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ENGL 361-01, American Realism and Naturalism, Fall 2009

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Authors	Petty, Leslie
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Professor Leslie Petty
Office Hours: T 11:15-12:15; W 2-3; Th 2-3 and by appointment
Palmer 307
843-3981
pettyl@rhodes.edu
Fall 2009
CRN: 1024

**English 361:
American Realism and Naturalism
(T/Th 12:30-1:45, Buckman 103)**

[The rules governing literary art] require that the personages of a tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone; or if they venture a miracle, the author must so plausibly set it forth as to make it look possible and reasonable.

---- *Mark Twain*

[The realist] finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character; nothing that God made is contemptible.

---- *William Dean Howells*

Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!

---- *Henry James*

Simply put, American Realism and Naturalism were concomitant aesthetic movements that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction against Romanticism brought on by post-Civil War disillusionment. As far as it goes, this definition suits; however, it is only the broadest outline of what cultural and artistic forces shaped American literature from about 1875-1910, producing the variety of literary forms and achievements that fall under the umbrella headings "realist" and/or "naturalist."

For example, technological and scientific advances such as the verisimilitude of photography made authors re-think the way they used language, as did the rise of the middle-class and the development of historiography, with its attention to telling the narrative of history in a plausible cause/effect sequence. A Darwinian understanding of the world was increasingly common, making people more attuned to the ways humans were products, not just (or even primarily) of their human "soul," but also of environmental and biological factors.

Industrialism meant that the nation was becoming more homogenized, and an unexpected consequence was an increased interest in stories about the particularities of various regions.

Newly freed slaves, a burgeoning immigrant population and a large class of single white women demanding their rights changed not only the demographics and social awareness of the nation, but contributed to the development of a realist and naturalist aesthetic as well.

Finally, this was the moment when the novel "came of age," so to speak; a generation of writers such as James, Howells and Twain began theorizing what makes the novel successful and what its merits are, in an attempt to elevate its status from simple mass entertainment to a legitimate art form. In this course, we will attempt to trace this intricate web of historical, cultural and aesthetic developments, considering how they grew out of the legacy of the Civil War but also how they propelled the nation toward modernity in the twentieth-century.

Required Reading

(Please note: I prefer that you use these editions. If you choose to use another edition, be aware that you will need to get supplemental texts (i.e. critical apparatus) from a classmate and that differences in pagination could make following class discussion difficult.)

Chesnutt, Charles. *The Marrow of Tradition*. (Penguin)

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. (Norton)

Howells, William Dean. *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. (Penguin)

James, Henry. *The Portrait of a Lady*. (Norton)

Jewett, Sarah Orne. *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. (Norton)

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (Riverside Edition. Houghton Mifflin)

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. (Norton)

Note: In addition, you will have some readings posted in the course folder as well as handouts; you are responsible for these as well.

Assignments

Essay #1 (5-7 pages)	20%
Essay #2 (5-7 pages)	20%
Final Essay (10-12 pages)	30%
Short response papers	20%
Participation	10%

We will discuss the particulars for these assignments in class.

Attendance Policy

Because this is a 300-level English class, you are expected to perform like majors and be serious about your work. I will have little patience, therefore, with lax attendance or inattention during class. You are to be here on-time, well-prepared, and well-rested. If you miss more than 3 classes, your final grade will be penalized 1/3 letter grade per absence. If you miss more than 6 classes, you will fail the course. Furthermore, a failure to participate can adversely affect your attendance.

Assignment Submission Policy

Essays are due at the beginning of class unless otherwise stated in class. You will lose 1/3 letter grade per day (including weekends) whenever an assignment is late; after an essay is one week late, you will receive an "F" on the assignment. If you fail to turn in any of the major assignments, you will fail the course.

Also, please note that essays 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

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 attached list of English department policies and read carefully the section on academic honesty. This policy governs our class. Please note particularly that work written for another class – even if revised – cannot be handed in as original work in this class. Doing so is considered intellectual dishonesty.\

Reading Assignment for Tuesday, Sept. 1: The Realist Aesthetic

COURSE FOLDER: Mark Twain, "James Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses"; Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," William Dean Howells, from *Criticism and Fiction*

English 361: American Realism and Naturalism
Reading Schedule

August

Thurs. 27: Introductions

September

Tues. 1: **The Realist Aesthetic:** COURSE FOLDER: Twain, "James Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses"; James, "The Art of Fiction," Howells, from *Criticism and Fiction*

Thurs. 3: **American Naturalism:** COURSE FOLDER: Crane, "An Experiment in Misery," and "The Open Boat," Cowley, "A Natural History of American Naturalism"

The Dean and the Master

Tues. 8 William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Chpts. I-IX (3-125)

Thurs. 10 William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Chpts.X-XIV (126-208)
COURSE FOLDER: Howells, "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business"
Group 1

Tues. 15 William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Chpts. XV-XXII (209-85)
Group 2

Thurs. 17 William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*; Chpts. XXIII-end (286-365)
Henry James, "Preface to the New York Edition [of *Portrait of a Lady*] (1908), 3-17
Group 3

Tues. 22 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*; Vol. I; Chpts. I-XVIII (17-163)

Thurs. 24 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*; Vol. I; Chpts. XIX-XXVIII (163-253)
Group 4

Tues. 29 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*; Vol. II; Chpts. XXVIII-XLVII (253-414)
Group 1

October

Tues. 6 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*; Vol. II; Chpts. XLVIII-end (414-490)
Group 2

Gender, Region and Economics

Thurs. 8 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*; Chpts. I-VI (1-27)
Essay #1 Due

Tues. 13 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*; Chpts. VII-XVIII (28-112)
Group 3

Thurs. 15 Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*; Chpts. XIX-end (113-133)
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*; Chpts. I-X (3-30)

Tues. 20: FALL BREAK

Thurs. 22: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*; Chpts. XI-XXIV (30-70)
COURSE FOLDER: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Solitude of Self" (1899)
Group 4

Tues. 27: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*; Chpts. XXV-end (70-109)
Group 1

Thurs. 29: Edith Wharton *The House of Mirth*; Book I; Chpts. I-VII (5-68)
Thorstein Veblen "Conspicuous Consumption and the Servant-Wife" [in *The Awakening: Norton Critical Edition*, 154-59] and "Conspicuous Leisure and Conspicuous Consumption" [in *The House of Mirth: A Norton Critical Edition*, 264-71]

November

Tues. 3: Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*; Book I; Chpts. VIII-XV; Book II; Chpts. I-V (68-189)
Group 2

Thurs. 5: Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*; Book II; Chpts. VI-end (189-256)
Group 3

Race and Reconstruction

- Tues. 10 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Chpts. I-XV (69-142)
COURSE FOLDER: Twain, Chpt. 46 of *Life on the Mississippi*
Essay #2 Due
- Thurs. 12 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Chpts. XVI-XX (142-192)
Group 4
- Tues. 17 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Chpts. XXI-XXXII (192-265)
Group 1
- Thurs. 19 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Chpts. XXXIII-end (265-320)
Group 2
- Tues. 24 Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*; Chpts. I-V (1-62)
COURSE FOLDER: Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its
Phases"
- Thurs. 26: THANKSGIVING BREAK

December

- Tues. 1 Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*; Chpts. VI-XXIV (63-209)
Group 3
- Thurs. 3 Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*; Chpts. XXV-XXXI (210-73)
Group 4
- Tues. 8 Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*; Chpts. XXXII-end (274-329)