

WRITING AMERICA



U.S. LITERATURE FROM THE COLONIAL AGE TO POSTMODERNISM

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at
Room and time: Room HS 06.02 · Wed 11:45-13:15 **Course number:** V 512.241 **First session:** March 11, 2015

Course description: The course is conceptualized as an introductory lecture series to American literature from the Early Republic to the Postmodern Era. It will start by looking at the first major attempts to formulate a unique 'American' consciousness during and shortly after the Revolution. Hector de Crèvecoeur's famous question "What then is the American, this new man?" (famously asked in his *Letters from an American Farmer* from 1782) has since led to a number of literary discourses either manifesting or challenging the idea of 'American Exceptionalism.' Among others, we will discuss texts by Susanna Rowson, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Stephen Crane, Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow, John Barth, and Jonathan Safran Foer.

Methods: Interactive presentations of crucial developments in American literature with close readings of representative texts.

Assessment: Reading assignments, Final exam. Note: *Regular attendance* will raise your chances of **passing** the final exam!

Syllabus

- March 11** **Early American and Colonial Literature**
(1490s-1780s – Genres: Narratives of Exploration, Sermons, Jeremiads, Spiritual Autobiographies)
Basic texts (recommended):
Hans-Peter Wagner, "The Colonial Period" and "From the Revolution to 1800" (2010).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of Captivity and Restoration* (1682);
Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702); J. Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).
- March 18** **Literature of the Early U.S. Republic -- Susanna Rowson and American Sentimentalism**
(1780s-1850s – Genres: Novels of Seduction, Sentimental Fiction, Picaresque Novels, Political Texts)
Main text (required):
Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth* (1791/94) [excerpts].
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850); Maria S. Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (1854);
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).
- March 25** **The Age of Gothic – Charles Brockden Brown and the Dark Side of the American Dream**
(1790s-1820s – Genres: Short Stories, Frontier Novels, Historical Narratives)
Main text (required):
Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799) [excerpts].
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland, or, The Transformation* (1798);
Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819);
James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).
- April 22** **Dark Romanticism – Edgar Allan Poe and the 'Imp of the Perverse'**
(1830s-1850s – Genres: Short Stories, Dark Romances, Travel Literature, Detective Fiction)
Main text (required):
Edgar Allan Poe, "The Black Cat" (1843).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839);
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) and *The Scarlet Letter* (1850);
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (1851) and "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853/56).
- April 29** **Transcendentalism – Emerson, Whitman and the 'American Renaissance'**
(1830s-1880s – Genres: Philosophical Essays, Poems, Non-Fiction, Political History)
Main text (required):
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855/1892) [excerpts].
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836) and "Self-Reliance" (1841); Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854).
- May 6** **American Realism I – Mark Twain and the Common Man**
(1865-1890s – Genres: Local Color, Tall Tales)
Main text (required):
Mark Twain, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865).
Additional authors and texts (optional):



- Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884); Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896)
- May 13 American Realism II – Henry James and the Novel of Manners**
(1870-1900s – Genres: International Novel, Novel of Manners)
Main text (required):
Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1878).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881); William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885).
- May 20 American Naturalism – Stephen Crane, Immigration, and Class**
(1890s-1920s – Genres: Immigrant Writing, Melodrama, Muckraking, Tales of Adventure, Utopian Fiction)
Main text (required):
Stephen Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893) [excerpts].
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890); Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900);
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920);
Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1896) and “The Open Boat” (1898);
Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) and *The Abysmal Brute* (1913);
Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1899) and *Vandover and the Brute* (1914).
- May 27 Feminist and Emancipatory Literature – Charlotte P. Gilman and the ‘Separate Spheres’**
(1770s-1890s – Genres: Women’s Fiction, Slave Narratives, Tales of Emancipation)
Main text (required):
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (1899) and “The Story of an Hour” (1894);
William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or, The President’s Daughter* (1853).
- June 3 American Modernism – Ernest Hemingway and the Crisis of the Modern Subject**
(1920s-1940s – Genres: Avant-Garde Fiction, Modernist Poetry, Harlem Renaissance)
Main text (required):
Ernest Hemingway, “The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber” (1936).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (1911/1925); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925);
Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952);
William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” (1930); John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).
- June 10 Postwar Literature – Saul Bellow and the Culture of Non-Conformism**
(1940s-1960s – Genres: Beat Writing, Quest Narratives, Ethnic *Bildungsroman*, Radical Theater)
Main text (required):
Saul Bellow, *Adventures of Augie March* (1953).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” (1955/56); Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957);
J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952);
James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953); Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1963).
- June 17 Early Postmodernism – John Barth “Lost in the Funhouse”**
(1960s-1970s – Genres: Anti-Detective Fiction, Experimental Writing)
Main text (required):
John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse” (1968).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966); Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985).
- June 24 PoMo, Neo-Realism, Metamodernism – Jonathan Safran Foer and the Challenges of Postmodernity**
(1980s-2010s – Genres: Confessional Poetry, Neorealism, Neo-Slave Narratives, Ethnic /Queer Literature)
Main text (required):
Jonathan Safran Foer, excerpts from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005).
Additional authors and texts (optional):
Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985); Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
and *Beloved* (1987); Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1975);
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987).



July 1 Final Exam



“Why can’t you be more like little Hester Prynne?
She’s getting straight A’s.”