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LIT 391.02: ST - The Gilded Age

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Lit 391.02: Special Topics: The Gilded Ages
TR 3:40-4:50 LA 202
Professor Nancy Cook (nancy.cook@mso.umt.edu)
LA 124 Office hours: W 2-3, Th 2:30-3:30

In literary studies, we refer to the period in American literary history between 1870 and 1910 as the period of American Realism and Naturalism. What happens when we call this period “The Gilded Age,” as historians do? This course looks at American literature through the lens of wealth and poverty, making comparisons between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries on one hand, and on the
last 15 years, on the other. We will read texts from canonical writers from the period—Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Stephen Crane—from not-so-canonical writers such as Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Frederick Douglass, Rebecca Harding Davis, Sarah Orne Jewett, Charles Chesnutt, Jacob Riis, and Zitkala Sa. We will put those writers into conversation with historians, artists, journalists, cartoonists, and a few writers from our own moment. In what ways are these two periods similar? How do they differ? What can the 19th and 20th century writers tell us about our own moment? Be prepared to research the period, read a range of work, think imaginatively about the relations between literature and life, and engage in classroom conversations.

We will read novels, short fiction, essays and some criticism. By the end of the course, students will have a better understanding of how the U.S. got to this “second Gilded Age,” and what writers, painters, and other creative arts producers have to tell us about the costs of wealth disparity and how we might find our way to a more equitable manifestation of nationhood. Students will be expected to participate in class discussions, write frequently, and produce one well-researched consideration of a text from the course.

BOOK LIST:
Please note that some of these books are neither readily available nor cheap. I have put copies of books on reserve. For living authors, try to buy new books, for the deceased authors, buy, borrow, or share the cheapest copy you can find.

Nagel and Quirk. *The Portable American Realism Reader.*
Trachtenberg. *The Incorporation of America.*
Doctorow. *Ragtime.*

**WARNINGS:**
Americans, newly minted, long-landed, or original peoples had a rough time during the Gilded Ages. These books frequently represent aspects of the difficulties Americans faced, including, but not limited to: economic injustice, sexual assault, victimization by violence, racial profiling, abortion, violence by medicine or lack of medical treatment, poverty, and gross underestimation. You will need to be prepared to engage with representations and the subject matter.

**A NOTE ON REQUIREMENTS, OUTCOMES, ASSESSMENTS:**
The following list of activities tries to quantify your expected work. Frankly, no one can “quantify the quality” of your writing or discussion. Grading in arts and humanities courses inevitably entails subjective criteria. Because of that subjectivity, more dialogue between student and faculty can be part of the process of creating and grading humanities “performance.” Literature is a conversation. Literary criticism grows out of conversation. I hope you come to feel that I am open for you to get to know me in the classroom and in my office. Please come see me to talk through assignments or anything else. On written work, both form and content will be graded, and explicit writing standards will be part of each assignment. Grades are based on a combination of 1) 75% written work (content & form); 2) 15% discussion questions, participation, presentations, other in-class writing; and 3) 10% attendance (max. 2 absences = one week of class time). In addition, if you have any certifiable disability that makes meeting the course requirements difficult, I will be glad to work with you on a strategy for success.
OUTCOME CRITERIA:

1) Familiarity with the literary styles of realism and naturalism, of the historical period from late 19th to early 20th century US known as “The Gilded Age”

2) Recognition of key cultural and ideological perspectives on social, economic, and political inequality in the texts

3) Recognition of different methods -- literary and historical, artistic and social, aesthetic and ethical, textual and contextual -- for considering texts.

4) Engagement with themes of the course as they apply to 21st-century lives.

5) Understanding of the ways artistic production engages and critiques important issues for a nation, and the ways it can lead us to action.

