

Professor Leslie Petty  
Office Hours: MW 2-3 p.m.; TTh 8:30-9:30 a.m., and by appointment  
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Fall 2010

**English 265:  
Bachelors and Solitary Women in American Literature**

Old Maid: One of the favored subjects for exercising the courage of the coward and the wit of the witless.  
-- Anonymous. In *Littell's Living Age Magazine*, 1852

The Bachelor: A Snail

No friends, no family to him belong.  
Who only lives for one the whole day long;  
Should the least danger e'er approach his cell,  
He suddenly retires within his shell.  
To love himself, and only self, he's known,  
And of his house to fill the whole alone.  
He sallies forth, when dew drops deck the thorns,  
To plant some friendly neighbor's head with horns.  
From gem to gem with trail impure he creeps,  
And each fair flower with slimy kisses sweeps.  
Within himself as in a prison fast,  
At length grown old and sad he breathes his last,  
'Tis here we see, unless our senses fail,  
The picture of the *bachelor* and *snail*.

-- Anonymous, translated from French. *The Old Guard Magazine*, 1865

In a nation (and literary tradition) so invested in domesticity and marriage, what can we learn from marginalized, unorthodox characters (and authors) who remain outside the domestic economy? In an attempt to answer this question, we will read a wide range of texts concerned with the position of single (i.e. unmarried) adults in American literature, as well as with people who, though married, are isolated from their families and perhaps their communities. As American society became modernized, the figures of single men and independent women became increasingly prominent on the cultural landscape. Thus, we will begin with popular representations of old maids and bachelors in the years before the Civil War, discussing the anxieties and assumptions associated with those people doomed to "single blessedness." With this as a backdrop, we will proceed rather peripatetically (though loosely chronologically) through canonical and non-canonical works of literature written after the Civil War and well into the twentieth century. As we progress, I hope our initial inquiry will expand into a constellation of questions. Is solitude empowering or debilitating? Does it make one a more or less astute observer of the human condition? What are the dangers or delights of being unmarried? Do these conditions change over time? Does gender or race or class make a difference? We will not find simple or satisfying answers to these questions, but my hope is that we will begin to understand how complex these characters are and how central to an investigation of our national literature.

## Required Reading

(Please note: I prefer that you use these editions. If you choose to use another edition, be aware that differences in pagination could make following class discussion difficult.)

### Primary Texts

Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. Delta Fiction.  
 Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* Penguin Classics.  
 Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Norton Critical Edition.  
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Blithedale Romance*. Norton Critical Edition.  
 Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand and Passing*. Rutgers University Press.  
 Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. Penguin Classics.

The syllabus requires that you read several shorter texts that will be available electronically in our public folder. Generally, the file name will be the author's last name and an abbreviated version of the title. **You should consider these required texts for the class, which means that it is mandatory that you not only read them but print them out and bring them to class.** I can't stress this strongly enough. Failure to do so will quite negatively affect your participation grade.

### Assignments

Essay #1 (4-5 pgs.)	15%
Essay #2 (4-5 pgs.)	15%
Essay #3 (4-5 pgs.)	20%
Final Essay (8-10 pgs.)	25%
Short Response Papers	15%
Participation	10%

We will discuss the particulars for these assignments at a later date.

### Attendance Policy

You are expected to be in class every day. Being "present" doesn't just mean physically being in the room; you are to be alert and prepared. Anyone not alert (i.e. sleeping, reading the paper, working a crossword, etc.) will be counted absent, as will anyone clearly not prepared to participate. If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed and what, if anything, you need to make up. **More than 3 absences (for any reason other than a school sanctioned event) will adversely affect your grade; i.e. you will lose 1/3 letter grade for each additional absence.** Chronic tardiness will count towards absences. Excessive absences (i.e. more than 6 of the total class days) could result in an "F" for the course.

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

Essays and other assignments are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. **Late papers will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per day, including weekends.** Except in the case of documented illness or family emergency, papers more than a week late will receive a failing grade. If you believe you have a legitimate reason for missing a deadline, talk to me beforehand to make alternate arrangements. Also, please note that essays and response papers must be typed, double-spaced with an inch-margin, stapled, and adhere to MLA standards in both layout and documentation. See me if you have questions about MLA or need further information.

### **Academic Honesty**

Every assignment that you submit must be your original work, written specifically for this class, and it must clearly and properly cite any sources you used in writing it. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask. I am bound by the honor code to turn in any work I suspect of being plagiarized to the honor council, and I will not have a conversation with you before doing so. Therefore, it is best to approach me with any concerns before the assignment is submitted. If you plagiarize an essay or other assignment, in part or whole, you will fail the course in addition to any punishment meted out by the Honor Council. Please see the English Department policies attached to this syllabus for a further elaboration of the course plagiarism policy. Also, note that the college is in the process of obtaining a license to use "Turn It In," which is a program designed to help you (and me) identify potential plagiarism problems. I very well may require you to use this program before I will grade your papers.

