

American Literary Realism

English 5350.061 || SPRING 2026

FACULTY: Dr. Anett Jessop

OFFICE: CAS 248

OFFICE On-campus: W - 8:45-9:45pm; T/R -

HOURS: 5:00-5:30 pm; Online students by appointments

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George Bellows, "A Knock Down" (c. 1918-1921)

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

Welcome! In this course, we will study a selection of later-19th and early-20th-century American fiction representing American Literary Realism. Historically, this period (c. 1865-1920) spans important transitions in the development of U.S. nationhood, including post-Civil War Reconstruction, The Gilded Age, and The Progressive Era, as well as continuing westward expansion, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization. Pressured by a developing capitalist economy, this period faced sweeping social changes, to include labor disputes, race and class struggle, and women's suffrage movements.

The American Realist movement was an aesthetic response that redefined literature as well as the visual arts, music, and journalism. Literary Realism was a reaction and response to romantic and sentimental modes of the past and its writers experimented with new approaches for representing cultural changes, to include genre choice, subject matter, new characterizations of different social classes, language differences and dialects, and expanded regional representation beyond New England. Many of the topics and struggles represented in the literature are familiar to present-day Americans, such as issues of race, gender, economic and social class, immigration, and regional dominance. We will investigate how this literary movement interpreted the 'realities' of its historical moment—and to what explicit and implicit goals and outcomes.

Pedagogically, I am committed to your appreciation and enriched understanding of the aesthetic and cultural contexts for this body of literature as well as to your further development as sophisticated readers, critical thinkers, and writers about literary texts. In written and posted assignments, you will practice close reading skills as well as synthesize and interpret patterns and themes toward developing strong thesis claims and polished essays. As you are an advanced body of readers and writers, this class will function like a seminar wherein you will be assisting in leading online discussions and thereby practicing your abilities to analyze a text and to present it to peers in an organized format.

Content-Based

- ♦ Students will become familiar with the works of a range of American realist writers from diverse backgrounds with an emphasis upon fiction;
- ♦ Students will learn to situate Literary Realism within the larger context of American literature, as well as to better understand the cultural pressures and developments during this period in U.S. history;

- ◆ Students will deepen their thinking about the relationships between and among history, culture, and literature as well as the relationships between identities and historically shifting ideas about difference (gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, immigration status);

Skills-Based

- ◆ Students will engage in close readings of complex literary and theoretical texts and, as a result, hone skills in nuanced analysis, research, cogent writing, and thoughtful discussion and debate;
- ◆ Students will demonstrate the ability to formulate a thesis related to American realist literary studies and to support the thesis with evidence and argumentation;
- ◆ Students will practice both personal and learning community responsibility as borne out in meeting deadlines, respectfully engaging with peers and faculty, and working to highest academic standards.

These outcomes will be demonstrated through online discussions, discussion leadership, analytical essays, alternative course designs, and creative variations, all aimed to elicit objective analysis and substantive written responses.

REQUIRED READING (alphabetical order with original publication dates in brackets)

- Barrish, Phillip, ed. ***Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism***. Cambridge UP, 2011.
ISBN: 978-0521050104
- Chopin, Kate. ***The Awakening and Selected Stories***. [1899] Penguin Classics, 2003.
ISBN: 9780142437322 ***
- Hopkins, Pauline E. ***Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South***. [1900] Oxford UP, 1991. ISBN-13: 9780195067859
- Howells, William Dean. ***A Hazard of New Fortunes***. [1890] Penguin Classics, 2001.
ISBN-13: 9780140439236 ***
- Jewett, Sarah Orne. ***The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories***. [1896] Signet Classics, 2009.
ISBN-13: 978-0451531445 ***
- London, Jack. ***The Sea-Wolf***. [1904] SeaWolf Press, 2017. ISBN-13: 9781948132350 ***
- Paredes, Americo. ***George Washington Gomez: A Mexicotexan Novel***. [1936-1940] Arte Publico Pr, 1990. ISBN-13: 9781558850125
- Wharton, Edith. ***The House of Mirth***. [1905] Penguin Classics. ISBN 9780140187298

*** The starred works are available in free e-textbook format (see link under Modules in Canvas)

DIGITAL ARCHIVES & RESOURCES

Overview: https://public.archive.wsu.edu/campbelld/public_html/amlit/realism.htm

Visual Art: <https://www.artsy.net/gene/american-realism>

Search the **University of Pennsylvania Call-For-Papers** site to see current conversations that feature conferences and panels relevant to our field of study. If you are interested in submitting a conference proposal, I am happy to work with you. <https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/category/all>

