



SENTIMENT IS THE DEVIL

AMERICAN LITERARY NATURALISM FROM THE 1890S TO THE 1940S

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

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Room and Time: SR 34 D2 · Wed., 11:45-13:15

First session: March 12, 2014

Course number: SE 512.273

Course description: This course provides an introduction to the tenets and themes of what is called 'American literary naturalism.' Roughly covering the years from 1893 (the year in which Stephen Crane published *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*) to the 1920s and 30s (when Theodore Dreiser's and Ernest Hemingway's main naturalist works appeared), the seminar will discuss both the naturalists' rejection of realist "teacup tragedies" and their focus on romantic and epic components (Frank Norris). How was 'naturalism' defined from a late 19th-century and early 20th-century point of view? What social and cultural function did the movement have in U.S. cultural practice? We will also seek to explore the cultural determinism as well as the social criticism associated with naturalism and related movements (such as modernism). Another important accent will be placed on the closeness of naturalist writings to scientifically motivated approaches such as "social Darwinism" and "degeneration theory."

Methods: Interactive presentations of important developments in American literature with close readings of representative texts. There is a **course reader** available at our Office (Mon-Fri, 9-12).

Aims: The lecture series intends to give an overview of the chief works of American literary naturalism, discussing narrative and aesthetic techniques as well as examining the social background and critical reception.

Assessment: Final exam on July 2.

Syllabus

Mar. 12 Introduction – The Origins and Tenets of American Literary Naturalism

Main texts (strongly recommended):

Stephen Matterson, "Naturalism," from *American Literature* (2003), 152-154.

Frank Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901),

Mar. 19 Urban Naturalism – How the Other Half Lives (and Dies)

Main text (required):

Stephen Crane, excerpts from *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893).

Companion text (recommended):

Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906).

Mar. 26 Nature and Determinism in Outdoor Fiction – Lack of Agency, Indifference, Survival

Main text (required):

Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" (1897).

Companion text (recommended):

Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

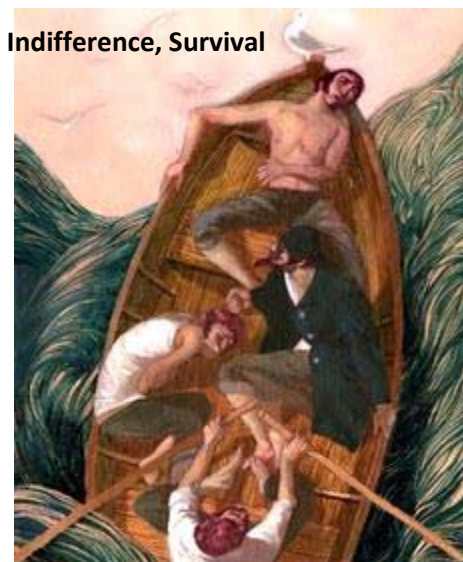
Apr. 2 Ethnicity and Immigration – Jewish American Literature

Main text (required):

Abraham Cahan, "A Ghetto Wedding" (1898).

Companion text (recommended):

Anzia Yezierska, "Children of Loneliness" (1923).



Apr. 9 The Men Who Cried 'Wolf' – Atavism and Social Anthropology

Main text (required):

Frank Norris, excerpts from *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899).

Companion texts (recommended):

Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute* (1894/1914).

Greed (1923, dir. Erich v. Stroheim).

May 7 Going Primitive – Spencer, Darwin, and the 'Call of the Wild'

Main text (required):

Jack London, excerpts from *The Call of the Wild* (1903).

Companion texts (recommended):

Jack London, *White Fang* (1906) & "To Build a Fire" (1908).

Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912).

May 14 Adventure and Frontier Tales – The New Cult of Manliness

Main text (required):

Jack London, excerpts from *The Sea-Wolf* (1904).

Companion texts (recommended):

Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (1901).

Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912).

The Madness of 'Separate Spheres' – Emancipation and Women's Fiction

Main text (required):

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).

Companion text (recommended):

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899).

Fear, Flight, Fate – The African American (Anti-) Bildungsroman

Main text (required):

John Weldon Johnson, excerpts from *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912).

Companion texts (recommended):

Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Lynching of Jube Benson" (1902).

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940).

James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1956).

June 4 No class!

June 11 Lost in Psychology – Stories of Adolescence and Initiation

Main text (required):

Willa Cather, "Paul's Case" (1913).

Companion text (recommended):

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1896).

June 18 American Tragedies – Love, Loss, and Death in Melodrama

Main text (required):

Theodore Dreiser, excerpts from *An American Tragedy* (1925).

Companion texts (recommended):

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900).

A Place in the Sun (1951, dir. George Stevens).

June 25 Still No Happy Endings – The Lasting Heritage of Naturalism in Modernist Fiction

Main text (required):

Ernest Hemingway, "The Short, Happy, Life of Francis Macomber" (1936).

Companion texts (recommended):

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (1927).

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1936).

July 2 Final Exam

