

*Late Nineteenth Century*  
*1865–1910*



Nations, Regions, Borders  
Critical Visions of Postbellum America  
Developments in Women's Writing  
A Sheaf of Poetry by  
Late-Nineteenth-Century American Women  
The Making of "Americans"

The conjunction/contradiction of the terms "nation," "regions," and "borders," along with the focus on gender indicated by *women's* writing, suggest both a turn away from a deductive approach to literary categorization and analysis based on assumptions concerning what is universal or central about the human—and more specifically the national—experience and a move toward an inductive approach that recognizes the value of regarding the specificity of cultural context in understanding how a text works. Rather than *a priori* assuming certain texts or cultural experiences to be marginal because they foreground issues of region and gender, thereby asserting the centrality of other texts supposedly free of such "ancillary" considerations, we can instead expand the possibilities for classroom discussion and pedagogical practice by regarding all human experience and cultural expression as profoundly "regional," as intimately concerned with questions of geography and gender, as well as race, social class, and other crucial processes of social definition. To group together, either in the anthology or on a syllabus, Henry James and Charles Chesnutt, African-American folktales and the works of Samuel Clemens, is not to argue for the "equivalency" of these texts according to some external standard of literary evaluation but to invite a consideration and comparison of their regionalness—the unique cultural contexts of their productions—as well as the dialogue, debate, and competition going on among them. Instead of using a set methodology for the reading of all texts, the conjunction of the texts in these sections asks students and teachers to consider how different texts signal different audience expectations, how they indicate or counter-indicate a desired audience, how they speak to a variety of audiences and

audience expectations at once—how “regions,” whether regions of gender or geography, race or class communicate with each other across borders of race, culture, gender, and class.

If we regard all texts as regional, from the perspective of pedagogy the primary region for class investigation is the classroom itself, where the particularity and “regionality” of each student’s response to the literature occurs. As a preparation for a discussion of terms like “central” and “regional,” “major” and “minor,” “representative” and “marginal,” students can explore their own responses to see what they find familiar and foreign in these texts, which borders these texts ask them to cross. Here again the inductive approach works well, for while such reactions will obviously vary from student to student, and from class to class, they provide us with a region-specific context for the consideration of the reception history of these works. Following Judith Fetterley’s lead in *The Resisting Reader*, both women and men in the class can explore the traditional experience of reading texts that assume the centrality of male experience; similarly, all students can consider the difference represented by texts that assume the definitiveness and centrality of female experience—the texts in the section on women’s writing and Kate Chopin, Grace King, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson in the section on nation, regions, and borders. Students from outside the Northeast can discuss what it’s like reading texts that take the geography, climate, and culture of New England as a norm or that figure the West as someplace wild, exotic, and mysterious. Clearly, this approach allows for a variety of cultural configurations and can be adapted to the specific demographics of the individual classroom.

Late-nineteenth-century women’s writing, because it was long dismissed as merely “regionalist” writing, is in many ways now central to this regional approach to pedagogy. In her essay “‘Distilling Essences’: Regionalism and ‘Women’s Culture,’” Marjorie Pryse suggests that the women writers traditionally classified as “regionalists” (writers like Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Sarah Orne Jewett) used the idea of regional rhetorically as a means of demonstrating that supposedly universal terms like “mother,” “home,” “black,” and “white” are in fact socially constructed while at the same time negotiating a cultural space to make such demonstrations. These texts thus raise the question of how to get to center stage from the margins. Such a question functions as both a means

of interpreting a story like Alcott's "My Contraband" and of understanding Alcott's position as a writer. Such a manipulation of center and margin can be applied equally to Paul Laurence Dunbar or Charles Chesnutt, who write of the African-American experience in the language of formal European literary traditions (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s work on the African-American cultural tradition of "signifyin[g]"—of both appropriating and ironically transforming forms and values from the dominant culture as part of an originally African rhetorical tradition—is especially applicable here as well as suggestive of rhetorical strategies used by any marginalized group) and to Samuel Clemens, who uses dialect and satire to write about a middle-class white world he both despised and aspired to.

One initial point of departure for classes using either one or both volumes of *The Heath Anthology* is the question of what difference the Civil War makes, both in general historical terms and in relation to these particular issues. Many institutions still structure their survey classes using 1865 as the "border" between old and new, the past and the modern, and this division reflects and reinforces widespread, if often conflicting and loosely defined, beliefs about the Civil War as the seminal event in American history. Again, the versions of this general historical sense the students bring to class can create the context for the reading and discussion of these post-Civil War texts, beginning with considerations of how different interpretations and representations of the Civil War serve different social, political, and cultural purposes (the Ken Burns documentary, with its aestheticized presentation, the attendant controversy over its romanticizing of the Confederate military and political leadership, and its current status as fundraising cash cow for PBS can be one starting point).

The issue of race and the struggles of African Americans in post-Civil War America find representation here in the work of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, while the majority of the texts in this section focus more on the evolution of the women's movement and the efforts of both Native American and Latino cultures to survive the continuing expansion of the U.S. empire. Again, the idea of cultural rhetoric can serve as a pedagogical entry into these texts by asking how these writers positioned themselves amidst various and often conflicting

cultural identities related to gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, and region.

The question of empire—political, economic, and cultural—is particularly important to the historical study of post-Civil War America and can provide entry to these texts as well. Henry Adams’s famous, and now canonical, use of the image of the Virgin and the dynamo to signify the cultural difference of modernity can be paired with Upton Sinclair’s metaphor of “the jungle,” along with his harrowing depictions of the meat-packing industry, as contrasting, yet not necessarily contradictory, visions of the impact of the expanding capitalist economy. In both cases, asking students to consider the perspectives from which these accounts are written (that of a member of one of America’s elite families versus that of a crusading socialist journalist) can lead to discussions that integrate issues of political philosophy, rhetorical purpose, audience, tone, diction, and structure.

For example, Adams’s scholarly allusions and ornate prose style, which are often alienating for students, can be studied as strategies meant to register with different members of the reading public in specific ways, so that questions about the difficulty of his style can lead to questions both about the audience he wants to reach and the audience he doesn’t, and about why a writer would deliberately aim for a narrow readership while making claims for the universality of his analysis. The students can then examine where they feel they stand in relation to Adams’s intended audience. The same questions, of course, can be posed in relation to Sinclair. In his case, the strategy is to reach a wide readership and incite moral outrage. Such questions of audience and rhetorical purpose lead to questions of canonicity, questions of which styles and strategies come to be considered “literary,” which styles merely instrumental. Seeing and reading Adams in terms of his particular cultural and social position extends this discussion of canonicity to considerations involving the supposed universality of certain texts and the equally supposed limited appeal of others. Why, for example, has the skillfully rendered mid-life crisis of an upper-class New England intellectual been seen as universal in significance while the carefully constructed portrayal of the social practices leading to the nervous breakdown

of a middle-class woman (Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper") has until recently been ignored or thought of as interesting only to a limited group of readers? Just as important, why have attitudes changed regarding "The Yellow Wall-Paper"? The purpose of such questions is not to insist that students adhere to a new version of the canon or simply to discredit an older version, but to understand that all considerations of literary merit and cultural significance take place in the context of changing social and cultural values and as part of ongoing debates about those values, debates that include college students as both observers and participants.

### **The Making of "Americans"**

While earlier in American history, writers like Benjamin Franklin, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederick Douglass can be seen to have engaged in a highly self-conscious process of creating models for a national identity, the texts in this section can be read as attempts to assimilate, negotiate, and restructure established myths of national identity, especially in the context of late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century patterns of immigration from Eastern Europe and Asia. Students can prepare for reading these texts by exploring their own received versions of these myths and by discussing various myths of immigration and assimilation, including the implications, desirability, and undesirability of the "melting pot" and other metaphors.

Beyond this examination of cultural mythology, the class can ground their discussions by compiling their own individual and family immigration histories. This project can include oral histories and research into various immigrant experiences. These immigration histories, along with the texts in this section, can then be approached in terms of how they do or don't fit into stereotypical models of the American self and the immigrant experience; more specifically, students can discuss the strategies these writers—as well as students and their ancestors—used in confronting these models. Rather than simply reacting to a cultural situation, these texts attempt in various ways to alter and revise that situation. How did the large influx



of Russian and Eastern European Jewish immigrants, for example, adapt to and transform the American cultural landscape? Finally, Gertrude Bonnin's text continues the tradition among Native American writers of turning the immigrant myth inside out by addressing the question of how members of indigenous cultures deal with the experience of finding themselves strangers in their own land.

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## **Nations, Regions, Borders**

### **African-American Folktales**

*Contributing Editor: Susan L. Blake*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Some of the questions about these folktales I would anticipate from students are: The tales are so simple—are they really art? If they didn't actually contribute to the abolition of slavery, how are they subversive? Both African-American students and others may be made uncomfortable by stereotypical characterizations and dialect. What's the point of perpetuating im-

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ages of slavery today? Answering these questions is not easy;  
I've tried to address them in the material below.

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Folktales interpret the experience of tellers and audience. While motifs endure from century to century and culture to culture, details and emphases vary with group experience and individual talent. Indeed, the art of the tale is to adapt the traditional motif to particular circumstances. Most African-American tales are about power relations, but as power relations are contextual, so are interpretations of the tales. Students familiar with slavery and willing to take metaphoric leaps will be able to read the John and Old Marster tales and the animal stories as critiques of slavery and, more generally, a racist society. But it is important, too, to think of the range of meanings the tales might hold for tellers and listeners in various social positions at various historical moments.

The ongoing conflict between John and Old Marster dramatizes the contradiction between humanity and slavery. The John tales turn on the paradox that John is a man and yet a slave, Old Marster's colleague/ confidant and yet his chattel. John keeps trying to close the gap between his status and that of Old Marster. When he succeeds—in, for example, claiming a right to the chickens he's raised—he in effect achieves freedom. Even when John fails or appears foolish, the tale still skewers slavery by its use of metaphor. There is little evidence, however, that these tales were told during slavery, and the slave-master relationship they depict, between two individual men, for all its metaphoric power, is narrow and relatively genial. Another way to think of the tales would be as an interpretation of race relations under "freedom" as slavery.

Unlike the John tales, the animal tales, which were told during slavery, do not distinguish neatly between unjust and justified antagonists. They can, however, be seen as a pointed refutation of the romantic myth of the old plantation that developed in the 1830s and may be most popularly represented in *Gone with the Wind*. On the plantation of myth, status is based on virtue, and human relations are governed by honor, pride, justice, and benevolence. In the recognizably human society of the animal tales, status is based on power, honor is absent, pride is a liability, justice is anything you can get away with, and benevolence is stupidity. Animal characters provide not only camouflage for social criticism but the essential metaphor of society as jungle.

The two conjure tales collected by Zora Neale Hurston, in which the rivals for the power represented by conjure are not master and slave but male and female, provide an interesting counterpoint to the John tales and animal stories. These tales draw attention to the absence of women in the other tales and raise a host of questions: Are they about gender conflict? Is there a specifically woman's point of view missing from the body of African-American tales? Is it significant that these tales were collected and published by one of the few female folktale collectors? Would these tales be read the same way in the 1930s and the 1990s?

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

Folktales might be said to have three audiences, all of them in some sense "original": The people who hear and help create the oral tales; folklorists who persuade storytellers to perform their tales for publication; and readers of the published collections. It can be difficult for students to grasp that the tales were not "written" by a single "author" but are the product of a historically and politically mediated collaboration. Some of the stylistic features of the tales are conventional—the reproduction of animal sounds in dialogue, for example, and the retort that concludes the tales of John "stealing" Old Marster's livestock. At the same time, the tales bear the stamp of an individual performer's style and emphasis—E. L. Smith tells a snappy tale, John Blackamore a highly developed one; Mrs. Josie Jordan's "Malitis" concludes with a comment on slavery, J. D. Suggs's "Who Ate Up the Butter?" with a comment on the present. The tales also show the fingerprints of the collectors: the introductions to the two tales of the Flying Africans from *Drums and Shadows*, the distanced narration of Zora Neale Hurston's two conjure tales, the gratuitous misspellings ("lide" for "lied," "rode" for "road") in W. A. Eddins's "How Sandy Got His Meat." It would be useful for students to look for evidence of both the performers and the collectors in the published texts. For example, what are the characteristics of John Blackamore's or J. D. Suggs's style? Which tales seem most nearly quoted from the performer, which most edited by

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the collector, and why? What can you tell from the texts about the collectors' attitudes toward the tellers or the interaction between collectors and tellers? How might the conditions of collecting—the historical moment, the collectors' race (Hurstun is black, the other collectors represented here are white), and the recording technology—affect the collecting event and the published text?

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Comparison between any of the tales and a European, African, or other American variant (Dorson, *American Negro Folktales*, provides comparative references) highlights both the political analysis and the art of the African-American tale. Comparison between the told-for-true story “Malitis” and any of the food-stealing stories in the John cycle reveals the conventions of folk fiction. Comparisons might also be drawn with contemporary African-American humor, rap lyrics, the tales of the southwestern humor tradition, and the fiction of Langston Hughes, whose Simple stories update the John tales, and Toni Morrison, whose *Song of Solomon* is based on the tale of the flying Africans. A comparison between Zora Neale Hurston's fiction and the folktales she published might illuminate her strategies in folktale editing as well as fiction.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

Topics for discussion, in addition to those suggested above, include the following: The function of violence in the animal stories, John as loser and fool, the way retorts work, kinds of racial experience not reflected in the tales, narrative strategies of indirection, whether and in what contexts the stories could be considered subversive.

The repetition of plot elements in a number of short texts makes folktales good subjects for analytic papers. Students might also write their own folktales following a traditional pattern. The terms of a creative assignment, which might be worked out by the class in discussion, should be quite spe-

cific so writing their own tale helps students see the structure, implications, and limitations of the traditional form. Such an assignment might be the following: Write a John tale in which John transgresses against slavery in some way not represented in the tales we've read (learns to read, dances with Old Master's daughter), or the slave is not John but Johnetta, or the two protagonists are not slave and master but representatives of some other relationship of unequal power (student-teacher, worker-boss). In any case, establish at the beginning that the dominant character trusts and depends on the subordinate and conclude the tale with a retort that undermines the principle of the unequal power relationship that has been transgressed.

## Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain) (1835–1910)

*Contributing Editor: Everett Emerson*

Much of what Mark Twain wrote continues to be read by large numbers of readers. The selections gathered together in the *Heath Anthology* demonstrate how broad his interests were and how eloquently he addressed problems of his day that remain urgent in our society today.

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Mark Twain frequently wrote as if what he had to say was provided by someone else, at times someone more credible than himself. Thus he wrote as a Chinese immigrant and as a black woman who had suffered severely as a slave. Most notably, after *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, in which the writer presents himself as an educated person who had traveled in Europe, he wrote a sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which begins, "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter. The book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly." Among his earlier works

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are “Goldsmith’s Friend Abroad Again,” in which he writes as a Chinese immigrant, and “A True Story,” which appears to be an account by a former slave who cooked at Quarry Farm, where Clemens often summered. The Chinese immigrant’s story and *Huckleberry Finn* are fiction; Clemens told a friend that “A True Story” is true but was “not altered . . . except to begin at the beginning, instead of the middle,” as the cook told the story; her account “traveled both ways.”

How legitimate was it for Mark Twain to invent the story told by the Chinese immigrant and to shape and organize the woman’s story? Does a reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, written much later, suggest that the two earlier pieces were helpful in the writing of the later masterpiece?

## **Original Audience**

Both “A True Story” and *Huckleberry Finn*, which Huck appears to be writing in the 1850s, were composed after the Civil War and thus after slavery had been officially banished. Why did Mark Twain choose to make vivid to his readers of later years the experiences of blacks in the days of slavery? Are these works of any value to readers in the twenty-first century? Has the mind-set that subjected human values to property values disappeared?

## **Comparisons**

Herman Melville and Mark Twain were highly distinctive writers. What are the most striking differences about the works of these two? Does a comparison always result in higher marks for Mark Twain? Which author is especially valuable in comparison with Mark Twain? What does such a comparison demonstrate?

## **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

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1. Of the most admired writers of American literature, none is judged to be superior to Mark Twain as a humorist, though much that he wrote is not humorous. Identify a piece by Mark Twain that is intended to be humorous. Exactly what is humorous about it?
2. Most readers readily identify Mark Twain as a writer of some standing. Did your judgment of the selections in the text cause you to revise your judgment of Mark Twain? Would it be useful to read more of his work? Especially attractive are the pieces, all relatively short, gathered together in two volumes in the Library of America, *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays*, edited by Louis J. Budd.

## Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908)

*Contributing Editor: George Friedman*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Get ready to meet some resistance to Harris, particularly to the Tar-Baby story, because the dialect is initially so daunting. It might be useful to tell students (particularly those from north of the Potomac River) that the dialect becomes easier to read as the story progresses; if you have the time at the end of the class preceding the Harris assignment, you might want to go over some of the more common words such as “sezee,” “kaze,” “gwine.” I have on occasion been asked (by students who never saw “Song of the South”) just what a Tar-Baby looked like; I use the analogy of a snowman.

As for “Free Joe,” I find it useful to ask students to look for signs that this story was the creation of a *white* man. Your most perceptive students will have no trouble zeroing in on such lines as “The slaves laughed loudly day to day, but Free Joe rarely laughed. The slaves sang at their work and danced at their frolics, but no one ever heard Free Joe sing or saw him

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dance.” Students should also notice and question Harris’s assertion that no slave could possibly envy Joe’s freedom.

In many instances, discussion of these lines generates a lively debate over the nature of slavery and harshness of life on an antebellum plantation. That slaves sang in the course of their daily labor is not to be denied, but it is useful to point out the lyrics of these songs, particularly the more religious ones, with their strong emphasis on the book of Exodus and eventual emancipation.

Students should also be encouraged to debate Harris’s principal message in “Free Joe,” and in particular the overall impression he wants to convey of Joe himself. Is it fair to dismiss Joe as an “Uncle Tom,” passively taking whatever meanness that Spite Calderwood doles out? Students who characterize him as such will be challenged by others, who will point out that in the world of central Georgia in the middle of the nineteenth century, there wasn’t much Joe could do to resist Calderwood. Nonetheless, other students will say, he doesn’t seem to need to suppress rage, because he doesn’t seem to feel any rage to begin with. A related question then arises: Is Harris’s principal point in this story that no one should have such boundless power over the life of someone else, or is he saying that an African American is unable to function without a white guardian? Let your class discuss this at some length, but don’t expect a consensus.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

As the preceding section suggests, “Free Joe” opens up a host of questions about the nature of slavery in the antebellum South and the extent to which a “Free Negro” was really free. You might want to tell your students that historical accounts of Southern slavery have varied drastically in their characterizations of it, with some historians likening plantations to “vocational training schools” and others declaring Southern slavery the cruellest in western history, principally because it did not face organized opposition from the church and masters were

rarely encouraged, by the clergy or anyone else, to emancipate their slaves or even to think of them as human beings.

It is useful to point out that Harris's treatment of slavery is much closer to the first of these two characterizations, and to put both "Free Joe" and the Tar-Baby story in the context of an age that sentimentalized the antebellum South—to point out that in story after story in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the antebellum South was depicted as a land where races lived in harmony and both master and mistress considered their slaves part of the family, as did the slaves themselves. Point out that this idealized version of the antebellum South survived well into this century and reached its apogee in *Gone with the Wind*.

## Original Audience

Harris's original audience, particularly for the Uncle Remus stories, was heavily northern. The stories originally appeared in his Atlanta *Constitution*, but they were quickly syndicated, and appeared in many northern newspapers. He also put out an *Uncle Remus Magazine* at the turn of the century and it had a brisk sale nationwide. Letters to Harris, reprinted by his daughter Julia, suggest that some of his most admiring readers considered themselves sincere champions of the rights of African Americans.

It is very important to stress that at the turn of the century there were a great many writers and politicians eager to roll back the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments, and that these people railed against African Americans in extremely shrill and vicious terms, to very wide and very gullible audiences. It might be useful to quote from Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*, which sold over 1,000,000 copies in 1902, or read from Senator "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman's (a Democrat from South Carolina) famous speech on the floor of the Senate in defense of lynching. Harris's condescension toward African Americans might look a bit less defamatory when placed alongside such savage and widely accepted views of the race.



### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

In addition to the comparisons and contrasts cited above, Charles W. Chesnutt's Uncle Julius stories offer the most logical point of contrast—to both the Uncle Remus stories and “Free Joe.” It is useful to point out that Uncle Remus's only apparent motive in telling his stories is to entertain a little white boy, whereas Chesnutt's Uncle Julius is a far craftier character; he always has an underlying motive rooted in his own self-interest. Regardless of the Chesnutt story you use, it will depict the institution of slavery itself in terms far more bleak than what is found in Harris's stories—no one sings in Chesnutt's stories and no one frolics, either.

Other African-American writers of the age suggest themselves: certainly Dunbar's poem “We Wear the Mask” could be cited, since the mask Dunbar describes in this poem appears to have fooled Harris himself. Booker T. Washington's own memories of slavery would form a useful comparison, as would the more critical observations of W. E. B. Du Bois, in “The Sorrow Songs.”

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

I've already suggested the most fruitful questions: For the Tar-Baby story, you might ask why these stories would have held so much appeal for the slaves themselves. See if your students can discern for themselves the connections between the weak but wily rabbit and the slave; and strong but oafish fox or bear and the master.

For “Free Joe,” ask them to look for signs that the work was written by a white man, and see how many pick up on Harris's emphasis on the slaves' singing and dancing, and his certainty that no slave would ever envy Joe's freedom.

One final point for discussion in “Free Joe” would be Harris's attitude toward poor whites, as represented by the Staleys. For one whose origins were themselves so humble, Harris seemed to have very little sympathy for poor whites; the Staleys are insensitive and superstitious. They nevertheless

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open the only doors in the story for Joe; does Harris want us to think of them in a positive light?

## Bibliography

For “Free Joe,” try R. Bruce Bickley, *Joel Chandler Harris* (1987), pp. 113–16, and Catherine Starke, *Black Portraiture in American Fiction* (1971), pp. 53–54.

Just about everything written about the Tar-Baby Story concentrates on Harris’s use of dialect. The best of such studies is probably Lee Pederson’s “Language in the Uncle Remus Tales,” *Modern Philology* 82 (1985): 292–98.

A useful book for Harris is *The Atlantic Historical Journal*, 30 (1986–87): iii–iv. The entire issue is devoted to articles on the man and his work.

## Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858–1932)

*Contributing Editor: William L. Andrews*

## Classroom Issues and Strategies

Classroom issues include: How critical or satirical of blacks is Chesnutt in his portrayal of them? Does he treat them with sympathy, even when they behave foolishly? Is Chesnutt’s satire biting and distant or self-involving and tolerant?

There’s rarely one source of authority in a Chesnutt story. Different points of view compete for authority. Get the students to identify the different points of view and play them against each other.

Stress that Chesnutt’s conjure stories were written in such a way as not to identify their author as an African American. How effective is Chesnutt in this effort?

Students want to know what Chesnutt’s social purposes were in writing his conjure stories. How could stories about

slavery have any bearing on the situation of blacks and on race relations at the turn of the century—when Chesnutt wrote—and today?

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Major themes include the following: Chesnutt's attitude toward the Old South; the myth of the plantation and the happy darkey; the mixed-blood (monster or natural and even an evolutionary improvement); and miscegenation as a natural process, not something to be shocked by.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Chesnutt wrote during the era of literary realism. What is his relationship to realism, its standards, its themes, its ideas about appropriateness of subject matter and tone?

### **Original Audience**

I stress that Chesnutt wrote for genteel magazine readers much less critical and aware of their racism than we. How does he both appeal to and gently undermine that audience's assumptions?

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Chesnutt wrote to counter the stories of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris. Chesnutt might also be compared to Paul Laurence Dunbar and Frederick Douglass as depictees of blacks on the plantation before the Civil War.

### **Bibliography**

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Read the chapter on the dialect fiction in William L. Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1980).

## Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906)

*Contributing Editor: Kenny J. Williams*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Although Paul Laurence Dunbar also produced novels, short stories, and a large number of poems written in conventional English, he is best known for his adoption in verse of what was presented as the language (or “dialect”) of the black southern folk. Indeed, he has been viewed by some commentators as an artist who used negative stereotypes of his own people to satisfy a white audience, and there are still those who suggest that his work lacks substance.

In his lifetime, however, Dunbar was generally considered to be a symbol of African-American literary artistry and an apt representative of his race. Yet close reading of his poetry reveals him to be far more than an unimaginative purveyor of antiblack images. Moreover, few modern readers are aware of the essays on American race relations and other contemporaneous issues that Dunbar published at the height of his popularity. It is perhaps no wonder that from shortly after his death through the mid-twentieth century, his name was associated with numerous respected institutions in the African-American community. Practically gone now are the various Paul Laurence Dunbar Literary Societies that flourished throughout the country, but the schools and housing projects bearing his name still exist in many cities.

