

American literary canons: traditions, schools, movements
BMA-AMED-101
Spring 2018

Tue 11:00-12:30, Rm 356
Instructor: Enikő Bollobás
Office hrs: Thu 12-13, Office: 312

This core graduate course is an advanced survey of American literature, the several traditions, movements, schools, and trends that make up its diverse canons. It builds on a basic knowledge of American literature accumulated in survey courses at the BA level and through your own readings. Here we will explore the internal dynamics of canon formation: the ways authors tackled the social issues and artistic demands of their times and often came up with similar or at least comparable solutions—in other words, how they created literary movements, schools, and traditions.

MA students typically come from different schools, some of which are not even humanities institutions. Therefore, their familiarity with the basic canon of American literature will vary. However, since this is a graduate course taking a step further from the basics, students must build the foundations in retrospect, if necessary. This is how they can do this.

- (i) Students who feel they have gaps regarding the foundational readings are strongly advised to read through the texts of the classical canon. This includes the study of (as well as reading, comprehending, interpreting, and even arguing with) the relevant chapters of a recent literary history.
 - a. For Hungarian students, this is Enikő Bollobás's *Az amerikai irodalom története* (2005) (which was one of your required readings for the admission interview already) or *Az amerikai irodalom rövid története* (2015);
 - b. for foreign students, the recommended literary history is Richard Gray's *A History of American Literature* (2004) or *A Brief History of American Literature* (2011).
- (ii) In addition, students are free to attend the lectures and seminars announced for BA students: AmLit1 and AmLit3 (fall) and AmLit2 and AmLit4 (spring).

Grades will be based on

- (i) the exhibited comprehension of the assigned texts,
- (ii) a total of seven pieces of written homework,
- (iii) classroom work, involving active participation as well as the random presentation of written homework,
- (iv) a final oral exam.

If any part of this grade is a 1 (fail grade), the final grade is a 1 too.

Attendance. ELTE students have the right to miss three classes per semester. But remember: not reading the assignments of the day or not writing the assigned homework counts as an absence here (even if you are physically present) and is therefore included into the three possible absences you can accumulate.

Reading and comprehending the assigned texts. Students are required to come prepared for class: having read & annotated their assignments for the day, they must be able to understand

the texts (know the words as well as the main topics and thematics, forms and structures, theses and arguments), remember details, and formulate their critical comments. Always bring the readings to class.

*Written homework.*¹ Students will submit a total of seven pieces of homework through the semester. This exercise will help you practice certain critical reading strategies necessary for the serious study of scholarly writing and get a grasp of academic editing conventions.

- Annotations will be carried out in longhand on the margins of the poetic texts themselves, while outlines will be (type)written as separate documents.

- As to your outlines of the critical essays (Bollobás, Perloff), make sure you allow yourself ample time to go through the texts several times so you really understand the set of claims and the whole paradigm. Have a conceptual map in your mind which you can present in class. These multilevel outlines should not exceed a total of one thousand words each. Give word count at the end of your paper.

- Plot outlines will not exceed a total of 600 words. Do not get lost in details: select what is more important, leave out what is less. **DO NOT TAKE THEM OFF THE INTERNET, DO NOT PLAGIARIZE.**

- Observe the rules of grammar, esp. tense agreement, subject/predicate agreement, word choice. Follow the rules of American English punctuation (esp. commas, quotation marks) in all places.

- Apply US editing conventions in general, and MLA guidelines in particular, with scrupulous attention. Remember, editing conventions are like street signs, and if you do not pass the street sign test, you will not be allowed to drive a car. In other words, the prerequisite for getting a grade is your full observation of these rules.

PLAGIARISM is a serious academic offense, which will result in a failing grade (i.e. you fail the course, no matter what). (See university and SEAS regulations.) Plagiarism includes “borrowings” that range from the appropriation of only words and sentences of other people (without quotation marks) to whole texts copied from internet sources (without giving credit to those sources).

NO LATE SUBMISSIONS. Please pay particular attention to your assignments. Deadlines and requirements will be observed seriously, with no chance for make-up papers. What you submit in class will be considered your final version.

