

Burgeoning Selves

American Literature as *Bildungsliteratur* from Sentimental Fiction to Contemporary Life Writing

Room and time: Seminar Room 34.D2, Wednesday, 11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. · **Course number:** ENP.01024UB

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: Since the early years of the U.S. American republic, the idea of ‘selfhood’ has been a dominant theme in the nation’s cultural imaginary. Beginning with Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1793) and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendentalist essay “Self-Reliance” (1841), American writers and intellectuals have, time and again, dealt with questions of self-formation and self-education. The most visible results of this search for stable cultural identity are the concepts of the ‘American Dream’ and the ‘Self-Made Man.’ Not coincidentally, the emergence of American ‘*Bildungsliteratur*’ in the late 18th and early 19th century went hand in hand with the nation’s coming of age. The adolescent characters in Charles B. Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn* (1799/1800) and Tabitha Tenney’s *Female Quixotism* (1801), for example, are portrayed as apprentices of the American ideas of independence and liberty. The course will discuss texts from various periods of American literary history, examining how the tropes of ‘initiation’ and ‘maturation’ are connected to narratives of nation-building, and cultural self-fashioning. Further examples will include Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854), Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1867), Ernest Hemingway’s “Indian Camp” (1925), J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), and Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008). Our main goal is to explore the aesthetic strategies employed in these texts and discuss the function of these works within their cultural context.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forums on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Students will organize *expert sessions* for each meeting, using questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work as didactic tools.

Materialien/Materials: All relevant texts will be made available in excerpts on Moodle. Be prepared to purchase a few books for further investigation.

Aims: The course will familiarize participants with the key features of U.S. American *Bildungsliteratur* (especially with regard to composition, background, and effect).

Assessment:

A.) Regular attendance (no more than 2 absences!), **active participation**, and at least **seven** substantiated entries in the **Moodle discussion forum (1/3)** (not including your own session);

B.) Expert Session, Handout, and Revised Presentation (to be held in class and then uploaded onto the Moodle course site in a *revised, adapted, and extended form*) **(1/3)**;

Important: For the correct mode of citation, follow the style sheet on Moodle.

C.) 2-page research proposal plus **12-15-page final paper** (5,000 – 6,000 words, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography). Please use templates on Moodle! **(1/3)**.

Note: You need to pass each section to pass the whole course.

A.) REGULAR ATTENDANCE, CLASS, PARTICIPATION, AND MOODLE DISCUSSION FORUM

Regular attendance and **active participation** in class sessions are crucial to the success of the course. Absences must be explained in writing, preferably prior to class. No more than two absences are allowed. You are expected to be present in our meetings, not only having read the assigned material, but also prepared to fully engage with the material, ask questions, offer perceptive interpretations, and even argue for your way of reading the text at hand. Note: There might be **pop quizzes** (i.e., unannounced tests at the beginning of a session) to check whether you have read the materials.

You need to **post at least seven substantial entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum**. Make sure you are well informed *before* answering the three discussion questions: Read the required text. Conduct some **additional online research** according to your own research interests. When making an entry, refer to useful materials you found on the internet (clips, articles, etc.). Ideally, you will also **respond to other entries** already uploaded by other students.

B.) EXPERT SESSION, REVISED PRESENTATION, AND HANDOUT

As an expert, you will prepare **three short questions** for the discussion forum, focusing on composition, background, and effect in the main text (to be uploaded 6 days in advance), potentially together with links to **clips** or **images**. Show your discussion questions to me 1 week before your session (or send them to me via email)!

In class, you can start with some **essential information** on the topic (look at the keywords on the syllabus first), then pose questions to trigger a **lively discussion**. Choose **examples** related to the topic of the session that you can discuss in class (for example, in group work). Be **interactive**. Show images and clips, launch a game, pick up questions. Do not stick to your schedule *too much*!

Revise, adapt, and extend your PPT carefully after the session (answering all questions brought up in the expert session) and **upload it** together with a **handout** (3 pages) on Moodle **within one week after the session**!

C.) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND FINAL PAPER

The **research proposal** (2 pages), containing a basic outline for your final paper, is due **Dec. 7, 2022**. The form for the research proposal is available on Moodle. Fill it out and upload it together with an **editable Google docs version** of that same document in the 'upload section' for research proposals on Moodle. **Insert the link to the Google docs version in the comment function to your post on Moodle.** (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)

Important: **Consult the secondary texts on the Moodle website!** (Search for your topic under the respective session.)

