

## **U.S. Literary Canons in International Perspective**

This seminar will explore the various canons of U.S. literature in their international contexts. Assuming that the literary canon as a changing cultural construct expresses society's image of itself, we will examine literature as the vehicle for national self-expression and self-definition (most obviously, as colony or empire). But since the premise of the course is that literature is dense with a multiple heritage and with international relations and interests, we will go beyond the national and examine how U.S. literary canons evolved as cultural formations with international dimensions. To provoke the critical-historical imagination, then, we will follow the comparative routes of (i) the classical "Western"/American canon, (ii) the canon of representation, and (iii) the canon of experimentation. In these instances both literary and critical connections will be examined. The time frame of the course is the outgoing 20th century, in terms of its two major literary movements: modernism and postmodernism, in both fiction and poetry. Although for methodological reasons we try proceed along distinctions made among the various canons, esthetic criteria, chronology, and genres, overlappings within all these categories are inevitable (and probably desirable too).

### **Topics and assignments**

#### **1. The three canons: Canon of colonization, canon of representation, the canon of experimentation**

- Paul Lauter, "Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon," "The Two Criticisms"
- Harold Bloom, "An Elegy for the Canon"
- Enikő Bollobás, "Avatars of Tradition: Rainbows, Floodgates, and Enemy Camps in the U.S. Canon Debate"
- Charles Altieri, "An Idea and Ideal of Literary Canon"
- Donald Pease, *boundary 2*

#### **2. Power and powerlessness: Fantasy, hallucination, and the real**

- Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"
- Jorge Luis Borges, "The End of the Duel"
- Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*
- Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*

#### **3. The "woman question" and the New Woman**

- Mary Wilkins Freeman, "The Revolt of 'Mother'"
- Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen"
- Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
- Lev N. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
- Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*
- Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

#### **4. The modern gothic vs. magical realism**

- Isaac Bashevis Singer, "A Crown of Feathers"
- Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"
- Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis"
- Gabriel García Márquez, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"
- Jorge Luis Borges, "The Secret Miracle"
- Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"
- Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

#### **5. "The Racial Mountain" and Masquerade: Black Bodies (That Matter)**

- Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*
- Richard Wright, *Native Son*
- Hazel Rowley, "The First Best-Selling Black American Writer: Richard Wright and the Book-of-the-Month-Club"

#### **6. Postmodernisms**

- Hans Bertens, "The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and its Relation to Modernism: an Introductory Survey"

#### **7. Self-Reflexive Fiction: History as Autobiography, Autobiography as Fiction**

- Richard Kostelanetz, "Twenty-Five Fictional Hypotheses"
- Ronald Sukenick, "The Death of the Novel"
- Thomas Pynchon, "Entropy"

#### **8. Bilingualism: writing (in the margin) allegories of marginality**

- Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
- Sylvia Söderlind, "Margins and Metaphors: The Politics of Post-"
- Raymond Federman, "A Voice Within a Voice"
- Ronald Sukenick, "The New Tradition in Fiction"

#### **9. Reshuffling history**

- J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*
- Brenda K. Marshall, "Critique of Representation and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*"
- John Thieme, "Passages to England"

#### **10. Feminist Postmodernism/The Postmodern Female Machine**

- Laurie Anderson, *Americans on the Move*
- Cindy Sherman
- Thomas Pynchon, *V.*

#### **10. Early modernism in poetry**

- Introduction, "Prologue to Forerunners"
- texts by: Walt Whitman, Charles Baudelaire, Emily Dickinson, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Stein, Rilke, Apollinaire, Kafka, Loy, Pound, Duchamp
- L. Moholy-Nagy, "The Function of Art," "Space-Time Problems"
- Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades'"

#### **11. The early movements: Futurism, Expressionism, Dada**

- "Prologue to Futurism I," "Prologue to Futurism II"
- texts by: Marinetti, Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky
- "Prologue to Expressionism"
- texts by: Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Trakl

- "Prologue to Dada"
- texts by: Tzara, Ball, Arp, Picabia Duchamp, Freytag-Loringhoven
- > L. Moholy-Nagy, "Literature"

## **12. Elsewhere/otherwise**

- texts by: Stein, Rilke, Stevens, Williams, Pound, H.D., Moore, Mandelstam, Vallejo, Tsvetayeva, Cummings, Blaga, Montale, Lorca
- "Prologue to 'Objectivists'"
- texts by: Williams, Oppen, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Niedecker, Riding, Illyés, Radnóti, Rukeyser
- Michael Davidson, "Postmodern Poetry and the Material Text"
- Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson, "Duende, Muse, and Angel"

## **13. Négritude, "origins"**

- "Prologue to Négritude"
- texts by: Césaire, Senghor, Damas
- Clayton Eshleman, "A Visionary Note on Césaire Vallejo and William Blake," "Vallejo and the Indigenous"
- "Prologue to Origins"
- texts by: Pound, Senghor, Prabhu Eshleman, Duncan, Baraka, Aborigine, Tzara, Césaire, Ortiz, Mac Low, Olson, Bacharach, Jabes
- Jerome Rothenberg, "Pre-Face"

## **14. Poetry in the dark**

- texts by: Olson, Celan, Akhmatova, Sankichi, Bachmann, Artaud, Rukeyser, Holan, Beckett, Duncan, Levertov, Creeley
- Clayton Eshleman, "The Stevens-Artaud Rainbow"

## **15. Ultimate decenterings: poetry on the boundaries**

- texts by Cage, Mac Low
- Concrete Poetry section, Oral Poetry section; Antin, Baraka, Language Poetry
- Marjorie Perloff, "John Cage's 'What You Say'"
- Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence*

## Bibliography

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*The Short Story: 30 Masterpieces*, ed. Beverly Lawn. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
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Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*  
Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*  
Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*  
Lev N. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*  
Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*  
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*  
Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*  
*Borges: A Reader*, ed. Emir Rodriguez Moengal and Alastair Reid. New York: Dutton, 1981.  
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*  
Richard Wright, *Native Son*
- Raymond Federman, *A Version of My Life; Double or Nothing* (1971)  
*Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow*, ed. Raymond Federman. Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1975.  
*History and Memory in African American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre & Robert O'Meally. Oxford UP, 1994.  
Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. Oxford UP, 1986.  
Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.  
Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.  
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Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists*.  
Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*.  
Alain Locke, *The New Negro*  
Werner Sollors, from *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*  
Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America*. Rutgers UP, 1998.  
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Denise Levertov, *New and Selected Essays*. New York: New Directions, 1992.  
*Sound States. Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adelaide Morris. U of North Carolina Press, 1997.  
*The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1982.