



Thomas Eakins *Taking the Count*

SYLLABUS 2019/2020

Major works in 19th century American Literature

Instructor: Agnese De Marchi

Course description:

The course will focus on significant (female and male) voices of American literature which characterized the 2nd half of the 19th century such as: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson; Kate Chopin; Charlotte Perkins Gilman; Henry James; Stephen Crane, and Mark Twain. We will analyze a variety of texts belonging to different genres by the above mentioned authors: novels, poems and short stories. These American authors reflected the polyphony which defined American culture during a highly complex period. Through the analysis of these literary texts and the historical, cultural, and artistic contexts within which they were created, a number of issues will be dealt with: the relation between individual and communal identity, the Civil War, the Reconstruction and war narrative, the role of 19th century American women in society, the cultural relationship between America and Europe, and finally, the birth of an American identity.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass*, First Edition (1855); "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (1865). Whitman's influence on The Ashcan School
- Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).
- Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and the short story "The Veteran".
- Henry James: *Washington Square* (1880)
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman: "The Yellow Wallpaper"(1892)
- Emily Dickinson: "After great pain, a formal feeling comes", "One need not be a Chamber-", "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church", "Wild Nights – Wild Nights!", "There's a certain Slant of Light", "I dwell in Possibility –", "She rose to His Requirement – dropt".

➤ Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (1894).

BACKGROUND READING

R. Gray, *A History of American Literature*, Blackwell, 2004.

(historical context; introduction to the authors' lives and work):

Whitman: pp.232-237; Dickinson pp.237-244; Chapter 3, 'The Development of American Literature 1865-1900' pp. 245-250; Twain pp. 250-257; Chopin pp.270-274; James pp. 287-296; Crane pp.303-305; Gilman 316-318.

(page numbers may vary depending on the edition).

Course objectives: Knowledge and understanding: Students will learn about the development of American literature and culture in the second half of the 19th century, through the close reading of a selection of texts belonging to different genres (poems, novels and shorts stories). Applying knowledge and understanding: students will be able to analyze a selection of American literary texts, and appreciate the distinctive qualities of different literary genres and American authors; they will also be able to comprehend issues in American literature, in relation to the historical, cultural and artistic contexts, such as the relation between individual and communal identity, the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era and war narrative, the role of 19th century American women in society, the cultural relationship between America and Europe, and finally, the birth of an American identity . Making judgments: by the end of the course, students will become sophisticated readers who can effectively express their own opinions on literary texts and cultural issues in an informed manner.

Communication skills: by the end of the course, students will be able to articulate their own opinions and questions clearly.

Learning skills: by the end of the course, students will have developed critical thinking abilities.

Prerequisites: Good English language skills (B2 level of the European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Teaching methods: Lectures and close reading of literary texts in class. Students are invited to attend classes regularly and bring the texts with them (electronic format or paper format).

Students will be strongly encouraged to actively participate in class discussions about the analyzed texts and authors. Students are required to read the primary sources in full in order to take the exam.

PowerPoint presentations will be used to introduce major topics, historical context, and authors, together with audio files, films and videos. Both primary and secondary sources (essays, websites, digital archives) will be made available on the MOODLE platform.

Assessment: Student learning will be assessed through a written exam which will consist of two parts. Part one: quiz (15 minutes): students will answer ten closed questions pertaining to the authors and primary sources treated in class. This part is worth 30% of the final grade.

Part two (1 hour and 45 minutes): students will answer five essay questions pertaining to the texts covered in class. Students may be asked to discuss a particular topic and/or identify and analyze a passage from a literary text. This part is worth 70% of the grade. The grading system ranges from 18/30 to 30/30 cum laude. In order to pass the exam, students must answer correctly five questions in part one of the exam paper and at least two essay questions in part two. Students who answer correctly fewer than half the questions in part one will fail the exam regardless of how they have answered the essay questions in part two.