

# CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

## SYLLABUS

Fall Semester 2016

Associate Professor Oksana Starshova

### Course Description

The course gives a general overview of the development of American literature since the 1950s, introduces you to selected works representing major trends in American literature since the end of World War II. This course examines a selection of contemporary American fiction in historic, aesthetic, and social contexts. In other words, we will explore the relationship between contemporary American literature and the world we live in. Topics may include literature and postmodern culture, how aesthetic style may be influenced by social and historical conditions, the blurring of fact and fiction in contemporary literature, and how literature is affected by issues of race, class, and gender. The course should help you think, talk and write more effectively about your reading. It consists of 7 lecture classes and 7 seminars, which will cover the following range of topics:

- Beat Generation. Poetry of the Beats
- Black Humor
- Development of American Postmodernism
- Multiculturalism in American Literature: Native American, Jewish American, African American, Asian American, Hispanic Literature, etc.
- Development of American Drama
- American Literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### Course Requirements

- 1) *Class Participation*: Because this is a discussion class, participation is Extremely Important. I expect everyone to do the reading and to help create a supportive environment in which all students are able to honestly express opinions on the texts.
- 2) *Writing Assignments*: one 4-5 page research/analytical essay submitted by **25 November** based on research on a chosen topic. This is a short critical response paper, based on your own close reading of a particular text. Read all the pieces in the list below (one or the other), then choose one story or poem to write about. Reread it carefully, taking notes as if you were carrying on a conversation with the text. Then think about your response to that piece, perhaps by exploring why you chose it (but be sure to focus on the qualities of the piece itself and not simply compare to others as better or worse). Then return to the piece and your notes to examine how specific features of the story contributed to your response, or how upon further and close reading, you now have questions about your initial response. Finally, write a short essay, developing these ideas into a coherent essay, as detailed and specific as you can make it. I prefer that my students select topics of personal interest. Papers drawn from the Internet **will not** be graded. Plagiarism and late papers are not accepted. The objective of this assignment is to develop students' critical approach to literature.
- 3) *Author Presentation*: a 5-minute presentation of the biography of an author (up to 10 slides).
- 4) *Reading Responses*: There will be unannounced short in-class writing or oral assignments, each a response to the assigned reading, given throughout the semester.

During the course we will read short stories and drama pieces most of which can be found in *Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

### Final Grade in the course is based on the following:

- 1) Class participation at each class period – **50% of course grade**
- 2) Critical essay – **10 % of course grade**
- 3) Presentation – **10 % of course grade**
- 4) Final exam – **30 % of course grade**

## Class Schedule

### Lectures

- Lecture 1.* Introduction. Postwar American literature. Non-conformism in literature and culture. The Beat Generation and High Sixties. Counterculture. A. Miller. W.Burroughs. J.Kerouac.
- Lecture 2.* “Black Humor” in American literature. K.Vonnegut *Slaughterhouse-5*. J.Heller *Catch 22*. From “Black Humor” to postmodernism. Discussion of K.Kesey’s novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Narrative strategies of the book and the film.
- Lecture 3.* Development of American postmodernism. J.Barth *Lost in the Funhouse*. *Chimera (Dunyazadiad)*.
- Lecture 4.* Versions of postmodernism. D.Barthelme *At the End of the Mechanical Age*. American Minimalism. R.Carver *Cathedral*.
- Lecture 5.* Multiculturalism in American literature. African American voices. A.Walker *Everyday Use*.
- Lecture 6.* Border consciousness and hybrid consciousness. G.Anzaldua *Towards a New Consciousness*. S.Cisneros *Barbie-Q. Mericans*. J.Lahiri *Interpreter of Maladies*.
- Lecture 7.* Development of American drama. T.Williams *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Postcolonial criticism and D.Hwang’s play *M.Butterfly*.

### Seminars

- Seminar 1.* The Beat character in A.Ginsberg’s *Howl*. Poetry reading: L.Ferlinghetti *Sometime During Eternity...* G. Corso *Marriage*.
- Seminar 2.* Non-conformism vs middle class. J.D.Salinger *The Catcher in the Rye*. Counterculture in J.Kerouac’s novel *On the Road*.
- Seminar 3.* The idea of entropy in modern culture. Th.Pynchon *Entropy*.
- Seminar 4.* Literature of American reality. J.C.Oates *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?* J.Updike *Separating*.
- Seminar 5.* Issues of race and gender in modern America. L.M.Silko. *Lullaby*. T.Morrison *Recitatif*.
- Seminar 6.* Rethinking history – reconstructing America in E.Doctorow’s novel *Ragtime* and T.Morrison’s novel *A Mercy*.
- Seminar 7.* Chicano identity in R.Anaya’s novel *Bless me, Ultima*.

### *Reading List*

J.D.Salinger <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> .	A.Walker <i>Everyday Use</i> .
J.Updike <i>Separating</i> .	T.Williams <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> .
K.Vonnegut. <i>Slaughterhouse-5</i> .	D.Hwang <i>M.Butterfly</i> .
K.Kesey <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest</i> .	R.Carver <i>Cathedral</i> .
J.Kerouac <i>On the Road</i> .	D.Barthelme <i>At the End of the Mechanical Age</i> .
A.Ginsberg <i>Howl</i> .	E.Doctorow <i>Ragtime</i> .
L.Ferlinghetti <i>Sometime During Eternity...</i>	L.M.Silko. <i>Lullaby</i> .
G. Corso <i>Marriage</i> .	T.Morrison <i>Recitatif. A Mercy</i>
J.C.Oates <i>Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?</i>	J.Lahiri <i>Interpreter of Maladies</i> .
Th.Pynchon <i>Entropy</i> .	G.Anzaldua <i>Towards a New Consciousness</i> .
J.Barth <i>Chimera (Dunyazadiad). Lost in the Funhouse</i> .	R.Anaya. <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i>
S.Cisneros <i>Barbie-Q. Mericans</i> .	