

# READING AMERICA

## U.S. LITERATURE FROM THE REVOLUTION TO POSTMODERNISM

**Lecturer:** Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at  
**Room and time:** Room HS 06.02 · Fri, 11:45-13:15    **Course number:** V 512.241  
**First session:** March 14, 2013

**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 Crevecoeur'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.' This lecture course will explore a number of cultural images and self-concepts developed in American writing since the Colonial Era. To what extent have notions such as the 'American Dream' and the 'Frontier' permeated canonized literary works? In writing about America, representative authors have attempted to negotiate the underlying promises, challenges and limits of American society. 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, Frank Norris, Ernest Hemingway, and Thomas Pynchon.

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

**Assessment:** Reading assignments, Final exam.

### Syllabus

- March 14**      **Introduction – The Beginnings (Colonial and Revolutionary Literature)**  
Basic text (recommended):  
Hans-Peter Wagner, "The Colonial Period" & "From the Revolution to 1800" (2010).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of Captivity and Restoration* (1682).  
Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) & *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702).  
Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).
- March 21**      **Sentimental Fiction and Its (Dis-)Contents – Susanna Rowson and Other 'Scribbling Women'**  
Main text (required):  
Susanna Rowson, excerpts from *Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth* (1791/94).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1850).  
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).  
Maria S. Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (1854).
- Apr. 18**      **The Age of Gothic – Charles Brockden Brown and the Dark Side of the American Dream**  
Main text (required):  
Charles Brockden Brown, excerpts from *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland, or, The Transformation* (1798).  
Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) & "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819).  
James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).
- Apr. 25**      **Dark Romanticism – Edgar Allan Poe and the 'Imp of the Perverse'**  
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) & *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).  
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (1851) & "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853/56).
- May 2**      **The Spirit of Transcendentalism – Walt Whitman and the American Renaissance**  
Main text (required):  
Walt Whitman, excerpts from *Leaves of Grass* (1855/1892).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836) & "Self-Reliance" (1841).  
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854).

- May 9**            **No class! (Ascension Day)**    *Relax and enjoy!*
- May 16**           **The Project of Realism – Mark Twain, Local Color, and the Social Novel**  
 Main text (required):  
     Mark Twain, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865).  
 Additional authors and texts (optional):  
     Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).  
     Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).  
     William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885).  
     Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896).
- May 23**           **Feminist and Emancipatory Literature – Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Madness of ‘Separate Spheres’**  
 Main text (required):  
     Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892).  
 Additional authors and texts (optional):  
     Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” (1894) & *The Awakening* (1899).  
     Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).  
     Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).  
     Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987).  
     William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or, The President’s Daughter* (1853).
- May 30**           **No class!**    *Relax and enjoy!*
- June 6**            **From Realism to Naturalism – Stephen Crane and the ‘Other Half’**  
 Main text (required):  
     Stephen Crane, excerpts from *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893).  
 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).
- June 13**           **Naturalist Tales of Adventure – Frank Norris and the *bête humaine***  
 Main text (required):  
     Frank Norris, excerpts from *McTeague, A Story of San Francisco* (1899).  
 Additional authors and texts (optional):  
     Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat” (1898).  
     Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) & *The Abysmal Brute* (1913).  
     Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute* (1914).
- June 20**           **American Modernism from Experimental Fiction to the Bestseller – The Case of Ernest Hemingway**  
 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).  
     Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) & *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).  
     F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925).  
     William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932) & “A Rose for Emily” (1930).  
     John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).  
     J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).
- June 27**           **‘Lost in the Funhouse’ – America and the Challenges of Postmodernism**  
 Main text (required):  
     Thomas Pynchon, excerpts from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).  
 Additional authors and texts:  
     Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (1964).  
     John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse” (1968).  
     Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985).  
     Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985).  
     Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) & *Beloved* (1987).  
     Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1975).  
     Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984).
- July 4**            **Final Exam**