

# WRITING AMERICA

## U.S. American Literature from the Revolutionary Period to Modernism

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

**Room and time:** Hörsaal D (Hof 10), Thursdays, 9:45-11:15

**Course number and type:** 123210 – Vorlesung

**First session:** October 13, 2011

**Course description:** The course is conceptualized as an introductory lecture series to American literature from the Early Republic to the Modern Era. It will start by looking at the first major attempts to formulate a unique 'American' consciousness during the American 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 Revolutionary Era. To what extent have notions such as the 'American Dream' and the 'Frontier' permeated canonized literary works? The writing of American literature, in a way, also implies the writing of America itself. In writing *about* America, representative authors have also attempted to negotiate the underlying promises, challenges and limits of American society. Among others, we will discuss texts by Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, and Ernest Hemingway.

**Credit requirements:** Reading assignments; final exam.

**Date of Final Exam:** Thursday, January 19, 2012.

### Syllabus

- Oct. 13**      **Introduction – What is America? What is an American? Historical Background.**  
Basic text (recommended):  
Geoff Ward, "Introduction" to *The Writing of America: Literature and Cultural Identity from the Puritans to the Present* (2002).<sup>1</sup>
- Oct. 20**      **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): "Preface"; "A Boarding School" (ch. I); "An Intriguing Teacher" (ch. VI); "Natural Sense of Propriety" (ch. VII); "We Know Not What a Day May Bring Forth" (ch. IX); "Conflict of Love and Duty" (ch. XI), "Nature's Last, Best Gift" (ch. XII); "Reflections" (ch. XVIII), "A Mistake Discovered" (ch. XIX); "Chapter of Accidents" (ch. XX); "Pensive She Mourn'd" (ch. XXVII), "Subject Continued" (ch. XXXI), "Reasons Why and Wherefore" (ch. XXXII); "Which People Void of Feeling Need Not Read" (ch. XXXIII), "Retribution" (ch. XXXIV), "Conclusion" (ch. XXXV).  
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).
- Oct. 27**      **The Age of Gothic: Charles Brockden Brown and the Dark Side of the American Wilderness**  
Main text (required):  
Charles Brockden Brown, excerpts from *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* (1799): "Preface", ch. I; XVI-XVII; XIX – XXI.  
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).
- Nov. 3**      **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):  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown" (1835).  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).  
Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* (1851).

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<sup>1</sup> All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: <https://moodle.univie.ac.at/>.



- Nov. 10**      **America and the 'Open Road': Walt Whitman and the Vision of a 'Brotherhood of Man'**  
Main text (required):  
Walt Whitman, excerpts from *Leaves of Grass* (1855/1892): "Song of Myself" (sections 1-5 & 24); "I Sing the Body Electric" (sections 1-9); "Mannahatta".  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1836) & "Self-Reliance" (1841).  
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854).
- Nov. 17**      **The Post-Bellum Period: Mark Twain and the Project of Realism**  
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).
- Nov. 24**      **The Age of 'Separate Spheres': Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Gender Question**  
Main text (required):  
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886).  
Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (1894) & *The Awakening* (1899).
- Dec. 1**        **'How the Other Half Lives': Stephen Crane and the Challenge of Impoverishment**  
Main text (required):  
Stephen Crane, excerpts from *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893): ch. I, II, XIX.  
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).
- Dec. 8**        **No class!**  
*Relax and enjoy!*
- Dec. 15**      **Darwinism in America: Frank Norris and the *bête humaine***  
Main text (required):  
Frank Norris, excerpts from *McTeague, A Story of San Francisco* (1899): ch. 1-2, 7 (parts) 18, 19, 22 (parts).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904).  
Jack London, *The Abysmal Brute* (1913).  
Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute* (1914).
- Jan. 12**      **America and the Lost Generation: Ernest Hemingway's Battle with Masculinity**  
Main text (required):  
Ernest Hemingway, "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1936).  
Additional authors and texts (optional):  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925).  
William Faulkner, *Light in August* (1932).  
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).  
Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).
- Jan. 19**      **Final Exam**
- Jan. 26**      **Wrap-Up**