations and the separate gendered spheres of work and home, as well as the ambiguous representation of the lives of leisure class women in these novels. Finally, we will discuss the documentary investments of the realist and naturalist fiction of America's

Gilded Age, focusing on the textured representation of material objects in these novels.

This course carries both F2 (Writing Intensive) and F4 (Literary Texts) credit. It includes a workshop of selected essays over the course of the semester.

Attendance Policy:

Late arrivals to class will be counted as an absence and any student who misses or comes late to class more than **four** times in the semester will receive a zero in the 10% of the grade reflecting class participation and attendance and may be asked to withdraw from the course.

Schedule:

Anatomy of the Leisure Class: Veblen and Wharton

August 21	Introductory remarks
August 23	Veblen, Preface, Chapters 1 and 2
August 26	Veblen, Chapters 5 and 7
August 28	<i>The House of Mirth</i> , Book 1: Chapters 1-6
August 30	<i>House of Mirth</i> , Chapters 7-11
September 2	Labor Day Recess
September 4	<i>House of Mirth</i> , Chapters 12-15
September 6	<i>House of Mirth</i> , Book 2: Chapters 1-7
September 9	<i>House of Mirth</i> , Book 2: Chapters 8-14
September 11	<i>The Passing of the Idle Rich</i> (excerpts)
September 13	First essay due
September 16	<i>The Custom of the Country</i> , Book 1
September 18	<i>Custom of the Country</i> , Book 2

September 20	No class
September 23	<i>Custom of the Country</i> , Book 3
September 25, 27	Workshops of first essay
September 30	<i>Custom of the Country</i> , Book 4
October 2	<i>Custom of the Country</i> , Book 5
October 4	Second essay due

American Naturalism: Theodore Dreiser

October 7	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> , Chapters 1-9
October 9	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> , Chapters 10-20
October 11	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> , Chapters 21-33
October 14	Fall Break
October 16	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> , Chapters 34-46
October 18	<i>Jennie Gerhardt</i> , Chapters 47-62
October 21, 23	Workshops of second essay
October 25	<i>The Financier</i> , Chapters 1-15
October 28	<i>The Financier</i> , Chapters 16-25
October 30	<i>The Financier</i> , Chapters 26-36
November 1	<i>The Financier</i> , Chapters 37-49
November 4	<i>The Financier</i> , Chapters 50-59
November 5	Third essay due

Capitalism and the Rise of the American City

November 6	<i>The Pit</i> , Chapters 1 and 2
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November 8	<i>The Pit</i> , Chapters 3 and 4
November 11	<i>The Pit</i> , Chapters 5 and 6
November 13	<i>The Pit</i> , Chapters 7 and 8
November 15	<i>The Pit</i> , Chapters 9 and 10

The Gilded Age, in Retrospect

November 18	<i>The Age of Innocence</i> , Book 1: Chapters 1-10
November 20	<i>Age of Innocence</i> , Book 1: Chapters 11-18
November 22	<i>Age of Innocence</i> , Book 2: Chapters 19-25
November 25	<i>Age of Innocence</i> , Book 2: Chapters 26-34
November 27-29	Thanksgiving Recess
December 2	“The Seacoast of Despair” (handout)
December 4	Final class
December 6	Fourth essay due

Method of Evaluation:

First essay (4 pages)	20%
Second essay (4 pages)	20%
Third essay (4 pages)	20%
Fourth essay (4 pages)	20%
In-class question*	10%
In-class grade	10%

* Each student will pose one formal question to the class during the semester, speaking from notes only. Your question should be focused, given a context,

and its potential significance made clear to your classmates. The question should explore a fresh aspect of the text that you think important to our understanding of the work. Having posed your question, you will then guide class discussion.

** All late essays will be penalized by at least a letter grade, and may not be rewritten.