

THE “OTHER” IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Almost exactly 100 years ago social critic Randolph Bourne observed that the “melting pot” model as it had been and was being practiced in the US in the 1910s was failing. “The strands [of different cultures] are here,” he wrote, and “we must have a policy and an ideal for an actual situation. Our question is, What shall we do with our America?” A central element in his thinking about the future was to “weave a wholly novel international nation out of our chaotic America,” and thus to “liberate and harmonize the creative power of all these peoples and give them the new spiritual citizenship.” Bourne was way ahead of his time, and it would be another 80 years or so before the “transnational turn” caught up with American Studies. The US fabric rests, culturally as well as ideologically, on networks that cross borders, on exchanges that traverse and make their mark also on aesthetic representations. American literature consequently abounds with encounters between different figures of Self and Others, and their representations take a number of different shapes.

This course relies first and foremost on primary works that in various ways engage with the related ideas of among others weaving “back and forth,” of otherness, the space of alterity, and possible reconciliations. We consequently read a selection of texts in terms of their ambiguities and varied provenances, all the while paying close attention to how these are carried in aesthetic form; to the connections between the weaving of the “many strands” that undergird literary reflections and the embrace of multi-layered ambivalence?

Primary texts (listed according to course schedule – titles in bold can be purchased at Akademika, note that a packet will be available at a reduced price)

Rowlandson, Mary, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, [1682] 2016.

Herman Melville, “Benito Cereno,” *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 8th ed., [1855] 2013 (Literature Kiosk)

Chopin, Kate, “Désirée’s Baby” (online)

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=bmRhLm9yZ3xtcy1zdXR0b24tLS1pYi1lbmdsaXNoLTR8Z3g6NTUxZDYyZjY0MDc2NzM5NA>

Larsen, Nella, *Passing*, Martino Fine Books, 2011

Lahiri, Jhumpa, *The Namesake*, First Mariner Books, 2003

Rodriguez, Richard, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Dial Press, 2005

Jen, Gen, *Mona in the Promised Land*, Vintage 1997

Alexie, Sherman, “Captivity,” *First Indian on the Moon*, Hanging Loose Press 1993 (online)
<https://genius.com/Sherman-alexie-captivity-annotated#note-4067831>

Thomas King, “Borders,” *One Good Story, That One*, Harper Perennial 1999 (online)
<https://uit.no/Content/329345/Thomas%20King%20Borders-1.pdf>

Secondary texts (available on Mitt UiB or The Literature Kiosk)

Attridge, Derek, *The Singularity of Literature*, Routledge, 2004.

Bourne, Randolph. "Transnational America," *The Atlantic*, 1916 (online)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/07/trans-national-america/304838/>

Freedman, William. "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 4: 2 (1971), pp. 123-131 (online)
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1345147.pdf>

Miller, J. Hillis. "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995, 66-79.
<http://engl273-3-stair.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/j.+hillis+miller+-+narrative.pdf>