You will need to submit your written homework—in **HARD COPIES**—in class, before we discuss the relevant text. For pieces of homework submitted later that day, you lose one grade point; for those submitted even later, you lose one grade point each day. If you are absent from the class or if the class is cancelled for any reason, you must still submit your summary: just email me your homework before the class begins (bollobas.eniko@btk.elte.hu), and then leave the hard copy in my mailbox (in the department office [Rm 361]), or drop it in the **MESSAGES BOX** outside that office as soon as you can.

Texts. You will receive the harder-to-find texts in pdf form. These are the following:

- the Bollobás essay,
- a selection of modernist poetry,
- the Perloff essay.

¹ Pieces of homework will be formally polished, edited, down to the smallest detail, according to the MLA standard. Follow US spelling, typography, and editing conventions. Please put only your name (not mine) on the top of the paper (right hand corner), the course title, and the number of the written assignment. Just staple your submission, no need to put the sheets into plastic folders.

Classroom work. Be visible. Mere physical presence, even when you have read the assignments, is not enough: you have to prove your skills in reading, analysis, and argument in class discussions.

Presentation. As we discuss the various assigned texts, students will have an opportunity to present their written assignments.

Oral exam. This exam will cover all the readings, primary and secondary. Moreover, students will be asked to explain the instructor's comments on their homework.

Schedule of classes and assignments

Orientation, assignments

Emily Dickinson

Reading assignment

Poems #199, 448, 465, 505, 508, 527, 528, 633, 742, 754, 883, 906, 1072, 1632 (numbers referring to the Johnson edition) (FIND POEMS IN THE JOHNSON EDITION [SEAS LIBRARY]; BRING TEXTS TO CLASS.)

Enikő Bollobás's essay, "Circumference & Co.—Catachresis as the Trope of Performativity in Emily Dickinson's Poetry" (pdf)

Written assignment

1. Write annotations to each poem (to be submitted)
2. Write a multi-level outline (max. 3 pages total) of the Bollobás essay

Modernist poetry

Reading assignment

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (find text)

selection of radical modernist poetry (pdf)

T. E. Hulme, "Autumn," "Conversion"; F. S. Flint, "The Swan"

Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," "L'art, 1910," "Alba," "Doria," "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," "A Girl," "Li Po," "Pagani's, November 8," "The Tea Shop"

William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow," "Poem," "The Great Figure," "The Rose," "Portrait of a Lady," "Queen Anne's Lace," "This Is Just To Say," "As the Cat"

(BRING TEXTS TO CLASS.)

Marjorie Perloff, "Unreal Cities" (pdf)

Written assignment

3. Annotate *The Waste Land*

Your annotations must include:

- (i) Eliot's own Notes to the text;
- (ii) your own findings of the various literary and cultural sources (which you will research in books and on the internet);
- (iii) your own cultural associations;
- (iv) your translations of unknown words.

(FIND THE TEXT AND BRING IT TO CLASS WITH YOUR ANNOTATIONS ON IT)

4. Write a multi-level outline (max. 3 pages total) of Marjorie Perloff's essay

Modern(ist) fiction I

Reading assignment

Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle* (find text)

Reading assignment

5. Write a plot outline of the story

Moder(nist) fiction II

Reading assignment

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (find text)

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants," "A Very Short Story" (find texts)

William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (find text)

Postmodern fiction

Reading assignment

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (find text)

Written assignment

6. Write a plot outline of the novel

Postmodern texts

Reading assignment

David Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (find text)

Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (find text)

The female tradition I

Reading assignment

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (find text)

Susan Glaspell, *Trifles [The Jury of Her Peers]* (find text)

The female tradition II

Reading assignment

Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (find text)

Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (find text)

Written assignment

7. Write a plot outline

FINAL ORAL EXAM

Texts posted

1. Enikő Bollobás's essay, "Circumference & Co"
2. selection of modernist poetry
3. Marjorie Perloff, "Unreal Cities"