

Aspects of the greek tragic hero in american literature assignment

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Courses in modern Greek literature, language, and history are offered for credit in many colleges and universities. Some were initially promoted by members of the Modern Greek Studies Association, founded at Princeton in 1969. Most relate to Greece, of course, but the scholarly study of Greek America has also expanded in recent years. Such systematic study goes back at least to 1911, when Henry Pratt Fairchild published *Greek Immigration to the United States*. Thomas Burgess followed with *Greeks in America* (1913).

Since then many books and monographs, including master's theses and doctoral dissertations, have helped to make the Greek minority one of the more thoroughly researched in the nation. The most authoritative account to date remains *The Greeks in the United States* (1964) by Theodore Saloutos. Of late an interesting adjunct to these endeavors by social scientists has been an inquiry into the modern Greek presence in our literature, with respect to both fictional characters and creative writers. Until now the bibliographies either sparsely reported or completely ignored the Greek ethnic component.

The two-volume collection of essays *Ethnic Literature Since 1776: The Many Voices of America*, by W. T. Zyla and Wendell Aycock (1978), for example has no section on this subject. A fairly sizable segment on Greek Americans does appear in Wayne C. Miller's *Comprehensive Bibliography for the Study of American Minorities* (1976), although its listing of Greek writers and Greek characters in American fiction is incomplete. The standard literary indexes that mention immigrant and ethnic works are also unsatisfactory.

The current popularity of the ethnic dimension in American literature promises to hasten the needed bibliographical work. The establishment of MELUS, for the study of the multiethnic literature of the United States, indicates the growing value that scholars are placing on the new literary emphasis. Greek immigrants did not begin to arrive in large numbers until the 1980s. Coming mostly from peasant and pastoral backgrounds, unlearned and poor, they did not immediately express in writing the wonder, anguish, and triumph of their odyssey.

Their initial publications were both utilitarian and ephemeral ??? Greek-language newspapers such as *Atlantic*, *National Herald*, and *Chicago's Greek Star*. Some earlier accounts consisted of fugitive narratives and personal history deriving from the Greek Revolution, captivity and atrocity tales, and reminiscences. During the nineteenth century many non-Greeks visited Greece, however, and wrote interesting though usually impressionistic travel essays. Most of them wanted to learn at first hand if four hundred years of Turkish enslavement had left in the Greeks any traces of their classical greatness. Stephen A.

Larrabee's excellent *Hellas Observed* (1957) documents these reports as well as many other works, including those that reflect the "Greek fever" of support for the Greek revolutionary cause. A valuable extension of Larrabee's pioneering research is the more recent *American Poets and the Greek Revolution (1821-1828)* by Alexander Papas and Marios Byron Raizis. Subtitled *A Study in Byronic Philhellenism*, the book records how American poets celebrated in verse the rebirth of modern Greece. The writings cited by

Larrabee, Papas, and Raizis help to illustrate the impact of Hellenism on the early years of our republic.

They form a useful intellectual background for the contribution made by Greek ethnics to American literature. By “ ethnics” I mean any Greek writers, regardless of place of birth, who have lived and worked in the United States, and by “ Greek” I mean any person who has at least one Greek parent and does not deliberately flee from his or her heritage by change of name (unless through marriage) or by other means. I assume, of course, that writers of Greek descent can contribute to American literature even if they choose never to write about their fellow Greeks.

No scholar can know for sure, at this stage of research, how many Greek Americans can qualify as writers by virtue of having published worthy poems, stories, or essays. In the 126 issues of Athene magazine, the leading American journal of Hellenic thought, a couple hundred more or less minor authors were represented during the twenty-seven years of publication from 1940 until 1967. Many others have published in Greek newspapers, written privately printed booklets, and so on. The Greek press has often published poetry and short fiction.

These scattered and rather slight works may have some value for term and seminar papers ??? that is, if one can locate them to begin with; they have not as yet been gathered and cataloged at any central location. Even many books by the forty or so relatively important Greek-American authors are so long out of print that they cannot be readily assigned as texts. In time, no doubt, the archives of Greek Americana will be as complete as money and

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effort can make them. Then, on microfilm and through inter-library loans they will be available to students throughout the country.

Lafcadio Hearn, the first major writer usually regarded as Greek, at least in part, presents the problem of not having shown any interest in modern Greece. Born on the Greek island of Lefkas, Hearn had an Irish father and a Greek mother, Rosa Tessima. She was "Grecian" or "predominately Greek," as he writes, although she may have been Maltese or Maltese with a Greek heritage. Hearn alludes frequently to classical Hellenism in his many essays, yet he never uses a modern Greek in his fiction.

He does portray rather exotic ethnic types such as Creoles, Polynesians, and Japanese. As a writer and teacher he spent much of his adult life in Japan; he left Lefkas at an early age and never went back. After the age of seven, in fact, Hearn never again saw his parents. Thus, even though he enjoys permanent stature in American literature and despite the accident of having a Greek mother, Hearn cannot be considered a Greek ethnic. i need all bibliographies and parer are related to aspects of the Greek tragic hero in American drama.