

Realism and Sentimentalism in American Literature

ENGL 680 | Eisenhower Hall 219 | MWF 11:30 | Fall 2007
Course Website: www.ksu.edu/english/eiselei/realsent/
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Office Hours: MWF 10:30-11:20, Tue 12:00-1:00, plus many more by appointment



Course Description

With their roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy and science, realism and sentimentalism emerged in nineteenth-century as two of the most popular and enduring styles in American literary history. Their critical reputations have waxed and waned from the advent of modernism and its successor, postmodernism, but realism and sentimentalism remain beloved and widespread throughout contemporary literature, entertainment, and the arts. At the heart of both of these genres are fascinating questions about mimesis, emotion, politics, class, race, and gender.

This course examines some of the key sentimental and realistic texts from the eighteenth century to the present, and the reading will include Stowe, Rowson, Jacobs, Howells, Steinbeck, and Wright. The course will conclude with attention to the autobiographer Piri Thomas and the novelist Amy Tan. Along the way, we will explore various theories and definitions of realism and sentimentalism, texts that challenge the distinction between the two styles, and the ever-changing critical standing of sentimentalism and realism among academic and popular audiences.

Course Goals

When you finish ENGL 680: Realism and Sentimentalism in American Literature, you should be able to do the following:

- Demonstrate a broad and deep understanding of realist and sentimental literature in the United States.
- Generate thoughtful critical interpretations of specific realist and sentimental texts, paying attention to formal, aesthetic, historical, and cultural features.
- Discuss realist and sentimental literature in an intelligent, informed, and persuasive manner.
- Explain to others the meaning, significance, and value of specific realist and sentimental texts.
- Demonstrate a familiarity with literary criticism and theory on realist and sentimental literature in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts and problems in the definition of realism and sentimentalism.
- Research and write a persuasive critical essay on realism and sentimentalism in American literature, an essay that is carefully researched and aware of its relationship to previous scholarship on these authors.

This course also aims to intensify students' proficiency in the skills at the heart of a liberal education: the ability to reason, think critically, communicate effectively, and appreciate excellent writing and thinking.

Course Requirements

In-Class Work. Because one of our course goals is learning how to discuss these texts critically, attendance and class participation are vital to the work in this course. You will also take part in some in-

class activities and writing exercises. I will not assign letter grades to this in-class work, but I will factor attendance, class participation, and in-class writing into your final grade.

Written Work. The writing in the course will consist of two papers: a shorter comparative analysis (approximately five pages) and a longer research paper (twelve to fifteen pages). Students will also have the opportunity to write one article-length paper (twenty pages or so) in lieu of these two paper assignments. During the semester, I will distribute handouts describing these assignments in detail.

Examinations. There will be a midterm examination on Wednesday, October 10th and an in-class comprehensive final examination on Friday, December 14th at 9:40 a.m.

Grades. In determining final grades, each course requirement carries the following relative weight:

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| • Attendance, Participation, and In-Class Work | 20% |
| • Paper #1: Comparative Analysis | 20% |
| • Paper #2: Research Paper | 30% |
| • Midterm Examination | 10% |
| • Final Examination | 20% |

Course Policies

Late Papers. I do not typically accept late papers, but in certain, limited circumstances I will accept papers after the due date. Assignments will lose a letter grade for every class period that they are late. I collect papers at the beginning of class on the due date.

Revisions. You may choose to revise each paper for a higher grade. If you would like to revise a paper, the revision would be due exactly one week after the papers have been returned. A revision does not automatically receive a better grade. The revision must be substantially improved to merit a grade change. To submit a revision, please write a one-paragraph summary explaining why and how you revised and hand it in with both the revised version and the old version with my comments. Revisions that don't meet these criteria (arriving by the deadline, offering substantial change, providing a summary of changes, and enclosing the original version) are returned.



