

ENGLISH 578
Fall 2008
Heavilon Hall 126
T /Th 4:30-6:00

Modern American Fiction
1900-1940

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The following texts are available at Von's Book Shop on State Street:

1. Willa Cather, *The Professor's House* (Vintage Classics)
2. Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (Penguin) [U of Pennsylvania Press reconstructed text]
3. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (Vintage International) [corrected text]
4. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (Scribner) [original 1934 text]
5. Ernest Hemingway, *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (Scribner)
6. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper Perennial)
7. Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (Picador)
8. Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (Penguin)
9. Jean Toomer, *Cane* (Norton Critical)
10. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (Scribner)
11. Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Harper Perennial) [reconstructed, unexpurgated text]

Note: It is important that you have the proper editions of the Dreiser, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Wright texts. For *Sister Carrie* either the Penguin or University of Pennsylvania edition (from which the Penguin is offset); for *Tender Is the Night* any edition that begins "On the pleasant shore of the French Riviera" (if your edition begins "In the spring of 1917" then you have a faulty text); for *Absalom, Absalom!* I strongly recommend the above edition; and for *Native Son* either the above Harper paperback or the hardcover Library of America edition.

(Generally, lectures will be delivered on the first day of an assigned text. In several cases, these will continue into the second. It is recommended that you complete your reading of the entire text by the day it is assigned.)

UNIT ONE—Generic Foundations

Week One

- 8/26 Introductory Meeting/Overview of Course
Lecture—Genre, Art, and Culture: The Nineteenth-Century Background to Modern American Fiction
- 8/28 **Lecture—The Profession of Authorship and the Evolution of the Literary Marketplace**

Week Two

- 9/2 **Lecture—Rock and Roll: The Urban/Naturalist Prosaics of Theodore Dreiser**
Assignment: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)
- 9/4 Discussion: *Sister Carrie*

Week Three

- 9/9 Discussion: *Sister Carrie*, continued
- 9/11 **Lecture—The Mating Game: Edith Wharton, the New Woman (Writer), and the Realist Novel of Manners**
Assignment: Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905)

Week Four

- 9/16 Discussion: *The House of Mirth*
- 9/18 Discussion: *Sister Carrie* and *The House of Mirth*
- Brief Talk—Main Street/Main Stream: Sinclair Lewis and the Domestication of American Naturalism**

Week Five

- 9/23 **Lecture—The Mother of Modernist Fiction: The Importance of Gertrude Stein**
Assignment: Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (1909)
- 9/25 Discussion: *Three Lives*

UNIT TWO—Tradition and Innovation: Revolution and Reaction in American Fiction

Week Six

- 9/30 **Lecture—Pine Trees and “A” Trains: The Dynamics of the Harlem Renaissance**
Assignment: Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)
- 10/2 Discussion: *Cane*

Week Seven

- 10/7 **Lecture—A Clean, Well-Lighted Prose: Ernest Hemingway and the Domestication of American Modernist Fiction**
- Please note: Your volume contains Hemingway’s first three story collections with the stories in the same order as they appear in those collections: *In Our Time* (1925, pp. 89-233 for the original edition, pp. 87-233 for all subsequently reprinted editions since 1930); *Men Without Women* (1927,

pp. 235-371); and *Winner Take Nothing* (pp. 272-499). It also includes the three long 1936 stories (pp. 3-77), one of the six Spanish Civil War stories (pp. 78-80); and his earliest story (pp. 81-86).

Assignment: *In Our Time* (1930 edition) complete (pp. 89-233); “An Alpine Idyll” (1927); * “The Killers” (1927); ** “A Canary for One” (1927); * “In Another Country” (1927); * “Now I Lay Me” (1927); “A Pursuit Race” (1927); “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927); “After the Storm” (1932); “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen” (1933); * “The Light of the World” (1933); * “A Way You’ll Never Be” (1933); “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” (1933); * “Fathers and Sons” (1933); “The Capital of the World” (1936); “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936); “Old Man at the Bridge” (1938). (*an asterisk indicates a definite Nick Adams story; ** two asterisks indicate a possible Nick Adams story)

10/9 Discussion of Hemingway

Week Eight

10/14 October Break (no classes)

10/16 Discussion of Hemingway, continued

Week Nine

10/21 **Lecture—Regionalism Demeublé: The Modernist Aesthetic of Willa Cather**

Assignment: Willa Cather, *The Professor’s House* (1925)

10/23 Discussion: *The Professor’s House*

Week Ten

10/28 **Lectures—The Three “M”s : Modernization, Modernity, and Modernism**
and

The Mourning After Modernism: The Lost World of F. Scott Fitzgerald

Assignment: F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night* (1934)

10/30 Discussion: *Tender Is the Night*

UNIT THREE—“Which Side Are You On?”: Modern Fiction and the Real World

Week Eleven

11/4 **Lecture—Tenement Tales: Ethnicity, Nativism, and Modernism**

Assignment: Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep* (1934)

11/6 Discussion: *Call It Sleep*

Week Twelve

11/11 **Lecture—Designing Men: William Faulkner, (Southern) History, and the (Post)Modern Boundary**

Assignment: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)

11/13 Discussion: *Absalom, Absalom!*

Week Thirteen

11/18 Discussion: *Absalom, Absalom!* continued

11/20 **Lecture—Reconfiguring Horizons: Zora Neale Hurston's Geography of Race/Gender**

Assignment: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Week Fourteen (Thanksgiving)

Week Fifteen

12/2 Discussion: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

12/4 **Lecture—Toward an Integration of Genres: The Naturalist/Realist/Modernist Aesthetics of Richard Wright**

Assignment: Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

Week Sixteen

12/9 Discussion: *Native Son*

(I'll be handing out possible final exam questions on this day)

12/11 Review of Course: What Was Modern American Fiction?

(Discussion of possible final exam questions)

Please note: There will be a final exam on which you will be asked to address two questions from the list of topics, and a 15-20 page research paper due by Friday 12/19 at 5 P.M.

Outline for First Week's Lectures

I. The Emergence of American Realism

1. The French Realist Background
2. Antebellum Realist Elements
3. The Impact of the Civil War
4. The Realist Generation

II. The Nature of American Realism

1. Salient Features
2. Postwar Intellectual Discourses
3. Demystifying Romantic Codes
4. The Meanings of Social Life
5. Realist Characters
6. Of Humans and Things
7. Language and Narration

III. The Backdrop to American Naturalism

1. The European Background: Naturalism and Determinism
2. The 1890s: Technology, Economics, and Consolidation
3. Social Darwinism
4. The 1890s: Immigration, Industry, Urbanization, Labor, and Poverty
5. The Failure of American Realism: Choice and Coercion

IV. American Naturalism as a Genre

1. The Naturalists
2. Causality and Philosophy
3. Conflating Genres: *The Awakening* as a Realist/Regionalist/Naturalist/Modernist Text

V. The Evolution of the Literary Marketplace

1. Belles-Lettres
2. The Invasion of the Novel
3. The Fate of Non-Market Literatures
4. The New Profession of Authorship and the New Mass Readership
5. The Fate of High Realism