

# Realism, Naturalism, Early Modernisms: U.S. Literature from the Civil War to the Armory Show

(Prof. Dr. Frank Kelleter)

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 1:

### CULTURE IN THE GILDED AGE AND THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

1. Define the terms "Gilded Age" and "Progressive Era"! Why can the Armory Show be seen as a historical boundary marker in American cultural history?
2. In how far is the postbellum era an era of modernization?
3. Define the term "corporate America"!
4. What are the consequences of immigration in the postbellum era?
5. Characterize the importance of literary magazines in the postbellum era!
6. Summarize the main thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)!
7. Define the terms "mass-production" and "mass-consumption"! Why can the American 1880s and 1890s be seen as harbingers of a new American culture of display?
8. Define the terms "commodity" and "commodification"!
9. Characterize the importance of Thorstein Veblen's concept of "conspicuous consumption" (in *Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899)!
10. Define the terms "robber barons," "muckrakers," and "Populist Movement"!
11. Inform yourself about the Scopes Monkey Trial (especially with reference to William Jennings Bryan's participation in it)!
12. Describe the challenge of Darwinism in postbellum intellectual culture!
13. What is pragmatism and why did it become popular after the Civil War? Inform yourself about leading pragmatists in Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001)!
14. Why does Menand claim that the Civil War "marks the birth of modern America"?
15. What do the pragmatists mean when they say that ideas are like "tools"?

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSIONS 2 & 3:

### MARK TWAIN

(Text: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884/5) )

1. Discuss the function of the opening paragraph!
2. Identify the structure of the novel!
3. Discuss the genesis of the novel! What are relevant historical contexts? What's the significance of chapter 16?
4. Describe the narrative voice (Huck as narrator)!
5. Describe the protagonist (Huck as character)!
6. Identify the position of the implied author in *Huckleberry Finn*! (Check handbooks on narratology or your notes from E-proseminars and proseminars for "Implied Author").
7. Analyze the relationship between Huck and Jim! Discuss the use of the term "nigger"!
8. Discuss the rendition of different aspects of Southern society! (Pay particular attention to the feud!)
9. Interpret the king and duke-episodes!
10. What's the meaning and function of the theme of theatricality (or mediated experience) in *Huckleberry Finn*?
11. Discuss *Huckleberry Finn* as an intertextual novel! (Pay particular attention to Emmeline Grangerford and Tom Sawyer!)
12. Why has the novel's ending been the object of so much critical controversy?
13. Interpret the final paragraph!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 4:

### JOHN W. DE FOREST AND THOMAS NELSON PAGE

(Texts: from De Forest, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*: chapters 1-7, 14, 16, 18-21, 23, 24, 29, 32, 34, 35, 37; from Page, *In Ole Virginia*: "Marse Chan." Suggested Further Reading: Booker T. Washington, from *Up from Slavery*: "The Atlanta Exhibition Address.").

#### I. John W. De Forest

1. Why did William Dean Howells praise De Forest's novel as an exemplary text of American literary realism? Do you agree?
2. Sentimental conventions and inversions of sentimentalism in *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*.
3. The characters as representatives of social forces.
4. What American society is reproduced / constructed by the character constellation and its conflicts?
5. Discuss *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* as a comedy of manners! What are later examples of this genre in American literature?
6. Discuss *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* as a war novel and as a novel of the Civil War!
7. Modern warfare and literary expression in De Forest's text.
8. The national function of war in the novel's plot.
9. The representation of the army as a social system in *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*.
10. Masculinity in *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*.
11. De Forest's reconciliation-plot: What is the narrator's attitude toward New England? What does he mean by "New England isms?" In how far does a cultural reconciliation between South and North take place?
12. Identify the implied author's political position! What is his attitude toward the politics of Reconstruction?
13. Discuss the presence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in De Forest's text! In how far can *Miss Ravenel* be called a post-abolitionist novel?
14. Meritocracy and pragmatism in De Forest's novel.

#### II. Thomas Nelson Page

1. Compare Southern writing in the 1850s to Southern writing in the post-Reconstruction era!
2. Closely analyze the opening paragraph of "Marse Chan"!
3. The structure of "Marse Chan."
4. "Marse Chan" as an example of local color writing.
5. Compare "Marse Chan" to earlier examples of the plantation romance!
6. The concepts of time and history in "Marse Chan."
7. The concepts of family and self-interest in "Marse Chan."
8. Discuss the function and rendition of dialect in "Marse Chan"!
9. Identify the dominant plot patterns in "Marse Chan"!
10. The function of Sam as character and "narrator" (?) in "Marse Chan."
11. What image of slavery is presented in "Marse Chan"? Pay particular attention to the description of planter-slave-interaction!
12. Compare the representation of African Americans in "Marse Chan" to the representation of African Americans in antebellum Southern literature (e.g. Edward Pollard, *Black Diamonds*)
13. Try to account for the national popularity of Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia*!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 5:

### HENRY JAMES, *DAISY MILLER*

(Text: *Daisy Miller*)

