

Scams, Shams, and the Real Thing in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature

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Office Hours: Wed. 1-3, Thurs. 11-12, and by appointment

When Ralph Waldo Emerson called for an "original relation" with nature in 1836, he was not thinking of city zoos or taxidermy specimens in Museums of Natural History. But it was through such examples that many later nineteenth-century Americans would encounter and imagine the original, the natural, the authentic. This course raises the question of the real thing in an era when distinctions between the genuine and the fake were not easy or always obvious. In authors including Henry James, Edith Wharton, Kate Chopin, Abraham Cahan, Nella Larsen, and William Carlos Williams, we will consider how problems of authenticity inform thinking about literature and writing, about nature and technology, about race, gender, ethnicity -- and about the very category of the "American" in an age both enamored and skeptical of that label.

"God never jests with us, and will not compromise the end of nature by permitting any inconsequence in its procession. Any distrust of the permanence of laws would paralyze the faculties of man. Their permanence is sacredly respected, and his faith therein is perfect."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1836

"The dynamo, next to the steam-engine, was the most familiar of exhibits. For Adams's objects its value lay chiefly in its occult mechanism. Between the dynamo in the Gallery of Machines and the engine-house outside, the break of continuity amounted to abysmal fracture for the historian's objects. No...relation could he discover between the steam and the electric current...he could only see an absolute *fiat* in electricity as faith. [Adams] found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exhibition of 1900, with his historical neck broken by the sudden interruption of forces totally new."

- Henry Adams, 1918

"They were all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs."

- Edith Wharton, 1920

REQUIRED BOOKS (ALL PUBLICATION DATES REFER TO FIRST EDITION)

Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (1896)
Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (1925)
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899)
Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories* (1925-)
William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)
Henry James, *Selected Tales* (mostly 1890s)
Nella Larsen, *The Complete Fiction (Passing, 1929)*
Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives and Tender Buttons (Tender Buttons, 1914)*
Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894)
Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (1920)

ONLINE READINGS (E-RES)

Henry Adams, from *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918)
Charles Chesnutt, from *The Conjure Woman* (1899)
W.E.B. DuBois, from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Compensation" (1844)
D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1925)
Frank Norris, "A Deal in Wheat" (1902); "The Dual Personality of Slick Dick Nickerson" (1903)
Alan Trachtenberg, from *Brooklyn Bridge* (1965)
Mark Twain, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865)
William Carlos Williams, from *In the American Grain* (1925)

REQUIREMENTS: SEE FOLLOWING PAGES FOR MORE DETAIL

Ongoing: Class Participation (30%)
As Scheduled: Topic Presentations *or* mise-en-scène, in pairs (10%)
September 14: Fun Exercise: scene writing, parody of James or Twain (part of class participation)
September 28: Close-reading exercise, 3-5 pp. (10%)
November 2: Paper, 5-7 pp (25%)
December 14: Paper, 5-7 pp (25%)

HONOR CODE

The honor code mandate in this course will include the provisions for written work (that it be your own, that all sources be acknowledged, that it be signed with the customary pledge) as well as for group activities (that work be original and divided equally among group participants).

POLICIES

- Attendance, reading, and class participation is assumed without *a priori* arrangements. Barring major illness or other such event, you are allowed to miss 2 class meetings without penalty. Beyond that, your class participation score will decline precipitously.
- Please do not leave class while we are in session without a vastly compelling biological reason
- For group work, please do not leave your partner to bear the burden of the labor. Such lassitude is unfair, and is always apparent during the presentation itself.
- Written work is due on the date specified, by 5 p.m. Late work is penalized at the heavy toll of one grade per day. Extensions may be granted in some cases, but not at the eleventh hour. If you anticipate serious conflicts (between assignments in various courses, for instance), make arrangements with me soon.

SCHEDULE

Part One: The True Beginning?

Thursday, Sep. 2: Introduction to course and participants

Tuesday Sep. 7: Mark Twain, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865); Henry James, “The Real Thing” (1893)

Part Two: True Colors – Décor and Authenticity

Thursday, Sep. 9: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1899)
Presentation Topic: S. Weir Mitchell

Tuesday, Sep. 14: Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”; Henry James, “The Figure in the Carpet” (1896)
Exercise Due: Parody of James or Twain (paper copy, and posted to Blackboard)

Thursday, Sep. 16: Lewis Mumford, from “The Brown Decades” (1931); Robert Henri, from *The Art Spirit* (1923); Henry James, “Paste”
Presentation Topic: The White City

Tuesday, Sep. 21: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)
Presentation Topic: Paint

Thursday, Sep. 23: Howells, *Rise of S. Lapham*

Tuesday, Sep. 28: Howells, *Rise of S. Lapham*
Presentation Topic: Boston/Urban Planning
Exercise Due: Close Reading, 3-5 pp.

Part Three: True Selves – Identity, Psychology, Race, Ethnicity

Thursday, Sep. 30: W.E.B. DuBois, from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903); Frank Norris, “The Dual Personality of Slick Dick Nickerson” (1903); Charles Chesnutt, “The Gophered Grapevine” (1899)

Tuesday, Oct. 5: Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (1896)
Presentation Topic: Late Nineteenth-Century New York City

- Film Screening, *Hester Street* (time to be arranged) -

Thursday, Oct. 7: Cahan, *Yekl*; guest lecture: Amy Rodgers, U. of Michigan, on *Hester Street*

Tuesday, Oct. 12: Nella Larsen, Passing
Presentation Topic: Passing

Thursday, Oct. 15: Larsen, Passing

**** Fall Recess ****

Tuesday, Oct. 26: Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894)

Thursday, Oct. 28: Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson
Presentation Topic: Critical Controversies in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Tuesday, Nov. 2: Kate Chopin, The Awakening (1899)
PAPER #1: 5-7 pp.

Thursday, Nov. 4: Chopin, The Awakening
Presentation: Louisiana/Hybridity

Part Four: The Way We Used to Be - Authenticity and Nostalgia

Tuesday, Nov. 9: William Carlos Williams, from In the American Grain (1925); D.H. Lawrence, from Studies in Classic American Literature (1925); Henry Adams, from The Education of Henry Adams (1918)
Presentation Topic: Exhibitions – Paris, Chicago, etc.

Thursday, Nov. 11: Adams, from The Education of Henry Adams; Trachtenberg, from Brooklyn Bridge (1965)

Tuesday, Nov. 16: Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence (1920)
Presentation Topic: novel's first page

- Film Screening, *The Age of Innocence* (time to be arranged) –

Thursday, Nov. 18: Wharton, Age of Innocence

Tuesday, Nov. 23: Wharton, Age of Innocence

**** Thanksgiving Recess ****

Tuesday, Nov. 30: Ernest Hemingway, The Nick Adams Stories (1925-)
Presentation Topic: the Nick Adams character

Thursday, Dec. 2: Hemingway, The Nick Adams Stories

Tuesday, Dec. 7: Willa Cather, The Professor's House (1925)

Presentation Topic: Archaeology of Western America; Native American “discovery”

Thursday, Dec. 9: Cather, Professor's House

Tuesday, Dec. 14: Cather, Professor's House; Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons (1929)

Presentation Topic: Modernists/Expatriates

PAPER #2: 5-7 pp.