The **final paper** (max. 15 pages, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography, 5,000 – 6,000 words) should be uploaded (together with an **editable Google Docs version**) in the respective forum on Moodle.

Important: **Insert the link to the Google docs version in the comment function to your post on Moodle.** (Do not put it somewhere in the document itself!)

The final paper should show your name and email address, the course title, the instructor's name, the date of submission, and the number of words. Primary and secondary sources need to be cited according to the Uni Graz guidelines for style and format. The **deadline** for submission of the final paper is **Monday, 13 February 2023**. Keep in mind: A good paper is a finished paper. There is **no extension** of this deadline.

Important: **Cite all sources according to the Uni Graz guidelines (see style sheet on Moodle).** (Do not use APA or other modes of citation.)

Syllabus ¹

12 October Introduction: American Literature as *Bildungsliteratur*

Basic texts (reading recommended):

David Mikics, "Bildungsroman (Definition)" (2007).

M.H. Gottfried & D.H. Miles, "Defining Bildungsroman as a Genre" (1976).

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841).

19 October Self-Modeling, Temperance, and the Construction of American Identity

Main text (reading required):

Benjamin Franklin, excerpts from his *Autobiography* (1790 [1784]).

Keywords:

Autobiography; *Bildungsideal*; Enlightenment; Individualism; Protestant Work Ethic; Revolution; Self-Fashioning; Self-Made Man; Temperance.

9 November The Sentimental Bildungsroman – Adventure, Urbanity, Self-Formation

Main text (reading required):

Charles Brockden Brown, excerpts from *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799/1800).

Keywords:

Adventure; City vs. Countryside; Happiness; Innocence; Memoir; Recovery; Sentimentalism; *Sturm und Drang*; Yellow Fever.

16 November The Christian Bildungsroman – Religious Faith, Temptation, and Redemption

Main text (reading required):

Maria S. Cummins, excerpts from *The Lamplighter* (1854).

Keywords:

Christian Charity; Chastity; *Erbauungsliteratur*; Female Bildungsroman; Sentimental Fiction; *Wide Wide World* (novel).

30 November Academic Writing – Preparation of Research Proposal and Final Paper

Important! Bring a draft version of your research proposal to this session!

Have the following three sections of the research proposal prepared:

Working title / Research Questions / Main thesis

7 December From Dishwasher to Millionaire – The Emergence of the American Dream

Main text (reading required):

Horatio Alger, excerpts from *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York* (1867).

Keywords:

American Dream; Class Assimilation; Dime Novels; Masculinity; Ragged Dick; Rags to Riches; Social Mobility; Young Adult Fiction.



DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

¹ Note: All required texts can be found on Moodle.

14 December Life Writing, 'American Virtues,' and the Reconciliation Romance

Main text (reading required):

Helen Keller, excerpts from *The Story of My Life* (1903).

Keywords:

American Virtues; Christianity; Disability; Kinesthetics; Life Writing; Optimism; Perception; Reconciliation Romance; Social Relations.

11 January Education, Success, and Failure – The Fragility of the 'Self-Made Man'

Main text (reading required):

Jack London, excerpts from *Martin Eden* (1909).

Additional text (optional):

Henry Adams, excerpts from *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918 [1907]).

Keywords:

Anarchism; Autodidacticism; Disillusionment; Education; Failure; *Künstlerroman*; Naturalism; Politics; Socialism.

18 January Rebellion and Non-Conformism – The New Lost Generation

Main text (reading required):

J.D. Salinger, excerpts from *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

Keywords:

Adolescence; Culture/Class; Juvenile Delinquency; New Lost Generation; Non-Conformism; Personal Narrative; Rebellion.

25 January Self-Fashioning and Otherness in Native American Writing

Main text (reading required):

Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), excerpts.

Keywords:

Disability; Double Consciousness; Exclusion; Intertextuality; Irony; Native American Renaissance; Otherness; Postmodernism; Racism; Self-Reflection; YAF.

1 February Coming of Age in Dystopian Fiction – The Bildungsroman as Fantastic Literature

Main text (reading required):

Suzanne Collins, excerpts from *The Hunger Games* (2008).

Keywords:

Dystopian Fiction; Gender; Greek mythology; Female Heroine; Power; Reality Television; Rebellion; Spectacle; Totalitarianism; Wealth.

DUE DATE FINAL PAPER: MONDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2023