1. In how far can Henry James be seen as an American author?
2. What is "the international theme"?
3. Subdivide James's literary oeuvre in distinct phases!
4. Inform yourself about the textual history of *Daisy Miller*! Why do you think the editors of the *Norton Anthology* choose not to reproduce the text of James's New York Edition?
5. Discuss *Daisy Miller* as a novel of manners!
6. Discuss the theme of misunderstanding in *Daisy Miller*! What is the difference between social and cultural misunderstanding?
7. In how far is Daisy Miller "an American girl"? Inform yourself about this cultural type in the late nineteenth century ("the American girl") and show how Daisy represents - or differs from - this type!
8. Define the meaning(s) of "innocence" in the text!
9. Define the terms *coquette* and *flirt*! Discuss their importance for the plot!
10. What is the function of Randolph in the text?
11. Discuss Daisy as a character of radical innocence! (For the concept of radical innocence, see Ihab Hassan.)
12. Would you describe Daisy as a sentimental character?
13. Closely analyze Daisy's first appearance in the novel! Pay particular attention to point-of-view and narrative voice!
14. Distinguish between direct speech, indirect speech, and free indirect style! Why is the latter style so important in *Daisy Miller*?
15. Is *Daisy Miller* an anti-European text?
16. Comment on the following remark: The tragedy of Daisy Miller is the tragedy of Winterbourne.

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSIONS 6 & 7:**  
**WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS**

(Text: *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885))

1. Discuss Howells's influence on American literature!
2. Acquaint yourself with Howells's political biography! Where are his changing positions reflected in his works?
3. Where do you find Howells's social beliefs reflected (and dramatized) in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*? (Pay particular attention to the character of Minister Sewell).
4. Discuss *The Rise of Silas Lapham* as a metaliterary novel! Where does the novel raise questions of literary theory - especially of novel-reading and novel-writing? What are those questions and how are they decided?
5. How is the discourse of sentimentality rendered in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*?
6. Acquaint yourself with Howells's theory of a specifically *American* form of literary realism!
7. Identify the major plot lines in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*!
8. Interpret the novel's title! What conventional plot patterns are evoked and/or inverted? Find examples for them in American literature!
9. Analyze the function and structure of the opening chapter!
10. Discuss *The Rise of Silas Lapham* as a novel of manners! (Identify the major contrasts between the Laphams and the Coreys!)
11. Analyze the interaction of the two families and pay attention to the emergence of an authorial perspective! What seems to be the implied author's socio-political vision? (Pay particular attention to chapter 14).
12. Contextualize: Discuss *The Rise of Silas Lapham* as a novel of the 1880s/1890s! In how far are competing concepts of individualism and conformity presented as new forms of socio-economic behavior? To answer this, acquaint yourself with Thorstein Veblen's theory of emulation in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), paying particular attention to his concept of "conspicuous consumption"! (You may also want to reread Andrew Carnegie's "Wealth" from "Introduction to American Cultural History" and compare it to Max Weber's concept of "innerweltliche Askese" in *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*.)
13. Discuss the form and function of the love plot in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*! How is it interlinked with the business plot? (Pay attention to the connection between Lapham's sense of family and his sense of business.)

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSIONS 8 & 9:**  
**THEODORE DREISER**

(Text: *Sister Carrie* (1900))

1. Situate the novel in the context of literary history! In how far is or isn't it influenced by literary realism and/or literary naturalism?
2. Describe the novel's genesis and history of publication! (Have a look at the so-called "Pennsylvania Edition"!)
3. Define and characterize the narrator's voice!
4. How is the narrative action structured?
5. Identify the major plot lines! Which conventional plot patterns are reproduced or inverted? (Find examples in literary history!)
6. In how far is Chicago represented through characters? What aspects of modern urbanity are highlighted in each case?
7. Identify various economic philosophies operative in the Chicago-part of the novel (pay particular attention to the Hansons, Drouet and Hurstwood)!
8. How would you characterize Carrie's attitude toward money?
9. Discuss Carrie's socio-economic behavior against the background of Thorstein Veblen's concept of *conspicuous consumption*!
10. Analyze the representation of Chicago in *Sister Carrie* and compare it to Georg Simmel's sociological essay "Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben" (1902)!
11. Closely analyze the second half of chapter 2! What image of the city is conveyed here? What forms of urban behavior are foregrounded?
12. Discuss the significance of clothing, theatricality and role-play in *Sister Carrie*! (Pay particular attention to chapter 6!)
13. What's the function of Hurstwood in the New York part of the story?
14. In how far are the characters of the novel (morally) responsible for their behavior? (Pay particular attention to chapter 8!)
15. Discuss the function of accidents in *Sister Carrie*!
16. Interpret the ending of the novel! What is the significance of the rocking chair? (You should also consult the ending of the Pennsylvania Edition.)
17. Interpret Hurstwood's death-scene!
18. Discuss the function of Ames in the novel!

