

## Dr John Fagg

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### About

I took my BA in English and Philosophy at the University of Leeds, and my MA and PhD in American Studies at the University of Nottingham, where I then held a Leverhulme Postdoctoral Research Fellowship followed by a Lectureship in American Literature.

My research focuses on American literature and visual art in the decades around 1900 and explores the ways in which cultural forms adapted to the new circumstances of American modernity.

### Qualifications

- BA (Leeds)
- MA, PhD (Nottingham)

### Teaching

- 20th Century American Literature and Culture (convenor)
- New York, New York (convenor)
- Literature and Illustration (co-convenor)
- Research Skills in American and Canadian Studies
- Contemporary American Fiction (co-convenor)
- Transatlantic Literary Relations (contributor)
- MA Contemporary Literary Cultures: Politics (contributor)
- MA Literature, Culture and Modernity: Victorian and Modernist (programme convenor)

### Postgraduate supervision

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### Research

#### Genre Painting in Early Twentieth-Century America

How was the nineteenth-century genre painting tradition re-imagined to meet the demands and circumstances of the early twentieth-century?

Genre paintings – commonly glossed as paintings of everyday life – tend towards gentle humour, broad stereotypes, cosy domesticity and normative naturalism. But to claim that a work of art represents the everyday is to make a powerful assertion about what constitutes average or ordinary experience. Genre paintings tend to be ‘official art’ reinforcing hegemony and appealing to conservative tastes, but, just occasionally, genre paintings can be subversive.

The Metropolitan Museum’s recent [Telling Stories](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId=%7B264FD9D3-6A90-457E-B97C-404AFC2382B8%7D) ([http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se\\_event.asp?OccurrenceId=%7B264FD9D3-6A90-457E-B97C-404AFC2382B8%7D](http://www.metmuseum.org/special/se_event.asp?OccurrenceId=%7B264FD9D3-6A90-457E-B97C-404AFC2382B8%7D)) exhibition surveyed American genre paintings produced across a (very) long nineteenth century, but did not undo the common perception of a tradition that was at its most vibrant, popular and culturally relevant in the antebellum era. To trace into the early twentieth century the ongoing expression of genre painting’s mix of humour and sentiment, its absorption in the leisure, labour and interaction of everyday life, and its capacity to evolve complex systems of meaning, it is necessary to look beyond the traditions’ conventional forms and modes of production and reception. My research explores the way that the street-level anecdotes of Ashcan School realism can be read within and against the genre tradition; the reworking of genre motifs, types and techniques by commercial illustrators in the 1910s; the expansion of the (visual) discourse of everyday life in America to include marginalised groups and regions; and the self-conscious revival of nineteenth-century genre in the 1930s art-world. It is informed by and traces the emergence of the politics and poetics of daily life as a site of oppression and resistance.

Outputs from this research include the [Representing the Everyday in American Visual Culture](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nirvc/conferences/american-life.aspx) (<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nirvc/conferences/american-life.aspx>) conference and forthcoming edited collection; articles on Ben Shahn’s painting and photography and on the 1930s genre revival (details below); and a book-in-progress provisionally titled, *Re-envisioning the Everyday: American Genre Scenes, 1900-1940*.

## Realism, Impressionism, Modernism

How did writers and artists working within nineteenth-century forms respond as the pace and complexity of city life presented new challenges to familiar modes of representation?

My work on the writer [Stephen Crane and the painter George Bellows](http://www.uapress.ua.edu/product/On-the-Cusp.1985.aspx) (<http://www.uapress.ua.edu/product/On-the-Cusp.1985.aspx>) answers this question by considering the ways in which aspects of their work – their use of sketches, ellipses, anecdotes, frames, schema, aphorisms and clichés – reveal figures caught between modes of representation, at times pre-empting the forms of more fully-realised modernisms but also working within the established terms of realist literature and art. Rather than seeking to make modernists of Crane and Bellows I use them to explore frayed, messy, dynamic processes of cultural change.

Even as he was being hailed by H.L. Mencken as America’s foremost cultural critic – and mocked by Randolph Bourne as “our gourmand of culture” – James Huneker assured his readers that he was a “man of the [eighteen-] eighties” out of step with the worlds he encountered in New York bars, galleries and tango halls during the 1910s. Huneker’s journalism and criticism were avowedly impressionistic, drawing on the voice and tradition of the sketch-writer, the flâneur and the amateur critic. In the article listed below and in my ongoing research I explore the way that Huneker’s ‘back-number aesthetics’ enabled him to be a gourmand of urban modernity’s myriad sensations and a conduit for the intersecting cultures of the European avant-garde and the New York street in the years before the First World War.

## Magazine Culture: Literature, Illustration, Networks

How was the production of American periodicals shaped by networks of contributors, editors, publishers, advertisers and political interests - and how do those networks respond to and reveal the processes of early-twentieth-century modernity?

