Topics in American Literature: Henry James and Women

ENGL 6339
Spring 2011 Syllabus
Thurs. 6:00 – 8:50 Carlisle 102A
Prof. Neill Matheson  office: 406 Carlisle
office hours: Tues.-Thurs. 2:30-4:00 p.m., and by appointment
email: matheson@uta.edu
English Department main office phone: 817-272-2692

Course Description:

This course focuses both on women in Henry James’s fiction, and on James’s relation to several American women writers, connected with him through personal friendship or literary influence: Constance Fenimore Woolson, Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather. The course will consider issues of canon-formation and gender inequality in the literary marketplace relevant to the careers of these authors. Yet if James is one of the most prominent figures of the masculine cultural authority associated with “high” literary realism (as the epithet “The Master” implies), he is also a writer who was centrally interested in exploring femininity in his fiction, and much recent gender studies and queer theory scholarship has demonstrated that gender identity is very much in question in his work. We will explore James’s intense interest in and identification with female protagonists, and consider how this pattern of authorial investment is taken up by women writers who can be seen as responding to him. One of the contexts for the course will be ideas about gender and sexual identity around the turn of the nineteenth century, a time of profound transition: we will discuss changes in the status of women and in norms for feminine sexuality, as well as emergent ideas about homosexuality. We will also consider genre, style, and narrative form, but particularly in terms of the cultural meanings and values that are associated with these aspects of literary writing.

Course Texts:

Willa Cather, The Professor’s House
Willa Cather, Paul’s Case and Other Stories
Henry James, The Bostonians
Henry James, Selected Tales
Sarah Orne Jewett, The Country of the Pointed Firs
Colm Toibin, The Master
Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence
Edith Wharton, Summer
Constance Fenimore Woolson, selected stories on e-reserves

Additional readings will be available through e-reserve, unless otherwise noted.

Course Requirements:

1. Eight response papers. Minimum two pages double-spaced. Response papers should engage with the week’s readings, including critical/theoretical as well as literary texts. Begin with one or two discussion questions that you think are important, worth considering in class. Though you can provide some overview of main points, these papers should not simply summarize critical arguments. They are an opportunity to explore issues and ideas in a context that is a little less formal than a standard academic paper, but more substantial than a reading journal. You can also
use them as a trial run for ideas that might lead to a seminar paper later in the course. **Note:** Response papers must be submitted in class the week of the readings they address, and should not be turned in if you are unable to attend class. These short papers will not be graded individually—I will give them an aggregate grade at the end of the course.

2. Final paper. A substantial research paper (minimum 15 pages) drawing on readings and issues from the course. Students will give a presentation based on their papers at the end of the course. The final class meeting will be set aside for this purpose.

3. Participation.

**Course Grade:**

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<td>Eight response papers</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation and presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Research paper</td>
<td>60%</td>
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**Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students will become familiar with a number of major and minor works by the authors covered in the course, as well as with important critical issues, particularly related to the course thematic, that have shaped scholarship on these writers individually, and in relationship to each other. Students will become acquainted with a range of contexts relevant to considering these authors, including literary historical accounts of fiction in the period, and changing cultural norms for gender and sexuality. Students will be able to produce original scholarship according to accepted academic standards, reflecting an awareness of existing scholarship on their topic.

**Attendance and Participation:**

Because this is a graduate seminar that meets once a week, absences will only be excused in the case of truly unavoidable circumstances. Two or more absences will have an effect on your final grade. I expect you to come to class each week having carefully read the texts for that day’s meeting, prepared with questions, comments, thoughts, enthusiasms, or objections. Participation for the course includes informal contributions to class discussion as well as presentations.

**Academic Integrity:**

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

“Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.”  [Regents Rules and Regulations]

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.
Americans with Disabilities Act:

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

Reading Schedule:

Note: There may be minor changes, additions, or deletions in the course readings.

1/20   Introduction
       Colm Toibin, *The Master*

1/27   *The Master*

2/3    James, *Daisy Miller* (in *Selected Tales*)
       Lisa Johnson, “Daisy Miller: Cowboy Feminist”
       Sarah Wadsworth, “What Daisy Knew: Reading Against Type in *Daisy Miller: A Study*”

2/10   *The Bostonians*
       Claire Kahane, “Medusa’s Voice: Male Hysteria in *The Bostonians*”

2/17   *The Bostonians*
       Critical essay t.b.a.

2/24   Woolson, “Castle Nowhere,” “St. Clair Flats,” “Miss Elisabetha,” “Felipa,” “Miss Grief”
       Woolson, letters to James
       Victoria Coulson, “Teacups and Love Letters”
       Anne Boyd, “Anticipating James, Anticipating Grief”

3/3    Woolson, “The Street of the Hyacinth,” “The Florentine Experiment”
       James, “The Beast in the Jungle” (in *Selected Tales*)
       Eve Sedgwick, “The Beast in the Closet”
       James, “Miss Woolson”

3/10   Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*
       Critical essay t.b.a.

3/17   Spring Break!
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| 3/24 | James, *In the Cage* (in *Selected Tales*)  
Tessa Hadley, “Poor girls with their rent to pay: class in ‘In the Cage’…”  
Eric Savoy, “‘In the Cage’ and the Queer Effects of Gay History” |       |
| 3/31 | Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* |       |
| 4/7  | *The Age of Innocence* |       |
| 4/14 | Wharton, *Summer*  
Meredith Goldsmith, “‘Other People’s Clothes…”” |       |
| 4/21 | Cather, *The Professor’s House* |       |
| 4/28 | *The Professor’s House*  
“Paul’s Case”  
“A Wagner Matinee”  
Eve Sedwick, “Willa Cather and Others” |       |
| 5/5  | Presentations |       |
| 5/12 | Presentations (if necessary; final exam week class) |       |

**Final paper due Thursday, May 5 in class**