

The 'Call of the Wild'

American Literary Naturalism and Its Other(s)

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

Room and time: H-H-C 3305, Thursdays 14-16

Course type: Vorlesung

Modules: M 9a.7: Text, Kultur und Sprache im Englischunterricht / Literatur-, Medien- und Kulturanalyse; Grund-, Haupt- und Realschule, Schwerpunkt G; M 5.1: Texte und Medien; Berufskolleg: M 6.3: Literatur und Kultur: Spezialisierung / Autoren(gruppen); Grund-, Haupt- und Realschule, Schwerpunkt HR; M 5.1: Texte und Medien; Bachelor: M 8.1: Kulturelle Öffentlichkeiten: Literarisches Leben / Medieninstitutionen und Medienpolitik

First session: April 15, 2010

Course description: This course provides an introduction to the tenets and themes of what is called 'American literary naturalism.' Roughly covering the years from 1893 (the year in which Stephen Crane published *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*) to 1925 (when Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* came out), the seminar will discuss both the naturalists' rejection of realist "teacup tragedies" and their focus on romantic and epic components in fiction (Frank Norris). How was 'naturalism' defined from a late 19th-century and early 20th-century point of view? What social and cultural function did the movement have in U.S. society? We will also seek to explore the cultural determinism as well as the social criticism associated with naturalism and related movements (such as modernism). Another important accent will be placed on the closeness of naturalist writings to scientifically motivated approaches such as "social Darwinism" and "degeneration theory." We will look at fictional as well as non-fictional texts (F. Norris, S. Crane, J. London, T. Dreiser, and E. Wharton) and a number of films (*Greed*, *Sunrise*) and other cultural documents linked to the naturalist imagination.

Grading: For 2 CP: regular attendance, at least seven entries in the discussion forum, successful participation in final exam (45 min.). For 5 CP: regular attendance, at least nine entries in the discussion forum, participation in class discussions, and successful participation in final exam (90 min.). For 7 CP: regular attendance, nine entries in the discussion forum, lively participation in class discussions, successful participation in final exam (90 min.), and final paper (8-10 pages).

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, August 31 (Tuesday), 2010. Note: There is no extension of this deadline. Please throw papers into my box (2nd floor of the AR-H building) or send them in postal form. Do not (!) send papers via email.

Final Exam: July 15 (Thursday)

Syllabus

15 April **Introduction: The Origins and Tenets of American Literary Naturalism**

Basic texts:

Sidney Gendin, "Was Stephen Crane (or Anybody Else) a Naturalist?" (1995)¹

Frank Norris, "The Responsibilities of the Novelist" & "A Plea for Romantic Fiction" (1901).

22 April **The Urban Jungle – Class and Individualism in Naturalist City Fiction**

Main text (required):

Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), ch. I, II, XIX.

Reference texts (optional):

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900).

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905).

