White Liberal Identity, Literary Pedagogy, and Classic Realism

Barrish, Phillip

Published by The Ohio State University Press


For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/28272

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1177670
“Timely in the issues he takes up and path-breaking in his methodology, Barrish confronts the core dilemmas underwriting what Lionel Trilling called the ‘liberal imagination’ and addresses multiple constituencies in doing so: literary theorists, political scientists, and students and scholars of American Studies. Juxtaposing classical realist texts with contemporary occasions in which their paradoxical aspects are most urgently felt, this book produces a useful pedagogical discourse that ‘does justice’ to the complex relationship between race and (white) liberalism in the academy. I consider this the most searching interrogation of the liberal imagination since Lionel Trilling’s work of that title.”

~ Donald Pease, Dartmouth College

“This book makes visible the conflicted structures of feeling that support contemporary liberalism. In its wide-ranging chapters, Barrish’s book joins a needed contemporary effort to generate this self-understanding in a clear, useful, and yet often startling way.”

~ Scott Derrick, Rice University

White Liberal Identity, Literary Pedagogy, and Classic American Realism brings literary works from the turn of the last century face to face with some of the dilemmas and paradoxes that currently define white liberal identity in the United States. Phillip Barrish develops fresh analytic and pedagogical tools for probing contemporary white liberalism, while also offering new critical insights and classroom approaches to American literary realism. New ground is broken by using bold close analysis of works by canonical American realist writers such as Henry James, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain, and Kate Chopin. These contexts include an affirmative-action court case, the liberal arts classroom, and the “war on drugs,” as well as current debates about the United States’ role on the international scene. Invoking a methodology that he calls “critical presentism,” Barrish’s book offers a fresh response to that perennial classroom question, often posed most forcefully by students committed to progressive political agendas: why devote so much time and effort to detailed analyses of canonical American literature?

This book makes specific contributions not only to American literary and cultural studies, but also to critical race theory, masculinity studies, and critical pedagogy.

Phillip Barrish is associate professor of English, The University of Texas at Austin.