

This is a representative syllabus. Actual course readings and course work may differ slightly from what is described here.

The Life of Objects, 1880 - 1930

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ENGL 372-10
CRN 16033
ICC 117

Course Description

How did objects help to shape American literary modernism? In the works of Henry James to Nella Larsen, we find a catalogue of both decorative and everyday objects that do more than establish a scene, illuminate character traits, or serve as symbols; rather, these things, such as the “unusually large cup” in the first paragraph of *The Portrait of a Lady* and the “shining brass bowl” in the first sentences of *Quicksand*, are part of a network of objects that comprise and express American culture as well as register debates about modernity, authenticity, and agency. In this course, we will explore how American modernist writers depicted and responded to material culture, including the collection of antiquities as well as the consumption of mass culture. We will read works by Henry James, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, and John Dos Passos, as well as examine the Chicago’s World Fair, which, in 1893, celebrated the world of things by not only orchestrating exhibits but also producing souvenirs as tokens of the experience. The course will offer students strategies and techniques for interpreting literature from the lens of material culture.

Accessibility and Inclusion

I am committed to creating a successful and productive learning environment for all students. If you have a documented disability, I will make accommodations for you in this class. Please see me early in the semester to discuss what accommodations you need. If you think that you have a disability that will influence your performance in the class, but do not have documentation, please contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu) for more information.

Readings

This course is reading-intensive. For the works of fiction, I ask that you purchase physical copies of the texts (rather than electronic ones). Productive and focused class discussions depend on us being able to quickly locate passages to read closely together; physical books allow us to do this much more easily than electronic ones. For the theoretical texts, electronic copies will be acceptable.

Required Texts

Willa Cather, "Paul's Case" -PDF will be available, please print

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*

Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*

Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

In addition to these literary texts, we will also read a selection from a range of philosophers and thinkers on issues related to the consumption of material goods, objects, and thing theory. In particular, we will read selections from the following texts; I recommend you purchase these texts, but PDFs of selections will be available:

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*

Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*

Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*

Other selections from Roland Barthes, Bill Brown, Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty will be available on Canvas.

Course Work

Grades: A (100-93); A- (92-90); B+ (89-87); B (86-83); B- (82-80); C+ (79-77); C (76-73); C- (72-70); etc.

Your work in this class will be evaluated in the following way:

Homework and Participation: 20% of Final Grade

Discussion Leaders: 30% of Final Grade

Museum Visit: 20% of Final Grade

Final Paper: 30% of Final Grade

Participation and Homework: Your active participation in the course is expected. To participate actively, you should show up for class on time, complete the reading assignments carefully, and bring the appropriate materials to class. Be prepared to respond to discussion questions, pose questions of your own, demonstrate respect for other students' comments, and

help to create a positive learning environment for everyone. I will be paying attention to the quality – not simply the quantity – of your participation.

Discussion Leaders: During the semester, you will help to lead discussion **three times**. To prepare for the times when you lead discussion, you will write a short response paper (**1-2 pages**) that proposes possible questions for the class to consider as well as relevant passages to examine. These response papers will be due 12 hours before the beginning of class. Specific guidelines will be provided on the first day of class.

Museum Visit: Over the course of the summer, you will visit one museum exhibit in Washington, D.C. corresponding roughly to 1880-1930 and write a short review that incorporates the ideas about things we've been discussing in class. This review (**3-4 pages**) can be submitted at any point after the second week of the course. I will supply a list of relevant exhibits to visit.

Final Paper: At the end of the session, each student will submit a paper (**5-6 pages**) on a topic of their choice related to the course readings. To prepare for this paper, students will submit a proposal during the third week of the session, and we will do peer review during the last week of the summer session.

Course Policies

Digital Submission of Work: Most of your work for this class will be submitted electronically through **Canvas**. Unless I specifically direct you to, you do not need to print your work. .

Late Work

Work for the class should be submitted on time. Any work that comes in late will lose 5 points for each day late.

Drafts of Papers, Office Hours, and Email

I encourage you to use my office hours to share your work with me and to discuss ideas for papers.. I am very happy to meet with you at any stage of the writing process. I am also very happy to read drafts of papers. However, I will not pre-grade or proofread a paper.

In addition to office hours, I am happy to answer questions over email. If you'd like me to read a draft, you can email it to me, but we will meet in person to discuss it. I check email regularly during "business hours" Monday-Friday. If you send me an email after 6 p.m. or over the weekend, please expect that I will reply either the next day or on Monday.

Resources and Other Information

Writing Center:

The university has a fantastic Writing Center located in Lauinger Library (217a, next to Midnight Mug). This free peer tutoring service is available for all students. Writing Center tutors can assist you at any stage of the writing process. Whether you are brainstorming ideas for a paper or polishing a final draft, the tutors at the Writing Center can help you assess and review your work. To set up an appointment, visit <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu>.

Georgetown Honor Code

At Georgetown, every member of the community is expected to behave responsibly and to exercise academic integrity. All work that you should submit for this course should be your own and should be written for this course.

Title IX

Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. University policy requires faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include Jen Schweer, MA, LPC, Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention, (202) 687-0323 (jls242@georgetown.edu) and Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS), (202) 687-6985 (els54@georgetown.edu). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.