29 April **"None of Them Knew the Color of the Sky": Determinism and the Indifference of Nature**

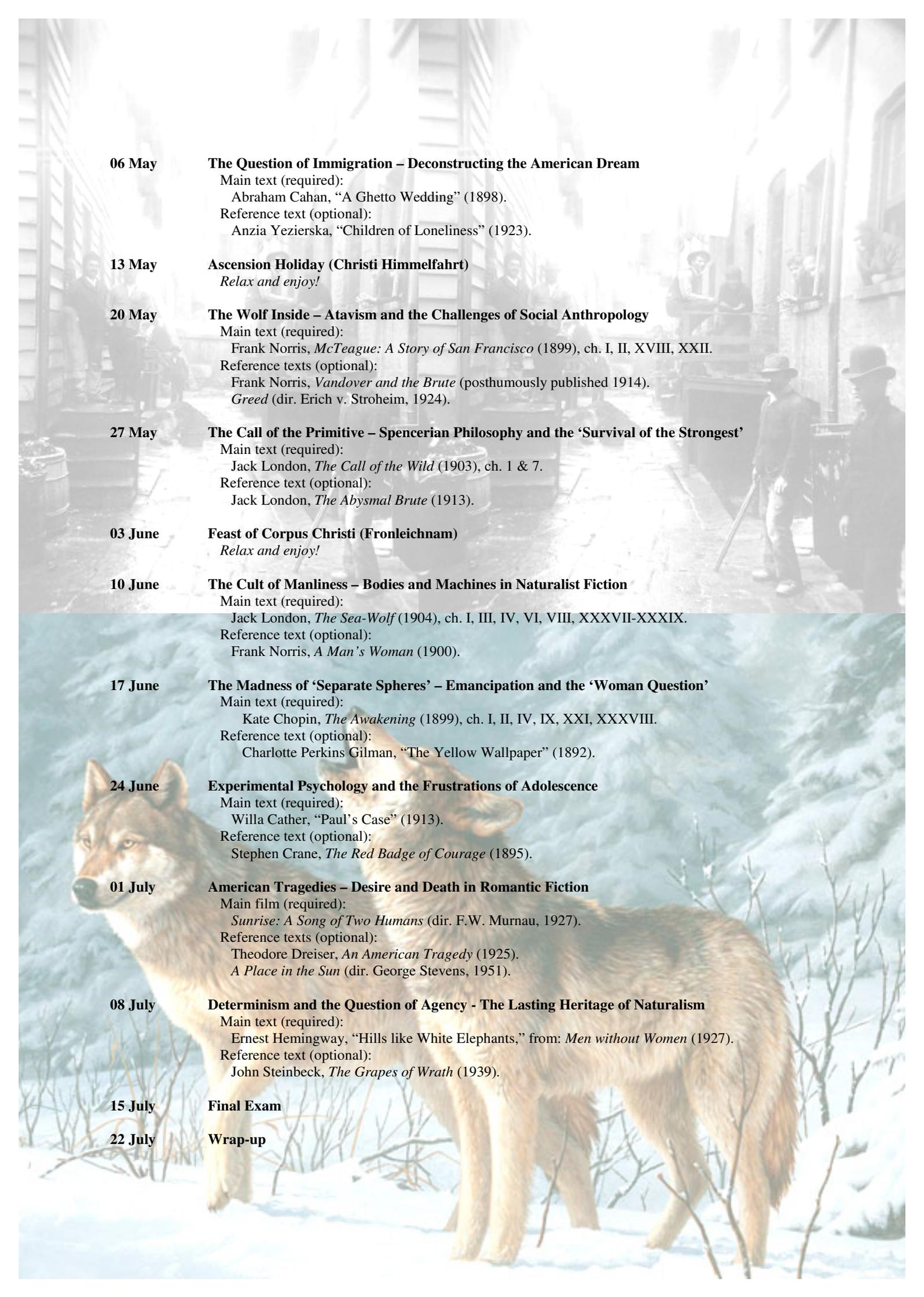
Main text (required):

Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" (1897).

Reference text (optional):

Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

¹ All texts for this course are available on the BSCW server. <http://bscw.avmz.uni-siegen.de/>

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- 06 May** **The Question of Immigration – Deconstructing the American Dream**
Main text (required):
Abraham Cahan, “A Ghetto Wedding” (1898).
Reference text (optional):
Anzia Yeziarska, “Children of Loneliness” (1923).
- 13 May** **Ascension Holiday (Christi Himmelfahrt)**
Relax and enjoy!
- 20 May** **The Wolf Inside – Atavism and the Challenges of Social Anthropology**
Main text (required):
Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899), ch. I, II, XVIII, XXII.
Reference texts (optional):
Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute* (posthumously published 1914).
Greed (dir. Erich v. Stroheim, 1924).
- 27 May** **The Call of the Primitive – Spencerian Philosophy and the ‘Survival of the Strongest’**
Main text (required):
Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903), ch. 1 & 7.
Reference text (optional):
Jack London, *The Abysmal Brute* (1913).
- 03 June** **Feast of Corpus Christi (Fronleichnam)**
Relax and enjoy!
- 10 June** **The Cult of Manliness – Bodies and Machines in Naturalist Fiction**
Main text (required):
Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), ch. I, III, IV, VI, VIII, XXXVII-XXXIX.
Reference text (optional):
Frank Norris, *A Man’s Woman* (1900).
- 17 June** **The Madness of ‘Separate Spheres’ – Emancipation and the ‘Woman Question’**
Main text (required):
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899), ch. I, II, IV, IX, XXI, XXXVIII.
Reference text (optional):
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892).
- 24 June** **Experimental Psychology and the Frustrations of Adolescence**
Main text (required):
Willa Cather, “Paul’s Case” (1913).
Reference text (optional):
Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895).
- 01 July** **American Tragedies – Desire and Death in Romantic Fiction**
Main film (required):
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1927).
Reference texts (optional):
Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (1925).
A Place in the Sun (dir. George Stevens, 1951).
- 08 July** **Determinism and the Question of Agency - The Lasting Heritage of Naturalism**
Main text (required):
Ernest Hemingway, “Hills like White Elephants,” from: *Men without Women* (1927).
Reference text (optional):
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).
- 15 July** **Final Exam**
- 22 July** **Wrap-up**