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 10:  
STEPHEN CRANE AND ABRAHAM CAHAN**

in preparation

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 11:

### KATE CHOPIN

(Text: *The Awakening* (1899))

1. Acquaint yourself with the social and political background of the author!
2. Discuss the novel's genesis and history of reception!
3. Why could *The Awakening* be considered an "improper" novel in the 1890s?
4. What literary tradition(s) does the novel partake in? In how far does it make sense to classify the novel as a local color work, as a naturalist novel, or as an example of *fin-de-siècle* decadence?
5. Identify the structure of the novel!
6. How is Creole society described? What's Edna's social position on Grand Isle? How does she fit in?
7. Discuss the significance of theatricality and role-play in the novel!
8. Analyze the representation of motherhood in the novel! (Pay particular attention to chapter 4). Characterize Edna as a mother, in comparison to Adèle Ratignolle!
9. Contextualize: In how far can *The Awakening* be described as a novel of the 1890s? Compare the narrator's concept of "mother-woman" with the contemporary concept of the "New Woman"! (You may want to distinguish the "New Woman" of the 1890s from the earlier concept of "Republican Womanhood" which you're acquainted with from "Introduction to American Cultural History.")
10. Can Edna - or any other female character in *The Awakening* - be called a New Woman? Are there any feminists in the novel?
11. Characterize and contextualize the relationship between Edna and her husband, Mr. Pontellier. (Pay attention to Pontellier's economic philosophy.)
12. Discuss the function of Robert Lebrun in the novel!
13. How is Edna's process of self-discovery rendered in terms of literary technique? To answer this, trace the development of point-of-view throughout the novel! Describe the narrator's strategies of focalization, beginning with the first chapter and moving at least to the third! How do focus and voice develop throughout the novel?
14. In the same context: Analyze the use of free indirect style (*style indirect libre*) in the first few chapters of the novel!
15. How is Edna's process of self-discovery organized by symbols and tropes?
16. Closely analyze chapter 7 (Edna and Adèle on the beach): What is Edna's *method* of introspection? In the same context: Define the (implied) author's concept of selfhood. In how far is the idea of repression important here?
17. Interpret the title of the novel!
18. Closely analyze the ending of the novel! In how far is Edna's death-scene different from other female deaths in 19th-century literature?



**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 12:  
DAVID BELASCO, WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY, ISRAEL ZANGWILL**

in preparation

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 13:  
TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY-POETRY AND THE LATE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES**

in preparation

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 14:

### EDWARD BELLAMY, CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN, W.E.B. DU BOIS

(Texts: *Looking Backward*, chapters 1-3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 19, 22, 24-26, 28; *Herland*, chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12; *The Souls of Black Folk*; selections in *Norton Anthology*.)

#### I. The Progressive Movement

1. Compare the Progressive idea of reform to the evangelical reform movements in the Jacksonian era!
2. Explain the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*! How is *laissez-faire* related to the emergence of the Progressive Movement?
3. Characterize the "muckrakers"!
4. Define the term "social sciences"! Why do the social sciences emerge around the turn of the century?
5. Re-read Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life* (excerpts in the course folder for "Introduction to American Cultural History") and summarize its major points! In how far can this text be seen as a typical example of Progressivism?

#### II. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*

1. Define "utopia" as a literary genre!
2. Why is utopian writing particularly popular in the nineteenth century?
3. Account for the enormous influence and popularity of *Looking Backward* in American cultural history.
4. Identify and discuss keyterms from the novel!
5. How is the transition to a post-capitalist society to be achieved, according to Bellamy?
6. Is Bellamy's utopia a socialist utopia? Find similarities with and differences from European socialism!
7. Evaluate Werner Sombart's famous question, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?"
8. Situate Bellamy's utopia in American cultural history! Can you find precedents or related traditions?
9. Discuss the role of technology in *Looking Backward*!
10. Read William James's "The Moral Equivalent of War" and relate it to Bellamy's novel!

#### III. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

1. Inform yourself about Gilman's biography, her oeuvre, and the reception of her novel!
2. Compare *Herland* to *Looking Backward*: What are the parallels, what are the differences?
3. Discuss *Herland* as a polemical work!
4. Discuss *Herland* as a humorous work!
5. Describe the relationship between nature and culture in *Herland*!
6. In how far can *Herland* be described as a fictionalized account of basic methodologies of Cultural Theory?
7. Distinguish between "sex" and "gender"! In how far is this distinction important in Gilman's novel?
8. Comment on the narrative perspective in *Herland*!

#### IV. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

1. Briefly outline Du Bois's major arguments against Booker T. Washington! Is his critique justified? Where does Du Bois situate himself in the spectrum of black protest?
2. Explicate the term "double consciousness"!
3. What does Du Bois mean when he speaks of "the revolution of 1876"?
4. Define Du Bois's *concept* of "education". What is his opinion of Tuskegee?

5. What does Du Bois have to say about the question of racial identity? How do you account for his views on interracial sexuality? Compare the underlying concept of "race" to the racial views of Booker T. Washington's and Marcus Garvey!
6. Discuss the meaning of the terms "America" and "Africa" in Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*! How do these two constructions of identity interrelate?
7. Briefly outline the significance of the NAACP!
8. Interpret Du Bois's sentence, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line"!