If you are interested in learning more about academic publishing, you might explore the submission guidelines for the following journal: **American Literary Realism**:

<https://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/?id=alr>

POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

COMMUNICATION POLICY || Emails will be answered within 24-36 hours during the school week and occur between 10am and 9pm. Feedback on written assignments will be within 2 weeks of submission unless otherwise informed. Please note: *My on-campus teaching schedule this semester is Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday (afternoons and evenings).*

DISCUSSION FORUM POLICY || Prompts, questions, and responses on the discussion board are to enable students to brainstorm about the readings and assignments. The postings on the discussion board must be focused on the assigned topic. All technical problems associated with Canvas, the Internet, or library databases, including passwords and user IDs, should be directed to the respective departments. The course instructor cannot answer technical questions.

DEBATE & COLLEAGIALITY || We are all responsible for creating a seminar that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful.

HOMEWORK & PAPER FORMAT || All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, use normal margins and readable font. Paper headings should include your name, date, course title, and professor's name. Each page should include page number and your last name. Use MLA documentation to cite sources and include a Works Cited page. **Please do not submit in PDF formatting as that limits my ability to provide more extensive feedback.**

DUE DATE POLICY || Assignments must be submitted through Canvas on or before the due date (unless otherwise requested). Work turned in late without a compelling reason will be lowered one-third of a grade per day.

AI POLICY || **For this course, AI is not permitted in this course at all.** I expect all work students submit for this course to be their own. I have carefully designed all assignments and class activities to support your learning. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in mastering course learning objectives. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values.

ASSIGNMENTS & PROJECTS

Readings & Discussions

⌘ ASSIGNED READINGS || Complete all literary and critical assigned readings by the due date so that you can participate in classroom discussion and learning activities.

⌘ WEEKLY DISCUSSION LEADER POSTINGS || Across the semester, each student will be responsible for initiating **THREE** online discussions of the weeks' readings. You have been assigned a slot (please

see the Calendar of Readings) to summarize and comment on the current chapter in the Barrish text (*Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism*) and, during a different week, on the selected readings from the current novel. *I've made initial assignments; please let me know if you have a conflict with that date.* **FORMAT:** **400+** words. **POST by Monday (midnight)** of the week during which the readings are assigned.

- For **BARRISH'S Introduction to American Literary Realism**: Briefly summarize the chapter's main points as to literary trends, historical context, as well as highlighted authors and works. You might choose to point to novels under review in the class and/or contrast American Realism with other movements and works you have studied. You might comment from your 21st-century vantage point on the aims of the literary Realist movement and the issues of the historical period. Conclude with meaningful discussion questions and prompts for the class.
- For the **NOVELS**: Briefly summarize the plot arc for the week's reading and then deepen the discussion by considering the ways in which the novel illustrates Realist techniques, subjects, and goals. Consider the novel's historical context as you evaluate the protagonists' opportunities and challenges. It is often effective to offer the class a passage to dissect in a close reading. Feel free to make connections across our critical and literary readings up to that point. Follow your summation with a number of questions and prompts for the class to discuss.

Discussion leadership postings will be **letter-graded** according to the concision of the summary, the depth and thoughtfulness of the discussion prompts and questions, and the grammatical correctness and polish of the prose. You are welcome to consult with me as you draft your posting!

⌘ **WEEKLY CLASS DISCUSSION RESPONSES** || Each class member is responsible for a cogent response to the week's discussion leaders' postings. (NOTE: The weekly discussion leaders should also respond to their colleague's post.) Once you've posted for the week, feel free to respond more briefly to colleagues' comments. **FORMAT:** **200+ words**. POST responses by **SUNDAY** (midnight) of the calendar week. Graded 'complete/incomplete.'

Analytic & Creative Writing

⌘ **'PROSPECTUS' RESEARCH PAPER ABSTRACT** || There will be **TWO** "prospectus" paper submissions for which students will map out an abstract for a research paper, to include a working thesis argument paragraph followed by a set of supporting passages (both creative and critical-scholarly sources) and a rationale statement for how these would be used to support the thesis. You are free to choose your own topic(s) of analysis as you explore more deeply your insights about works under review during the period of the semester leading up to the due date. Include the questions you are using to help guide your research; the specific novel/s you propose to examine; and difficulties, questions, or problems you anticipate. You will get feedback, so ask any other questions as well. Concision and logic of the argument are key!