The Honor Code. Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance in academic matters that one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor & Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off-campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System web site can be reach via the following URL: www.ksu.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge, which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation. Perhaps the most serious violation of the Honor Code in an English course is plagiarism—taking or copying someone else's words or ideas as if they were your own. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on the exam, paper, or project; the truly gnarly XF grade for the course; and/or expulsion from the university.

Students with Disabilities. Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible. You may also want to contact Disability Support Services (DSS) in Holton Hall 202 (532-6441), so that they may assist us in making any needed arrangements.

Course Resources

Course Website. The URL for the course website is www.ksu.edu/english/eiselei/realsent. You may find there online resources related to the course, assignments and handouts, as well as basic information about the class.

Course Listserv. You will all soon be subscribed to a course listserv, and we can all post comments, information, and queries by sending messages to realsent@k-state.edu. The purpose of this listserv is to try out ideas and facilitate communication among class participants outside of class. Posting to this listserv is not required; it is here for our convenience. The only rule is this: all postings to the list should be related to our class in some way or another. If you have your K-State e-mail forwarded to another address, the University will subscribe you to that address also so that you can send messages to this list from either address.

Texts. The following books are available at the K-State Union Bookstore and Varney's Bookstore in Aggieville:

Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (Norton)
 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Norton)
 Morris, *Realism* (Routledge)
 Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (Penguin)
 Steinbeck, *Grapes Of Wrath* (Penguin)
 Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Norton)
 Tan, *Joy Luck Club* (Penguin)
 Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets* (Vintage)
 Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* (HarperPerennial)



You will also be doing some reading on theories of sentimentality from a coursepack. It will be available later this semester at the Arts and Sciences Copy Center in the basement of Eisenhower Hall.

Reading Schedule (Part 1)

1. Two Sentimental Classics: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Aug 20 M	Introductions
Aug 22 W	Rowson, <i>Charlotte Temple</i> , xlix-1, 1-70
Aug 24 F	Rowson, <i>Charlotte Temple</i> , 71-132
Aug 27 M	Douglas, Introduction to <i>Charlotte Temple</i> , vii-xlvi
Aug 29 W	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 1-67
Aug 31 F	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 67-131
Sept 3 M	Labor Day (no class)
Sept 5 W	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 132-264
Sept 7 F	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 264-330
Sept 10 M	Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> , 331-88
Sept 12 W	Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," in Stowe, 495-501 Tompkins, "Sentimental Power," in Stowe, 501-22

2. Two Realist Masterpieces: *The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*

Sept 14 F	Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> , 1-63
Sept 17 M	Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> , 63-136
Sept 19 W	Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> , 137-205
Sept 21 F	Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> , 205-63
Sept 24 M	Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> , 263-321
Sept 26 W	"Howells and the Dilemmas of Realism," in Howells, 486-516
Sept 28 F	Wright, <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> , 16-124
Oct 1 M	Fall Break (no class)
Oct 3 W	Wright, <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> , 125-220
	PAPER #1 DUE
Oct 5 F	Wright, <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> , 221-63
Oct 8 M	Yarborough, Introduction to <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> , ix-xxix
	Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," in <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> , 1-15
Oct 10 W	MIDTERM EXAMINATION

Important Dates on the Reading Schedule (Part 2)

3. *Theories of Sentimentalism and Theories of Realism (Oct 12-Oct 25)*

4. *Realism or Sentimentalism? Harriet Jacobs and John Steinbeck (Oct 26-Nov 14)*

Nov 14 W In-Class Writing Workshop

5. *Realism and Sentimentalism in Postmodern America: Piri Thomas and Amy Tan (Nov 16-Dec 7)*

Nov 19 M **PAPER #2 OR ALTERNATIVE PAPER DUE**
 Nov 21 W Thanksgiving Break (no class)
 Nov 23 F Thanksgiving Break (no class)
 Dec 7 F Conclusions
 Dec 14 F **FINAL EXAMINATION**, 9:40-11:30 a.m.



Illustrations: Harriet Beecher Stowe (1), William Dean Howells (2), Harriet Jacobs (3), and Amy Tan and Lou De Mattei, with their Yorkshire Terriers, Bubba and Lilli (4).