OUTCOME ASSESSMENTS:
Discussion and Attendance:
I’m strict on attendance. As adults you make your own decisions, and the class runs on a combination of readings, discussions, and lectures, all of which need your participation. I hope you are making a commitment to this conversation. Lectures and discussions both are founded on your attendance; so more than two unexcused absences (one week of classes) can drop the final grade. An excused absence generally requires a medical crisis. Notice of any absence should be given in advance when we can arrange for your make-up work. The goal here is participation as both a listener and speaker in class discussions of diverse literary texts. (Verbal assessment of Criteria 1-4)
a. Discussion Questions:
Student teams will rotate responsibility for supplying questions for a discussion handout on daily readings through the semester. Each member of the team is responsible for at least three substantive questions per handout. One team will make a handout of discussion questions for each class on a revolving basis. That means finishing the reading and preparing the questions, including copies for everyone, before the class when your DQ group is up. You must also email me a copy of your individual questions prior to class when it’s your team’s turn, and one team member should email me the handout.
b. Discussion groups and full-class discussions.
Participation in discussion of daily readings will be in both small groups and the full class. The course is designed for your input. Some of the best lectures happen when there are good questions or comments from the floor. “Participation” can be both vocal and silent, both speaking and listening, but not all of one or the other. Discussion is one of the best ways to learn, and the class depends upon your active engagement. This pedagogy is so crucial to the course that I’ll take a few more lines here to explain: Everyone’s idea is important. When you speak, try to give your idea away to the group. You don’t need to defend it once it’s out there. And equally, when you listen, give each speaker respect. Humor helps too. We don’t need to have everyone agree, but perhaps we can build a community in the classroom where each of us can feel engaged with the questions.

2) Writing skills and critical thinking
in analyzing diverse literary texts critically. (Written assessment of Criteria 1-4) Note that the UM Writing Center is open for coaching writers at all levels. Writing assignments will be a combination of response papers, microthemes, quizzes, thesis exercises, and essays, all with bibliographic form. On the microthemes and essays, I expect hours/days of work on rough drafts, which should be turned in as hard copies along with the final draft, which is emailed to me. Generally, if you try to write the paper the day of class or even the night before, you will get a lower grade, so think of this as a writing exercise designed to help boost your skills. Proofreading is crucial as well. See handouts for more info on my grading criteria. In addition, writing skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism (see note below in “Legalities”).

The final draft of your written work must be sent to my email address as a single Word.doc attachment (don't send bibliography separately), along with a hard copy brought to class or to my mailbox. Hard copies of earlier drafts must be handed to me in class on the due date, labeled with your name and stapled (no paper clips). NB: When you email me, be sure to put the exact spelling of the class rubric, 391, at the front of your email’s subject line. Because of the overload in my inbox, I cannot guarantee that you will get credit for your online work unless you make this the start of your subject line.
Response Paper:
A single-page response to a reading, focusing on a particular question or issue that catches your mind and heart. The short essay should include a thesis statement, not
only giving your topic, but your opinion as well. These need to be a minimum of 500 words.

More formal writings:
there will be THREE microthemes due during the semester: 1st Microtheme due 2/12, 2nd Microtheme due 3/19, and 3rd due 4/9. All are take-home short-essays, where you can combine personal response and critical analysis, graded on content and form. Microthemes are a two-page essay analysis of a question or questions on the readings. You should quote, judiciously, from the text(s). Skills in thesis development and in integrating quoted citations into your argument are crucial in written work. Thus, plan on a Works Cited page for each essay, with proper in-text citations and bibliographic form. Get to know the MLA Handbook. In addition, those skills require an understanding of how to avoid plagiarism (see Legalities below).

Here’s more coaching on the writing. Too often, students write about a piece of literature without coming to a thesis, i.e., without articulating or sometimes even really knowing what they have to say about it. Focusing on literary analysis, the essays should build three elements of a workable thesis statement that goes beyond summarizing or retelling a piece of literature: 1) narrow topic 2) assertion (not description) 3) preview. Generally, a thesis is preceded (in drafts if not in the final essay) by a focused question. The goal of literary analysis is to (gently) take apart and put back together some dynamic aspect of a text, listing and labeling those parts, so that the reader may understand the text more fully and deeply and acutely, with more insight into form and/or content. Such literary criticism looks beyond what is said to ask how, why, or so what? How does it say what it says? Why is it structured as it is? So what is the significance of saying and structuring it that way? Writing about literature is one of the best ways to read it, and it indeed can intensify the pleasure of reading.
Repeat: Do not be absent on due dates for take-home papers.

