

# WRITING 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:** October 11, 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 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, Frank Norris, Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow, and Thomas Pynchon.

**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

#### **October 11    Early American and Colonial Literature**

(1490s-1780s – Genres: Narratives of Exploration, Sermons, Jeremiads, Spiritual Autobiographies)

Basic text (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, *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) and *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702).

Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).

#### **October 18    No class!**

#### **October 25    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).

#### **November 1    No class!**

#### **November 8    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).

#### **November 15    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).

#### **November 22    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).



- November 29 American Realism – Mark Twain and the ‘Common Man’**  
 (1865-1890s – Genres: Local Color, Impressionism, Novel of Manners, Tall Tales)  
 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).
- December 6 Feminist and Emancipatory Literature – Charlotte P. Gilman and the Madness of ‘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).
- December 13 American Naturalism – Stephen Crane and the ‘Other Half’ of U.S. Society**  
 (1890s-1920s – Genres: 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).  
 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).
- December 20 American Modernism – Ernest Hemingway and the Crisis of the Modern Subject**  
 (1920s-1940s – Genres: Avant-Garde Fiction and 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).  
 Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925).  
 William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932) and “A Rose for Emily” (1930).  
 John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).
- January 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:  
 Allen Ginsburg, “Howl” (1955/56) and 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).  
 Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (1964).
- January 17 ‘Lost in the Funhouse’ – Thomas Pynchon and the Challenges of Postmodernism**  
 (1960s-2010s – Genres: Anti-Detective Fiction, Neorealism, Ethnic and Queer Literature)  
 Main text (required):  
 Thomas Pynchon, excerpts from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).  
 Additional authors and texts:  
 John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse” (1968).  
 Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985).  
 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985).  
 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987).  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1975).  
 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984).  
 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987).
- January 24 Final Exam**

**Note: This one session will  
take place from 13:30-15:00!  
(same room)**



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