

V41.0635 AMERICAN FICTION FROM 1900 TO WORLD WAR II
Fall 2005, TR 11:00-12:15, 25 West 4th St., Room C-4

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Office Hours: T 9:30-11:00, 19 University Place, Room 615

Course Overview: This period course will make an intensive study of American prose from the first half of the Twentieth Century. The major literary modes (e.g., naturalism, regionalism, modernism) and movements (e.g., The Harlem Renaissance, the Lost Generation) of this period will be explored. Along with the canonical authors and texts, the course will also cover the rise of genre fiction (the Western, the detective story, the weird tale) during this time period. The emphasis will be on close reading of the texts, but effort will be made as well to place the novels and stories within their particular cultural context. Finally, the course will encourage students to think comparatively, to consider the various intertextual links between the works on the syllabus.

Texts (available at NYU Bookstore, Washington Place): 1. Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Herland and Selected Stories (Signet Classic) 2. Owen Wister: The Virginian (Penguin Classics) 3. Frank Norris: The Octopus (Penguin Classics) 4. Edith Wharton: The House of Mirth (Signet Classic) 5. Willa Cather: A Lost Lady (Vintage) 6. Nella Larsen: Quicksand & Passing (Rutgers University Press) 7. John Dos Passos: Three Soldiers (Penguin Classics) 8. F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great Gatsby (Scribner) 9. H.P. Lovecraft: The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: Bloodcurdling Tales of Horror and the Macabre (Del Rey) 10. Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio (Penguin Classics) 11. Ernest Hemingway: The Complete Short Stories (Finca Vigia Edition) (Scribner) 12. James M. Cain: The Postman Always Rings Twice (Vintage) 13. William Faulkner: Absalom, Absalom! (Vintage) 14. Nathanael West: The Day of the Locust (Signet Classics) 15. Richard Wright: Native Son (Harper Perennial)

Course Requirements:

Class Participation (10% of final grade): This means being present in mind as well as body; keeping on track with the assigned readings and being prepared to engage in class discussions/activities. Please note that attendance is MANDATORY. You are allowed two absences for the semester (use them wisely—for serious illness or emergency—not as vacation days). For each and every absence beyond the allotted two, your final grade will be lowered one increment (e.g. a third absence would mean that a final grade of B is lowered to a B-).

Paper #1 Engaging the Literary Criticism (7-8 pp., 15% of final grade): detailed instructions below.

Paper #2 Comparative Analysis (10 pp., 25% of final grade): detailed instructions below.

Final Exam (50% of final grade): will include short answer/objective-type questions, passage identification and explication, and an essay. During the semester, I will supply you with a handout detailing the exam format and offering sample questions.

Schedule of Assignments:

(Note: please take the time to read a text's editorial introduction, when available)

T 9/6 Course Intro. "To Build a Fire" [pub. 1908] by Jack London (handout)

R 9/8 SF: Speculative Feminism. Herland [1915] by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

T 9/13 The Birth of the Western. The Virginian [1902] by Owen Wister (Ch. I-XXXI)

R 9/15 American Naturalism. The Virginian (Ch. XXXII-end); The Octopus (1901) by Frank Norris (p. 3-124)

T 9/20 American Naturalism. The Octopus (pp. 125-522)

R 9/22 American Naturalism. The Octopus (pp. 523-652)

T 9/27 The Novel of Manners. The House of Mirth [1905] by Edith Wharton (Book I)

R 9/29 The Novel of Manners. The House of Mirth (Book II)

T 10/4 Frontier Female. A Lost Lady [1923] by Willa Cather

R 10/6 The Harlem Renaissance. Passing [1929] by Nella Larsen

T 10/11 The Great War and Modernism. Three Soldiers [1921] by John Dos Passos (pp. 7-227)

R 10/13 The Great War and Modernism. Three Soldiers (p. 231-364)

T 10/18 The (Self-)Made Man. The Great Gatsby [1925] by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Ch. I-V).
Paper #1 due.

R 10/20 The (Self-)Made Man. The Great Gatsby (Ch. VI-IX)

T 10/25 Weird Tales. Selections from The Best of H.P. Lovecraft: “The Rats in the Walls”; “Pickman’s Model”; “The Music of Erich Zann”; “The Call of Cthulhu”; “The Dunwich Horror”; “The Colour Out of Space”

R 10/27 Midwest Grotesques. Selections from Winesburg, Ohio [1919] by Sherwood Anderson: “*The Book of the Grotesque*”; “Hands”; “Paper Pills”; “Mother”; “The Philosopher”; “Respectability”; “The Strength of God”; “The Teacher”; “Loneliness”; “Death”; “Sophistication”; “Departure”

T 11/1 The Lost Generation. Selections from The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: “A Very Short Story”; “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”; “Fifty Grand”; “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”; “The Sea Change”; “A Canary for One”; “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”; “A Man of the World”; “The Butterfly and the Tank”

R 11/3 The Lost Generation. Selections, cont’d: “Indian Camp”; “Ten Indians”; “The Killers”; “In Another Country”; Big Two-Hearted River: Part I”; “Big Two-Hearted River: Part II”; “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”

T 11/8 Detective/Noir Fiction. “Too Many Have Lived” [1932] by Dashiell Hammett (handout); The Postman Always Rings Twice [1934] by James M. Cain (pp. 3-73)

R 11/10 Detective/Noir Fiction. The Postman Always Rings Twice (pp. 74-116)

T 11/15 Southern Gothic. Absalom, Absalom! [1936] by William Faulkner (pp. 3-106)

R 11/17 Southern Gothic. Absalom, Absalom! (pp. 107-175)

T 11/22 Southern Gothic. Absalom, Absalom! (pp. 176-309)

R 11/24 Happy Thanksgiving!