In 1913 Norman Hapgood purchased *Harper’s Weekly*. Harper & Brothers’ “Journal of Civilization” had been among the most influential American periodicals of the nineteenth century but was, by the 1910s, rapidly losing status and readership. The energetic editor sought to revive the institution by drawing on various networks of contributors including college friends from Harvard (most prominently Louis Brandeis), the muckraking journalists he had employed on *Collier’s Weekly*, and Greenwich Village writers and artists (including George Bellows, John Sloan and Stuart Davis) who he knew through his brother Hutchins.

Hapgood’s magazine asserted its modernity by borrowing its graphic style from *The Masses*, but was mailed out to the previous editor’s subscribers who wrote back to complain about the “shredded wheat” illustrations. It was informed by the radical (feminist) politics emerging from Greenwich Village, but was intended by Hapgood and Brandeis to serve as a platform for supporters of Woodrow Wilson. These conflicting interests were brought to a head by the onset of the First World War, and the magazine collapsed in 1916. Hapgood’s *Harper’s* offers an insight into the periodical as at once the product of a collaborative network and the projection of a unified voice, and provides a productive way of thinking about the end of the nineteenth century.

My research in this area contributes to the [Knowledge Networks: Nineteenth Century American Periodicals, Print Cultures, and Communities](http://knowledgegenetworks.wordpress.com/) (<http://knowledgegenetworks.wordpress.com/>) project.

## Publications

### Books

- *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellows and Modernism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009)

### Articles

- Forthcoming: “Hazing and Other Violent Rituals” chapter in *George Bellows Revisited* (Columbus Museum of Art)
- “‘The Bewhiskered Rustic, Turned Orator’ Robert Robinson’s Old Men, Politics and the *Saturday Evening Post*.” *American Art*. 27.2 (2013): 68-93.
- “‘That Abused Word: Genre’: The 1930s Genre Painting Revival.” [The Space Between: Literature and Culture, 1914-1945](http://www.monmouth.edu/the_space_between/previousissues.asp) ([http://www.monmouth.edu/the\\_space\\_between/previousissues.asp](http://www.monmouth.edu/the_space_between/previousissues.asp)). 7.1 (2011): 55-79.
- “Sport and Spectatorship as Everyday Ritual in Ben Shahn’s Painting and Photography.” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*. 28.8 (May-June 2011): 1353-1369. Special issue, The Visual in Sport.
- “From Back Number Aesthetics to New Expression: James Gibbons Huneker’s *New Cosmopolis*.” *European Journal of American Culture*. 28.1 (2009): 21-40.
- “Stephen Crane and the Literary Sketch: Genre and History in ‘Sailing Day Scenes’ and ‘Coney Island’s Failing Days’.” *American Literary Realism*. 38.1 (2005): 1-17.
- “Anecdote and the Painting of George Bellows.” *Journal of American Studies* 38.3 (2004): 473-488.
- “Arcane Subjects/Urbane Tones: Stephen Crane’s Sullivan County Sketches.” *Stephen Crane Studies*. 13.2 (2004): 10-20.
- “Unfulfilled Potential: Reading Ekphrasis in Stephen Crane’s *The Third Violet*.” *Letterature d’America*. 23.96 (2003): 5-27.
- [“Parody, Sincerity and the Martial Ideal](http://www.baas.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116%3Aissue-2-autumn-2001-article-2&catid=15&Itemid=11) ([http://www.baas.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=116%3Aissue-2-autumn-2001-article-2&catid=15&Itemid=11](http://www.baas.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=116%3Aissue-2-autumn-2001-article-2&catid=15&Itemid=11)) in the Literary Impressionism of Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*,” *U.S. Studies Online* 2 (Autumn 2001).

### Other writing

- Matthew Pethers, Phillip H. Round, Graham Thompson, John Fagg and Evan Brier, [“Online Roundtable: A History of the Book in America](http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8600071) (<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8600071>),” *Journal of American Studies*, 46, E22 (2012) doi:10.1017/S0021875812000497
- “The Cult of the Strenuous Life: The Strenuous Life and the New Narcissism,” [Pop Culture Universe: Icons, Idols, Ideas](http://www.ebscohost.com/public/pop-culture-universe) (<http://www.ebscohost.com/public/pop-culture-universe>)(ABC-CLIO, 2011)
- “The Cult of the Strenuous Life: The Strenuous Life and the New Narcissism,” *Pop Culture Universe: Icons, Idols, Ideas* (ABC-CLIO, 2011)
- “Seeing History/Showing Seeing in Ashcan School Painting” (Review Essay), *Journal of American Studies* 43.3 (2009) 535-43
- “British Encounters with American Art,” *American Art* 22.3 (2008) 11-13

- **“There Will be Muckraking (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2008/mar/10/therewillbemuckraking>),”** *Guardian*, “Book Blog” (March 10, 2008)
- “Creation of Mass Culture 1900-1945” and “Mass Culture 1945-present” ABC-Clio *World History Encyclopedia*

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