

Spring 13 Course Description -- Revised 1/31/13  
R6205 Section 2  
Office Hours: Thursdays 6-7 or by appointment

David Ebershoff  
[david@ebershoff.com](mailto:david@ebershoff.com)

Three American Masters: Melville, James, and Wharton

We all have at least one thing in common: we're writers in New York. Whether you've lived here for decades or for months, you're now writing in a tradition that includes three of America's greatest novelists, Herman Melville, Henry James, and Edith Wharton. This semester we'll read some of their greatest novels and stories from the point of view of a writer, breaking open the fiction to understand its art and craft. Our goal is to assess how the masters do what they do. We'll also look at the connections between these writers, both stylistic and thematic. Lastly, we'll look at how New York influenced each author over their careers. We'll focus on the author's shorter works to allow for close reading. The class requires active participation every week and two writing assignments, one critical, the other creative.

Reading list

\*Herman Melville: *Bartleby the Scrivener*, *Benito Cereno*, *Billy Budd*, and the stories "The Piazza", "The Bell-Tower", "The Apple-Tree Table"

\*Henry James: *Washington Square*, *Daisy Miller*, *The Aspern Papers*, *In the Cage*, and the stories "A Round of Visits" and "The Story of a Masterpiece"

\*Edith Wharton: *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Bunner Sisters*, *New Year's Day*

January 31 -- *Bartleby*

February 7 -- *Washington Square*

February 14 -- *The Bunner Sisters*

February 21 -- *Benito Cereno*

February 28 -- *Daisy Miller*

March 7 -- *Ethan Frome*

March 14 -- Melville Stories

March 21 -- Spring Break

March 28 -- *The House of Mirth*

April 4 -- *The Aspern Papers*

April 11 -- *Billy Budd*

April 18 - *In the Cage*

April 25 -- *New Year's Day*

May 2 -- *A Round of Visits* and *The Story of a Masterpiece*

Writing Assignments -- The first two are required, the third optional but should be done after you complete the first two.

- 1) A 2-3 page essay on one of the three authors' relationship to New York. You may interpret this assignment as creatively as you like, but your piece should be grounded in fact. I do not want you to write an academic paper; rather I want you to write a creative piece that relies on detail and style. To write this well you will most likely want to do some hoofing around town and looking things up.
- 2) I want you to go to one place mentioned in any of the semester's readings and write *in situ* a 2-3 page creative response: a short story, a sketch, an interpretation of what you see and experience. It's up to you, but I want you to use the setting as your prompt and see where it leads you. This is your first draft. Then revise it as many times as you like before you turn it in.
- 3) Find a minor character in one of the semester's texts and write a 2-3 page story/sketch/poem/vignette/monologue -- it's up to you -- about that character. Be as inventive as you wish. You can set your piece within the constraints of the original work (time, place, etc.) or you can transpose this character to another world, another time, etc.