In order for students to appreciate the enduring literary achievement represented by Dunbar’s best work, they should be given some sense of the daunting obstacles arrayed against black authors at that time and, accordingly, of the complex constraints placed upon them by white editors and readers

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alike. To put it another way, students should be encouraged to consider not just *what* Dunbar wrote but *why* he wrote as he did.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

One cannot overemphasize the fact that Dunbar lived during a period when the access allowed blacks to major white publications was extremely limited. Although there were a number of important African-American periodicals in existence as well, for the ambitious black author eager to make his or her mark on the mainstream literary landscape, magazines such as *Century* and the *Atlantic Monthly* constituted the height of success. All too often, however, editors of these and similar periodicals expected African-American writers dealing with black material to follow the conventions of what has been termed the Plantation Tradition, which dominated the literary representation of black life and culture in the late nineteenth century. When coupled with the popularity of dialect verse of all kinds at the time, these conventions (perhaps best embodied in the fiction of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page) exerted tremendous pressure upon aspiring African-American authors. As a result, one should urge students not to search Dunbar's work for outright protest and direct rejection of the dominant racial stereotypes of the day but rather to attend to the subtle use of irony and the often veiled allusions to the dilemmas of race that mark much of his writing.

It is also important to recall that Dunbar wrote at a time when American poetry was in a state of transition. Authors such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Whitcomb Riley were seen as "true" poets, and such sentimental pieces as Eugene Field's "Little Boy Blue" and Will Carleton's "Over the Hills to the Poorhouse" were celebrated as the epitome of poetic genius. Although Emily Dickinson had died in 1886, her work was virtually unknown until the 1930s, and scant serious attention was paid to Ralph Waldo Emerson's poetic theory or Walt Whitman's free verse innovations. The invigorating literary experiments of the modernist period were still several years off.



The state of American poetry at the turn of the century explains, to some extent, the diverse, occasionally conflicting formal strains in Dunbar's work. If, on the one hand, his dialect poems reflect his adoption of stylistic strategies of both James Whitcomb Riley and also the Plantation Tradition writers, on the other hand, he modeled his conventional English poetry after the popular sentimental magazine verse of his day. Ultimately, neither approach was conducive to a realistic rendering of either the psychology or the vernacular expressions of African Americans. (One should also keep in mind that Dunbar was born and raised in the post-Civil War North and thus had little firsthand knowledge of southern life generally and none of slavery.)

### **Original Audience**

Dunbar was read widely in both the black and the white communities, with the extraordinary sales of his books making him one of the most successful American writers of his time, regardless of race. Some attention should be given in the classroom to the possible consequences for Dunbar's art of this dual audience, especially given that most white readers were not just unaware of the complexities of African-American life and culture but possessed of attitudes toward blacks shaped primarily by the racist images disseminated in the popular press, on the minstrel stage, and by post-Reconstruction southern politicians.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Despite the creative and personal tensions that plagued his tragically brief career, Dunbar was, without question, the single most influential African-American poet before Langston Hughes, even if many of the writers of the generation that followed his rejected aspects of his work. Extremely useful comparisons can and should be drawn between Dunbar's poetry and that of the New Negro Renaissance.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

For “Mr. Cornelius Johnson, Office-Seeker”:

1. What did the Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution (1865–70) accomplish? What did they fail to do?
2. Johnson is both a believing fool and a sad figure of a man who is not only a victim but also a victimizer. His hope for a political future in payment for his support, and his lack of understanding of the political process are told with an admirable economy of language—as in the ironic use of “Mr.” in the title. Given the method of character presentation, do you—as the reader—sympathize with Cornelius Johnson? Do you find any weaknesses in him that might tend to explain his predicament?

For Dunbar’s poetry:

1. By “scanning” Dunbar’s poetry, does a reader learn anything about Dunbar’s poetic technique?
2. Analyze Dunbar’s representation of black southern life in “When Malindy Sings” and “An Ante-Bellum Sermon.” In particular, consider the tactics he utilizes in attempting to undermine the stereotypes that his characterizations appear on the surface to endorse. How successful are these tactics? Examine the role of religion and the use of irony in both poems.
3. From your knowledge of Frederick Douglass, does Dunbar’s poem entitled “Frederick Douglass” transmit important information about the nineteenth-century leader? The poem, demonstrating none of the technical innovation of which Dunbar was capable, might seem so pedestrian today that readers will overlook the force of its emotion.
4. The complexity of “We Wear the Mask” is perhaps obscured by the simplicity of the poem’s language. Central to an understanding of the work are the opening

lines: “We wear the mask that grins and lies,/It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes.” The fact that the “mask” is lying rather than the wearer of the mask suggests something of the irony of the poem. If one assigns an active role to the mask, a reader can legitimately ask: Is the mask lying to the wearer, or is it lying to the observer? Composed of three variant-length stanzas with an unusual consistency of rhyme, this early poem illustrates Dunbar’s ability to operate within the constraints of linguistic control. In “Sympathy,” he demonstrates emotional control. The repetition of “I know why the caged bird sings” may have been directly related to his own daily experience in an elevator cage; however, the poem transcends the personal and rises toward the universality of enduring literature.

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## **George Washington Cable (1844–1925)**

*Contributing Editor: James Robert Payne*

## **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Students need to have some knowledge of southern American history as distinct from the historical emphasis on the North-

east that generally prevails in American history and literature courses. They should have a sense of the historical pluralism of southern American society, understanding that it includes American Indians, blacks, Hispanic Americans, exploited poor whites, as well as the conservative white elite, which tends to be the object of most attention. Cable's perception of multi-cultural southern America is central to his fiction.

Students need to be reminded that not all southerners supported slavery before the Civil War nor did all support segregation after the Civil War. For example, George Washington Cable, a middle-class white native of Louisiana, actively supported civil rights through his writings and through ordinary political work.

To break up tendencies to stereotype the South, students may be reminded that many southern cities voted against secession from the Union before the Civil War, and the voting was by white males only. Cable's fiction is expressive of pluralism in southern life and values.

With specific reference to "'Tite Poulette": Discuss Cable's portrayal of the limits that confront Creole women as well as the possibilities for those women to achieve some kind of autonomy. For Zalli and 'Tite Poulette, the double standard of sexual morality is further complicated by their racial identity, while their class status as free people of color limits their professional opportunities. Consider how Cable's evocation of New Orleans history as one of repeated conquest and rebellion lends additional significance to his narrative of "two poor children."

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

1. A central theme of Cable's fiction is the impact of the complex history of the American South on modern southern life. In his sense of the profound influence of history on the present, Cable anticipates the later master southern fictionist, William Faulkner.
2. An issue that might be regarded as more personal concerns Cable's relation to New Orleans Creoles (in New

Orleans, people of French or Spanish ancestry who preserved elements of their European culture). Creoles felt that their fellow New Orleanian betrayed them by what they saw as Cable's excessively biting satire and critique of the Creole community in his fiction.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Cable needs to be taught as a southern American realist author (at least insofar as his early, most vital fiction is concerned) who combines tendencies of critical realism (in his critique of southern social injustice and hypocrisy) and local color realism (in his evocation of old New Orleans and plantation Louisiana in all their exoticism).

Yet unlike the work of his fellow realists of the North, such as William Dean Howells and Henry James, Cable's greatest works, *Old Creole Days*, *The Grandissimes*, and *Madame Delphine*, are historical "period" fictions.

### **Original Audience**

In Cable's day, many southerners objected to what they saw as his unjust and disloyal criticism of southern social injustice. More specifically, some of Cable's New Orleans Creole readers expressed offense at what they re-garded as Cable's sharp satire (amounting to caricature, as they saw it) on the Creole community. Cable found his readership by publishing his fiction in *Scribner's Monthly*. It was a readership much like that of his fellow authors William Dean Howells and Henry James, essentially middle class, "genteel," and mostly outside the South. Cable's audience today admires his work as giving the best depiction of old New Orleans and of Louisiana as well.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

1. *Mark Twain*—The greatest of all southern writers of Cable’s day, Mark Twain, is comparable to Cable in certain important ways. Both were essentially liberal southerners whose writings effectively criticized problems in southern life. Both Mark Twain and Cable also convey their love and understanding of their region through their endeavors to convey its varied dialects, complex social relationships, and dramatic history.
2. *Kate Chopin*—Cable shares with his fellow Louisiana writer Kate Chopin a strong interest in the Louisiana French-American community and the tensions between the French and Anglo communities, as well as a concern for the situation of women in the South of their day.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. (a) Consider how the critical realist Cable undercuts romantic myths of the “noble aristocracy” of the “Old South.”
2. (a) In an essay, discuss the significance of Cable’s method of representing American language in relation to his themes. Hint: Remember that American language does not always mean English. Consider his representation of communication in French and, depending on which of Cable’s works are being studied, other languages.  
(b) Consider residual romantic tendencies in the fiction of the southern realist George Washington Cable.  
(c) In an essay, discuss and demonstrate—with specific references to passages of Cable’s fiction—how Cable undercuts ethnic stereotyping in his work.
3. (a) In an essay, examine the many ways in which Cable implies throughout “Tite Poulette” that women are treated as a form of property to be owned or exchanged. With reference to specific examples, discuss this issue in light of Cable’s general focus on different kinds of possession and trade.

- (b) Kristian Koppig's delirious cry that 'Tite Poulette is "jet white" exemplifies the illogic of legal and social codes governing interactions between members of different racial groups. Using the characters from the story as examples, consider how institutions such as the legal system, the church, or capitalism impact the construction of individual identity. What are the risks of violating such authority?
- 4. (a) The geographical setting of this story is bounded by the swamp. Consider the ways that the image of the swamp works within the contexts of American westward expansion and the mythology of Southern culture.

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## Grace King (1852–1932)

*Contributing Editor: Anne Jones*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

"The Little Convent Girl," a small jewel of a story, should be accessible and immediately interesting to most student audiences, since it represents its issues so starkly, and since those issues (cultural repression and its internalization, the awakening of desire and identity, the loss and discovery of parents, the impact of religion, racism, and gender, for example) are concerns of many undergraduates. Happily, the story also provides the opportunity for some remarkable conjunctions of teaching strategies: Its taut, understated, suggestive style invites careful close readings, its allusions and issues invite intertextual and contextual readings, and the political questions it raises, concerning the intersections of race and gender, invite readings through contemporary theory, such as Judith Butler's essay on



Nella Larsen's *Passing* (in *Bodies That Matter*: New York, 1993).

Students might be drawn into these discussions through the highlighting of key words, images, and phrases (see below, “Significant Form”), historical allusions (see below, “Major Themes”), or intertextual connections (see below, “Comparisons”). Or, for something a bit different, they might “enter” the story by focusing not on text but on the white space that intrudes into it immediately after the first utterance of the word “Colored!” What happens in the month between that utterance and the girl’s death—in the white space? If students are invited to invent and compare their own narratives to fill in this absence, many of the story’s central ambiguities may surface as well.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Grace King has frequently been seen as a woman of letters whose major projects, both literary and personal, had to do with defending the conservative South. It is certainly possible to read “The Little Convent Girl” in such a vein, as the story of the terrible consequences of miscegenation, for example: after all, her parents’ cross-racial relationship ends in the girl’s death. But the story’s position on race is complicated by its connection with gender. Blackness—from the bodies of laborers to the curl of the girl’s hair—represents a vitality and desire whose “management” becomes a repeated question in the story; the fact that the girl’s vitality and desire are “managed” by a repressive church-femininity suggests an alliance between racial and sexual problematics frequently thought to be more characteristic of northern than southern discourses. Cincinnati was, of course, a major center for slaves seeking freedom. The story appeared in 1893, three years before *Plessy v. Ferguson* authorized segregation, and in the thick of the proliferation of Jim Crow laws and practices in the South. King even uses the phrase “Jim Crow”—but how? In what ways does the story comment on its historical context?

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

This story seems to be looking toward modernism, with its understatement, its absences, its unobtrusive symbolism, and its economy of language. “Unpacking” passages can be a fruitful enterprise. The first paragraph, for example, suggests several continuing themes: the question of the significance of “good-bys,” the connection between the girl’s passivity and the bolted door, and the journey down river, away from the historical site of freedom for slaves. Other image patterns worth tracing with care include mouths and lips; sound and noise; needlework; pleasure and constraint (*ad libitum* literally means “at pleasure”); the doubled rivers and mothers; and of course whiteness and darkness.

The point of view from which the story is narrated is critical, for it never allows readers to “enter” the girl’s thoughts and—since she doesn’t speak—keeps her subjectivity opaque. How precisely can we describe the point of view? And how does the narration achieve its power?

### Original Audience

“The Little Convent Girl” appeared in Grace King’s collection *Balcony Stories* (New York: Century, 1893) and in *Century Magazine*, XLVI (August 1893), 547–51. In both forms it reached a wide national audience of men and women who were most likely white and middle class. *Balcony Stories* remained in print a remarkably long time; new editions were published in 1914 and 1925.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Robert Bush suggests comparing “The Little Convent Girl” as a “mixed blood” story to Sherwood Bonner’s “A Volcanic Interlude” and George W. Cable’s “Tite Poulette” and “Madame Delphine.” One might add Kate Chopin’s “Désirée’s

Baby” and Charles Chesnutt’s “The Wife of His Youth” to that list, among others. Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells a very different story of a slow boat down the Mississippi and a problematic arrival, but one whose differences might help to highlight the conjunctions between race and gender that seem so crucial to King. Kate Chopin’s sketch “Emancipation” plays on some of the same liberation keys; *The Awakening* introduces what King’s story avoids, female desire expressed as explicit sexuality, but its thematics of mothering and its relation to female desire (Adele Ratignolle’s “mothering” of Edna on the beach, for instance, and its effects on Edna’s voice) are worthy of comparison. Frances E. W. Harper treats “passing” from the point of view of the woman who “knows” she is black, in *Iola Leroy*; and Anna Julia Cooper, in *A Voice from the South*, in a sense gives speech to the silent convent girl. The life of an octoroon woman in New Orleans is imagined by Quentin Compson and his roommate in *Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner.

## Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875–1935)

*Contributing Editor: Akasha (Gloria) Hull*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

The state of African-American literature when these two stories were published (1899–1900) was the transition period between post-slavery Reconstruction and the flowering of black literature in the nineteen-teens (1915 into the Harlem Renaissance)—before Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery* (1901) and W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) had articulated the terms of a racial debate that highlighted the difference between old and new ways of conceptualizing and presenting (politically and artistically) black American culture. There was continuing richness of folk literature, but it still did not represent an extensive scribal tradition. Two black men-of-letters had achieved national recognition—Paul Laurence Dunbar for his dialect poetry (which, despite its original genius, still used familiar minstrel and plantation motifs) and Charles Chesnutt, author of *The Conjure Woman* and *The Wife of His Youth* (1899), stories that featured a tale-telling trickster figure and the “color line,” respectively. Clearly, Dunbar-Nelson is helping to define a nascent modern tradition, and doing so in ways that avoided limitations and stereotypes but also skirted race.

One must remember, too, the context of nineteenth-century popular fiction with its penchant for narrative modes and devices we now eschew—romance, melodrama, moralizing, etc. Of particular relevance is the flourishing of the local color tradition, in which women writers excelled. The South and Louisiana had its representatives, and Dunbar-Nelson wrote and was read in the light of George Washington Cable and Kate Chopin. In an early letter to her, Paul Laurence Dunbar said:

Your determination to contest Cable for his laurels is a commendable one. Why shouldn’t  
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you tell those pretty Creole stories as well as he? You have the force, the fire and the artistic touch that is so delicate and yet so strong.

Do you know that New Orleans—in fact all of Louisiana—seems to me to be a kind of romance land. . . . No wonder you have Grace King and Geo. W. Cable, no wonder you will have Alice R.[uth] M.[oore] [Dunbar-Nelson’s pre-marriage name].

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Race and racism within the U.S. is a contextual given. One of the specific results/manifestations that is relevant is *intra*-racial color prejudice, especially the prejudice against darker-skinned black people and the hierarchy of color. These contexts relate to Auguste in “Pearl.” So does the phenomenon of “passing” (usually economically motivated). Dunbar-Nelson herself casually passed on occasion—to see a theatrical performance, to have a swim at a bathing spa, to travel comfortably.

Auguste does so in a much more serious and sustained way for, in the eyes of the Irish politicians, his free black grandfather makes him just as much a “nigger” as Frank and the others.

The ambiguous racial status of the Louisiana Creoles is an even further refinement on the race-racism theme. Their admixture of French-Spanish-Indian-black-white blood, their often free status, their closed/distinct society/culture, etc., set them apart. Readers did not (do not?) tend to see these Creole characters as black/African Americans, but as some kind of non-white exotics.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Race and the African-American writer. There has always been feeling and discussion on the black writer's proper role/stance with regard to her/his racial roots and the use of this material. This has been complicated by the pseudo-argument of whether one wants to be a "black writer" or a "writer" (recall the shibboleth of being "universal").

## Original Audience

Answering questions like this was also affected by questions of audience and readership, since the authors had to write for predominantly white or mixed audiences. Furthermore, whites controlled the mass markets. Black newspapers and journals furnished independent outlets, but these were comparatively few and small. Clearly, Dunbar-Nelson was writing for a larger, mostly white readership. She had also learned from experience that this audience did not accept controversial treatments of blacks or black-white relations.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Dunbar-Nelson has usually been taught—if at all—as a very minor female poet of the Harlem Renaissance, partly because of that period's notoriety and also because only a few of her poems have been available. Literary historians knew/know of her "Creole stories," but they have not been easy to access. It radically alters our view of her to see that poetry was the least significant genre for her and short fiction the most important. After *Violets* and *St. Rocque*, she wrote two other collections that were never published (though a few individual stories were): *Women and Men*, more nature and original Creole and non-Creole materials, and *The Annals of 'Steenth Street*, tales of Irish tenement youth set in New York City. She also wrote various other types of stories until she died.

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Possible further reading: Two other Dunbar-Nelson stories: “The Goodness of St. Rocque,” which typifies, perhaps, her mode in these works, and “The Stones of the Village,” an even more overt and tragic handling of race, passing, and the black Creole; plus “Brass Ankles Speaks,” an autobiographical essay about growing up in New Orleans as a “light nigger,” which Dunbar-Nelson wrote pseudonymously toward the end of her life.

Secondary criticism: The biographical-literary chapter devoted to Dunbar-Nelson in Gloria T. Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and the Introduction to *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*.

## Ghost Dance Songs

Please refer to the headnote in the text for complete information.

Alexander Lawrence Posey (Creek) (1873–1908)

*Contributing Editor: Bethany Ridgway Schneider*

## Classroom Issues and Strategies

Present the “Ode” in the context of American poetry of the nineteenth century; it consciously follows in the tradition of Bryant and Longfellow and should be taught as such. The Hotgun poem and Fus Fixico letter will be more complicated for students, who may struggle with the dialect. Negotiate the question of dialect writing as you would with other dialect writers of the time: for example, Clemens, Harris, Chesnutt, Dunbar, and Chopin. Point out that Posey admired such writers, but held them up to very high standards of accuracy,

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scorning writers of “Indian” dialects who relied on stereotype rather than the particularities of regional speech.

Students are interested in Posey’s political involvement, particularly his efforts to form the Indian state of Sequoyah. They are fascinated by the “Americanization” of Indians like Posey—his classical education and early romantic lyrics—and the effects that “Americanization” has on Indian nationalisms (e.g., Posey’s refusal to publish the *Fus Fixico* Letters outside of Indian Territory).

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

1. The seeming inconsistencies in Posey’s notion of Indian potential, for example, the extent to which Posey and other Indian writers embraced the notion of the “vanishing Indian” and the extent to which they resisted it.
2. Indian humor—students are often surprised to find humor in pieces by Indian writers, and are much more comfortable with uncomplicated “tragic” voices.
3. The tension between “traditional” ways and modern or “Americanized” ways, particularly surrounding the problem of materialism. The problem of a simultaneous nostalgia for a perceived “simple” traditional past and the perceived need to “progress” into modernity.
4. The role of the “editorial,” and the way in which the *Fus Fixico* letter can be seen as political intervention.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

The same questions that apply to any lyrical poetry, dialect poetry, and dialect prose, apply to Posey’s writing in these genres. His dialect writings fit perfectly into the local color movement and should be seen in conversation with writers like Harte, Cable, Chopin, Garland, and Harris. The implication—that Indian Territory can be seen as a region just like the West or the South—is fascinating.



## Original Audience

Posey published most of his poems and letters in Indian Territory publications, even explicitly refusing to publish some of his work in “white” magazines. Because of the U.S. policy of assimilation and explicit attempts to destroy Indian cultures, languages, and practices, Posey witnessed, across his lifetime, a radical decrease in Indian culture. His work attempts to document that passing, and thus anticipates the work of Indian writers of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first, whose writing focuses largely on rediscovering lost cultural practices.

John Milton Oskison (Cherokee) (1874–1947)

*Contributing Editor: Bethany Ridgway Schneider*

## Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students are interested in the broad question of Indian-white relations at this time, especially the efforts to make Indians conform to the expectations of white society, as opposed to the exclusion of blacks during the same period. Students are also very interested in the specific question of Cherokee-white relations, particularly Cherokee gender constructions, and the history of the Cherokee nation in Oklahoma, and they are intrigued by the problems of nationhood raised by the idea of “Indian Country” vis-à-vis the United States. The question of the role of religion in the battle over cultural sovereignty is also fascinating to students, who are often very willing to debate the relationship of religion to cultural survival and integrity.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspective, Personal Issues**

1. The battle over ideology, and the imposition of one ideology over another
2. Historical and cultural background resulting in different worldviews
3. Conflicting gender roles and differing expectations of womanhood
4. Religious zeal and the destruction of culture

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

The story sits firmly within the short story form and should be treated as such. It draws from the local color and regionalist traditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Original Audience**

This piece was written for a broad audience of both white and Indian readers at the time that federal Indian policy was attempting to mainstream Indians and to consciously destroy cultural and religious difference—to “kill the Indian and save the man.”

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Oskison’s story reads very well alongside the works of Posey (“Fus Fixico Letter”) and Eastman (“The Great Mystery”). It also reads well alongside “Ghost Dance Songs,” which records western Indians’ anti-assimilationist response and attempt to negotiate the imperatives of both traditional religion and Christianity. Chesnutt and other contemporary black writers provide a fascinating comparison. Following on the questions of religious conflict, Bonnin’s “Why I Am a Pagan” makes a perfect pair with this story.

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## Corridos

*Contributing Editor: Raymund Paredes*

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

In this group of *corridos*, it's important to note that American cowboy culture derives largely from Mexican culture: the *corrido* "Kiansis I" lauds the superiority of Mexican cowboys over their Anglo counterparts. The point is that Mexican Americans have resented the appropriation of their culture without due recognition. "Gregorio Cortez" and "Jacinto Treviño" are epic ballads that deal with Mexican/Mexican-American responses to "American" injustice and bigotry. They are also of great interest because they make no distinction between a Mexican citizen and resident like Treviño and a resident of the United States like Cortez. Both are simply "mexicanos" who fight for their community's rights and dignity.

*Corridos* not only treat epic historical issues like cultural conflict along the south Texas border but focus on more intimate matters that reflect and preserve traditional family values. "El Hijo Desobediente," one of the best-known and best-loved of *corridos*, emphasizes the need for sons to respect their fathers. In this ballad, the son Felipe is agitated to the point of threatening his father, an action that seals his tragic fate.

A final point about *corridos* to be made here is that this musical tradition is still vigorous and still exists primarily in Spanish. "Recordando al Presidente" fondly recalls John F. Kennedy, whose Catholicism endeared him to "mexicanos" and other Latinos. The "Corrido de César Chávez," of still more recent origin, recounts the victory of Chávez and the United Farm Workers over grape growers as a result of a brilliantly executed boycott.

## María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832–1895)

*Contributing Editor: Jesse Alemán*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

I often begin teaching Ruiz de Burton's work by offering a brief account of her life because it reflects the cultural contradictions that shape Mexican-American history and identity. Her marriage to Henry S. Burton and her east coast experiences situate her within Anglo America. Her land troubles and eventual dispossession position her in Mexican-American history, and her two novels place her within and against American and Mexican-American literary traditions. Students often find her biography fascinating, and the collusion of race, class, gender, and nation in her life extends to an analysis of her work. *The Squatter and the Don* in particular invites students to consider the relationship between class status, racial identity, and the formation of stereotypes. I've found it effective to compare and contrast the representation of each character to unpack how Ruiz de Burton counters prevailing stereotypes of Mexicans, draws class distinctions between sympathetic and unsympathetic Yankees, and maintains a racial distinction between Californios and Indians. The reference to the Don's daughters by the younger generation of American settlers also introduces the notion of romance as a resolution to national conflict, an idea that can be connected to Ruiz de Burton's biography as well as the history of Anglo-Mexican marriages in nineteenth-century California. Students may see no difference between Anglo-American racism and Ruiz de Burton's sense of class privilege and whiteness, and they may be right, but it's also important to emphasize the way Ruiz de Burton uses race, class, and romance to position Mexican Americans within the United States's imaginary citizenry.

## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

The selection provides an opportunity for students to research the 1846–48 Mexican War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The war years marked the nadir of the United States's "Manifest Destiny," doubled the nation in size, and in effect created a Mexican-American population that became foreigners in their native land. Especially in California, the 1851 Land Law displaced Mexican landowners and the rapid changes in California's economy (from agricultural to industrial) further pauperized the state's Mexican gentry. Ruiz de Burton's narrative is an alternative history of the Southwest, one that doesn't celebrate the settling of the West but critiques it as rampant Yankee squatterism. At the same time, the class should discuss the cultural contradictions of Ruiz de Burton's critique—that Californios were themselves a Mexican colonial elite that displaced California's Indian population and were quite willing to profit from Manifest Destiny, as the Don's plan demonstrates. Mexican-American historical background also contextualizes the novel's themes. The don's plan, for instance, reverses the usual "tradition versus progress" theme. Although he's a vestige of California's Old World, the Don proposes a progressive future for San Diego that the squatters reject. Legality is also a central theme in the selection as Ruiz de Burton critiques the supposed objectivity of laws and reveals a gap between the letter of the Land Law and the natural law of the land.

## Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

*The Squatter and the Don* is essentially an historical romance that uses cross-cultural marriages to resolve the national conflict between Anglo and Mexican Americans, but the narrative is also novelistic as it incorporates multiple discourses: literary, historical, romantic, legal, and national (Spanish, English, and nonstandard English). The text thus hybridizes the traditional form of the historical romance with the modern style of the novel. It also combines romance with realism, resembles

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an American jeremiad that calls for the country to live up to its lost ideals, and predates the political critiques of the Muck-racking movement.

### Original Audience

It's most likely that Ruiz de Burton was writing to an Anglo-American audience, especially considering the novel's cultural critique, counter-construction of Californio whiteness, and its publication in English. Ruiz de Burton's "C. Loyal" pseudonym and the incorporation of Spanish in the text, however, suggest that Californios may be the novel's shadow audience. Indeed, the novel's narrator functions as the representative voice of the Californios, speaking for them rather than to them.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Students should read Ruiz de Burton alongside José Martí, a selection of *corridos*, and works by William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, Edith Maud Eaton (Sui-Sin Far), Mary Austin, and Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa). Ruiz de Burton's critique of American colonialism echoes Martí's, but while Martí foregrounds *mestizaje*, Ruiz de Burton erases it. Her narrative also challenges the status often accorded to *corridos* as the representative literary form of Mexican Americans. If *corridos* represent a proto-Chicano, working-class identity that resists American assimilation, Ruiz de Burton's novels are high-brow modes of literary production that speak for an entirely different class of Mexican Americans. Students may see strains of Howell's realism and Norris's naturalism in Ruiz de Burton's style, and Eaton, Austin, and Bonnin offer contrasting views on the relationship between gender, national identity, and racial assimilation that is at the center of Ruiz de Burton's work.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. What's wrong with the Land Law and No Fence policy, and how does Ruiz de Burton critique them? Is her critique relevant to contemporary laws?
2. Why is it important that Ruiz de Burton emphasizes the "whiteness" of the Californios? What kinds of historical and social "politics" are involved with such a claim?
3. How would you characterize the narrator of the selection? You might consider the narrator's tone and references to literature and law.

## **William Dean Howells (1837–1920)**

*Contributing Editor: Gary Scharnhorst*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

The leading American novelist of the late-nineteenth century (Mark Twain was considered too vulgar and Henry James too foreign), Howells is largely unknown to students nowadays. His modern critical reputation too often centers on his (in)famous assertion in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891) that "the smiling aspects of life" are the "more truly American." In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm in 1930, for example, Sinclair Lewis excoriated Howells: he was "one of the gentlest, sweetest, and most honest of men, but he had the code of a pious old maid whose greatest delight was to have tea at the vicarage."

Yet Howells was scarcely the timid or prudish writer his modern reputation would suggest. In fact, he was a staunch defender of unpopular, progressive, even radical causes, and in the mid-1880s, under the influence of Tolstoy, he became a socialist. Howells's vehement protest of the "civic murder" of the Haymarket Square anarchists in 1887 epitomizes his willingness to risk his popular reputation for political and social principle; it also set a precedent for subsequent protests over the fates of such celebrated defendants as Sacco and Vanzetti and the Scottsboro boys. He was an outspoken critic of mili-

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tary imperialism, and he was a founding member of the NAACP. He also treated issues of sexuality without apology, as in “Editha.” As James Tuttleton remarks, “Howells’s contemporaries hardly thought him a spokesman for conservative gentility, and he was no stranger to controversy in his own time.”

Still, Howells occupies at best an ambiguous position in the contemporary literary canon. His reputation has been in slow eclipse since early in this century. As he wrote Henry James in 1915, “I am comparatively a dead cult with my statues cast down and the grass growing over them in the pale moonlight.” His critical stock has slowly risen over the past half-century, however. Several of his novels, including *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, and *A Modern Instance*, are available in classroom editions; a definitive edition of his writings, including six volumes of his letters, has been issued; and the W. D. Howells Society sponsors sessions at the annual conventions of the American Literature Association. Howells’s decanonization early in the twentieth century and his modest postwar revival may prompt a class discussion of the process of canon formation.

## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

Like other realists such as Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Willa Cather, Howells began his professional career as a journalist. That is, he was by training a skilled observer of human behavior. His narrators, as in the excerpt from *Suburban Sketches* and in “Editha,” portray characters with subtle nuances, often in an ironic voice. How complicit is Editha in the death of George Gearson, for example? How is she changed, if at all, by the experience?

I usually teach “Editha” in conjunction with Mark Twain’s “The War Prayer.” Both texts betray their authors’ condemnation of imperialism and protest the mindless patriotism that celebrated the Spanish-American War.

Howells’s radicalism is nowhere more apparent than in the letters—one published, the other unsent—he addressed to



the editor of the *New York Tribune* to protest the pending executions of the Haymarket anarchists. I would emphasize the risks Howells incurred in his public protest—he was, after all, dependent upon public goodwill for his livelihood—and I would speculate on his apparent reticence to publish the second, longer, angrier letter.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

Howells was both the leading American theorist and practitioner of literary realism, a brand of fiction that insisted upon “a truthful treatment of materials.” Realism was fundamentally democratic insofar as it presumed a broad and informed readership, and it was socially critical insofar as it indicted naive sentimentality, urban squalor, racism, oppressive marriage, or small-town parochialism. Though the strategy of realism seemed to valorize normal and commonplace events, and though it has been disparaged and dismissed by poststructural theorists, Howells obviously believed realism represented an evolutionary leap forward from literary romanticism: “It remained for realism to assert that fidelity to experience and probability of motive are essential conditions of a great imaginative literature,” as he argued in 1891.

Ever respectful of his literary ancestors, however, Howells readily acknowledged Hawthorne’s influence on his own work. As Robert Emmet Long explains, “Howells’s assimilation of Hawthorne’s romance into his realism coincided with James’s assimilation of Hawthorne during the same period.” Like Hawthorne’s romances, Howells’s fiction often questioned but rarely criticized conventional moral standards. Note the allusion to Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* in the excerpt from *Suburban Sketches*.

The so-called Dean of American Letters toward the end of his long career, Howells was a prominent Gilded Age liberal intellectual. As James W. Tuttleton has noted, his “literary interests” were “catholic and wide-ranging” and his sympathies were “perceptive and generous.” Not surprisingly, then, he also welcomed new voices in American literature. There was “a solidity, an honest observation, in the work” of such

women writers as Rose Terry Cook, Mary E. Wilkins, and Sarah Orne Jewett, “which often leaves little to be desired,” he wrote in *Criticism and Fiction* (1891). He hailed the work of such African-American writers as Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, though he was not entirely free of racial stereotyping.

## Original Audience

As one of the characters in Howells’s novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) remarks, “women form three fourths of the reading public in this country.” The United States was “a nation of women readers,” as he later remarked. As astute judge of the literary market, Howells took care to pitch his fiction to women readers, or at the very least not to offend them. As John W. Crowley contends, despite Howells’s “life-long ambivalence toward women,” some of his fiction merits a place in the feminist canon.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

As editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1871 to 1881 and later as a prolific reviewer, Howells helped promote both the “local colorists” and regionalist on the one hand (e.g., Mark Twain, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Charles Chesnutt, Sarah Orne Jewett, Paul Laurence Dunbar), and the “psychological realists” on the other (e.g., Henry James and Charlotte Perkins Gilman). That is, he may be conveniently (and conventionally) situated between Mark Twain and James, an intermediary figure in the literary history of the period. His patronage of such black writers as Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, however, was not entirely free of bias: while acknowledging his help, for example, Dunbar complained that he thought Howells had caused him “irrevocable harm” by urging him to specialize in dialect verse. Late in his career, Howells also promoted the writings of an emerging school of American literary naturalists, including Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane.

## Bibliography

The best recent overviews of Howells criticism are John Crowley's "Howells in the Seventies" and "Howells in the Eighties" in *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* (1979, 1986–87). Also, Chapel Petty-Schmidt has compiled a recent checklist of Howells scholarship, "Criticism of W. D. Howells: A Selected Checklist," *American Literary Realism*, 1988. The research annual *American Literary Scholarship* also contains yearly updates of Howells criticism.

The standard biographies of Howells are Edwin H. Cady's *The Road to Realism*, 1956, and *The Realist at War*, 1958; and John W. Crowley's *The Black Heart's Truth: The Early Career of W. D. Howells*, 1985, and *The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of W. D. Howells* (1999).

## Henry James (1843–1916)

*Contributing Editor: Alfred Habegger*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

In “The Art of Fiction,” many of James’s literary references will be unfamiliar to the students. In addition, the debate about the status and artistry of the novel that James enters will also be new terrain for the students. Provide them with the context of the debate by having them summarize the opening paragraphs of the essay. Ask them to locate James’s central criticisms of Besant’s theory of fiction. Then have them find James’s own claims about the ideal aims and techniques of the novel.

In “The Beast in the Jungle,” James’s late style will be a problem. In “Daisy Miller,” students may well miss the important social nuances of the language used by the characters and the narrator. Most of us take for granted certain usages—“ever so many,” “it seems as if,” “I guess,” “quaint”—that are indications of the Millers’ lack of cultivation. Also, there are some genteelisms in their speech—Mrs. Miller’s “the principal ones.” Then there’s the narrator’s somewhat inflated diction—“imbibed,” “much disposed towards.”

Distribute ahead of time a short list of usages, divided according to categories, and ask the students to add some usages from their own reading of “Daisy Miller.”

Another problem that should be mentioned is point of view. Tell the students ahead of time that both “Daisy” and “Beast” use the same technical device of restricting the reader’s perspective to what one character sees and knows. Ask them to decide what character this is. Give examples; find exceptions where the narrator speaks out.

“Daisy Miller”: Some students inevitably despise Daisy for her occasional social crudity and inexperience. A good tactic to deal with this attitude is to emphasize such matters right at the start, trusting to other students to feel that they must speak up and defend Daisy’s naturalness and boldness. I

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also recommend getting the obvious fact that the Millers represent vulgar new money out in the open from the start; otherwise, some rather slow readers will triumphantly announce this fact later on in order to simplify the heroine's character.

Students will appreciate some facts about Rome. The story takes place before the floor of the Colosseum was excavated and before the cause of malaria was discovered. The 1883 Baedeker guide reminded tourists of the traditional danger of malaria: "In summer when the fever-laden *aria cattiva* [bad air] prevails, all the inhabitants who can afford it make a point of leaving the city." Some students will have no experience of Giovanelli's type—the public dandy and loungeur.

Students consistently enjoy analyzing and judging (with great ferocity) the various characters. I am often surprised at the harsh judgments passed on Daisy's flirtatiousness and game playing.

"Beast": Few students respond well to "Beast," partly because of the aridity of the lives portrayed. The students may want to know why the story is so long, why it delays the revelation of Marcher's emptiness.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

In "Art," emphasize the importance of this essay within the context of James's significant body of criticism and American letter, more generally. This will help them grasp the prescient nature of this essay as well as the breadth of complexity of James's artistic endeavor.

In "Beast" I like to stress Marcher's eerie hollowness, the fact that he isn't quite alive and doesn't know it (until the end). In "Daisy Miller" students will probably need a detailed explanation of the Colosseum scene, where Winterbourne finally makes up his mind about Daisy, not only deciding that she isn't respectable but showing her by his behavior that he scorns her as beyond the pale. He learns the truth about her (and his own feelings for her) too late, of course—just like Marcher.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

“The Art of Fiction” lays the foundation of James’s realist approach. At the same time, the essay itself, in its leisurely pace, witty yet informal tone, and seemingly circuitous structure, serves as a good example of late nineteenth-century essayist writing.

“Daisy Miller” may be presented as a classic instance of nineteenth-century realism in presenting “a study” of a modern character-type. Simultaneously, since the story follows Winterbourne’s point of view, James’s subject becomes a double one and also concerns the male character’s process of vision and understanding. In this sense, the story is about Winterbourne’s “studying.”

In “Beast” the emphasis on the man’s process of vision becomes even more salient. The lack of objective detail points to modernism.

### **Original Audience**

For “Art,” ask the students to deduce James’s intended audience by examining his literary references as well as his generalizations about the novel’s readership.

For “Beast,” students need to be told that the two characters are late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century English, and that Weatherend is an upper-class country house frequented by weekend guests.

In “Daisy Miller” students will need help in grasping the leisure-class European social code: the importance of restraint, public decorum, the drawing of lines. When Daisy looks at Winterbourne and boasts of having had “a great deal of gentleman’s society,” she doesn’t know (though Winterbourne and James do) that she is coming on precisely as a courtesan would.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

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When teaching “The Art of Fiction,” have the students apply James’s theories of realism and the importance of the writer’s *donnee* to “Beast” or “Daisy.” Ask them to evaluate these works of fiction using his criteria.

Many valuable comparisons can be drawn between “Daisy Miller” and “The Beast in the Jungle.” Both stories tell of an aborted romance in which the man distances himself emotionally until it is too late. This fundamental similarity can help bring out the real differences between the works, especially the fact that “Daisy Miller” supplies a good deal of pictorial background and social realism, while “Beast” focuses far more intensively on Marcher’s state of mind and perceptions. “Beast” may also profitably be compared with Eliot’s “Pru-frock.”

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. Ask students to pay attention to those situations in “Daisy Miller” where one character tries to gauge or classify another. They may notice that Winterbourne’s social judgment is much shakier than at first appears. Not only does he misread Daisy (in the Colosseum) but he is wrong in pronouncing Giovanelli “not a gentleman.” Giovanelli turns out to be a respectable lawyer.
2. I like to ask students to compare and contrast the scene in the Colosseum where Winterbourne decided Daisy is a reprobate and laughs in her face to the scene in *Huckleberry Finn* where Huck decides to go to hell out of friendship with Jim. One character gives way to a rigid social exclusion, the other defies it.

### Bibliography

The preface that James wrote for “Daisy Miller” in the New York edition is illuminating but must be used with care. The preface was written about thirty years after the story, and James’s attitudes had changed somewhat. Now he was much more uneasy about the vulgarity of speech and manners of

American women, and he decided he had been too easy on the Daisy Miller type. Hence he labeled this story “pure poetry”—a way of calling it romance rather than realism.

Two helpful and somewhat contrasting studies: Wayne Booth’s discussion of “Daisy Miller” in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Louise K. Barnett, “Jamesian Feminism: Women in ‘Daisy Miller,’ ” *Studies in Short Fiction* 16, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 281–87.

It’s difficult to know whether Daisy Miller is a historically accurate type. Upper-class single women did not apparently go out alone in the evening in New York of the 1870s, but they did not require a duenna when accompanied by a man.

## Kate Chopin (1851–1904)

*Contributing Editor: Peggy Skaggs*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Chopin’s irony is too subtle for some students, who may see her female characters as cold, unloving, unfeeling women. Students almost always respond to Chopin’s treatment of the relationship between men and women. Often the male students intensely dislike such characters as Edna Pontellier. In other words, students today still hold many of the notions about women that inspired Chopin’s best irony and satire. Often, also, they judge her to be uncaring about her children, and they view Edna’s awakening as irresponsible. Class discussions usually help a great deal to clear up such misunderstandings. These discussions are based on a very close reading of the text, calling attention to myriad small clues.

Since Chopin wrote everything she produced during the last decade of the nineteenth century but was too advanced in her thinking to be accepted until the last quarter of the twentieth century, she offers a fine vehicle for exploring the intellectual and aesthetic tides of American thinking and American

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literature. In important ways, she summarizes the nineteenth century with her fine mixture of romanticism, realism, and naturalism. But in other ways, she predicts the latter part of the twentieth century with her feminism and existentialism. I like to close one century and begin the next with her works.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Chopin's feminism certainly is a major theme, but an instructor must be careful not to overstate it. Chopin seems to have believed that men and women alike have great difficulty reconciling their need to live as discrete individuals with their need to live in close relationship with a mate; these conflicting needs lie at the center of her work.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Since Chopin's works contain clear elements of romanticism, transcendentalism, realism, naturalism, existentialism, and feminism, her stories can help students understand these literary modes and the directions in which American literature has developed during the last century and a half. Chopin's style offers opportunities to point out the virtues of conciseness; strong, clear imagery; symbolism; understatement; humor; and irony.

### **Original Audience**

I discuss the intellectual background against which Chopin was writing in the 1890s. I share with the students some of the vitriolic reviews received by *The Awakening* in 1899. I trace the history of Chopin's literary reputation from the time the critics buried her in 1899 until a Norwegian, Per Seyersted, resurrected her work in 1969.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Chopin admired Maupassant's stories enormously, and she translated a number of them into English. Many writers have noted his strong influence, especially apparent in the sharp, ironic conclusions Chopin favored in many stories ("The Story of an Hour" and "Désirée's Baby," for example). The influence of Hawthorne, Whitman, and Henry James has been noted by various critics, also.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. I try to get students to look for irony, simply because so many of them are prone to miss it in Chopin's work.
2. In class discussion, I ask the students to trace the literal and figurative manifestations of Edna Pontellier's understanding of herself and her predicament in patriarchal society. How do her extramarital romances and her artistic ambitions coincide or conflict? I also ask them to evaluate the novel's ending. What is the symbolic significance of her drowning in the sea? How does this ending function as a critique of aristocratic, Creole society at the turn-of-the-century?

## Bibliography

Particularly useful is *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's "The Awakening,"* edited by Bernard Koloski (New York: MLA, 1988). The backgrounds, biographical information, discussion of critical studies, bibliography, and aids to teaching all contain information useful for teaching Chopin's short stories as well as the novel.

In *Kate Chopin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), I discuss "Désirée's Baby" as well as everything else Chopin wrote.

Thomas Bonner, Jr., in *The Kate Chopin Companion, with Chopin's Translations from French Fiction*, Westport: Copyright © Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

Greenwood Press, 1988, has made Chopin's translations of Maupassant's stories easily available for the first time—a very important resource in understanding Chopin's own stories.

And Emily Toth's *Kate Chopin*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990, gives us for the first time a comprehensive biography filled with previously unknown or simply rumored details about Chopin's life.

## Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?)

*Contributing Editor: Cathy N. Davidson*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Two primary issues present themselves in teaching “Chickamauga.” First the details are grotesque. The procession of bloody, dying men and the macabre humor of the small child mounting one as he would a pony (or his father's slaves “playing horsey”) often disturbs students very much. This, of course, is exactly Bierce's intention. Second, the ending seems like a gratuitous trick. Is it necessary that the child be deaf and dumb? Realistically, this is necessary since the child does not hear the great battle—we are told so explicitly. But it's also important symbolically: the temptation to war is so great in male culture that even this small child learns it, even though there is so much he does not understand.

To address these issues, first I read some conventional war accounts and war stories—or even the lyrics to war songs. I then read aloud the most grotesque parts of Bierce. I next ask my students which is, in its consequence, the more violent. We then discuss protest literature and Bierce's disgust that the several prominent generals of the Civil War were rewriting the incomparably brutal history of that war. Second, we go through the story isolating how the child learns, what he knows and doesn't. The picture book lesson at the beginning makes the point that a child is already learning values at the

earliest age, prelinguistically. These are *powerful* messages, calls to violence.

Try reading some definitions from the *Devil's Dictionary*. “*War*, n. A by-product of the arts of peace. War loves to come like a thief in the night; professions of eternal amity provide the night.” “*Peace*, n. In international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.”

I usually give a full biographical lecture on Bierce because he was such a character and such a successful muck-raker. Students are always fascinated by his disappearance—no skeleton was ever found. (Several expeditions were mounted and, since he was over 6 feet tall and had a full head of pure white hair, the rumors of his every move were rampant: but there has never been confirmation of his death.) Brigid Brophy insists he did not die but merely came back again when the world was more ready for his wild, stylistic experiments. According to Brophy, he now writes under the nom de plume of “Jorge Luis Borges.” (Actually, since Borges died recently, I suppose that must mean Bierce finally did, too.)

## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

War, the tendency toward violence, the idea that we fear what we do not know but perhaps should most fear what we know (i.e., ourselves, our fellow humans, those people we love who nonetheless perpetuate the values of violence). The child sees nothing wrong with war until it literally comes home—the burned house, the dead and probably raped body of the mother. Note, too, the rampant animal imagery throughout the story. Early critics called it an “allegory” and it is.

## Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

Unlike most so-called naturalists, Bierce blamed humans, not Fate, for determining the course of human existence. However, he was a naturalist in his use of macabre and even lurid details that force the reader to see the full implications of war. Stylistic

tically, he brilliantly mimics the actions of the boy (as well as his perceptions, devoid of sound and often sense, since, as a small child, he lacks the experience to know what is harmful, what not: bears are cute in the picture books, so is war) and of the dying soldiers. The famous passage of the ground in motion and the creek relies in repetition to heighten the sense of relentless violence. Allegory is another important genre to discuss and elucidate here.

### **Original Audience**

I always discuss the memoirs of the Civil War veterans as well as the beginning of America's full-fledged attempt at imperialism in Latin America, the Spanish-American War. Bierce, in his other capacity as a journalist, vociferously denounced the war that William Randolph Hearst bragged he started (saying people buy newspapers during wars). Bierce was fired from that job but went on to other newspapers where he was equally adamant in his opposition to the war. He died (or rather disappeared) sometime in 1914, over 70 years old, when he went to Mexico to see Pancho Villa firsthand. Carlos Fuentes's *The Old Gringo* is a retelling of Bierce's journey into Mexico, where peasants still insist Bierce wanders the Sierra Madres.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Stephen Crane learned his craft from Bierce. Hemingway later borrowed some of his techniques. Bierce is highly regarded by postmodernists such as Fuentes as well as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. He is said to be similar to Guy de Maupassant or O. Henry. But while both of those authors use trick endings, most of Bierce's "tricks" have some larger metaphysical purpose.

### **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

1. I let students be surprised by the ending and horrified by the language. I try not to give anything away before they get to the story.

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2. I sometimes have them do historical research on the Spanish-American War.

## **Bibliography**

I have a long section on “Chickamauga” in my *Experimental Fictions of Ambrose Bierce*.

## Hamlin Garland (1860–1940)

*Contributing Editor: James Robert Payne*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Discussion and explanation of Garland's populist values and political activities definitely enhance an appreciation of his fiction, as does some consideration, however brief, of his interest in Henry George's economic theories. Relate the populist movement of late nineteenth-century America to present-day grievances and problems of American farmers. More generally, compare social and political tensions between southern, midwestern, and western American regions on the one hand, and the northeastern region on the other in Garland's day and today.

Garland's profound empathy for the life situation of the rural and small-town midwestern farm woman requires discussion and may be productively studied in relation to Garland's biography. If feasible (depending on student interest), compare Garland's "single-tax" notions (derived from Henry George, 1839–97) with present-day tax reform schemes. What would be the social impact of such schemes, then and now?

Students express interest in Garland's representation of the impact on rural society of national economic policies and laws. They are also interested in comparing the role of women in rural America as given in Garland's writing with what they perceive as the role of women in rural areas today. Students will also compare the impact of land speculators and monopoly industries on society today with the impact of such forces as represented in Garland's writings.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

1. Central to much of Garland's best fiction and autobiography is an attempt to contrast actual conditions of American farm families with nineteenth-century (and earlier) idealizations of farm life.
2. As we see in his story "Up the Coulé" and elsewhere, Garland was very interested in the drama inherent in relations between farm families and their urbanized children.
3. Garland's theme of white America's injustice to Indians, apparent in his novel *The Captain of the Gray-Horse Troop* and his collection the *Book of the American Indian*, is very important though neglected in teaching and writing about Garland.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

1. If the instructor is interested in such conventions as "realism" and "naturalism," Garland may be taught as a transitional figure between the relatively genteel realism of William Dean Howells and the harsher naturalism we associate with Stephen Crane (as in *Maggie*, 1893) and Theodore Dreiser (as in *Sister Carrie*, 1900).
2. Consider represented speech in Garland's fiction, including suggestions of German language, as we see in "Up the Coulé," as indicative of Garland's efforts toward realism.