Final Project (due 1:10 PM 5/1):
You will write a 10-15pg. essay using library resources and again emphasizing thesis development and integrated citations, Pre-work due 4/23: a working thesis, prospectus or detailed outline, and bibliography of research project. The class may consult with a Humanities Librarian on research tools.

Peer Editing:
We will have workshop sessions for your final project. I encourage teams to meet outside class for peer editing sessions. Editing others’ work can be one of the best ways to develop yourself as a writer (my thanks to Prof. David Moore for his detailed and useful syllabi. Much of the text following “Note on Requirements, Outcomes, Assessments has been adapted, sometimes very modestly, from his clear syllabi).

NB: The Writing Center is available to students of all abilities: LA 144, phone 243-2266, with on-site tutoring; plus writing and test-taking workshops, etc. Also, online tutoring.
My desk copies have not arrived, so page numbers or chapters will be provided soon.

**Schedule:**

**Week 1:**
1/10: welcome and orientation to course

**Week 2:**
1/15: read Mark Twain’s sketch “A True Story,” originally published in *The Atlantic* in 1874. It is readily available on-line. Use Mansfield portal to assure free access. You might want to print it for class.
1/17: Trachtenberg: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS THROUGH CHAPTER 1 “THE WESTWARD ROUTE”; Nagel and Quirk: George W Cable “BELLES DEMOISELLES PLANTATION” (32-46)

**Week 3:**
1/22: Trachtenberg: CHAPTERS 2 & 3; Nagel and Quirk: Grace E King “LA GRANDE DEMOISELLE” (110-115), Kate Chopin “ATHENAISE” (116-142)
1/24: Trachtenberg: CHAPTER 4 THROUGH “Further Reading”; Nagel and Quirk: Charles Chesnutt “THE SHERRIF’S CHILDREN” (170-185), Joel C Harris “FREE JOE & THE REST OF THE WORLD” (152-161)

**Week 4:**
1/29: Nagel and Quirk: Sarah O Jewett “A WHITE HERON” (71-80), “MISS TEMPY’S WATCHERS” (161-170)
1/31: Nagel and Quirk: Mary W Freeman “THE REVOLT OF ‘MOTHER’” (208-222), Willa Cather “A WAGNER MATINEE” (405-411)

**Week 5:**
2/5: Nagel and Quirk: Hamlin Garland “THE RETURN OF A PRIVATE” (185-199), Harold Frederic “MY AUNT SUSAN” (222-232)
2/7: Nagel and Quirk: Charlotte P Gilman “THE YELLOW WALLPAPER” (254-269), John M Oskison “THE PROBLEM OF OLD HARJO” (531-537)

**Week 6:**
2/12: MICROTHEME 1 DUE, Nagel and Quirk: Kate Chopin “DESIREE’S BABY” (269-274), Charles Chesnutt “THE WIFE OF HIS YOUTH” (380-390)

**Week 7:**
2/19: Nagel and Quirk: Abraham Cahan “A PROVIDENTIAL MATCH” (356-374), Edith Wharton “THE OTHER TWO” (395-405), Sui Sin Far “MRS. SPRING FRAGRANCE” (438-448)
2/21: Nagel and Quirk: Henry James “THE REAL THING” (233-254), Stephen Crane “AN EXPERIMENT IN MISERY” (457-465)

**Week 8:**
2/26: Riis: HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES: FIRST HALF
2/28: Riis: HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES: SECOND HALF

Week 9:
3/5: TBD
3/7: TBD

Week 10:
3/12: Howells: THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM: FIRST HALF Ch____ through____
3/14: Howells: THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM: SECOND HALF

Week 11:
3/19: Microtheme 2 Due, Howells discussion continued
3/21: Wharton: THE HOUSE OF MIRTH: Ch. ____through____

Week 12: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

Week 13:
4/2: Wharton: Ch____through____
4/4: Wharton discussion

Week 14:
4/9: Microtheme 3 Due, Wharton: discussion Doctorow: SECTION ONE
4/11: Doctorow: SECTION TWO

Week 15:
4/16: Doctorow: SECTION THREE
4/18: Kwan: ALL

Week 16:
4/23: Project PRE WORK DUE, Kwan: discussion
4/25: discussion, workshops
PROJECTS DUE 1:10 PM MAY 1