FORMAT: Word count should be a **minimum of 500+ and no more than 1200 words**, including the bibliography. **Title** your prospectus and submit as a Word document (not PDF). More information about the formatting and letter grading is posted in Canvas and will be discussed in announcements.

Letter-graded.

NOTE: There are **multiple submission ‘due dates’** specified in the schedule to help you manage your workload and to allow you to choose an author/s and text/s that you have growing interest in analyzing.

⌘ FINAL RESEARCH PAPER || For the end-of-term project, expand upon and/or revise one of the prospectus assignments already submitted OR design a new paper topic that explores a set of propositions that constellate creative and critical texts into significant conversations. *If a final paper is not submitted, the student will fail the course.*

FORMAT: In a *minimum of 3500+ words, including Works Cited*, engage the creative and critical works we've discussed and deploy arguments highlighted throughout the semester in order to offer a literary-critical examination and focused close reading. The paper should include a minimum of three outside scholarly sources. Feel free to draw from the criticism we've read over the semester and pay attention to Barrish's "Notes" and "Works Cited" for more resources. Your essay must be typed and formatted according to the "Homework & Paper Format" description above. Use MLA documentation to cite sources. Submit the final paper through Canvas in a Word (not PDF) document.

I've designed this assignment to model an article submission to ***The Explicator*** journal or another literary publication that attracts your attention (it is up to you whether you actually do a final submission at semester's end). *Be inspired by a UT Tyler alum! Jonahs Kneitly (2021), "Rappaccini's Queer Daughter: Gender Non-Conformity in "Rappaccini's Daughter." *The Explicator*, 79(3), 97–100.*

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00144940.2021.1920358>

⌘ E-SYMPORIUM || Seminar paper abstracts will be posted during the final week of the semester in a mini-conference format. Feel free to use this forum for brainstorming and requesting suggestions and feedback from your colleagues to help you during your final paper drafting process. Graded 'complete/incomplete'

⌘ ALTERNATIVE SYLLABUS || This assignment offers students the opportunity to design a syllabus for a different configuration (thematic, regional, generic) of creative and theoretical readings and emphases for an American Realism course to be offered at a high school, community college, or university. *More information on formatting and grading is available in Canvas.*

⌘ CREATIVE VARIATION & EXPLICATION || To test your engagement with this literary movement, you will create an original work (short fiction, a dialogue exchange, scene/setting vignette, a character portrait, fanfiction extension or alternative ending) inspired by American Realist authors. *This effort will not be letter-graded.*

In an attached **explication (600+ words)**, explain the premises for your creative work and discuss the ways in which you engage the literary-critical categories, style, and/or patterns of literary realism. Briefly describe the insights you have gained in the process of designing your creative piece. *The explication will be letter graded. More information is available on Canvas.*

■ GRADES & FINAL EVALUATION

Final course grades will be based on the weighted average grades based on the following percentages. The final grade will include my assessment of your overall contribution to and progress in the class. Feel free to communicate with me at any time about your grades.

Discussion Leadership (3)	15%
Weekly Class Discussion Responses	15%
Prospectuses (2)	20%
Creative Variation	10%
Alternative Syllabus	10%
Final Paper and E-Symposium	30%

PAPER GRADING STANDARDS

Excellent (A) papers have clear theses and soundly organized arguments that reflect detailed, nuanced understanding of the text. They are precisely and concisely written and have few if any mechanical problems—even minor ones. They weave quotations into their arguments smoothly and forcefully. A vital, graceful voice animates such essays; they say something compelling in a compelling way.

Good (B) papers have clear theses and are thoughtfully and reasonably organized. They may be marred by a few infelicities (inappropriateness) of style, but they will have no major mechanical problems—and not many minor ones either. These are solid, disciplined papers that make a definite point in a logical, coherent manner to a definite audience.

Satisfactory (C) papers have a thesis supported by evidence. The writing is clean and properly proofed, but not always compelling; it may be marred by some minor mechanical problems and one or two major ones (like fragments or run-ons). While their arguments may not be particularly cogent, these papers do say something interesting, and they say it in a comprehensible and responsible way.

Poor (D) papers, while giving evidence of effort on the part of the writer, lack a thesis, have major mechanical problems, poor organization, betray serious misreadings of the text, and show little sense of subject or audience.

Failing (F) papers have weaknesses even graver than those indicated for poor papers. They usually betray a lack of effort on the part of the writer. Any evidence of plagiarism (intentional or otherwise) will result in a failing grade—and referral to the Academic Conduct Committee.



Martin Lewis, *Shadow Dance*, dry point and sand-ground, 1930