### Original Audience

Although Garland's early fiction, such as that collected in *Main-Travelled Roads* (which includes "Up the Coulé"), shocked many with its frank portrayal of the harshness of actual farm life as Garland perceived that life, by the end of his career, particularly through such works as *A Son of the Middle Border*, Garland was a recognized, even beloved, chronicler of the opening up and settlement of the American Midwest and West. In Garland's day, many rural midwesterners read *A Son of the Middle Border* as their region's analogue to Benjamin

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Franklin's *Autobiography*. Readers today value Garland's work as giving a most authentic dramatization of post–Civil War midwestern rural life.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

*Emile Zola* (1840–1902)—French naturalist author who endeavored to convey an accurate picture of the poor and marginalized of France in his day. Compare and contrast with Garland's drama of the harsh life on nineteenth-century American farms.

*Willa Cather* (1873–1947)—Compare Cather's presentation of rural midwestern life to Garland's. Is the picture that Cather gives us more balanced, varied, and perhaps more positive than Garland's generally bleak views?

*John Steinbeck* (1902–1947)—With particular reference to Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), compare unrest of farmers in 1930s (Steinbeck) to that in the late nineteenth century (Garland).

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. Items that follow refer specifically to Garland's story "Up the Coulé":
  - (a) As you read, recall a time when you returned to your parental home after a considerable period of absence during which you achieved, perhaps, a new sophistication. Compare your experience, feelings, and family tension to family tensions and feelings represented in "Up the Coulé."
  - (b) Compare Garland's portrayal of farm life to your experience of farm life.
2. Discuss Garland's fiction against the background of the populist movement of late-nineteenth-century America.
  - (a) Research Garland's autobiographies, especially *A Son of the Middle Border* and *A Daughter of the Middle Border* and trace autobiographical tendencies in Garland's fiction.

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- (b) Research Henry George's "single-tax" theories (see George's *Progress and Poverty*, 1879) and compare George's ideas and themes with ideas implicit in Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* stories.
- (c) Compare and contrast themes and values of Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border* to Franklin's *Autobiography*.

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## Stephen Crane (1871–1900)

*Contributing Editor: Donald Vanouse*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Stephen Crane’s works present sudden shifts in tone and point of view, and frequently the works end without establishing either certainty about characters or resolution of thematic issues. Crane’s imagery is vivid, but the works seldom provide final interpretations (e.g., the empty bucket in “A Mystery of Heroism”). These qualities contribute to Crane’s multi-layered irony.

The instructor should attempt to shift the focus from *resolving* issues of plot or character (e.g., “Is Collins a hero?”) to showing the students that Crane seems to encourage the reader to *enrich* and *reevaluate* ideas about patterns of action and thought. Crane asks questions rather than providing answers.

Consider using the poems to introduce some of his major themes. Crane seems to have valued the poems quite highly as expressions of his sense of the world. In like manner, the pace and drama of “A Mystery of Heroism” and “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” make them easier as doorways to

Crane than the more stately and ambitious reflectiveness of “The Open Boat.”

Like other scholars, students in class often are concerned with Crane’s attitude toward God. It is useful—if complex—to invite them to look at “God Lay Dead in Heaven,” “A Man Said to the Universe,” “Do Not Weep, Maiden, For War Is Kind,” “Chant You Loud of Punishments,” and “When a People Reach the Top of a Hill.” These poems, along with the “prayer” in “The Open Boat,” indicate the *variety* of religious experiences in Crane.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Crane writes about extreme experiences that are confronted by ordinary people. His characters are not larger-than-life, but they touch the mysterious edges of their capacities for perception, action, and understanding.

In his themes and styles, Crane is an avant-garde writer.

The New York City sketch, “A Detail,” was reprinted in 1898 with “The Open Boat,” and the two works express parallel naturalistic themes. In both, individuals are shown to struggle for communication while being buffeted by tumultuous forces. “A Detail” is about an old woman looking for work in New York City.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Crane’s works reflect many of the major artistic concerns at the end of the nineteenth century, especially realism, naturalism, impressionism, and symbolism.

His works insist that we live in a universe of vast and indifferent natural forces, not in a world of divine providence or a certain moral order. “A Man Said to the Universe” is useful in identifying this aspect of Crane. But Crane’s vivid and explosive prose styles distinguish his works from those by many other writers who are labeled naturalists.

Many readers (including Hamlin Garland and Joseph Conrad, who were personal friends of Crane) have used the term impressionist to describe Crane's vivid renderings of moments of visual beauty and uncertainty. Even Crane's "discontinuous" rendering of action has been identified as impressionist. Such structures parallel the decenterings in Impressionist paintings.

In "The Open Boat," Crane has been seen as a symbolist narrative. Perhaps it is most appropriate to see the story as a skeptical balancing of concern with vast archetypes such as the sea with an equal concern with the psychology of individual perception.

## **Original Audience**

Crane had a popular audience as well as a cultivated, literary audience during his lifetime.

Crane was a "star" journalist, and he published many of his best fictional works in the popular press. Nonetheless his comment in his poem that a newspaper is a "collection of half-injustices" indicates his skepticism about that medium of communication.

## **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Crane's relationship to naturalism links him to such writers as Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and John Dos Passos.

Crane's brief free-verse poems invite comparison with those of Emily Dickinson (Howells read them to him), and with a number of twentieth-century poets, particularly those influenced by imagism (Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, for example). In brevity and in the author's desire to escape conventional poetic rhetoric, these poems are comparable to Crane's. There are, of course, some vast differences in subject. Crane's poems "The Impact of a Dollar" and "A Newspaper" are early instances of pop art in literary subject matter that connects to William Carlos Williams, Alan Ginsberg, and Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones).

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### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. Why does Crane use the term “Mystery” in the title of his war story? What is the mystery? Or do you find more than one?
2. In “The Bride,” Crane seems interested in the role of women. Does the story show a shift of power from male violence?
3. In “The Open Boat,” Crane seems very interested in what the correspondent learns. What does he learn about nature? Or about seeing nature? Or his relationship to other human beings?
4. How useful is “A Man Said to the Universe” in understanding the correspondent’s experience?
5. “There Was a Man with Tongue of Wood” and “Chant You Loud of Punishments” are poems about poetry. What do these poems say about Crane’s ambition or purpose as a poet?
6. Crane’s vivid prose makes him particularly valuable in developing student skills in discussing literary style. Also, his spare and startling structures (especially “endings”) provide useful occasions for assignments on literary structure.
7. Crane’s relationship to naturalism provokes questions about the possibilities of individual freedom and responsibility.

## **Bibliography**

The facts of Crane's life were blurred by the 1923 biography by Thomas Beer. *The Crane Log: A Documentary Life of Stephen Crane* by Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino is an essential source for Crane biography.

Jack London (1876–1916)

*Contributing Editor: Joan D. Hedrick*

## **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

I explore the way in which the class divisions of society, demarcated by "The Slot," create divisions in an individual's consciousness. This opens up a way to discuss "South of the Slot," particularly if students have themselves experienced a self divided between two (or more) cultures. I have found that foreign students and working-class students have very strong, positive responses to London's stories of the hazards of cultural mobility.

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

The double is a familiar theme in American literature, but London gives it a new twist by exploring it in class as well as psychological terms. London's politics were shaped in the 1890s by the depression, labor disputes, and the Socialist Labor Party. During the same period he also determined that he would become a writer, motivated in part by his fear of slipping into the underclass, which he called "the Social Pit." London struggled to reconcile his radical, working-class identity with that of his middle-class, literary self. His satirical

portrait of Freddie Drummond distances him from a self he might have become. Exploring with considerable wit the contrasting social types of the university professor and the working-class labor leader, “South of the Slot” displays London’s lifelong quest for a humanity that the class divisions of his society rendered difficult.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

In general, naturalism is the literary movement that provides the best context for Jack London. Naturalism has been understood as a dialectic between free will and determinism (Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, a Divided Stream* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956]), but it is probably most intelligible through social history. The appeal of naturalistic tales is often escape. The urban problems of unemployment, labor wars, and poverty are left behind for a spare scenario in which an individual can be tested. A stock naturalistic device involves taking an “over-civilized” man from the upper classes into a primitive environment where he must live by muscle and wit. Frank Norris uses this device in *Moran of the Lady Letty*, as does London in *The Sea-Wolf*. *The Call of the Wild* also fits this pattern, although here the hero is a dog. Buck, a dog of northern ancestry who has been raised in southern California, is kidnapped and taken to Alaska where he must adapt to snow and the rule of the club.

In another common naturalistic pattern, the hero who stays in the city either becomes an ineffectual dandy or degenerates into a lower-class brute. Frank Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute*, set in San Francisco, traces the downward arc of Vandover’s career from a Harvard education through the urban horrors of drink, dissipation, and aimless drifting to his ultimate reward: he literally becomes a primitive brute when he falls victim to lycanthropy and finds himself barking like a wolf. London treats these materials more realistically, yet employs the same pattern whereby the city is associated with degeneration and the open country with rebirth. Both *Burning Daylight* and *The Valley of the Moon* contrast the vitality of the heroes in the country to the dissipation and bad luck they

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encounter in the city. “South of the Slot” departs from this pattern by portraying the city as the setting for a working-class victory.

## **Original Audience**

London’s goal was to write radical stories and publish them in mainstream, middle-class journals. “South of the Slot” was published in 1909 in *The Saturday Evening Post*, George Lorimer’s highly successful magazine for upwardly aspiring self-made Americans.

## **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

As a story about a double, “South of the Slot” may be compared to Poe’s “William Wilson” or to Hawthorne’s stories of allegorically paired characters, such as Arthur Dimmesdale and Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*. Treated as a story of social types, it may also be compared to Stowe’s portraits of class, race, and regional types in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

## **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

I begin discussions of London by putting up on the board a paired series of contrasts between working-class and middle-class stereotypes. In “South of the Slot” this contrast is embodied in Big Bill Totts and Freddie Drummond. Then I ask, where do these notions come from? Why is the lower class associated with, for example, muscle and a free expression of sexuality? What are the psychosocial implications of this division of human characteristics along class lines?

## Critical Visions of Postbellum America

Standing Bear (Machunazha Ponca) (1829–1908)

*Contributing Editor: R. D. Theisz*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

In order to assist students in achieving a meaningful response to this text, we must provide some ethnographic contextualization for them, to familiarize them with the historical framework of this text. Post–Civil War America reveled in the notion of *Manifest Destiny*, a crusading colonization of United States lands west of the Mississippi with total disregard for the rights of their indigenous owners. The hunger for “free land,” as it was perceived in non-Indian America, led to a dispossession and exploitation of the original owners, the residual consequences of which cry out for moral and material recompense to this day.

In addition, the nature of orality and its entextualization, of capturing oral performance in alphabet (print) form require some examination. The nature of Native American oratory, in this case the common exchange between the Native spokesmen (almost all were men) and U.S. federal officials, military representatives, or outside non-Indian representatives reflects the increasingly disparate power relationship between the Native spokesmen and European/American representatives. This may be exemplified in one simple illustration. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Native practice commonly addressed non-Indian representatives confidently as “Brothers,” but by the late nineteenth century, relationships had shifted so significantly in favor of the non-Indian that “Father” and “Grandfather” became common forms of address employed by Native spokesmen, “his Indian children.” Positions of strength have thus yielded to a Native recognition of cultural and po-

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litical subordination and the subsequent appeals to human morality, law, and fairness.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Several major themes may be explored, such as the reasons for America's frequent and cyclical interest in Native American cultural and political issues. When do mainstream Americans pursue a need to purge themselves of guilt or engage in a search for more "primitive" and thus more authentic indigenous experiences? Another theme, of course, is the nineteenth-century tide of *Manifest Destiny* sweeping all other considerations before it in its dispossession of Native owners. Modern readers seem to be fascinated by the drama of the ultimately faceless and immoral American bureaucracy, buttressed by the ideology of progress, which is confronted by the heroic but doomed action of the tribal individual or group.

Yet another theme to be considered is the alternative manner of viewing and expressing human experience in public discourse. Lineal Western thinking, critical analysis, classical explication, or whatever the modes of discourse may be, encounter a divergent manner of presenting ideas in cyclical patterns, frequent metaphors, loosely associated clusters of ideas, or seemingly disconnected or even digressive trains of thought that pay witness to the individual Native orator.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

The nature and principles of Native American oratory need to be introduced. The works cited at the end of the headnote can provide a beginning. Native American speechmaking can be divided into a ceremonial and secular tradition (see Ruoff). An additional short speech by Standing Bear, "My hand is not the color of yours," before Judge Dundy will deepen students' responses to this text (*From the Heart*, ed. Lee Miller, 225).

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

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Other Native speakers—and eventually writers—in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century echo Standing Bear's view of his relationship to the creator, the relationship of Native people to United States federal policy, and to the course of the historical fate of their cultures (see Nabakov). Postmodern concern with various marginalized and exploited peoples—especially those of color— broadens the perspective presented by Standing Bear.

## **Bibliography**

The text headnote presents some initial sources (see their bibliographies as well).

## **Charles Alexander Eastman (Sioux) (1858–1939)**

*Contributing Editor: Douglas Sackman*

## **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Consider Eastman's status as an intercultural figure whose life and work mediated between white and Indian culture and society. There may be a tendency to privilege Eastman's writing as both authentic and ultimately representative of the "Native American view." Students may too easily come to the conclusion that Eastman gives *voice* to the Other. Such a conclusion can be problematic because, first, it equates the individual author with the group, reinscribing the idea that the other is a collective while only members of the dominant culture can be creative individuals and, second, voice can suggest that which is unmediated and even biological, reinforcing the essentialist idea that Native Americans are natural beings.

The notion of positionality may have advantages over voice. Discussing how his position as a representative of Native Americans was constructed may be surprising since students might imagine that it was simply a birthright. You may explore how in the text Eastman positions himself as an authority, and how that position relates to the poles of Indian and white identity. Where does his authority as a spokesperson come from? As an authentic "other," or because he has received a "white" education? Having students see how his authority comes in part from both elements should begin to reveal the complexity of his identity. It also can be useful to discuss the antimodernism of turn of the century America, and how its desire for the authentic, the natural, and the spiritual

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prepared an eager audience for Eastman's writing. Though Eastman valorizes traditional ways, he was not simply a "traditional" Indian thrust into a "modern" nation. Eastman was as modern as any of his contemporaries, perhaps never more so than when he was talking about traditional Indian life.

In Eastman's day and in our own time, representatives of the Other have often been limited to two roles: witnesses or informants. It can be productive to organize the discussion of the two pieces around these two admittedly constraining roles. For the first selection, "The Great Mystery," consider Eastman's position as a native informant on Indian spirituality. As is suggested in the headnote, the piece does more than simply explain a truth about native culture as it fashions a pan-Indian spirituality that is then used to legitimize native culture and indict white spiritual declension or hypocrisy. For "The Ghost Dance War," consider Eastman's role as a witness. What is a witness? How does Eastman balance his identity as at once an Indian, a representative of the U.S. Government, and a scientifically trained physician? Have students consider what kind of distance there might have been between Eastman and the Sioux people of Pine Ridge when he arrived, fresh from his schooling in the East, as the "white doctor" in 1890. Why would he feel the need to keep "composure" when his Indian companions were "crying aloud"? What is his view on the Ghost Dance religion? It is worth discussing whether Eastman seems to have completely bought into white culture at the time of his arrival and then has that faith in its progressive nature shaken by the events of Wounded Knee, or if he seems more skeptical from the outset. How does the fact that his account was published twenty-six years after the event itself shape how we might answer that question? The role of the witness can be incorporated into larger discussions of the status of autobiography, especially in how the telling of a personal life can have profound political implications.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

The larger historical context includes the military, economic, and cultural dispossession of the Sioux and other Native Americans during the nineteenth century. The Santee Sioux uprising of 1862 and the military conflict with the U.S. government was one event in that larger history of dispossession. The conflict separated Eastman from his father and from other whites, but the ironic aspect of this is that the elder Eastman converted to Christianity and then sent the younger Eastman in a direction in which he would have close contact with whites. The millenarianism of the Ghost Dancers also needs to be understood in the context of dispossession and cross-cultural conflict.

In addressing the identity Eastman creates, issues surrounding assimilation and nationalism should be considered. In 1879, Joseph Henry Pratt, whose motto was “Kill the Indian and save the man,” founded the Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. We might now label this approach to education and reform “cultural genocide.” At the time, reformers held a variety of views on the value of native culture. Though some did not share Pratt’s view that native culture was an absolute obstacle to survival in modern America, most white reformers believed that white culture was superior. But as the notion of a ladder of civilization from the savage to the civilized partially gave way to cultural relativism in the early twentieth century (especially under the influence of anthropologist Franz Boas and his students), more room was created to assert the value of Native American culture. Eastman used his authority and skills gained by successfully completing an education that did not value Native American culture in order to reclaim and legitimate that culture. One can view this as ironic, and it is certainly a confirmation that those who negotiated between cultures faced a predicament that could not be resolved with absolute purity. While historical perspectives can inform our reading of the texts, the texts themselves offer interesting perspectives on history. To what extent does Eastman’s account of the Ghost Dance War question the triumphalist master-narrative of manifest destiny? To what extent does Eastman’s portrait of native religion before the intrusion of whites create an idyllic past in which everything was perfect and nothing changed? This view contradicts the view of many

Christian missionaries and academics in the late nineteenth century, who felt that Indians had lived from time immemorial in spiritual and technological darkness. But Eastman's version of precontact history also parallels the views of whites since it presents Indian society as immune to change and development.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

It should be noted that the first selection is from a set of essays on native religion, while the second is from Eastman's autobiography *From Deep Woods to Civilization*. The first essay seems a hybrid of argumentative essay, insider ethnography, and philosophy of religion. For the second piece, readers should pay attention to how Eastman moves from journalistic reporting to revelation of his own emotions and thoughts to a larger agenda of social criticism based on the events that he witnessed. The role of a white editor is less pronounced in Eastman's account of his life than it is for other Native Americans (e.g., Black Elk or Sarah Winnemucca). While his wife collaborated in the writing, to a large extent Eastman avoided the issue of having an outside editor reshape his life by translating from oral testimony into written work.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Eastman's texts can be compared to the writings of other Native Americans (such as Winnemucca, Oskison, Standing Bear, or Zitkala-Sa). It has been argued that the modernist form of autobiography, with its need to explore and reveal the interior self, has been resisted by Native Americans since, among other things, they tend to view the community as more important and meaningful than the self. Comparison with other autobiographical writing might yield insights on this issue. It could also be interesting to read his works alongside those of other Americans who were marginalized from the national community, particularly African Americans. W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness," which he developed in *The Souls of Black Folks*, can be compared to Eastman's

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exposition of native culture and spirituality as developed in *The Soul of an Indian*. Eastman's discussion of religion might also be read in relation to the tradition of the American Jeremiad. He certainly indicts contemporary Christianity as a fallen form of religion and urges a renewal through a revitalization of root Christian values. In his version of Puritan self-critique, though, he contributes a significant twist, arguing that Native American spirituality embodied a pure form of Christianity. You might also explore how his understanding of religion compares to transcendentalism.

Sarah Winnemucca (Thocmetony) (c. 1844–1891)

*Contributing Editor: Karen L. Kilcup*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

It is important to emphasize that this selection represents a part of a varied and much longer narrative. Moreover, like many nineteenth-century Indian texts, it encodes a negotiation between an Indian author and a white editor. Winnemucca was fortunate to obtain a sympathetic, reform-minded editor in Mary Mann (sister of social activist Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's wife), but students should be invited to consider the ways in which editors (the writers' contemporaries as well as present-day) can and do shape texts.

One way to initiate this investigation of the selection process is to ask students to spend a brief time, in or out of class, writing their own autobiographies, then exchanging with a partner who selects for presentation to the class the most "representative" or "interesting" paragraphs, also editing them for style. What gets left in and what is taken out? What is emphasized? Why? How do considerations of audience influence the selection process? How does the identity of the editor po-

tentially affect this process? An alternative to this student writing assignment is to assemble small groups of students who are required to take another autobiography in *The Heath Anthology* and reduce it by half, asking the same questions.

Another issue that is productive for discussion is the matter of students' emotional responses to Winnemucca's narrative. White students, in particular, may feel guilt or responsibility for the destruction of Paiute culture, especially given the kindness, trust, and idealism of Chief Truckee. Ask students to think about the author's goals: Does she want to provoke (paralyzing) guilt or action? How does she accomplish her purposes—what textual features stand out in this context? What emotions does the narrator project (anger, frustration, courage)? This discussion can open out into productive consideration of readers' emotional responses to texts more generally and of the means by which authors engage with or distance from affective matters.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

In addition to the obvious matters of Paiute dislocation, the transformation of a way of life, and the loss of traditional resources, an important issue for students to understand is the continuing prejudice in mainstream culture against women speaking in public. Because of this prejudice, Winnemucca's reputation was constantly assailed; hence, her editor, Mary Mann, thought it prudent to include an appendix of character references for the author in *Life Among the Piutes*. Reading aloud or photocopying some of these references will provide students with a sense of the gendered social environment in which Winnemucca worked.

These character attacks were also part of the racism endured by Native Americans. A related issue is the assumption of the sexual availability of Indian women to white men, a matter Winnemucca exposes quite plainly. Students should know about the cross-racial nature of this sexual appropriation, and comparing Winnemucca's account to others by African-

American writers (like Harriet Jacobs) is extremely productive.

Another important feature of Winnemucca's narrative is the internal division among the Paiutes, with some favoring the principle of hospitality initiated by Chief Truckee and others favoring the more cautious approach of her father. This kind of split, which sometimes reflected a conscious white strategy of "divide and conquer," occurred from the beginning of white-Indian relations; another example is the fragmentation of the Iroquois Confederacy during the Revolution, when some member tribes aligned themselves with the British and others with the revolutionaries.

Winnemucca's courage in the face of the fragmentation and dislocation of her people is an important subtext of the narrative, especially when contrasted with the cowardice of white soldiers and settlers whom she describes in later chapters. In addition, she overturns the "bring in the cavalry" myth that has permeated American popular culture, depicting the U.S. military as an ally that frequently intervened to protect the Indians from the depredations of white settlers. On the other hand, we see the corruption of government agents and the government itself, which is in sharp contrast to their putative "Christian" principles.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Genre and the "mixing" of genres (according to Western standards) feature prominently in *Life Among the Piutes*. The selection in *The Heath Anthology* incorporates a range of Indian and Western traditions. Emphasizing oral narrative in Chief Truckee's retelling of the Paiute myth, the opening chapter also included elements of tribal history, coup tale, autobiography, vindication story, dramatic narrative, sentimental drama, and sensation story. Winnemucca's individual voice comes through vividly and confidently, reflecting her success as a platform performer; at the same time, her story represents the collective experiences of her people, conserving Paiute history and culture.

## Original Audience

Aimed at educating a white audience about what the subtitle indicates—“Their Wrongs and Claims”—Winnemucca’s narrative purpose is clearly stated by Mary Mann: “Mrs. Hopkins came to the East from the Pacific coast with the courageous purpose of telling in detail to the mass of our people, ‘extenuating nothing and setting down naught in malice,’ the story of her people’s trials.” A useful exercise is to highlight the purpose of the volume as Mann outlines it and to compare this purpose to the text itself.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

The autobiographies and political writing of William Apess, Charles Eastman, and Zitkala-Sa offer extremely useful links. In addition to the writers’ depictions of tensions among the Indians themselves, consider the situation of the writer in relation to his/her tribe (as “insider” or “outsider” or both), the use of a plural or individual voice, and the “political” and/or “personal” nature of this autobiography. It is also useful to juxtapose Winnemucca’s narrative to other life writings by immigrant and non-white writers such as Anzia Yezierska, Young-hill Kang, and Sui Sin Far; to captivity narratives such as Mary Rowlandson’s; and to “mainstream” autobiographies like Benjamin Franklin’s.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. Discussion how racism affects men and women differently.
2. Discussion of film/media images of Native Americans, both in the past and today. The stereotype of the noble savage as well as the howling savage.
3. How does oral tradition influence Winnemucca’s narrative? What textual features help indicate its oral resonances and roots?

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4. What are today's attitudes toward women's public roles? How do those attitudes vary in different regional, ethnic, and religious communities?

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Marietta Holley ("Josiah Allen's Wife") (1836–1926)

*Contributing Editor: Kate H. Winter*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

It is helpful to read the early part of the chapter aloud so student readers can catch the rhythm of the language and see the humor in the odd spellings. Equally helpful is Jane Curry's recorded rendering of Samantha's voice in the tape cassette that accompanies *Samantha Rastles the Woman Question*.

Have students list the unfamiliar language usages and colloquialisms they encounter in their college community. Discuss what is amusing and/or revealing about these, what values are implicit in their use, and their use as a means of establishing community. Students often want to know whether Holley's audience found it difficult to read dialect and whether they took pleasure in it.

Ask students to examine the Declaration of Independence before reading the Holley selection. A journal or free-writing assignment could follow in which students respond to what they understand to be the values implicit in that document. Or you might ask students to rewrite the Declaration of Independence in their vernacular.

