Room and time: Seminar Room (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor) · Wednesday, 11:45-13:15
First session: October 12, 2016

Course number: 512.312
Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · Office hours: Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. · Email: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Description: There is hardly a motif in the western cultural imagination that has fascinated audiences as much as that of the beginning. “A magic dwells in each beginning,” German author Hermann Hesse once quipped. Formally, the beginning is one of the formative elements of each literary (and cinematic) work. The first sentence, often the first word,” literary theorist Norbert Miller argues, “is a preliminary decision made by an author regarding the mode, style, and genre of the narrative.” Beginnings often encapsulate the gist of the whole story before it actually starts; they foreshadow the coming events and prepare the reader for the general tone and framing of the work. Likewise, endings have a strong effect upon the way we perceive a particular work. Using cues from reception aesthetics and phenomenology as well as from structuralist theory, this course will look at the important function that beginnings and endings assume in American literature and film history. How do these important structural elements contribute to the dramaturgy and reception of literary and cinematic texts? Which function(s) do they have in the individual work? Examples will include the novels Moby-Dick (H. Melville, 1851), A Farewell to Arms (E. Hemingway, 1929), and Paradise (T. Morrison, 1997) as well as key works of American cinema such as Citizen Kane (dir. O. Welles, 1940), Casablanca (dir. M. Curtiz, 1942), and Looper (dir. R. Johnson, 2012).

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a fact file on a handout). Experts upload their questions 6 days in advance! Material: All printed texts will be made available on Moodle. Please watch the films and TV episodes in our Media Archive!

Assessment: A.) regular attendance (no more than 2 absences) and active in-class participation, as well as eight (!) substantial entries in the discussion forum (1/3); B.) presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and online questions (1/3); C.) research proposal (2 pages) and final paper (10 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers: (including declaration of honesty): Wednesday, February 8, 2017. There is no (!) extension of this deadline. Please indicate on a post-it attached to your final paper if you would like to get detailed feedback!

Syllabus

12 October Beginnings and Endings in Literature and Film – An Introduction
Basic texts:
Edward Said, Beginnings (1975), preface & chapter 1 [Text on Moodle]
Norbert Miller, “Einleitung,” Der empfindsame Erzähler (1968), on novel beginnings. [Text on Moodle]
Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1966), chapter 1. [Text on Moodle]

19 October “Let Me Start Again…” – Comedic Beginnings in Film
Main examples (watching required):
Manhattan (1979, dir. Woody Allen). [Link on Moodle]
Keywords: Addressing the Audience; Comic Relief; Mel Brooks; Marx Brothers.

09 November Shocking Beginnings – Visceral Involvement in Action & Horror Cinema
Main examples (watching required):
Jaws (1975, dir. Steven Spielberg). [Link on Moodle]
Keywords: Fears; Immersion; In Medias Res; Shock; Surprise; Visceral Involvement.

16 November Initiation and Growing Up – Framing Adulthood in Novels of Adolescence
Main texts (reading required):

Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1886). [Text on Moodle]

Keywords: Direct Address; Initiation; Realism; Vernacular; Young Adult Fiction.

23 November  **Autobiographical Approaches – Trauma and Survival in American Life Writing**
Main texts (reading required):

Keywords: Difference; Family; Otherness; Survival; Trauma.

30 November  **Historical Framings – Past, Present, and Future in Toni Morrison’s ‘Trilogy’**
Main texts (reading required):

Keywords: Ethnicity; Historiographic Metafiction; Temporality; Traumatization.

07 December  **Raising Consciousness – Protest and Visibility in Narratives of Resistance**
Main texts (reading required):

Keywords: African American; Injustice; Resistance Writing; Socialism; Visibility.

14 December  **Romantically Involved – Gender and Story Framing**
Main examples (reading required):
- Harold Bell Wright, *When a Man’s a Man* (1916). [Text on Moodle]
- Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). [Text on Moodle]

Keywords: Closure; Femininity; Masculinity; Naturalism; Nature; Romanticization; Tragedy.

11 January  **Breaking the Fourth Wall – Modernist and Minimalist Approaches**
Main example (reading/watching required):

Keywords: Alienation Effect; Fourth Wall; Minimalism; Props; Secondary Text; Staging.

18 January  **Postmodernist Framings – Shifting Angles in Time and Point of View**
Main texts (reading required):

Keywords: Authenticity; Author; Intertextuality; Metafiction; Point of View; Temporality; 9/11.

25 January  **Mind-Tricking Narratives – Shocking, Confrontational & Surprise Endings**
Main examples (watching required):

Keywords: Death; Mind-Tricking Fiction; Plot Twists; Psychology; Reality; *The Sixth Sense* (film).

01 February  **To Be Continued… – Open Endings in Narrative Cinema**
Main examples (watching required):

Keywords: Ambiguity; Camera Movement; Close-up; Real/Imaginary; Time Leaps.

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**FINAL PAPER DUE FEBRUARY 8 (THERE IS NO EXTENSION OF THIS DEADLINE!)**