T 11/29 Hollywood Gothic. The Day of the Locust [1939] by Nathanael West (Ch. 1-14).

R 12/1 Hollywood Gothic. The Day of the Locust (Ch. 15-27). **Paper #2 due.**

T 12/6 African-American Gothic. Native Son [1940] by Richard Wright (“How ‘Bigger’ Was Born” and Book One)

R 12/8 African-American Gothic. Native Son (Book Two)

T 12/13 Course Wrap-Up. Native Son (Book Three)

T 12/20 FINAL EXAM (10:00-11:50)

Instructions for Paper #1 Engaging the Literary Criticism (Due Date: T 10/18)

For this assignment (7-8 pp., typed, double-spaced, stapled), you will research an essay of literary criticism on any one text (novel or short story) from our syllabus and offer *your own critique* of that piece of criticism. The first half (approximately) of your paper should present the chosen essay to your readers: the argument the critic pursues (essay’s thesis?), the textual evidence s/he invokes, his/her methods for presenting the argument (e.g. does the critic draw on a particular school of literary theory?). The second half of your paper will involve your critical assessment of the researched essay. Do you agree with the critic’s argument/methods? Why or why not? Based on your own understanding of the particular novel or short story being discussed, would you have pursued a different tact or used different pieces of textual evidence? In other words, whether you veer towards support or disagreement (and you might have instances of both), continue the researched essay’s argument with your own analysis of the novel/short

story. Engage both the literary text and the critic's essay by quoting and analyzing specific pieces of each.

Further guidelines: attach a photocopy of the researched essay to the end of your paper (it need not be a clean copy; you can mark it up as you study it and prepare to write your paper).

Do not forget to create an appropriate title for your paper.

How to find your essay: The best bet would be to use the databases in the reference section of Bobst Library to access the MLA Bibliography (Note: you can also access the MLA Bibliography on your NYUHome account; click on the "Research" button and follow the links). Just type in the title of the text you want to find an essay on; a sizable list should appear in response to your query. Record the info for whichever essays sound interesting to you (judging at this point mainly by the title), then go check their availability within the library (Note: Bobst does not carry every academic journal in existence, and a book of essays might be checked out already, so stock yourself with a couple of choices). You might have to peruse more than one essay before finding one suitable to work with, so be sure to give yourself enough time to complete the assignment (Don't wait until the last minute!). Also, if you don't have a basic grasp of a certain school of literary theory (e.g., Marxist, psychoanalytic, deconstructionist), then don't choose an essay that relies heavily on such theory.

So your readers know the source of your researched essay, include a Works Cited page (MLA format).

If you have any questions, or encounter any problems, don't hesitate to seek me out.

Instructions for Paper #2 Comparative Analysis (Due Date: R 12/1—No Extensions)

Continuing the idea that our texts are not just discrete units on the syllabus but that they speak to each other directly and indirectly, your final paper (10 pp., typed, double-spaced, stapled) asks you to take an intertextual approach and to perform comparative analysis. You will choose any two texts from the syllabus and analyze the authors' handling of a particular topic/theme. Try to interweave your discussion of the two texts, instead of dividing the paper into two distinct halves and merely demonstrating that the first text does A while the second text does B. Take your argument a step further by considering the *larger significance* of the authors' respective approaches. What can we learn about each text by studying the comparative uses of this topic/theme? For example, if your topic is female camaraderie in Herland and Passing: what is each author trying to accomplish through the depiction of such relations? (what thematic/critical points are being made?)

Feel free to apply any notes/materials from class, but do not conduct any outside research (I am interested in *your* analysis). Again, your analysis will be most effective if you support and illustrate it with specific pieces of textual quotation. Be careful not to lapse into extended plot summary at the expense of critical analysis. Remember to create an appropriate title for your paper. Please don't use a cover page. A Works Cited page is not required, but do cite parenthetically the page numbers of your quotations within the paper.

I do not require you to submit a paper proposal, but I would be happy to discuss your topic/ideas with you.

Possible topics (these are just suggestions; you don't have to limit yourself to this list):

- *representations of the West in The Virginian and A Lost Lady
- *the role of cinema in Three Soldiers and The Day of the Locust
- *character study: the coming-of-age of Hemingway's Nick Adams & Anderson's George Willard
- *articulating the grotesque: narrative style in Lovecraft's tales & Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!
- *naturalism in "To Build a Fire" and The Octopus
- *male-female intrigue in The Great Gatsby and The Postman Always Rings Twice
- *race and the Gothic: Native Son and Absalom, Absalom!
- *critiques of the urban scene/societal values in The Octopus and The House of Mirth