Students often have difficulty understanding how women might feel religiously disenfranchised, so we do some

quick exercises demonstrating the power of exclusion—for example, not allowing anyone with blue eyes to speak in class for a set period. In addition, we discuss briefly the patriarchal structure of Christian religious practice and its impact.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Much of the book is taken up with Samantha's descriptions of how the local church women are refurbishing and maintaining the church counterpointed with her disagreements over Josiah's wrong-headed interpretations of Scripture. Samantha uses feminist arguments to explain away or circumvent the difficulties in biblical texts that excluded women: There may have been an error in translation; or the context within which the Scriptures were written rendered the literal meaning irrelevant to modern times; or the writer (St. Paul, for example) was just one man giving his personal opinion. The chapter included here extends the disagreement to interpreting the Declaration of Independence, thereby linking religious with legislative hypocrisy.

The language issues inherent in this text also provide an excellent opportunity to have students look at sexism in language, the significance of dialect (which students are apt to be familiar with from their own usages), and the standardization of English. Most classes can address questions about the ability of language to exclude or include privileged groups.

Through Samantha, Holley tackled the prevailing ideas of what gifts, responsibilities, and rights "Nater" and law had given women and men.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

In addition to showing the fault in the logic of the brethren, Holley was attempting to reproduce phonetically the patois of upstate New Yorkers. Holley captures the style and character of much upstate New York fiction as does Philander Deming, whose Adirondack stories are gems of local color writing, and

Irving Bacheller, whose novels of New York's North Country preserve an era and place long since lost.

Holley's audience often thought her spellings were the result of her being an uneducated country woman; only more sophisticated readers recognized that she, like Twain, adopted a persona for the distance it provided between audience and writer and the comic effect of the naive commentator. Vernacular humor often opposed the assumptions of gentility. It would be useful to ask which aspects of genteel society are being attacked. How does her humor seem to reinforce stereotypes? How does it subvert them?

As the headnote indicates, Holley's work blends several American literary traditions, including the verbal play of the male literary comedians. She also turned humorist Ann Stephens's vernacular humor and Frances Witcher's humorous modes to her own ends. Her style includes the elements of anticlimax, misquoted Scripture, decorative spelling, puns, malapropisms, comic similes, mixed metaphors, extravagant images, language reversals, and proverbs and maxims. She handles these techniques with the same flair and assurance that the male writers who dominated the tradition did. Furthermore, there is the comic irony of her saying one thing, doing another, and having Josiah deny the reality or validity of both. While the literary and social value of the satiric humor of the male writers in the tradition has rarely been debated, Holley's place in the canon of American humor—because of her subject matter—has been small and narrow.



## Original Audience

In addition to the work described above, I sketch for students the political background. In 1888, the National Methodist Conference (the “Brethren” of the title) had refused to seat four duly elected women delegates. Holley’s response to the outrage was this book, which is dedicated to “All women, who work trying to bring into dark lives the brightness and hope of a better country.” The author’s intimate friend within the church hierarchy, Bishop John Newman, and his wife, provided her with most of the background material and arguments that informed the debates. At the back of the first edition, the publishers appended six of the speeches delivered in deliberation at the conference. Students may wish to contrast the rhetoric in them with Samantha’s.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

In Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “The Revolt of ‘Mother,’ ” we see the local colorist’s use of dialect and dialogue that also marks Holley’s work and a similar struggle between patriarchal habit and the newly feminized Christianity of the late nineteenth century. The conflict that Freeman depicts is underlaid by the bedrock of prejudice that Josiah represents in Holley’s work. Students may want to consider what assumptions about gender differences form the basis for Josiah’s and the townspeople’s arguments. Holley’s fiction is particularly subversive because of Samantha’s willingness to work at the role of country wife while she chips away at the granite convictions about male superiority her husband Josiah clings to.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

I attempt to give writing tasks that invite the students to connect their own experience with what is in the text so that they begin to “own” the ideas and feelings. For example: have students write imitations of a short piece—even a paragraph—to

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approximate stylistic features; have them rewrite a piece in their own words to help them see the importance of the language community in shaping a text; ask them to transform a text by rewriting it in another genre—perhaps a news story, poem, dialogue, letter, etc. With any of these methods, the students get a glimpse of the decisions informing the author's choice of language and genre and contribute to their understanding of the creative process in a cultural context.

## Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911)

*Contributing Editor: Elizabeth Ammons*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Two primary issues in teaching Harper are: (1) the high-culture aesthetic in which students have been trained makes it hard for them to appreciate Harper and find ways to talk about her; (2) most students' ignorance of nineteenth-century African-American history deprives them of a strong and meaningful historical context in which to locate Harper's work.

To address the first issue, I ask students to think about the questions and methods of analysis that they may bring to the study of literature in the classroom. What do we look for in "good" literature? Their answers are many but usually involve the following: It should be "interesting" and deal with "important" ideas, themes, topics. It should be intellectually challenging. The style should be sophisticated—by which they mean economical, restrained, and learned without being pretentious. It should need analysis—that is, have many hidden points and many "levels" of meaning that readers (students) do not see until they get to class. Then we talk about these criteria: "Interesting" and "important" by whose standards? Theirs? *All* of theirs? Whose, then? *Why* is intellectually hard literature judged better than "easy" literature? Why is lean, restrained, educated style "better" than fullsome, emotional, colloquial, or vernacular style (except for keeping professors employed)?

The point here is to talk about the aesthetic students have been taught in school to value and to ask these questions: Where does it come from? Whose interests does it serve (in terms of class, race, ethnic group, and gender—both now and in the past)? What values does it reflect, morally and spiritually (intellect is superior to feelings, transmitting tradition is a primary goal of high-culture literature, etc.)? Thinking about our own aesthetic assumptions and expectations in these ways proves a good way of getting us to see that what we probably accept unquestioningly as "good art" (whether we "like" such

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art or not) is just one definition of “good art.” We can now ask: What aesthetic is Harper writing out of? Is hers the aesthetic we have just described, and is she simply not very good at it, or—at best—only half-way good at it? Or is she speaking and writing out of a different aesthetic—perhaps a mix of what we are familiar with plus other things that many or all of us are not familiar with?

To address the second problem, the historical ignorance that can hamper students’ understanding of Harper, one useful strategy is to assign a few short reports for students to present in class. The topics will depend on what selections by Harper one is teaching, and what resources are available, but might include such things as racist stereotypes of black people in newspaper cartoons in the nineteenth century; women’s resources against wife-abuse in the nineteenth century; the formation of the WCTU (Women’s Christian Temperance Union); the division between white feminists and black people created by the fight for the Fifteenth Amendment; the founding of the National Association of Colored Women. Such reports can give a sense of the intense climate of controversy out of which Harper wrote and can involve the students in the process of creating a historical context for Harper. Also, having students prepare these reports in pairs or small groups is a good way of spreading the work around, counteracting problems of nervousness about making presentations, and having them work corporately rather than individually—which is particularly appropriate for Harper.

Harper, like many other nineteenth-century writers, wrote to be heard, not just read. Therefore a good strategy is to have students prepare some of her work outside of class to deliver in class.

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Two major themes I emphasize in Harper are, first, her commitment not to individual psychology, ethics, development, and fulfillment but to the *group*. Harper, like Emerson, is ever the teacher and preacher, but the philosophy that she comes

out of and lives is not, like his, individualistic—not focused on the self or Self. It is group-centered. I think that this is one of the most important points to make about Harper. Therefore I ask my students to think about this question: Is the classic dominant-culture American schoolroom theme of the Individual versus Society relevant to Harper? If so, where and how? If not (and often it is not), what question(s) about America does Harper place at the center? If we use her, a black woman, as “the American”—that is, if we follow her lead and place her at the center rather than at the margin—what does “America” mean? What dominant theme(s) define Harper’s America?

Second, I emphasize that Harper is a political writer and a propagandist. Art and politics are not alienated for her but inseparably dependent: art is not above politics; it is the tool of politics. I ask the class to think about our customary high-culture disdain for art in the “service” of politics, our disdain for art as propaganda. Why do we have that disdain? What art is not political?

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Often Harper writes and speaks in popular forms. I ask the class to identify the forms and think about how they work. The sermon, the political stump-speech, melodrama, the ballad, African-American storytelling, and vernacular verse are among the forms Harper draws on. How do these forms work? What devices do they rely on (e.g., accessibility rather than abstruseness; repetition of the familiar; audience response/recall/participation; deliberate emotion-stirring, etc.)? We talk about the appropriateness of these characteristics of form, style, and artistry to Harper’s mission of reaching and affecting large numbers of people, including people not often written for or about with respect by white writers.

### **Original Audience**

The questions of Harper’s current audience inevitably comes up in the discussion of aesthetics. Because we have been

taught not to value the kind of literature she created or to know much about or take seriously the issues she addressed (group justice as opposed to individual development; wife abuse and alcoholism in the nineteenth century; voter fraud and corruption; lynching; divisions between black feminists and white feminists; employment barriers to middle-class blacks in the nineteenth century; black women as the definers of women's issues), most of us have not been exposed to Frances Ellen Harper. Clearly this will continue to change as the authority of identifying what is good, valuable, and important expands to include people traditionally excluded from the profession of professor (white women, people of color). Or will it? I ask how many students in the class plan to be teachers and scholars.

In her own time Harper was very popular and widely acclaimed, especially among black people. She was the best-known black poet between Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar. "The Two Offers" is probably the first short story published in the United States by any black author. For many years *Iola Leroy* was considered the first novel written by a black American woman. Harper's public speaking was uniformly praised as brilliant. In light of the gap between Harper's reputation in her own day and the widespread ignorance about her today, audience as a social construct—as something that doesn't just "happen" but is constructed by identifiable social forces (economics; the composition of the teaching profession in terms of race, gender, and class)—and the issue of why we teach the authors we teach are central to discussion of Harper.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Many other writers compare well with Harper, but especially other black women writers in the two *Heath Anthologies*. Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Pauline Hopkins. Comparing these writers can give a glimpse of the range of black women writers' work in the nineteenth century, which was broad. It is very important to teach more than one or two black women writers before 1900 and to make

comparisons. Otherwise there is a tendency to generalize one author's work and point of view into "the black woman's" perspective, of which there was not one but were many. That point—the existence of great difference and variety as well as common ground—should be stressed.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. Preparing an oral delivery, as suggested above, is an excellent way to get "inside" a work. Also a good exercise is to ask the class to choose one piece and extrapolate from it the aesthetic principles governing it. Before class they should try to arrive at a statement of what a particular poem or speech or piece of fiction does—the effect it is designed to have on the reader/listener—and how it accomplishes that end. Then have them form small groups and work together to make up and write down "A Brief Writer's Guide for Young Writers by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper" to discuss in class.
2. A good assignment for Harper is to ask students to think about her as a black woman writer. What did each of these three terms mean to her? How do the three terms clash? How do they cooperate?

### Bibliography

Useful discussion can be found in Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (1991); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987); Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (1992); Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746–1892* (1993); and Carla L. Peterson, "Doers of the Word": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1803–1880)* (1995).

## Anna Julia Cooper (1858?–1964)

*Contributing Editor: Richard Yarborough*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

It is essential that, at some point, Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* be situated historically if students are to get a clear sense of what was at stake for Cooper in writing this book and of why she wrote as she did. Nonetheless, one effective approach to opening a discussion of the anthologized selections from *Voice* can be to encourage students to link Cooper's arguments and observations regarding race and gender with those put forward by commentators today. For example, her stance on women's rights locates her in a tradition that leads quite directly to contemporary feminist ideas with which many students will be familiar, even if only indirectly.

Cooper's prose style itself might present difficulty for some students, given the leisurely pace of her writing and her use of irony and indirection. Yet she can also be fiercely forthright in her condemnation of racism and quite emotionally expressive in her outrage at unjust treatment. One important tactic then is to counsel patience on the part of the students and to emphasize at the outset the tension between Cooper's tightly controlled prose and the anger fueling her arguments.

### Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

In developing a sense of the historical context of Cooper's work, students need to appreciate the diverse obstacles against which Cooper and others like her labored in making their voices heard. First, she was writing at a time of extraordinarily virulent racism, when blacks of all classes were being physically assaulted, socially segregated, characterized in the scientific and popular literature as immoral and a threat to political

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stability, and, in the case of the men, disenfranchised throughout the South. (The harsh treatment in the late nineteenth century of other racial and ethnic groups, such as American Indians, is relevant here as well.) Instead of giving way to despair, however, Cooper and others dedicated themselves to improving the condition of blacks not just through community action but also through appealing to whites in the hope of having them recognize the injustices to which blacks—especially the middle-class blacks—were subjected. In addition, Cooper confronted as assertively as did any of her peers a second set of barriers, these placed in her way by many black men who, like their white fellows, held a conception of women's role that did not allow for the range of professional, scholarly, and political possibilities claimed by Cooper as her birthright.

Perhaps the thematic keystone in Cooper's writing is her conviction that the African-American woman's unique perspectives ideally suited her to serve as the moral leader in a society that betrayed so blatantly the democratic and Christian values that it claimed to embody. In the essay "Woman Versus the Indian," Cooper focuses particularly on the hypocrisy of white members of the Women's Movement—especially, in the South—whose prejudice prevented them from accepting blacks as their equals. In condemning racism among white feminists and also sexist attitudes within the African-American community, Cooper foreshadows the work of contemporary black feminists who stress the uniquely "intersectional" nature of black women's experiences, which fall outside the paradigms drawn exclusively from analyses of white women or black men.

Cooper's conception of the social role of bourgeois black women reveals the continuing potency in her day of the nineteenth-century concept of "true womanhood." That is, informing Cooper's position is the assumption that middle-class women can and should bear responsibility for the moral condition of society. Within the bourgeois African-American women's community in the late nineteenth century, commitment to this ideal found its practical manifestation in educational efforts, the black women's club movement, and religious and secular organizations of social uplift.

At a personal level, *A Voice from the South* reflects not just Cooper's own firm belief in education and rational discourse as effective ways to combat racial prejudice but also her desire to present her narrative persona as representative. In drawing upon her own experiences and those of other blacks in dramatizing the condition of the middle-class African-American woman, she seeks to speak quite self-consciously on behalf of *all* black women as a group. This tactic links her with a wide range of African-American writers throughout U.S. history.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

As an excellent example of Cooper's prose, "Woman Versus the Indian" amply rewards close stylistic analysis. At times formal, at times conversational, this essay reflects the various narrative strategies that Cooper adopts in the effort to sway readers of her time who were likely ill-disposed to take her side. In particular, one should pay close attention to the way in which Cooper opens the piece, to her strategically deployed asides, to her diverse figures of speech, and, above all, to her use of irony—one of the most commonly wielded weapons in the nineteenth-century black author's rhetorical arsenal. Finally, given that this essay was designed to be argumentative, to forward as aggressively as possible a particular position in the difficult, ongoing debate over the status of blacks in U.S. society, its logical construction merits examination as well.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Fruitful comparisons and contrasts can be made between Cooper's writing and that of other turn-of-the-century African-American authors. One important figure with whom Cooper, with her diverse interests and extraordinary intellectual abilities, might be constructively considered is W. E. B. Du Bois. Both of these ambitious and highly trained scholars felt driven to turn their energies not just to education and uplift but also to direct engagement with the most pressing political questions of

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the day. In structure, tone, and even intent, Cooper's *A Voice from the South* and Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* share some striking similarities. Broadening the range of useful connections, one might also discuss Cooper in the context of other female activists and social critics—from Margaret Fuller, Harriet Jacobs, Lydia Maria Child, Sarah Grimké, and Harriet Beecher Stowe through Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Pauline E. Hopkins.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

One place to begin a discussion of Cooper's work is the title of the anthologized essay. Why does she call this piece "Woman Versus the Indian"? How does the conflict to which this phrase apparently alludes relate to Cooper's examination of the status of African-American women at the end of the nineteenth century? Can one, in fact, determine her attitude toward the American Indian here? Another critical issue raised in Cooper's writing is that of class. Are there indications in the selections that her target audience may be primarily bourgeois readers? And does she seem to be addressing primarily bourgeois women? What is the role of class in Cooper's definition of women's role in effecting social change?

Students might also be asked to speculate on the contemporary efficacy of Cooper's arguments as a way to identify her goals in writing "Woman Versus the Indian," to come to grips with what exactly she wants her readers to do about the situation that she decries. This approach, in turn, can provide the opportunity for the class to consider not just what Cooper is contending in the essay but *how* she makes those contentions. As in the case of, for example, Du Bois's essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (anthologized in *The Heath Anthology*), the logical construction of "Woman Versus the Indian" is quite carefully crafted.

### Bibliography

Despite the attention paid over the past decade or so to the work of nineteenth-century black women writers, the body of scholarship specifically on Anna Julia Cooper remains small. In addition to the books listed in the headnote to the Cooper selections, the following titles provide valuable background information: Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, 1987. Christian, Barbara. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892–1976*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1980. Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Unwin Hyman, 1990. Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Gender.” In *Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender*, edited by Katherine T. Bartlett and Rosanne Kennedy. San Diego: Westview Publishing Company, 1991. Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class*, 1981. Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter . . . : The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Morrow, 1984.

## Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935)

*Contributing Editor: Elaine Hedges*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students like “The Yellow Wall-Paper” and don’t have serious difficulty understanding it, and they enjoy discussing the meanings of the wallpaper. They may, however, oversimplify the story, reading the ending either as the heroine’s victory over her circumstances, or her defeat. Have students choose and defend one or the other of these positions for a classroom debate (with the aim of showing that there is no easy resolution). Students might also want to debate (attack or defend) the role of the husband in the story.

Background information on medical treatment of women, and specifically white, middle-class women, in the  
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nineteenth century, especially Dr. S. Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure” (mentioned in the headnote) is useful.

Naive students sometimes wonder why the woman in the story can’t just leave; they need to understand the situation of white, middle-class married women in the nineteenth century: The censure against divorce, and their limited opportunities in the paid labor force.

“Turned,” like “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” deals with the situation of women inside marriage, but it offers a wife who takes matters into her own hands and re-creates her life. The two stories can thus be profitably compared and contrasted. Significant differences, of course, include the greater freedom (she is childless) and professional training (she can support herself) of the wife, Mrs. Marroner, in “Turned.” Gilman, in her major sociological work, *Women and Economics*, argued that only economic independence would release women from their subordination within marriage, and Mrs. Marroner is an example of this thesis. One might note the changes in her attitude toward Gerta, from a class-biased one to one of female bonding. “Turned” is also noteworthy as a frank treatment of an issue—an employer’s sexual abuse of a female domestic—that wasn’t openly discussed in fiction at the time.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Consider both stories as critiques of male power, including sexual power, and of marriage. Students can be asked how relevant these critiques are today: whether similar or comparable situations still exist.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

In “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” less sophisticated students may identify the narrator with Gilman, since the story is based on an episode in her life. Discussion of the literary convention of the first-person point of view and of differences between an author and her persona are useful. The dramatic immediacy of the first-person point of view (versus the use of the third person in “Turned”) can be demonstrated.

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Although Gilman's intention in both stories was didactic (she wrote "The Yellow Wall-Paper," she said, to warn readers against Dr. Mitchell's treatment), discussions of form and style can suggest how a text can transcend its author's intention or any narrow didactic purpose. In what ways is "Turned" more clearly didactic than "The Yellow Wall-Paper"?

"The Yellow Wall-Paper" is, of course, highly appropriate for a discussion of symbolism: how it emerges and operates within a text. Students enjoy discussing the symbolism of the wallpaper and of the room to which the narrator is confined.

## Original Audience

I discuss Gilman's difficulty in getting "The Yellow Wall-Paper" published, and ask students to consider why it might have disturbed her contemporaries. (It was rejected by the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* on the grounds that it would make readers too miserable.) Gilman received letters of praise for the story from readers who read it as an accurate clinical description of incipient madness. In 1899 a few reviewers read it as a critique of marriage and of medical treatment of women.

Readers in Gilman's time would have been familiar with Poe's stories. Might "The Yellow Wall-Paper" have been perceived as similar to a Poe story? In what significant ways is it different from Poe's stories?

"Turned" is one of about two hundred short stories Gilman wrote and published in her magazine, *The Forerunner*. They were intended to dramatize the ideas she expounded in her nonfiction about women's roles and status in society, and to suggest reforms. *The Forerunner* never had a circulation of more than a thousand copies. Today, however, more and more of these stories by Gilman are being reprinted. For others, see Barbara H. Solomon, editor, *HERLAND and Selected Short Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, Penguin USA, 1992, and Robert Shulman, ed., *"The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Other Stories*. New York: Oxford, 1995.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

In the same section of the anthology, other texts dealing with marriage and with male-female power relations include: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's, some of Kate Chopin's, and Mary Wilkins Freeman's. One could also contrast the Gilman pieces with the comic/satiric treatment of husband-wife relations in Marietta Holley.

Two of Emily Dickinson's poems provide useful contexts for "The Yellow Wall-Paper": "Much madness is divinest sense" and "She rose to his requirement."

### **Bibliography**

Elaine Hedges, "Afterword," *The Yellow Wall-Paper*, Feminist Press, 1973, has an analysis of the story and a brief biography of Gilman.

Catherine Golden, ed., *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper"*, Feminist Press, 1991, reprints a good selection of both nineteenth-century materials relevant to the story and contemporary critical treatments of it.

Ann Lane, ed., *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, Pantheon, 1980, includes a selection of Gilman's stories and excerpts from her longer fictions, including the utopia, *Herland*. See also Denise D. Knight, ed., *"The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994.

Finley Peter Dunne (1867–1936)

*Contributing Editor: Charles Fanning*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

There are two kinds of pieces here: vignettes of daily life and national commentary. Discuss the aims of each kind, and Dunne's ways of achieving them. The vignettes are like short stories; the commentaries are closer to the traditional newspaper column.

The issue of dialectical writing should be raised. What are the risks entailed? What are the benefits?

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Immigrant/ethnic voices in the 1890s. Consider Dunne as presenting "Irish-American" perspectives: Ireland as a colonized country, the perspective on imperialism, reactions against American Anglophilia. The rise to respectability in the new world of Irish immigrants.

Dunne switched gears in 1900, moving to New York and national commentary, leaving the community-based Chicago perspective behind. What did he gain and what did he lose by this shift?

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Consider the limits of the weekly newspaper column. How did Dunne work within them and expand the possibilities? Look again at the issue of dialect writing, and what the quality of these pieces tells us about the level of literacy (very high) assumed in the newspaper audience from the 1890s to World War I.

### **Original Audience**

Newspaper readers, at first in Chicago, and then all across the country in the syndicated post-1900 pieces were Dunne's original audience. In fact, he was the most famous columnist in America from 1900 to 1914. Why was this so?



## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Useful comparisons can be made with contemporary columnists familiar to the college-age audience, such as Dave Barry or Maureen Dowd.

Compare also the ethnic perspective of other writers of the eighteen-nineties and subsequently. Dunne's pieces add the Irish-American voice to this chorus.

Compare other nineteenth-century humorists, from Mark Twain to the lesser figures—Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, James Russell Lowell in the "Big'low Papers." A comparable twentieth-century figure to Mr. Dooley is Harlem's Jesse B. Semple, or "Simple," the creation of Langston Hughes.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

Students may try their hands at writing a short, short story with some of the punch of Dunne's best work, such as "The Wanderers," or writing a column of commentary on national policy comparable to "Immigration," which again in our time is a big issue. Such an exercise should illustrate the genius of the original pieces, which looks so effortless upon first reading.

## Bibliography

The most accessible paperback collection of Dunne's Chicago pieces is Charles Fanning, ed. *Mr. Dooley and the Chicago Irish: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Ethnic Group*. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987. The most accessible paperback collection of Dunne's national pieces is Robert Hutchinson, ed. *Mr. Dooley on Everything and Ivrybody*. New York: Dover Press. A recent assessment of Dunne can be found in J. C. Furnas, "The True American Sage." *American Scholar* 60 (Autumn 1991): 570–74.

## Upton Sinclair (1878–1968)

*Contributing Editor: James C. Wilson*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students generally respond to Sinclair's portrait of the unsanitary conditions in the meat-packing industry. They tend to be interested in the history of *The Jungle*—how it was written, the federal legislation that was passed because of the public reaction to it, etc. The most difficult problem in teaching *The Jungle* is how to approach a text in which literary qualities are subordinated to political purpose. *The Jungle* does not lend itself to the kinds of literary discussions that most of us are accustomed to.

A cultural studies approach works well with *The Jungle*. Students can contextualize the novel using resources and historical materials readily available on the Internet. *The Jungle* can also be approached as a political novel. Compare *The Jungle* to other political novels the students might have read. Discuss the criteria by which we evaluate—or should evaluate—a political novel. Should our criteria include social and/or political considerations? (It might be useful here to draw a parallel between a political novel and a postmodern novel, for example, in which ideas overshadow the other ingredients of the fiction.)

