



Gavin Jones

Professor

Frederick P. Rehmus Family Professor of the Humanities

B.A., The University of Oxford, First Class Honors, 1990

M.A., Princeton, 1993

Ph.D., Princeton University, 1996

At Stanford Since: 1999

About

Gavin Jones is the Frederick P. Rehmus Family Professor of the Humanities at Stanford University. He specializes in American literature of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. With a B.A. from Oxford University and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Princeton University, he also held a three-year fellowship in Harvard University's Society of Fellows before coming to Stanford in 1999 as an assistant professor.

His three published books explore the power of literature to embody complex social problems and to uncover difficult ideas that often remain hidden in the culture at large. His first book, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (California 1999) investigates the craze for dialect among post-Civil War American writers, a craze that gave us Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and a host of other works that focus on the vernacular varieties of American English, stretching from Maine to Louisiana and beyond. Jones shows how this turn to dialect, rather than an act of regional nostalgia, translated cultural anxieties in a nation facing the challenges of increased immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and racial conflict. His second book, *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945* (Princeton 2007), turns from culture to society by highlighting the ideological dilemmas created by the persistence of poverty amid American myths of mobility and success. Reading writers from Herman Melville in the antebellum era to Richard Wright in the Great Depression, Jones shows how literary discourse became a powerful means to understand the plight of the poor, hence placing poverty at the center of national debates about social justice, citizenship, and minority identity. His third book, *Failure and the American Writer: A Literary History* (Cambridge 2014) moves from the cultural and social concerns of the first two books to focus on the human self, particularly the feelings of personal failure that obsessed many nineteenth-century American authors. Jones notes the faltering styles, incoherent characters, and messy endings that run through even the best-known novels, and shows how, through these textual problems, American writers become the great theorists of failure. Ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to Sarah Orne Jewett, these writers found ways to translate their own insecurities into complex portrayals of a modern self, one founded in moral fallibility, precarious knowledge, and negative feelings.

In other projects, Jones has edited a new edition of the nation's only "transcendental novel," Sylvester Judd's *Margaret: A Tale of the Real and Ideal, Blight and Bloom* (1845). He has published diverse essays, ranging in subject from antebellum "pro-slavery" novels to more recent diasporic writing by African American women. He is currently writing a book about John Steinbeck, a writer neglected by literary critics despite his enormous popularity with a general readership. By stressing Steinbeck's tremendous variety and complexity as a writer, Jones hopes to recuperate Steinbeck as a crucial thinker for today's world, plagued by problems of ecological catastrophe, racial injustice, and global inequality.

Courses 2018-2019

Winter:

English 146A/ AMSTUD 146A: Steinbeck

English 316: American Story Cycles

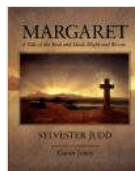
Spring:

English 146S: Secret Lives of the Short Story

Publications



Failure and the American Writer



Margaret: A Tale of the Real and Ideal, Blight and Bloom



American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945

Related News

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Office Hours

Fri 2:30-4:00

Research Interests

AMERICAN LITERATURE

Courses

Autumn 2017-2018

American Short Stories (AMSTUD 75N)

Spring 2017-2018

Steinbeck (AMSTUD 146A)

Spring 2017-2018

Short Story to Big Screen

Spring 2016-2017

Steinbeck (AMSTUD 146A)

Winter 2016-2017

Hemingway, Hurston, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald (AMSTUD 146C)

Spring 2016-2017

Gilded Age American Literature

Spring 2013-2014

The American West (ARTHIST 152, HISTORY 151, POLISCI 124A)

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