### **Cell Phones and Laptops**

I should never see or hear your cell phone, nor should I be aware of it vibrating. Please turn your phones off before you enter the room. Be warned that I reserve the right to answer any phone that rings in my class and that if I see you texting or checking your phone, you'll be counted absent for that day. I am happy for you to use laptops for taking notes, etc. However, if I discover that you are on the internet for any reason (other than my asking you to look something up) or you are doing something on your laptop that distracts you from class participation, then you will be counted absent that day, and I'll ask you not to bring your laptop back.

## Reading Schedule

### August

W, 25: Introductions

#### **Popular Representations of “Single Blessedness” in Antebellum America**

F, 27: Selections from periodical literature of the 1840s-60s on bachelors and old maids (File name: “Part\_1\_Bach\_Sol\_Wom”)

M, 30: Selections from periodical literature of the 1840s-60s on bachelors and old maids (File Name: “Part\_2\_Bach\_Sol\_Wom”)

### September

W, 1: Mitchell, “Smoke, Blaze and Ashes” from *Reveries of a Bachelor*  
Group 1

#### **Transcendental Mediations on the Single Life**

F, 3: Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women” (1590-1605)

M, 6: No Class: Labor Day Holiday

W, 8: Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women” (1605-26)  
Group 2

F, 10: Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*; chapters 1-7 (5-53)

M, 13: Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*; chapters 8-14 (54-118)  
Group 3

W, 15: No Class: “Munch and Learn” at the Dixon

F, 17: Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*; chapters 15-22 (119-178)  
Group 4

M, 20: Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*; chapters 23-end (179-228)  
Group 5

#### **Between Men: The Short Fiction of Herman Melville**

W, 22: Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids”  
Group 1

F, 24: Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”  
**Essay #1 Due**

M, 27: Melville, *Benito Cereno* (2372-2398)

W, 29: Melville, *Benito Cereno* (2399-2427)  
Group 2

**[Solitary] Woman in the [Late] Nineteenth Century: Spinster or New Woman?**

**October**

F, 1: James, "The Aspern Papers"

M, 4: James, "The Aspern Papers"  
Group 3

W, 6: Woolson, "Miss Grief"  
Group 4

F, 8: No Class: Professor out of town for conference

M, 11: Freeman, "A New England Nun"  
Group 5

W, 13: Stanton, "Solitude of Self"  
Group 1

F, 15: Chopin, *The Awakening*, chpts. I-XX (3-56)

M, 18: Fall Break

W, 20: Chopin, *The Awakening*, chpts. XXI-XXXIV (56-98)  
**Essay #2 Due**

F, 22: Chopin, *The Awakening*, chpts. XXXV-XXXIX (98-109)  
Group 2

**Missing Out?: The Sacrifices of the Single Life**

M, 25: Cather, *O, Pioneers!*; Part I "The Wild Lands" (1-48)

W, 27: Cather, *O, Pioneers!*; Part II, "Neighboring Fields" (100-122); Part III, "Winter Memories" (123-38)  
Group 3

F, 29: Cather, *O, Pioneers!*; Part IV, "The White Mulberry Tree" (139-184)  
Group 4

## November

- M, 1: Cather, *O, Pioneers!*; Part V, "Alexandra" (185-end)  
Group 5
- W, 3: James, "The Beast in the Jungle"; sections 1-3 (374-90)
- F, 5: James, "The Beast in the Jungle"; sections 4-6 (390-403)  
Group 1
- M, 8: Taylor, "Heads of Houses," "The Spinster's Tale"  
Group 2

## Modern Transgressions: Subversive Sexuality in the Twentieth Century

- W, 10: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*; Book I, chpts. 1-11 (3-81)  
**Essay #3 Due**
- F, 12: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*; Book I, chpts. 12-18 (82-143)  
Group 3
- M, 15: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*; Book II, chpts. 19-26 (144-219)  
Group 4
- W, 17: Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*; Book II, chpts. 27-34 (220-end)  
Group 5
- F, 19: Larsen, *Passing* (143-77)
- M, 22: Larsen, *Passing* (178-210)  
Group 1
- W, 24: Thanksgiving Break
- F, 26: Thanksgiving Break
- M, 29: Larsen, *Passing* (211-42)  
Group 2

## December

- W, 1: Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, Part One (3-71)  
Group 3
- F, 3: Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, Part Two (71-118)

Group 4

M, 6: Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, Part Two (119-69)

Group 5

W, 8: Last day of class: **Annotated bibliographies due**

**Final Essay Due Tuesday, December 14 @ 12:00 p.m.**