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Any discussion of *The Jungle* should mention the unsanitary conditions in the Chicago meat-packing industry at the turn of the century and the federal legislation that Congress passed as a result of the national furor that Sinclair's muckraking novel created. However, it is equally important to emphasize that *The Jungle* was—and is—primarily an indictment of wage slavery. Sinclair's purpose in writing the novel was to document the inhumane treatment of working men and women in industrial capitalism and to argue that socialism provided the only solution to the problem.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Questions of style and form often seem irrelevant to *The Jungle*. However, it is possible to discuss the primitive, at times brutal, prose of the novel as an appropriate vehicle to convey the quality of human life that Sinclair found in the stockyards of Chicago.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

*The Jungle* should be considered in the context of three separate but related literary movements in America. First, the novel comes out of the muckraking era. The Muckrakers—so named by Theodore Roosevelt because they, like the Man with the Muckrake in *Pilgrim's Progress*, looked down at the filth and ignored the celestial crown—exposed and attempted to correct graft and corruption in both government and business. The most famous of the Muckrakers, in addition to Sinclair, were Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, whose major works, *The Shame of the Cities* and *History of the Standard Oil Company* respectively, appeared in 1901.

*The Jungle* also has its roots in American naturalism, with its first twenty-one chapters conforming, in both form and content, to the typical naturalistic novel of that period. For example, both style and psychological complexity are subordinated to the necessary machinations of the plot—the inevitable movement toward chaos and disintegration. Jurgis and his family, like the heroines of Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*, Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, and Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, are victims of hereditary, environmental, social, and economic forces beyond their control—forces that shape their lives in an impersonal mechanistic way.

Of course, what distinguishes *The Jungle* from these other examples of American naturalism is the turn toward socialism in the last four chapters, which allows Sinclair to end his novel on an optimistic note. The fact that Sinclair was a socialist, and that he used his writing as a vehicle to express his socialism, identifies him with the group of radical writers and artists that was centered in Greenwich Village (where the radical socialist magazine *The Masses* was published) and that included Floyd Dell, Randolph Bourne, Lincoln Steffens, Max Eastman, and John Reed. Sinclair, like these other socialist writers of the progressive era, understood that journalism and fiction could be used as political tools. Sinclair’s critique of American capitalism has much in common with his fellow socialists in the pre–World War I period.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. (a) Discuss *The Jungle* as an indictment of wage slavery and compare it to other works of literature that attack antebellum slavery (e.g., Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*).
- (b) Discuss Sinclair’s portrait of industrial capitalism in *The Jungle*. Look at the connection between the meat-packing industry and the other institutions represented in the novel. Look at the function of money and the false sense of security it promises. Look at Jurgis’s response to hardship: “I will work harder.”

- (c) Discuss Sinclair's portrait of European immigrants in *The Jungle*. Discuss his portrait of the American city at the beginning of the twentieth century and compare it to other treatments of the American city in similar novels.
- 2. (a) Examine one or more of the major works of other American writers referred to as Muckrakers (especially Lincoln Steffens's *The Shame of the Cities* and Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company*). Compare these works to *The Jungle*. What common values and assumptions do all of these works share?  
(b) Explore Sinclair's connection with the radical writers who wrote for *The Masses* (1911–17). Read Sinclair's novel *King Coal* (1917) and compare its treatment of the Colorado mine wars of 1913–14 with Max Eastman's in "Class War in Colorado" (*The Masses*, June 1914) and John Reed's treatment of the famous Patterson, New Jersey, textile strike in "War in Patterson" (*The Masses*, June 1913).

## Bibliography

Especially helpful are the chapters on *The Jungle* in the following critical works:

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Herms, Dieter, ed. *Upton Sinclair: Literature and Social Reform*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990.

Mookerjee, R. N. *Art for Social Justice: The Major Novels of Upton Sinclair*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1988.

Scott, Ivan. *Upton Sinclair, The Forgotten Socialist*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 1997.

## Henry Adams (1838–1918)

*Contributing Editor: Earl N. Harbert*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Explain Henry Adams's point of view as an outsider even when he writes about his own life. Note also his allusive, old-fashioned prose style, which is so different from that of (for example) Hemingway. Discuss Adams's lack of dependence on the economic rewards that his writings might bring and his unusual authorial attitudes. Also important is an extended exploration of the meaning and usefulness of his key symbols.

In teaching Henry Adams, especially the entries included in *The Heath Anthology*, I emphasize the following five themes:

1. Although born into a tradition of elite political, social, and intellectual leadership, Henry Adams remained essentially an observer rather than a participant in the robust American life of the 1860–1912 period. Writing in all literary forms, his point of view is that of an outsider—even when he tells about his own life (as the third-person narration in the *Education* demonstrates).
2. A writer by choice, tradition, and careful training, Adams's economic independence allowed him always to do the work of his choice: namely, to pursue a broadly cultural and historical study of the past and present (represented in the selections from *Chartres* and the *Education*).
3. As a pioneer in intellectual history, as well as an interested student of science, Henry Adams sought to measure the European twelfth century against the American late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His method concentrated on the vital principles that characterized both eras. Thus, the medieval virgin (religion) appears first in *Chartres* and later is compared and contrasted with the modern dynamo (the force of electric power), when the conjunction becomes explicit in Chapter 25 of

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the *Education*. Adams uses the same symbolic progression to suggest the path of his personal intellectual voyage to increased understanding.

4. Adams's poem defines this intellectual journey in a more personal and perhaps a more compelling form. In particular, it reveals the deference (or even skepticism) that prevents the author from accepting simplistic judgments on history, religion, and other topics that he discusses.
5. At its best, the thought and writing of Henry Adams resist what he finds to be the narrow parochialism of American experience. Building on this belief, Adams attempts to move his readers toward some larger understanding—even at some artistic cost in didacticism and possible misinterpretation.

As a practical minimum preparation for any instructor, and as the next step for any interested student, I recommend a careful reading of the entire *The Education of Henry Adams*, edited by Ernest Samuels.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

1. Henry Adams's life of privilege, born into a family that had achieved three generations of elite political and intellectual leadership.
2. Henry Adams's displacement from that role in the U.S. from 1860 to 1918.
3. Henry Adams's life-long concern with finding in history (human experience) some key to understanding and useful application.
4. Henry Adams's reclusive, "anti-confessional" pose as author (versus moderns and postmodern).

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Consider the definitions of autobiography and biography as matters of traditional literary form, but modified significantly in Henry Adams's work.

### **Original Audience**

I raise the question of the initial audience for Adams's private printings of both works. Thus, questions of interpretation become relative to considerations of audience.

## **Developments in Women's Writing**

Julia A. J. Foote (1823–1900)

*Contributing Editor: William L. Andrews*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Julia Foote's intensely religious view of life often contrasts with the secularism of today's students. Students often wonder whether she was self-deceived in thinking herself authorized by the Holy Spirit to assert her will over those of the general mass of people in her church. It is important, therefore, to emphasize the relationship of Foote's religious worldview to her feminism. She supports her feminism by citing biblical precedent.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Major themes include Foote's search for her authentic self and the black woman's search for power and voice in male-dominated religious institutions.

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### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

How does Foote turn a straightforward narrative of her life into an argument for Christianity, feminism, and holiness?

### **Original Audience**

I stress to the students that Foote is addressing someone in particular—ask them how they can identify who this is.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Interesting comparisons can be made with slave narrators like Frederick Douglass, since Foote and Douglass are both concerned with affirming their sense of a spirit within that owes its allegiance only to transcendent ideals.

### **Bibliography**

Andrews, William L., ed. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. Discusses and annotates Foote's entire autobiography.

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888)

*Contributing Editor: Cynthia Butos*

### **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

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Students' understanding of the story may benefit from a review of the relevant material found in *The Heath Anthology*, Volume 1, in the introduction to "Early Nineteenth Century: 1800–1865." Sections on "The Debates over Racism and Slavery" and "The Debate over Women's 'Sphere'" are particularly helpful.

Depending upon students' experience with reading nineteenth-century Civil War fiction, they may not be aware of the more radical undercurrents found in Alcott's racial stereotyping and in Faith's explicit sexual attraction to Robert in the beginning of the story. A number of critics have pointed to Alcott's characterization of Robert both as a (white) man and a (black) slave. When Faith sees him as a white man, she is attracted to him. But when Robert reminds her that he was a slave, either by addressing her as his mistress or by his melancholy and vengeful moods, her reaction to him varies from a nurse/maternal figure to a mistress who tells him what to do.

The ending of the story may also pose a problem for students who are not accustomed to nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. The utopian conclusion is especially jarring in light of the more gothic elements in the story, and some readers are put off by it. Students should understand that although the Civil War allowed greater freedom for women writers to deal with radical subjects such as interracial attraction (especially a white woman's attraction to a black man) and incestuous relationships, limits existed. By not having Robert kill his brother, even in battle, and by having Robert die as a result of bravery in battle, Alcott ultimately ends the tale within the boundaries for abolitionist fiction.

## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

As an abolitionist story, the message is clear: slavery is wrong. But like other writers before her (Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* and Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), Alcott emphasizes that slavery harmed not only those enslaved but those who enslaved.

A feminist message also underpins the story. Faith re-names “Bob” Robert, and Robert ultimately takes Dane as his surname, reversing the conventional gender role. The issue of Faith’s control over the brothers’ situation is also noteworthy. Faith is able to intercede in the brothers’ quarrel by using her “woman’s voice,” a predominant theme in mid-nineteenth-century women’s fiction. When Robert is poised to strangle his unconscious brother, Alcott boldly claims her woman’s voice: “one weapon I possessed,—a tongue,— often a woman’s best defence; and sympathy, stronger than fear, gave me power to use it.” In fact, Faith’s “voice,” her power of reasoning tempered with sympathy, persuades Robert to allow his brother to live. As with other Alcott characters, notably Jo March in *Little Women*, Robert must learn to control his baser passions, to rise above what slavery has taught him. He must learn what women know: That through the goodness of “heart,” of spirit, he can earn redemption and ultimately be reunited with Lucy.

## Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

This story moves between conventions of sentimental and gothic fiction. Following the sentimental genre, “My Contraband” encourages the reader “to feel right” when Faith comforts Robert about Lucy and convinces him not to kill his brother and when Alcott concludes with a description of Robert’s heroic actions that earn him a place in heaven with Lucy and God. In the gothic tradition, however, Alcott includes the forbidden sexual undertones in Faith’s attraction to Robert, shocks the reader when Robert throws off his shirt to show

Faith his lash marks, and builds suspense around the brothers' incestuous relationship.

## Original Audience

Over Alcott's objections, the story was originally published as "The Brothers" at the insistence of James Field, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Alcott later titled it "My Contraband; or the Brothers," her preferred title, when it was reprinted in 1869. The two titles obviously highlight different aspects of the story: "The Brothers" immediately focuses attention on the relationship between Robert and Ned, while "My Contraband" emphasizes the first-person narrative of Faith and her role in the brothers' relationship. Alcott's insistence on highlighting Faith's importance is in keeping with her underlying feminist theme.

Audience expectations and forbearance quickly evolved during the Civil War. Alcott's story "M.L." was rejected for publication in the *Atlantic* in 1860 because, Alcott wrote in her journal, "it is anti-slavery and the dear South must not be offended." What Alcott doesn't mention is that "M.L." was probably the first abolitionist tale to allow a white woman to marry an ex-slave even after learning of his racial background. However, only three years later, in 1863, shortly after the publication of "My Contraband," the *Atlantic Monthly* published the controversial "M.L."

## Comparisons, Contrasts, and Conventions

Alcott's abolitionist stories follow many of the conventions used by other writers of the time. Alcott admired Harriet Beecher Stowe's work, and the two writers' work share themes about family, "heart," and a woman's ability to enact change by helping others to act morally. Since slavery was clearly an immoral practice to Alcott, she could enter the political dialogue, like Stowe before her, while writing about women's concerns of morality.

Robert's story also contains many of the elements found in slave narratives: incestuous relationships, horrific treatment of slaves, and separation of slave families.

## Harriet Prescott Spofford (1835–1921)

*Contributing Editor: Thelma Shinn Richard*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students need to develop an appreciation for “domestic imagery”—symbols and images drawn from female experience but used to represent universal values. In addition, they also should become aware of the transitional elements from romance to realism evident in the writings of Spofford and her contemporaries.

To address these issues, show contemporary appreciation of Spofford in better-known authors (such as Dickinson and Whittier). Help students discern the *patterns* of imagery so that they do not dismiss individual images as “popular” or “sentimental.” Point out the metaphorical implications of the setting which, while realistic (with its historical roots in Spofford's family), is also part of the romantic tradition.

### Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

Major themes include:

- The female artist
- Humanity as animal versus spirit
- Music/art as communication
- Romance versus realism (particularly in defining naturalism)
- The forest in American literature
- Importance of popular culture (well-known songs)

By basing “Circumstance” on an incident in the life of her maternal great-grandmother, Spofford shifts time and place to enter Hawthorne’s “neutral territory, . . . where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet.” While Hawthorne turns back two centuries to the suggestion of a historical event in *The Scarlet Letter*, however, Spofford chooses a closer time and a specific personal/historical moment. In doing so, she reflects the female consciousness that personal events—events recorded orally and handed down from mother to daughter—define human history perhaps more accurately than official records. In these records she finds a circumstance that can embody female and human experience in finite and infinite terms.

Although *circumstance* refers to essential and environmental conditions in which we find ourselves, the singular form specifically refers, according to *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, to “a piece of evidence that indicates the probability or improbability of an event.” While the existence of God cannot be proved, Spofford can present a “circumstance” that indicates for her its probability. And so she has in this story. The religious theme is all the more powerful because it is couched in the “Actual” and discovered by a woman not given to the “Imaginary.” Spofford reveals Hawthorne’s “neutral territory” to be the world in which we live, and it is in her journey through this world that the narrator must find evidence of the omnipresence of God.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Spofford anticipates the styles and themes of the realists, even of the naturalists who will surround her later writing career. Already in this 1860 story, her narrator must abandon her romantic notions of nature (“If all the silent powers of the forest did not conspire to help her!”) and face that “the dark, hollow night rose indifferently over her.” At the same time, she has recognized the naturalistic corollary to nature’s indifference in humanity’s animal antecedents. Impending death by a “living lump of appetites” forces her to acknowledge the self-loathing

as the beast “known by the strength of our lower natures let loose.” The primitive cannibalism of humanity seems to be reflected in her fear of becoming a part of the beast again: “the base, cursed thing howls with us forever through the forest.” Such pessimistic reflections indeed bring misery, as they will to later writers. “The Open Boat” finds Stephen Crane’s correspondent (also reflecting a true incident in Crane’s own life) similarly trapped in nature and discovering its indifference to him.

### **Original Audience**

Consider the following:

1. The time period during which the story was written and the New England setting
2. The fact that the story was first published in a periodical
3. The Puritan background of Spofford’s contemporary audience
4. The familiarity of the audience with the popular music mentioned

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Useful comparisons may be made with the following works:

Emily Dickinson, “Twas like a maelstrom”  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown”  
Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat”  
Henry James, “The Beast in the Jungle”

### **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

1. What songs do *you* know that she might be singing in each category? Where did you learn these songs? From whom?

2. (a) Find parallels in your experience to the story, its themes and particulars (consider sharing family stories).
- (b) Examine the roots of a genre (e.g., oral roots of fiction).
- (c) Interpret one art through another (art and music here).
- (d) Also try traditional thematic and stylistic approaches and comparisons to other stories.

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Solomon, Barbara H., ed. *Rediscoveries: American Short Stories by Women, 1832–1916*. New York: Penguin, 1994.

Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840–1894)

*Contributing Editor: Sharon L. Dean*

## Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students new to literary study sometimes have difficulty hearing the voice of the narrator in " 'Miss Grief.' " To help them with this, I read the first few paragraphs aloud and ask

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how reliable this first-person narrator is. I then ask them to find places in the text where he shows sympathy for Miss Grief or where he helps her with her career and to assess whether or not he has done enough. I point out that his voice postdates his marriage to Ethelind Abercrombie and ask what that marriage tells us about his character.

Students are also split on whether or not Miss Grief is a good writer. Some recall their own experiences in writing classes and ask if she is someone who refuses to listen to constructive criticism. Putting this question in the context of the narrator's inability to revise the physician out of Miss Grief's story enables them to see that, the quality of Miss Grief's writing aside, Woolson is raising questions about what it means to write in a different voice. When Woolson references this physician as an "especial figure in the carpet" who cannot be taken out "unless you unravel the whole," she is using a phrase that Henry James later picks up as the title for his 1896 short story, "The Figure in the Carpet."

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspective, Personal Issues**

Because Woolson's manuscripts have been lost, no composition dates exist for her stories, but both "Miss Grief" and the story she published just before it, "The South Devil" (*Atlantic Monthly*, February 1880), were likely written just after the death of her mother in February 1879. This would explain the sense of loneliness and rootlessness embedded in these stories and the sense that one way of combating these feelings is to focus on creating art. Other avenues for understanding the story would be in light of Woolson's own habits of travel, of the rising tendency of American artists to live abroad, and of what a few scholars believe is Woolson's lesbian theme.

Cheryl Torsney has read "Miss Grief" in the light of Woolson's own difficulty with her publishers James Osgood and the Appletons, who at this point in her career were failing to market her books and to follow through with tacit publishing agreements and even with payment. Other scholars, such as Leon Edel, have seen in the story Woolson's fear that Henry

James might reject her writing the way the narrator rejects Miss Grief's. We should remember, however, that Woolson wrote this story before she met James and that she had, as Torsney has shown, other literary father figures in people like poet E. C. Stedman, novelist and critic William Dean Howells, and even in her great-uncle James Fenimore Cooper, whose middle name she shared and conspicuously displayed as a way of marketing her work. Stedman helped her in her negotiations with her publishers and James supported her both by valuing their literary friendship and by including her in his profiles of writers collected in *Partial Portraits* (1887). But to have one's work promoted and to be treated fairly by publishers and critics is also to be placed under an obligation to them. Cheryl Torsney has shown that Woolson felt pressured by this sense of obligation to her last publisher, Harper and Brothers. In the light of this sense of obligation that she developed later in her career, one could read " 'Miss Grief' " as a commentary on her own fears that success might bring so much pressure that she could, like the narrator, sell her integrity for fame.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

One of the most striking things about " 'Miss Grief' " in relation to Woolson's other stories is its lack of physical setting. Because she published it in May 1880, just six months after she sailed for Europe, we can explain this absence in terms of her lack of familiarity with the European landscape. The story is also one of the few she wrote from a first-person male point of view. On the other hand, it possesses the rich allusiveness that Woolson drew on in all her work. Literary, biblical, and mythological references abound. Pointing out the footnote references to these and having students discuss their significance should give them further insight into the complexities and ambiguities of the text.

## Original Audience

When Woolson published “ ‘Miss Grief’ ” in 1880, she had been publishing successfully for a decade in such literary magazines as *Lippincott’s*, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, *Harper’s Bazar*, *Appleton’s Journal*, and the premier magazine of the day, *The Atlantic Monthly*. At this period in her career, she also began to publish novels, first in serial form and then in book form. One measure of her popularity is that her first novel, *Anne* (1883), sold over 50,000 copies. Although her later novels did not replicate this success, throughout her lifetime she remained a popular writer and gained increasing respect from critics and reviewers of her day.

## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Students can draw connections between “ ‘Miss Grief’ ” and any work they may have encountered that addresses issues about artists or the nature of art or about women’s roles. Possibilities include James’s “The Real Thing” and “The Aspern Papers,” Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper,” and Wharton’s “The Touchstone.” They could also pursue James’s possible response to his relationship with Woolson in “The Beast in the Jungle.”

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. I have used a number of questions to open discussion of “ ‘Miss Grief’ ”:
  - (a) Why is Miss Grief so persistent? How does the narrator feel about this? How do we feel?
  - (b) What is Miss Grief’s position in life?
  - (c) What is Serena’s role? How do you explain the name change? (A student once pointed out to me that Serena was a generic name for a servant, such as the Irish Biddy.)

- (d) What does this story suggest about the nature of art?  
About women who strive to become artists?
  - (e) What does the narrator learn/fail to learn from Miss Grief? Could Miss Grief be a figment of his imagination? If so, what would she represent?
2. The range of Woolson's writing offers numerous avenues for study. Students who want to look at "Miss Grief" in relation to other work by Woolson will find comparisons in "The Street of the Hyacinth," "At the Château of Corinne," and "In Sloane Street." Those wishing to look at other stories by Woolson in relationship to other writers could do valuable studies of "The Lady of Little Fishing" and Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp;" "Castle Nowhere," and Cooper's *The Deerslayer* or Hawthorne's "Rappaccinni's Daughter;" "Sister St. Luke" and Freeman's "A New England Nun;" "The Front Yard" and Wharton's "Mrs. Manstey's View;" or "A Transplanted Boy" and James's "The Pupil." A less academic writing assignment might ask students to chronicle their own struggles with being accepted as artists or writers.

## Bibliography

Useful background on nineteenth-century travel can be found in William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Two articles on Woolson and other writers are Caroline Gebhard's "Constance Fenimore Woolson Rewrites Bret Harte: The Sexual Politics of Intertextuality," in Cheryl B. Torsney, *Critical Essays on Constance Fenimore Woolson*, and Linda Grasso's " 'Thwarted Life, Mighty Hunger, Unfinished Work': The Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women Writing in America," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8 (June 1994): 97–118 (on Woolson and Mary Wilkins Freeman).

Fred Kaplan's biography *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* (New York: William Morrow, 1992) and Lyndall Gordon's *A Private Life of Henry James* (New York: Norton,

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1998), both present a more sympathetic view of Woolson than does Leon Edel's biography of James. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1982) includes an entry on Woolson and another in its volume titled *American Women Prose Writers 1870–1920* (2000). The Constance Fenimore Woolson Society has a full bibliography on its web site: <[www.gvsu.edu/woolson/](http://www.gvsu.edu/woolson/)>.

For a non-academic view, see Joan Weimer's use of Woolson in her memoir of recovering from back surgery, *Back Talk: Teaching Lost Selves to Speak* (New York: Random House, 1994).

## Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909)

*Contributing Editor: Elizabeth Ammons*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

I've encountered some problems teaching Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* because at first it seems dull to students, but they love "A White Heron" (hereafter WH) and I'm confident that they will also respond enthusiastically to "The Foreigner" (hereafter F). (There is, by the way, a film of WH that many people find excellent.)

Students often don't like the ending of WH (the author's intrusion) and are baffled by it; they wonder about Sylvia's mother—what's Jewett saying about her?—and about why the girl's grandmother sides with the man. Also they wonder why the bird is male.

### Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

Both of these stories are characteristic of Jewett, not only in focusing on women but also in focusing on women-centered or

women-dominated space, geographic and psychic. The existence and meaning of such space probably identify the most basic theme in Jewett.

Female-defined space is celebrated in *F*, which shows the boundaries of such space transcending the physical world and also national and ethnic barriers. The bonds between women find expression in and are grounded in the acts of mutual nurture, healing, storytelling, shelter, feeding, touching, and transmission of wisdom denigrated in the dominant culture as witchcraft. Female-defined reality is threatened but then reaffirmed, at least for the present, in *WH*, in which the intrusion of a man from the city into the grandmother/cow/girl-controlled rural space upsets the daily harmony, and potentially the life-balance itself, of nature.

Historically these stories explore the strength and depth of female bonding at a time when same-sex relationships between women in western culture were being redefined by sexologists such as Freud and Havelock Ellis as pathological and deviant. Jewett recognizes in *WH* the threat posed to same-sex female bonding by the allure of heterosexuality in the person of the hunter, who is sexy and deals in violence and death: If Sylvia falls for him, she will be participating, symbolically, in her own death (the killing and stuffing of the heron). In *F*, written later, Jewett sets against a stormy background a story affirming women's love, despite divisions of regions, nationality, and culture.

Sororal, filial, maternal, erotic: Bonds between women in Jewett's work no doubt reflect her own feelings and those of women close to her. While she numbered men among her friends and associates, her closest, most intimate friends were women. Debate about whether to call Jewett a lesbian writer exists because the term was not one Jewett would have used; our highly sexualized twentieth-century view of same-sex romantic and erotic attachment may very well not be a historically accurate way to describe Jewett's world, fictive or biographical. So labels need to be carefully thought about. Whatever terminology is used, though, the central, deep, recurrent theme in Jewett's work is love between women.

Also, race is an important topic in these two stories, even though—or especially because—it is not explicitly ac-

knowledge. In WH, the over-determination of whiteness—the bird, the cow’s milk, the emphatically pale skin of Sylvie—in combination with the tale’s rejection of city/industrial life points to Jewett’s creating a tale about protecting and preserving whiteness itself (the bird) from threatened attack (the hunter). Similarly, race constitutes a significant topic in F. The Foreigner comes from the West Indies, Josephine (born in the West Indies) figures in the story, and the dark visage of the Foreigner’s mother appears in the doorway. A good question to consider in teaching both of these stories is: How do these fictions inscribe whiteness as a racial category? How are they about white culture? White people? White anxieties? White dominance?

