



American Short Fiction

From Washington Irving to Stephen King

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

Contact: stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

Room and Time: SR 34 D2 · Fri, 15:00-16:30

First session: October 11, 2013

Course number: SE 512.251

Course description: The genre of the modern short story is often called a “uniquely American art form.” Given its concentration on intense and isolated experiences, the short story has been regarded by writers and critics alike as a suitable vehicle of representing American life. This introductory course offers an overview of various periods of the American short story, focusing on major writers from the 19th and 20th centuries and from various cultures and subcultures. What were the socio-cultural conditions under which short story writers were able to create their brief poetic tales? Examples will include texts by Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O’Connor, J.D. Salinger, John Barth, Sherman Alexie, and Stephen King.

Methods: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on Moodle 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 essential facts will be conveyed in a short information block.

Aims: The course will give an overview of the most influential American short stories. We will discuss the function of literary devices of short stories, such as character, plot, theme, point of view, setting, tone, and style, as well as the historical background and cultural mindset underlying individual short stories.

Assessment: Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with 2-page handout (in PDF form) and three online questions; at least seven entries in the discussion forum; midterm assignment of three and final paper of twelve pages.

Grading: Attendance, participation, and discussion entries (1/3); expert session (1/3); mid-term & final paper (1/3). You must succeed in all three parts in order to pass the course.

Syllabus

October 11 American Short Fiction – An Introduction

Basic text (recommended):

Stephen Matterson, “Short Story [Definition],” from: *American Literature* (2003).

M.H. Abrams, “Short Story [Definition],” from *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1985).¹

October 18 No Class!

October 25 The Classical American Short Story – Narratives of the Revolution

1. “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820) (Washington Irving)
2. “The Adventures of the German Student” (1824) (W. Irving)

November 1 No Class!

November 8 Independent Study Unit

Write a short proposal for a paper on one of the stories discussed in class, to be turned in on Nov. 15.

¹ All texts for this course are available on Moodle: <http://moodle.uni-graz.at/construct/index.php>.

ALL
AMERICAN
STORIES





November 15 Gothic Short Fiction – Tales of the Uncanny

1. "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) (Edgar Allan Poe)
2. "The Black Cat" (1843) (E.A. Poe)

– Deadline for 1-page research proposal –

November 22 Dark Romanticism and the American Renaissance

1. "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) (Nathaniel Hawthorne)
2. "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1856) (Herman Melville)

November 29 Local Color and Regionalism

1. "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865) (Mark Twain)
2. "A White Heron" (1886) (Sarah Orne Jewett)

December 6 Realism and Interior Monologue

1. "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890) (Ambrose Bierce)
2. "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) (Charlotte Perkins Gilman)
3. "The Story of an Hour" (1894) (Kate Chopin)

– Deadline for mid-term assignment –

December 13 The Naturalist Tale – Determinism and the Loss of Agency

1. "The Open Boat" (1897) (Stephen Crane)
2. "To Build a Fire" (1908) (Jack London)

December 20 Modernism and the Crisis of Subjectivity

1. "The Killers" (1927) (Ernest Hemingway)
2. "A Rose for Emily" (1930) (William Faulkner)
3. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1933) (Ernest Hemingway)

January 10 Postwar Literature and American Cultural Trauma

1. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" (1948) (J.D. Salinger)
2. "The Lottery" (1949) (Shirley Jackson)
3. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1953) (Flannery O'Connor)

January 17 Confessional and Neorealist Narratives – Ethnic and Queer Voices

1. "The Voice from the Wall" (1989) (Amy Tan)
2. "Fucking Martin" (1993) (Dale Peck)
3. "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" (1993) (Sherman Alexie)

January 24 Postmodernism and Metafiction

1. "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968) (John Barth)
2. "1/3, 1/3, 1/3" (1971) (Richard Brautigan)
3. "Secret Window, Secret Garden" (1990) (Stephen King)

– Deadline for the final paper –

