

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN NOVEL FROM THE 19TH TO THE 21ST CENTURY: INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY – 5 Creds.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this course is to offer a critical overview of the evolution of the Anglo-American novel from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. The starting point will be the documentary realism Victorian novelists inherited from eighteenth century authors, like Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe and Tobias Smollett, overtly working inside the picaresque tradition. Charles Dickens is the nineteenth century author who better consolidates this textual tradition. This tradition is not incompatible with other narrative developments, such as satire (Swift), sentimental romance (Burney), gothic romance (Radcliffe), historical romance (Scott), or domesticated ironic realism (Austen), but it undoubtedly provides a singular framework for the articulation of narrative modes that are sociologically biased, such as the “condition of England novel” (Dickens, Disraeli, Edgeworth, Charlotte Brontë) or crime romance (Dickens, Collins). Both modes strongly influenced later narrative experiments by Henry James, Joseph Conrad or George Eliot aimed at the exposure of ideological violence.

We also aim at exploring the deep structure underpinning many novels that virtually conform to these narrative modes. This deep structure features the conflict between a potentially anomic or anti-social individual and the normative realm (the *nomos*) of the social community that seeks to assimilate her with the aim of averting her potential threat. The tension between a free and potentially entropic subject and the organic community that may virtually repress her constitutes the blueprint of many narratives whose chief objective is to corroborate the impossibility of removing such tension and reaching a reconciliation. Adultery, crime and political subversion are some of the forms that individual, anti-communitarian, rebellion takes, but the morphology of delinquency is vast. In many cases, a false narrative closing leads either to the sacrifice of the anomic individual or to her forced re-integration within the community. Only modernist fiction affords veritable lines of flight (escape from society, erotic flight, suicide) only prefigured by the German romantics and American transcendentalists. This radical escapism is hardly compatible with plain realism. Still, Victorian fiction made exceptional room for it: Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Partly due to this escapist allure, modernist—and post-modernist—fiction run into a major contradiction. Ideological (political, religious and artistic) commitment often lead to the reactive creation of minor, if not minority, communities that could result, in the event, more essentialist, organic and repressive than the societies they seek to undo.

For the theoretical articulation of this course we will draw extensively from the work of Fredric Jameson, Franco Moretti, Joseph Hillis Miller and Jean-Luc Nancy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

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Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Katherine Mansfield, Selection of Short Stories
Carmel Bird, *Cape Grimm*

Secondary sources

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EVALUATION

Attendance and class participation (including oral presentations): 30%

Final examination: 70%