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

F uses many features of the traditional western ghost story to tell a love story. The storm, the cat, the ghost—the tale is deliberately encoded with ghost-story trappings, yet is in the end not scary but healing. The story is formally interesting to think about therefore as a transformation of something Poe or Hawthorne might do into a narrative that instead of scaring or depressing, succors. A kind of serious fierce maternalization of masculine form? Certainly WH plays with masculine form, reproducing in its structure the build to a high climax (literally the tippy-top of a tree) that both traditional, white, Western dramatic structure (exposition/conflict/complication/ climax/resolution) and, it can be argued, male-dominated heterosexual relations inscribe. Then at the end of WH Jewett disrupts and undoes this tight, linear pattern with a flossy, chatty final paragraph so exaggeratedly “feminine” in character as to call attention to itself. One question often asked by students is: Why does the narrative voice switch like this in the end? One answer is that, just as Sylvia’s decision thwarts the hunter, the narrative switch at the end deliberately deconstructs the traditional inherited masculine narrative pattern of climax-oriented fiction grounded in aggression and conflict that has preceded.

**Original Audience**

Jewett was widely read and admired in the late nineteenth century, but until recently she has been dismissed in the academy as minor, regional, slight. Her recent revival reflects in large part the increasing numbers and strength of women in the profession of professor and scholar. Not of interest (threatening?) to a predominantly white, male, heterosexual group of critics and scholars, Jewett is now finding an increasingly large audience as women gain power within the system of higher education. That is, Jewett is the beneficiary of a new group of people being able to define what is “interesting” and “important.” Thus Jewett, when we ponder the question of audience, vividly raises highly political issues: Who defines what is “good” and worth studying? How do the politics of gender and sexual orientation shape the politics of the classroom, without their ever even being acknowledged? What writers and kinds of writers are currently being excluded or denigrated because of the composition of the profession of professor?

**Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

Jewett is often compared quite productively with Mary Wilkins Freeman, a fellow New England writer. Jewett admired Harriet Beecher Stowe’s New England writing and therefore is fruitfully thought of in conjunction with Stowe. Since Willa Cather was encouraged by Jewett to write full time and, particularly, on the topic of women’s relationships with each other, Cather’s work is very interesting to compare and contrast with Jewett’s. As a regionalist—a writer engaged in trying to capture in detail and with great accuracy and sensitivity life as it was experienced in a particular region, rather than attempting to fill in a huge and more diffuse canvas, Jewett compares illuminatingly with other regionalists, especially across regions: Kate Chopin and Alice Dunbar-Nelson focusing on New Orleans; Hamlin Garland picturing the northern Midwest; Abraham Cahan on the Lower East Side in New York.

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### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. F: Who is the foreigner? Is this story racist?  
WH: Who/what does the heron symbolize? Why is the cow in the story? Why does it matter that Sylvia is nine years old? Why is the heron *white*?
2. These two stories together and individually lend themselves well to traditional kinds of textual analysis of symbols, imagery, characterization, authorial point of view, and so forth: for example, animal imagery and symbolism in either or both; nature as a character in either or both; comparing the portraits of old women in the two stories.

### Bibliography

Two sources for essays are: *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984) and *The Colby Library Quarterly: Special Issue on Jewett* (March 1986). WH and F are discussed from various points of view in a number of excellent essays in these two volumes. An important book-length study is Marilyn Sanders Mobley's *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison* (1991). Also *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, ed., June Howard, contains valuable essays that can be applied to these two stories.

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852–1930)

*Contributing Editor: Sandra A. Zagarell*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

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The best strategy in approaching Mary Wilkins Freeman's work is to provide a full context for both her life and period and to select particularly paradoxical passages for class discussion. It is especially enlightening to discuss the endings of her stories, which often disappoint students or trouble them. Have students consider possible revisions of these endings and then discuss why Freeman might have chosen to conclude as she did.

Students may wish to consider the title of "The Revolt of 'Mother' " and its implications. What is the nature of Sarah's "revolt"? Why does Freeman put "mother" in quotation marks? Students may be interested to know that Freeman's father, Warren Wilkins, gave up his plan of building the house Eleanor, Freeman's mother, had hoped for. Instead, the family moved in 1877 into the home in which Eleanor was to serve as hired housekeeper. Freeman's mother was thus "deprived of the very things which made a woman proud, her own kitchen, furniture, family china; and she had lost the one place in which it was acceptable for her to be powerful: her home" (Clark 177).

Another interesting comment is this one, made by Freeman in the *Saturday Evening Post*, published December 8, 1917 (long after the publication of the story). In the following excerpt, Freeman disparages her story for its lack of realism:

In the first place all fiction ought to be true and "The Revolt of 'Mother' " is not true. . . . There never was in New England a woman like Mother. If there had been she certainly would have lacked the nerve. She would also have lacked the imagination. New England women of that period coincided with their husbands in thinking that the sources of wealth should be better housed than the consumers.

"A New England Nun" provides an excellent instance of Freeman's ambiguity. Ask students to identify the tone and implications of the story's early, almost literal framing of Louisa Ellis at her sewing, seated in her sitting-room window,

within the context of the end of the day's work for the laborers in the fields outside and the "general stir arising over everything for the mere sake of subsistence—a premonition of rest and hush and night." Focus on passages that depict Louisa's domestic activities and her attitudes toward them with an eye toward teasing out both the potential divergences between the narrator's perspective on Louisa's life and her own and the narrator's sympathetic conveying of Louisa's attitudes toward her domestic life and her ambivalence about marriage. Students are generally enthusiastic about discussing the implication of Caesar, the once-ferocious dog Louisa has kept chained up for fourteen years, which Joe Daggart threatens to free, and of the pet bird upset by Joe's masculine presence. A challenge in such discussions is to get students to acknowledge the obvious psychological connotations of these animals' presence, yet resist pegging Louisa's edginess about an intimate relationship with Joe as a global judgment of her. Much of the artistry of "A New England Nun" lies in its complicated representation of Louisa's "path" as "narrow" yet also fulfilling, and its acknowledgment of Louisa's physical and emotional discomfort with Joe can be seen as representing a response that is viable on her part. Moreover, it's important to get students to view her discomfort in the context of the narrative's emphasis on the many aspects of her autonomy, which Louisa would have to relinquish in marrying Joe. Close attention to the story's final sentences will help keep before students the irresolvable irreconcilability of the choices Louisa is faced with, the gains and losses of the one she makes, and the doubleness of the story's projected attitude toward all of this.

Once students see the extraordinary complexity of the narrative, it would be fruitful to invite them to consider it in the context of its initial appearance in Harper's *Bazar*, a magazine addressed to urban or urban-identified women of the middle classes; its banner proclaimed its commitment to "fashion, pleasure, and instruction." The May 7, 1887 number—in which "A New England Nun" appeared—followed the magazine's typical format, featuring engravings of young women in the height of fashion on the cover and containing patterns for such consumables as lace as well as fiction, essays, and artwork treating contemporary subjects and a back section de-

voted to advertisements for skin creams, corsets, cocoa, and other consumer goods—even for personal shoppers. The world the *Bazar* reflects, in other words, is contemporary and cosmopolitan and emphatically consumerist. The rural New England life Freeman’s story depicts appears to offer a stark contrast to it. What, students might consider, would the appeal of Freeman’s story have been to the *Bazar*’s readers? If you have access to numbers of the *Bazar* from the era, students will find it fascinating to pursue such questions by looking at the magazine carefully, paying special attention to the range of attitudes toward women it exhibits.

Freeman wrote “Old Woman Magoun” during her unhappy marriage to Dr. Charles Freeman. It is interesting to consider Freeman’s experience of marriage in relation to the fears she invests in Old Woman Magoun of losing the young Lily to men like Nelson Barry and Jim Willis. In a letter to a newly married friend, Harriet Randolph Hyatt Mayor, she had written, “I shall find the old you. It will never be lost. I know how you feel . . . I am to be married myself before long. . . . If you don’t see the old *me*, I shall run *until I find her*” (Kendrick 205). Unfortunately, Freeman was forced to confine the “old me” until her husband’s alcoholism and abusive behavior finally ended in his being committed to the New Jersey State Hospital and her separation from him.

Students may wish to consider the nature of Old Woman Magoun’s extreme actions. A close study of the scene in which she allows Lily to eat the poisoned berries will yield a lively class discussion. When her grandmother nurses Lily into death, she describes a utopian afterlife for Lily, a female haven where no men can intrude. What does this conclusion suggest about growing up female in the nineteenth century?

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

The major themes of Freeman’s work illuminate aspects of her life. Mary Wilkins Freeman’s words to describe the feeling of receiving her first acceptance and check for a short story provide an interesting context: “I felt my wings spring from my

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shoulders, capable of flight, and I flew home” (*New York Times*, April 1926). Her statement characterizes the dilemma this remarkable turn-of-the-century New England writer faced, the paradox that she expressed in almost all of her work. Feeling “capable of flight” because of the power of her capacity as a writer, Freeman nevertheless could only fly “home.” Most striking in her life and work is the haunting echo of two inner voices: a voice that cries out for rebellious flight, another voice that clings to the safety of home. The heroines of Freeman’s short stories, even as they rebel, struggle with this conflict. Students may compare the heroines of “A New England Nun,” “The Revolt of ‘Mother,’ ” and “Old Woman Magoun,” listening for the ways in which Freeman invests the women with power and yet simultaneously limits their power, bringing their rebellious “flights” to what Freeman considered “home”—the realities of nineteenth-century New England.

It is important to explore her depiction of relationships between women, her focus on the role of work in women’s lives, the way in which she explores the psychology of rebellion as characters rebel, submit, or face the consequences of their rebellion. Of particular interest in offering a biographical context is the intensity of Freeman’s relationship with Mary Wales, with whom she lived for twenty-five years. Her stories reflect a great understanding of female friendships.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Freeman has often been categorized as a local colorist, a New England writer of the post–Civil War period whose primary talent lay in depicting the peculiarities of her region. She offers a vivid sense of New England life; at the same time, her work has an intensely psychological focus and is especially illuminating about women’s conflicts during her era. Her use of dialect may be compared with Mark Twain’s as she manages to bring us the voices she knew with fine precision.

### **Original Audience**

Freeman published in magazines for women readers such as Harper's *Bazar* and the family magazine *Harper's Monthly*. She was influenced at times by her editors' emphasis on propriety and their attention to codes governing women's conduct, and endings like that of "The Revolt of 'Mother' " couch rebellious content in acceptable domestic scenes. Many stories, including "A New England Nun," reflect on the complicated relationship between the rural life her fiction portrayed and the metropolitanism of the venues in which her work appeared.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

It is fruitful to compare Freeman with male peers such as Mark Twain, Henry James, and William Dean Howells. Her capacity for psychological portrait compares well with James, and many of her heroines may be compared with the heroines in James's short fiction. She participated in a project with James and Howells, a collaborative novel entitled *The Whole Family: A Novel by Twelve Authors* (Harper & Brothers, 1908). Her chapter in this novel should be compared with the chapters by James and Howells. Freeman enraged her male counterparts when she transformed the figure of "the old maid" as conceived by Howells in his first chapter into a boldly sensual and liberated single woman in her chapter entitled "The Old Maid Aunt." Twain's use of dialogue and humor may also be explored in relation to Freeman's. Finally, she should be compared with other American women writers at the turn of the century (particularly Sarah Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather).

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. (a) Study the role of work in each story in relation to the development of Freeman's heroines.
- (b) Analyze the conclusions of "A New England Nun" and "The Revolt of 'Mother.' " What seems paradoxical or unexpected? How do these conclusions relate to earlier stages of revolt in each story?

- (c) Note the image of wings in “Old Woman Magoun” and consider possible contexts. What does the final scene suggest?
2. Students enjoy focusing on the development of Freeman’s heroines, their contradictions and strengths. Consider a paper on the attitudes toward women the story suggests and its influence on the heroine’s actions. Ask students to study a particular scene or set of images (Sarah Penn’s work in her house: “She was an artist”; Louisa’s domestic pursuits in “A New England Nun.” Does Freeman’s work suggest anything about her sense of the artist?) Study the death scene in “Old Woman Magoun.” What do you make of the language of the old woman as she eases the child into death?

## Bibliography

The most recent literary biography on Freeman is *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* by Leah Blatt Glasser (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), a feminist study that demonstrates the way in which Freeman’s life and fiction are interwoven and suggests her lifelong struggle between autonomy and rebellion.

The most recently published selection of Freeman’s stories is Mary R. Reichardt’s *Mary Wilkins Freeman Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

A useful and brief discussion of Freeman’s life and work can be found in *Legacy: A Journal of Nineteenth Century American Women Writers*, Volume 4, Spring 1987 (“Profile: Mary E. Wilkins Freeman” by Leah B. Glasser).

Useful biographical material can also be gleaned from *The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, intelligently edited and introduced by Brent L. Kendrick. Her letters, though cautious and unrevealing on the surface, hint at the intensity of her relationship with her childhood friend Mary Wales. Freeman lived with Wales for over twenty years, and it is likely that much of her focus on friendships between women was drawn from this relationship. The difficulties of her marriage are also apparent in many of her letters

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written during that trying period of her life. The numerous letters she wrote to her editors reveal Freeman's seriousness about her career.

The two earlier biographies on Freeman are useful, although some-what outdated: Foster's *Mary E. Wilkins Freeman* and Westbrook's *Mary Wilkins Freeman*.

Interpretive studies of her work can be found in Clark's Afterword to *The Revolt of Mother and Other Stories*, Marjorie Pryse's Introduction and Afterword to *Selected Stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, and Leah Glasser's essays "Discovering Mary E. Wilkins Freeman" in *Between Women* and "The Stranger in the Mirror" in *The Massachusetts Review* (Summer 1984).

## Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859–1930)

*Contributing Editor: Jane Campbell*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

It is essential that students grasp the obstacles facing an African-American woman of Hopkins's day. Her ability to surmount cultural, racial, and gender barriers in order to write and publish fiction is extraordinary.

I recommend journal writing to give students an opportunity to consider how Hopkins does or does not seem relevant to our times or to their lives. Journals can also lead to fruitful comparisons with other works read so far in the course.

Students might work in small groups or pairs to raise questions about any barriers to understanding these stories. If taught as companion pieces, what similarities in theme and technique do the stories exhibit?

### Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

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I emphasize lynching and Klan activities and stress that the Klan is still active all over the United States. I also discuss interracial blood lines, voting disenfranchisement, job discrimination against African Americans, and color prejudice during both Hopkins's day and in contemporary times. Caucasian students may be shocked or surprised by the historical particulars and contemporary examples of racism, Klan activities, and discrimination, but they also express gratitude about learning of these realities. Students of color, while painfully cognizant of such issues, may be open to sharing their experiences, citing specific examples of racism in their community or on campus.

"The Wilmington tragedy" that drove Gentleman Jim and Jones out of the South refers to an actual event—a race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, resulting in mass murder of African Americans. This event reflected the ugly climate of the 1890s: aggression toward African Americans escalated, and lynching increased in the South.

Religious issues of hypocrisy, conversion, and redemption such as appear in these stories were common in early African-American fiction. Frederick Douglass, for example, observed in his *Autobiography* that the more religious a slaveholder, the more viciously he beat his slaves.

## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives

Hopkins based "A Dash for Liberty" on various historical accounts of the 1841 Creole revolt, in which an African American by the name of Madison Washington (renamed Madison Monroe in Hopkins's story) led nineteen slaves to rebel. Three Abolitionist writers—Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Lydia Maria Child—also penned versions of the revolt. Depending on which historical facts one wishes to believe, Hopkins changed very little. The revolt did take place, was successful, and resulted in the ship docking in Nassau, a free colony. It was hypothesized that Madison's wife was on board, and that Madison was an ex-slave who had returned with the express purpose of rescuing his wife. In any case,

Hopkins's version includes at least one original element: Madison's intervention in the attempted rape of Susan. This fictional device reflects Hopkins's ongoing concerns with the sexual exploitation of African-American women both during slavery and afterward. Moreover, the story draws attention to a fact rarely noted in standard history texts: that slave rebellions did occur, and that some were successful.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Fitting Hopkins into the tradition of African-American writers should involve discussion of cultural/literary conventions of the time. The tragic mulatto, a character appearing in many works by both African American and white writers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, can lead to interesting discussion, especially in light of why mulattos appeared so often in African-American fiction and how the device of the tragic mulatto simultaneously encouraged racial equality and underlined color prejudice. The issue of passing for white, in the case of Gentleman Jim, is certain to inspire ethical questions.

Hopkins consciously employs the conventions of romance fiction, including acts of unabashed heroism, appeals to the emotions (often derided as "sentimentality"), and coincidental plotting. Such conventions abounded in Hopkins's day, and they still abound in popular fiction, film, and television drama.

Both "A Dash for Liberty" and "As the Lord Lives, He Is One of Our Mother's Children" employ elements of romance fiction intertwined with political and social ideology. In both stories African-American men risk their lives to bring about social justice. "A Dash for Liberty" imbues historical fact with dramatic tension, and Madison's inability to enjoy his freedom without Susan appeals to most readers' basic humanity and romantic sensibilities. The seemingly outlandish coincidence of Susan's presence on the ship takes the historical speculation that she was on board one step further by making her the victim of a sexual assault and having Madison rescue her. Moreover, Hopkins deliberately creates a beautiful

octoroon and a hero of unmixed African descent to suggest certain notions. Hopkins's emphasis on Susan's "marbled skin, veined with her master's blood" further underscores the writer's outrage at the rape of black women by their owners, resulting in children of mixed ancestry who remained slaves.

Similar romance devices emerge in "As the Lord Lives, He Is One of Our Mother's Children." As with other nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American fiction, the plot hinges on an African American passing for white, a choice rendered dramatically necessary in this story by the racist legal system. Hopkins fuses other historical realities, such as lynching, with notions of heroism and spiritual redemption. Gentleman Jim typifies Hopkins's characters, standing for African-American courage and self-sacrifice. In all of her works, Hopkins repeatedly asserts the need for racial equality.

## **Original Audience**

Both of these stories were published in *The Colored American Magazine* (see headnote). Hopkins wrote to a mixed audience of African Americans and whites. Her use of romance conventions demonstrates that many of her readers were women and that she was interweaving politics and entertainment, thus raising the consciousness of a large audience. Clearly, these stories foster positive images of African Americans and promote interracial harmony.

## **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

If students have read contemporary fiction by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and other African-American women writers, they will discover parallels and differences. Why, for example, might Hopkins have created male protagonists? Connections with Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Frances Harper may be useful.

## **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

1. What appear to be Hopkins's attitudes toward relationships between African Americans and Caucasians? How do you feel about an African-American protagonist giving his life for white characters?
2. What role does religion play in "As the Lord Lives . . ."? What is Hopkins suggesting about religious leaders? Why does she emphasize the power of religious conversion?
3. Consider the significance of the title "A Dash for Liberty." Discuss the significance of the title "As the Lord Lives, He Is One of Our Mother's Children."
4. Why did Gentleman Jim pass for white? Was his decision ethical? What other motives were behind this practice in the past? Do people pass for white today? How do you regard their decision to do so?
5. How does coincidence figure in each story? What plot twists appear improbable?
6. Discuss Hopkins's artistic impulses behind the physical depictions of Madison and Susan. How do these depictions coincide with the genre of romance? How might a contemporary African-American woman writer portray the characters were she retelling the story? What other elements of the stories mark them as romance fiction?
7. What is Hopkins suggesting about love in "A Dash for Liberty"?

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## A Sheaf of Poetry by Late-Nineteenth-Century American Women

*Contributing Editor: Paula Bennett*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

With the exception of Emily Dickinson and, less dependably, Phillis Wheatley, undergraduate students are likely to know nothing about pre-twentieth-century American women poets. Their heads are filled, however, with a great many notions about nineteenth-century women generally: they were sexually and politically repressed, they were excessively "genteel," they put pantaloons around piano legs, and so forth. If students have read *Huckleberry Finn* somewhere along the way, they may also believe that the poetry these women wrote was sentimental, morbid, clichéd, and eminently not worth reading—unless one wanted a good laugh. When they encounter strong examples of nineteenth-century American women's writing, their first response is, therefore, surprise and their second (very often) anger. They want to know who these women were, what else they wrote, and why their poetry was erased. Male students are often embarrassed by the obvious sexism that went into this erasure, so it helps to note that excepting Whitman, male nineteenth-century poets have not fared much better. On the positive side, because this poetry is utterly new to them, students are very curious about it and open to a wide variety of thematic, formal, historical, theoretical, and biographical ap-

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proaches. Teachers are probably best advised to take the approach or approaches most useful and comfortable for them and that best fit their overall course plans and objectives.

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

By the end of the nineteenth century, American women had experienced massive changes in subjectivity, freeing many of them, particularly those from the middle class, to enter the public domain as writers, doctors, ministers, journalists, artists, and politicians. Liberated, partially at least, from the restrictions (and pieties) of domesticity, these women wrote poetry that was extraordinarily varied and thematically rich, especially in its contestation of domestic ideology. Thus, for example, in Adah Menken's "Judith," the speaker's powerful identification with her biblical subject leads to a violent outpouring of rage against a "Philistine" society that would crush her passion and disempower her as lover and woman. Tonally and philosophically Menken's antithesis, Celia Thaxter uses her speaker in "In Kittery Churchyard" to dissect coolly her equivocal response to a Puritan husband's passionate memorial for his dead wife, ironically concluding amidst her tears, "Doubtless he found another mate before/He followed Mary to the happy shore." No less ironic than Thaxter, or passionate than Menken, Sarah M. B. Piatt's speaker also uses her poetry to interrogate "true womanhood," the joys of domesticity, and the value of tears. Comparing herself in "Shapes of a Soul" to a snake on the one hand and a tiger on the other, she dismisses out of hand the idealized versions of womanhood within which society (represented in the poem by an implied male interlocutor) seeks to constrain her. The most subtle and broadest ranging of these poets, Piatt's attack on domesticity cannot be separated from her uniquely alienated position as a Southerner who moved north in 1861 and refused to blind herself to the social inequities that were constitutive of *both* geopolitical locations. As she demonstrates in poems such as "Giving Back the Flower," "The Palace-Burner," and "His Mother's Way," "domesticated" women, no less than "worldly" men, were ul-

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timately responsible for the miseries (from war to starvation) that the defense of slavery and the runaway growth of laissez-faire capitalism created between them. She deconstructs the binaries of gender even as she deconstructs the difference between North and South.

Along with attacking domestic ideology, these poets take on other controversial issues as well. Thaxter in “Wherefore,” Piatt in “We Two,” and Ella Wheeler Wilcox in “Illusion” all raise questions about received notions of God of the kind readers generally have associated only with Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville, among nineteenth-century American writers. Alice Dunbar-Nelson (“You! Inez!”) and Sophie Jewett (all three selections) write passionate love poetry to women. In the tradition of nineteenth-century women’s poetry from Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney on down, these poets also write pervasively on social issues, as, for example, Wilcox does in “Goddess of Liberty, Answer” (a bitterly sardonic response to Emma Lazarus’s far better known, but far less honest, “The New Colossus”), Elaine Goodale Eastman’s “The Wood-Chopper to His Ax” and “The Cross and the Pagan,” and Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s “The Proletariat Speaks.” Conversely, in the final decades of the century, a number of poets—in particular Edith Thomas, Lizette Woodworth Reese, Louise Imogen Guiney, and Sophie Jewett—show a proto-modernist tendency to turn away from the social in order to thematize their own subjectivity or (most strikingly in Reese) their relation to their art. These poets are as much harbingers of “high” modernist poetry as the more socially oriented poets are continuators of a tradition that would produce in the twentieth century the social protest poetry of writers such as Langston Hughes.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

If late-nineteenth-century women's poetry is thematically rich, it is also formally varied. Indeed, for students who have been taught to believe that only Whitman and Dickinson experimented stylistically in the century, this sheaf can help them establish a new and much more flexible set of parameters by which stylistic "experimentation" can be measured. As the metrically innovative work of Piatt, Reese, Guiney, and the poets of the nineties suggest, free verse is not the only test of a radical poetics or a poetics of change. While free verse is represented here in the work of Menken (one of the earliest and most vociferous of Whitman's disciples) and Dunbar-Nelson, what is most striking about these poets is the degree of freedom they achieved when using traditional forms, especially in their handling of cadence. Theirs is not the voice of the metronome but of subtle writers who learned to bring speech rhythms to fixed traditional meters well before Frost. (One could note here that Frost particularly admired Reese.)

Equally interesting—and possibly more exciting for some students to trace—is the way one can see a modernist linguistic stance emerge in this poetry. Read for their handling of imagery, late-nineteenth-century women poets can clearly be seen moving toward the precise language and vivid images associated with writers such as Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and H.D. Indeed, their use of imagery can achieve the kind of indeterminacy generally associated only with modernist poetry. In Reese's entire oeuvre, and in the poetry from the nineties, an emphasis on aestheticism for the sake of the aesthetic gives their poetry a peculiarly "modern" feel. Clearly for these poets, art's didactic function—its *raison d'être* for so much of the nineteenth century—no longer holds. Demonstrating such stylistic shifts helps students understand the complexity of artistic fashion, even as it demystifies the contribution of "major" writers such as Pound and H.D.

### Original Audience

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Like most poets of the nineteenth century, the poets collected in this sheaf not only published widely in newspapers and magazines but also produced books. Not counting juvenilia, Piatt published over four hundred poems in newspapers and periodicals, among them thirty-four poems in the *Atlantic Monthly* alone. Other poets also published heavily in these venues. Their audience was, therefore, national, reasonably well-educated, and largely middle-class. (This was true for writers of color as well as for white authors.) Indeed, this audience was probably largely composed of women (and men) much like themselves. They are not poets writing “high art” for an elite few nor did they intend their art to become (as, say, T. S. Eliot’s arguably did) “canonical.”

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

The most important comparison, contrast, and connection to be made is to their contemporary Emily Dickinson. (Following standard chronological division, Emily Dickinson appears in Volume 1 of *The Heath Anthology*. But, her selections, along with those of Walt Whitman, have been reprinted in a separately bound supplement to Volume 2.) Other useful comparisons would be to such “modernist” poets as Pound and H.D. on the one hand and the political poets gathered by Cary Nelson on the other. Nelson’s recovery work, like that represented by this “sheaf” of poets, raises important questions about canonization as well as the evolution of poetic style and the “radical” possibilities latent in traditional forms, which students may find interesting to ponder.

### **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

A number of these poets/poems beg for comparison/contrast approaches, for example, Piatt and Reese as postbellum Southern poets; Eastman and Johnson present two contrasting writers (one white, one Native American) dealing with Native American survival; Piatt and Dunbar-Nelson treat women in relation to war. Then there are deliberately controversial questions one can ask: Is Jewett writing “lesbian” poetry, and if so, how does one define it? When a poet like Piatt relies so heav-

ily on dialogue and invented speakers (Dickinson's "supposed person"), what happens to the notion of "voice"? Is "political" poetry (such as Wilcox's "Goddess of Liberty, Speak" and Eastman's "The Cross and the Pagan") "poetry"?

## Bibliography

Biographical and critical material for most of these authors is very scanty and frequently inaccurate. Besides the usual encyclopedia sources, studies of Menken, Reese, and Guiney are forthcoming in *An Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century American Poets*, edited by Eric Haralson, New York: Garland, and in introductions in *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets: An Anthology*, edited by Paula Bennett, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997. The most useful general study is Emily Stipes Watts, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632–1945*, Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1977. In *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, Cary Nelson treats the theoretical issues involved in the recovery of lost poets of the 1910–1940 period and much of what he says can be applied to the earlier poets as well.

## The Making of "Americans"

Abraham Cahan (1860–1951)

*Contributing Editor: Daniel Walden*

## Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students need to understand the following: (1) the Eastern European Jewish culture out of which Cahan came; (2) New York City as a fast-changing urban and technologized environment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; and Copyright © Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

(3) the nature of ethnicity in the context of the forces of Americanization.

To address these topics, I require I. Howe and E. Greenberg, Introduction to *Treasury of Yiddish Stories* (for the European culture), and Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews 1880–1920*, for the culture of New York City. For an introduction to Cahan as a realist, see Jules Chametzky, *From the Ghetto*, and Sanford Marovitz, *Abraham Cahan*.

I also use the following films:

1. *The Inheritance* (a documentary made by Amalgamated, 1964).
2. *The Distorted Image* (a set of slides on stereotyping by B'nai Brith, Anti-Defamation League).
3. *The Chosen* (film of Chaim Potok's novel).
4. *Hester Street* (film of Cahan's novel *Yekl*).
5. *The Pawnbroker* (film of Wallant's novel).

Students tend to identify with Cahan's attempts to find himself, a newcomer, a Jewish immigrant, in urban New York. They are surprised that this man, as an editor and novelist, was such a big influence in the 1900–40 era. They tend to ask about the Eastern European culture, what New York was *really* like in the 1910s, 1920s, and why and how people struggled for identity in the face of overt oppression, poverty, and discrimination.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Help students understand the parallel themes of ethnicity/identity and assimilation/Americanization. In *Yekl*, Cahan begins to address these themes; in *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) he was able to develop character and relationships in the context of the turn-of-the-century culture.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Cahan was a realist who had mastered English. His style bore the impress of his Russian literary and cultural background, as well as having come out of an Eastern European Jewish culture.

### **Original Audience**

It is necessary to prepare a word list or glossary of those few Yiddish words that are used. A contemporary American audience has to learn to tune in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian and Jewish cultures from which Cahan came.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

The classic Russian authors, like Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, and Turgenev, should be mentioned and briefly explained. W. D. Howells and his circle were also an influence on Cahan. Lastly, Yiddish authors like Mendele and Sholom Aleichem should be referred to. All were influences on Cahan, who absorbed their work even as he reflected the culture of New York City in the 1890–1913 era.

### **Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing**

1. (a) Explain the religio-cultural ethos of nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewry.  
(b) What was the literary culture of nineteenth-century Russia?
2. Abraham Cahan: Russian Jewish Realist.  
Abraham Cahan: Yiddishist, Reformer, Novelist.  
Abraham Cahan: Editor and Mediating Influence.  
Abraham Cahan: American Democratic Pragmatic Socialist.

## Edith Maud Eaton (Sui-Sin Far) (1865–1914)

*Contributing Editors: Amy Ling, King-Kok Cheung, Dominika Ferens*

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

If students are to appreciate the work of Edith Eaton fully, they must be given its historical and social context, namely the reception of Chinese by dominant Americans before and during her period. Students should know that though the Chinese were never enslaved in this country, as were Africans, they were brought here in large numbers as indentured laborers or coolies. The Chinese Exclusion Act was only repealed in 1943 and naturalized citizenship for Asians was permitted in 1954, long after African Americans and Native Americans were recognized as American citizens. Initially attracted to California by the discovery of gold in the mid-nineteenth century, by the 1860s thousands of Chinese laborers were enticed here to construct the mountainous western section of the transcontinental railroad. Almost from the beginning, prejudice against them was strong. They were regarded as an alien race with peculiar customs and habits that made them unassimilable in a nation that wanted to remain white; their hard-working, frugal ways, their willingness to work for lower wages than whites, rendered them an economic threat and thus targets of racial violence.

Into this environment, Edith Eaton came as a small child from England, living first in Hudson City, New York, and later settling in Montreal. Though her writing career began on the Montreal newspaper, *The Star*, she was to make her mark in the United States (she lived most of her adult life in Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco), writing articles and short stories using the Chinese pseudonym Sui-Sin Far.

Edith Eaton's autobiographical essay and her stories, of which "In the Land of the Free" is an example, show what it was to be a Chinese woman in the white man's world. Though Eaton herself was only one-half Chinese (and one-half Eng-

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lish), she was devoted to her mother and to the cause of counteracting the hatred and prejudice against her mother's people that was so pervasive during her own formative years. She took the Chinese name of a flower popular among the Chinese (Sui-Sin Far means Chinese narcissus) and courageously asserted her Chinese heritage.

In "Leaves" she describes through personal anecdotes her growing awareness of her own ethnic identity, her sensitivity to the curiosity and hostility of others, the difficulty of the Eurasian's position, and the development of her racial pride. The other theme apparent in "Leaves," and in many of her short stories, is Eaton's defense of the independent woman. The biographical fact that Eaton herself never married and the intimate details of her journal entries would indicate that she is telling her own story, but she refrained from identifying herself out of a delicate sense of modesty.

"In the Land of the Free" is typical of Edith Eaton's short fiction. Her themes are of utmost importance: racial insensitivity, the human costs of bureaucratic and discriminatory laws, the humanity of the Chinese. The creation of rounded characters is a secondary concern. *Lae Choo* is little more than maternity personified, maternity victimized by racial prejudice. But the very portrayal of a Chinese woman in the maternal role—loving, anxious, frantic, self-sacrificing—was itself a novelty and a contribution, for the popular conception of the Chinese woman, whose numbers were few in nineteenth-century America, was that of a sing-song girl, prostitute, or inmate of an opium den. In *Lae Choo*, Eaton gives the reading public a naive, trusting woman whose entire life is devoted to the small child that the law of "this land of the free" manages to keep away from her for nearly one year. By the end of the story, the irony of the title becomes forcefully apparent.

Mary Austin (1868–1934)

*Contributing Editor: Vera Norwood*

## **Classroom Issues and Strategies**

Students have difficulty responding to Austin's strident individualism and her vacillation between ardent feminist and male-identified writer. The best approach is to provide contextual background that reveals that Austin was not alone in her struggles to write from both inside and outside her culture.

Once we have addressed some of the difficulties of voice in this autobiography, I have the best luck with teaching what I think Austin as a writer was best at evoking. Her strength was in describing and evaluating the interior domestic spaces of her house and the natural and built environments of the Midwest and Far West, thus raising questions about the sort of material world women valued and created. Teaching sections of the auto-biography in conjunction with *The Land of Little Rain* and *Lost Borders* encourages literature students to think about various ways in which women have created appropriate spaces and changed the places they settled, both indoors as craftswomen and outdoors as gardeners and preservationists.

The main question Austin's autobiography engenders is how accurate a reflection she provides of late-nineteenth-century women's lives. Not that this is an issue with the particular selection made for the anthology, but Austin's depiction of the American Indian and Hispanic populations of the Southwest raises more questions and issues than the gender-related material. Teachers who branch out into other of her regional works will need to be prepared for these questions.

## **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

Austin was a Progressive Era writer, deeply involved in supporting regional diversity, multicultural perspectives, and environmental preservation. Students understand her authorial voice better when they know something about her work in these areas. Austin belonged to a generation of creative women struggling to shift from nineteenth-century lives as private, housebound, husband-and-father dominated people, to

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twentieth-century roles of modern, independent individuals influencing social and political trends. Students should also know something of her private circumstances: the long separation and eventual divorce from her husband, the birth of a retarded daughter, the necessity that she write a great deal to earn her living—each played a part in the sometimes contradictory voice appearing in her work.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

Obviously, some familiarity with autobiographical conventions is useful. Gender is an important variable when reading any autobiography. We discuss male and female voices, stressing that women began to write after men had established the basic form and so their works often combined male traditions with female experimentation. In Austin's case, the experiment is in her use of different voices for the visionary, individualistic persona and for the traditional, good daughter.

### **Original Audience**

Austin's audience in her time was more male than currently. Her reputation as a political activist and writer was with regionalists and environmentalists, among whom the leading lights were men. In many ways, her autobiography was written with an eye to setting herself off from the "ordinary" woman of her generation, of claiming a specialness that would put her in the male leagues while also encouraging other women to break free from gender-role proscriptions. In the process of this somewhat divisive attempt, however, she created a persona with a strong feminist character. In our time, it is that visionary woman who speaks to a much larger audience of women readers. For this audience, Austin is less interesting for what she did in the public sphere of environmentalist politics than for her scathing critique, and frustrated rejection, of the nineteenth-century gender-role model offered her by her mother.



## Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

I teach Austin with Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. All three worked in approximately the same time period and struggled with the same gender-role restrictions. Jewett and Gilman are particularly useful in tempering some of the negative reactions students have to Austin's voice. Also useful are Benjamin Franklin's and Frederick Douglass's autobiographies. Teaching these with Austin provides students with a better understanding of the genre in which Austin worked.

## Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. The main introduction I make to any autobiography is to suggest that students think about what sort of people have written their life story. Generally, such authors are engaged in an act of self-creation, which assumes that there is something unique to their life. I ask students to look at strategies the author uses to present herself as, in some way, remarkable. With autobiographies by women this becomes a particularly useful question to begin the study of how gender comes into play in issues of genre.
2. Selecting comparative/contrastive passages from the writers mentioned above and having students look for similarities/ differences has been successful. With Austin, Jewett's story "The White Heron" provides a good starting point for looking at landscape values as they are impacted by gender. Also, "The Basket Maker" chapter in *The Land of Little Rain* offers an opportunity for students to analyze how material from the autobiography matches Austin's more "fictional" work. This is a good exercise for demonstrating how much Austin created her autobiographical persona out of her earlier writing.

## Bibliography

Really the best additional reading a teacher could seek is more Austin. Mary Austin was a prolific, wide-ranging writer and one should be aware of the work on which her reputation is based. I would advise reading some of the stories in *Lost Borders* and a few chapters of *Land of Little Rain* as the best preparation for teaching Austin.

## Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) (Sioux) (1876–1938)

*Contributing Editor: Kristin Herzog*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Without a knowledge of Zitkala-Sa's life and the near impossibility for an American Indian woman of her time to publish independently, students will wonder where these stories fit in. It is important to point out the extreme difficulties of a writer trying to preserve a tribal heritage and yet to communicate to a white audience.

Besides dealing with matters of biography, history, and style, I think approaching these early American Indian authors from the religious perspective (Native American spirituality versus enforced assimilation to Christian beliefs) is effective in helping students to sense the very basic dilemma of a writer, a problem of cultural and spiritual identity that goes deeper than mere issues of civil rights, important as they are.

Students easily identify with the aspect of social criticism or rebellion, but may not find the style particularly attractive because they do not know the historical and biographical background and the tastes of the literary market at this time.

### Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

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Zitkala-Sa is a transitional writer whose life and work are expressing deep conflicts between tradition and assimilation, literature and politics, Native American religion and Christianity. If we focus on the tension between her artistic and her political commitments, she can be seen in the middle between Susette LaFlesche, whose fiction was almost submerged by her political speaking and writing, and Leslie Marmon Silko, who is able to create a blend of traditional and modern fiction that organically incorporates a political stance.

Nor by far are all of her political activities reflected in her writings, but in her editorials for the *American Indian Magazine*, for example, she discussed controversial issues like the enfranchisement of American Indians, Indian contributions to military service during World War I, corruption in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and allotment of tribal lands. The selections reprinted here from *American Indian Stories* are neither essays of cultural criticism nor strictly autobiographical accounts. They are an attempt at turning personal experience as well as social criticism into creative “stories.”

One aspect of Zitkala-Sa’s imbalanced, but path-breaking, attempt to merge cultural criticism and aesthetic form is her struggle with religion. In Parts IV and V of “School Days,” she vividly describes the little girl’s nightmares of the palefaces’ devil and the bitterness she felt when a schoolmate died with an open Bible on her bed, listening to the “superstitious ideas” of the paleface woman taking care of her. While Charles Eastman in *Indian Boyhood* (published in 1902, two years after “School Days”) uses the word “superstition” for some of his Sioux traditions, Zitkala-Sa turns the matter around: Christianity to her is superstitious.

Similarly, “Why I Am a Pagan” is an unusual statement in her time. Its sentimentality and self-consciously “poetic” language can partly be ascribed to the popular journal style of the time. There is daring in her point of view. Interestingly, she does not satirize a white preacher, but one of her own kin whom she sees as tragically duped by the Christian “superstition.” Even though we learn from other sources that she and her husband denounced the Peyote religion and therefore to some extent hampered the fight for American Indian freedom

of religion, the fact remains that she asserted the dignity of Indian religion and put her finger on two blindspots of Christianity that are being overcome only in our time: the disregard for nature and the disrespect for other cultures. What Christian theology is learning today from ecology and anthropology as well as from some of its own forgotten roots, Native American writers learned from their ancient tribal traditions.

### **Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions**

The selections from “The School Days of an Indian Girl” expose the blatant injustice of stripping a child of language, culture, religion, and familiar surroundings. At the same time they express the irony that the maltreated student is extremely unhappy upon returning home and finally feels the urge to return to the place of her earlier sufferings. While the style is sometimes stilted or sentimental, it is at other times direct and powerful, as, for example, in the passage on the hair cutting. In learning about American Indian customs and beliefs (“short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards”), we are made to experience the trauma of the child. In hearing the mother’s desperate cry for help from the spirits of her departed warrior brothers, we can sense the tragic family divisions caused by forced assimilation.

### **Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections**

The many years of literary silence in Zitkala-Sa’s life seem to indicate a serious break between artistic endeavors on the one hand and relentless activism on behalf of American Indian health, education, legal representation, and voting rights on the other. However, in her few publications she actually anticipated the concerns of contemporary writers. In blending autobiography with creative narrative, elements of tribal traditions, and social criticism, she helped to pave the way for those recent writers who have focused more clearly and more comprehensively on their own traditions.



### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. (a) What is your knowledge of American life around 1900 in terms of what you have “absorbed” over the years? In terms of consulting recent scholarly works?  
(b) What do you suppose were the difficulties of a Native American woman writer in writing for a white audience around 1900?
2. (a) How are literary art and protest merged in Zitkala-Sa’s work?  
(b) How did Zitkala-Sa pave the way for contemporary American Indian writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, or Louise Erdrich (in case contemporary American Indian women authors have been read in the class)?

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## Mary Antin (1881–1949)

*Contributing Editor: Richard Tuerk*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students are often unfamiliar with the time period treated in *The Promised Land*, especially so with aspects of the Great Migration and of immigrant settlement in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Especially important is conveying to them the kinds of conditions the newly arrived immigrants encountered in large eastern cities. Students are also unfamiliar with the kinds of conditions the immigrants lived in in the Old World.

I use slides made from photographs by people like Jacob Riis to try to give the students a feeling for life in the immigrant quarters. I also use books containing photographs by people like Roman Vishniak to give them a feeling for Old World Orthodox Jewish life. Frankly, I find that photographs have a stronger impact on my students than simple descriptions and statistics do.

Most of the questions I hear from students concern life in the Old World; however, most material treating Old World life has been omitted from the anthology. Other questions involve the urban environment of the newly arrived immigrant. Strangely enough, few of my students question Antin's idea that total assimilation is desirable.



## Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues

Loosely structured around the Book of Exodus, from which Antin gets her title, *The Promised Land* tells of her being born anew as an American and of her realization that as one of “the youngest of America’s children,” she is in an ideal position to appreciate and understand her new country. In recent years, critics are beginning to view the book as being more ambiguous than was previously thought, finding indications in it that Antin is not wholly negative toward the Old World and not wholly positive toward the New World, although she undeniably extols the virtues of total assimilation and holds herself up as a model for all immigrants to follow. Still, the book stands as one of the classic American immigrant autobiographies and, unlike Michael Gold’s *Jews without Money* and Ludwig Lewisohn’s autobiographical volumes, as one of the foremost works extolling the virtues of America and Americanization for immigrants and their children.

Antin’s emphasis on Americanization and total assimilation deserves careful scrutiny. I try to discuss the values of an ethic of assimilation as well as the problems it presents. I usually contrast Antin with at least one author—usually Ludwig Lewisohn, although Leslie Marmon Silko would do as well—who questions the ethic of assimilation. Particularly apt books for contrast are Lewisohn’s *Up Stream* and Silko’s *Ceremony*. I also discuss the related theme of initiation in Antin’s book.

The work may be treated in terms of its sociological content, that is, in terms of what it reveals about the expectations and possibilities of an immigrant girl in America around the turn of the century. It also may be treated in terms of the role of the public schools in helping (perhaps forcing) the immigrant to come to terms with American culture and society. However, the work may also be treated as a piece of literature.

## Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

As I see it, *The Promised Land* is a tale of initiation, even of rebirth. Antin's being reborn as an American provides her with her principal form in terms of her contrasting Old World and New and in terms of her growth in the New World. The book is, among other things, a study in radical discontinuity in terms of the relations of Antin's Old World life to her New World life and of continuous growth in terms of her New World life.

### Original Audience

Antin says that she is writing for all Americans, and her statement seems correct. I mention the tremendous popularity of her work and its use, either in whole or in part, in classrooms in public schools throughout America. Chapters from it became parts of textbooks used from coast to coast.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Other works of initiation are especially useful for comparison, especially those dealing with initiation into American society. Ethnic tales of initiation make instructive objects of comparison, works like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Ludwig Lewisohn's *Up Stream*, O. E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, and Richard Wright's *Black Boy*.

Even more helpful, however, is comparing Antin's book with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These works are in many ways very similar yet at the same time radically different, especially in terms of their evaluations of American society. Whereas Antin desires assimilation above all, Huck learns to loathe the idea of being assimilated into American society.

### Questions for Reading, Discussion, and Writing

1. In what ways is Antin's experience in the New World unique? In what ways is it typical?

In what ways is she unique? In what ways is she typical? As you read the selection, it might help to bear in mind that she insists that she is representative of all young immigrants.

What is her attitude toward public schools?

How realistic is her evaluation of America?

2. Compare Antin's attitude toward public schools with your own attitude; what incidents in her life and in yours are responsible for the similarities and differences in those attitudes? Trace the steps by which Antin shows herself becoming Americanized.

## José Martí (1853–1895)

*Contributing Editor: Enrique Sacerio-Garí*

### Classroom Issues and Strategies

Students face a difficult task as they read Martí within an *American* anthology. Even as part of a diverse group, with some knowledge of the role of the United States in Latin America and an awareness of issues of identity in our hardly homogeneous society, your strategy must recognize the exciting difficulties of reconciling differences in Martí's text as well as in your own classroom. What is *your* America?, I would ask the students. A good day may bring many voices that speak about communities, regions, neighborhoods, nations, ethnicity, race, and class. Are we empowered or disempowered by our most intimate America? In "Our America," does Martí empower a nation, a people, a whole continent, with his voice? The obstacles to integrating the different views may then be discussed, leading (perhaps) to Martí's call for understanding by means of direct knowledge and respect of others and by self-esteem through self-knowledge. Stylistic issues of images and themes that surface and resurface (see below) could be related to the sociopolitical experiences of nations and groups.

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Is *Nuestra América*, a text published in New York and Mexico City in 1891, representative of the literature of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century? At the beginning of the second millennium, is *Nuestra América* now more within the United States or excluded from the United States? Discuss the following statement by LeAlan Jones:

Where we live is a second America, where the laws of the land don't apply and the laws of the street do. You must learn *Our America* as we must learn your America, so that maybe, someday, we can become one.

LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman with David Isay, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1998.

### **Major Themes, Historical Perspectives, Personal Issues**

A discussion of Martí's emphasis on the racial composition of America, and his vision aligned with the indigenous groups, should contrast civilization and barbarism, false erudition and direct knowledge, imported colonizer culture and indigenous culture. Here, one could ask where the indigenous groups are now and how Martí's treatment of transcultural and transracial issues contrasts with current views. Another important topic is the psychology of the colonial situation, which could reconsider the polemics between Mannoni and Fanon. Martí's text could help promote thoughts on the hybrid nature of Latin America, where the metaphors of Ariel and Caliban are reconciled as an empowered *mestizo* culture.

As you explore our America as distinct realities, you could probe the class as to basic knowledge of geography and history of various regions and the culture of different Native American peoples. Considering the historical background offered in the introduction to "Our America," you might ask the class to research topics such as: the name *America*, Pan-Americanism in the late nineteenth century and free trade in

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the late twentieth century, writing in exile, immigrant voices in New York journals, ethnic and racial issues then and now, and how to “do the right thing.” An interesting comparison could be made with Jacob Riis (1849–1914), another famous New York City nocturnal walker, who immigrated from Denmark in 1870. As a reporter and photographer for the *New York Tribune*, he conducted a crusade against the dire conditions of the slums around “the Bend” of Mulberry Street. He was a close friend and biographer of Theodore Roosevelt.

### Significant Form, Style, or Artistic Conventions

Read the first two paragraphs in class. A thorough discussion of this passage should be sufficient to acquaint the students with Martí’s *modernista* style, which he initiated in Latin America. If further work with *modernista* poetics is desired, exposure to the ideals of Parnassian poets and the musicality of symbolist writers should be considered. This close reading will facilitate intratextual understanding of subsequent elaborations as, for example, “[l]et the world be grafted onto our republics, but the trunk must be our own.” An examination of resurgent images associated with greed, war, ignorance, and violence, contrasted with an informed resistance and knowledgeable (natural) defenses, may lead to a good discussion of how a reader produces meaning within Martí’s text. Footnotes 4, 9, and 14 to Martí’s essay offer suggestions on reading other passages.

### Comparisons, Contrasts, Connections

Of significance to an American poet in New York in the latter half of the nineteenth century was Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. In one of the notebooks he left with his literary executor, Martí describes a future project, “My Book: *The Rebel Poets*,” in which he planned to study Walt Whitman. Indeed, a backward glance over Martí’s works reveals many references to Whitman, including a historic essay “El poeta Walt Whitman,” published in Mexico and Argentina in 1887. In a

necrological note, published in Caracas in 1882, Martí describes Emerson as “a man who found himself alive, shook from his shoulders and his eyes all the mantles and all the blindfolds that past times place over men, and lived face to face with nature, as if all earth was his home.” With candor, “flooded with his immediate age,” as Whitman advised American poets of all nations, Martí wrote poetry and prose distilled from his experiences as a human, political, transcultural being. Martí strove to remove all the layers of the unexamined, taxing culture of Europe as false erudition, and demanded that Americans stand face to face with *nature*, that is, the hybrid *cultures* significant of our real lands. By knowing each other’s poets, mythologies, and noblest expectations, without reverting to hatred and racism, Martí expected the new Americans to rise.

Most significant to new American readers would be an acquaintance with the works of Latin American poets who follow Martí and Whitman. You might consider using Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío’s “To Roosevelt,” written after the United States invasion of Panama, or “The Heights of Macchu Picchu” by Chile’s Pablo Neruda. Martí’s own *Simple Verses* could be suggested as part of your supplemental readings.