

The History of American Literature

Spring 2017

Instructor Info:

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Office: Skolkovo 2.07

Office Hours: Mondays 14:00-16:00 or by appointment

Course Description:

What does it mean to have a national literature? What methods are we to use in order to discern what counts as a piece of a nation's literature? Is it limited by language? Geography? National borders? When it comes to defining the nature of American literature, we are befuddled by the multi-national polyglot history of the North American continent and the United States as a political entity. Beginning with the colonial period, this course will offer a survey of American letters from the point in time when people living in North America were either natives or subjects of European monarchies on up to the middle of the twentieth century. It will also ask students to reconsider their associations with the word "American" by looking at its many myths and meanings.

The list of authors covered aims to be diverse but cannot possibly be comprehensive. Through written assignments, students will explore both within and outside the version of the canon offered by the instructor in order to arrive at their own conclusions about how literature reflects notions of "Americanness" from their own perspectives. Any historical overview of literature is in and of itself an act of storytelling, and while this course presents its own particular narrative, it will ideally serve as a vantage point from which students can view other possibilities.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Perform "close reading"—reading that is sensitive to the nuances of language, the importance of form and genre, and the use of literary devices.
- Interpret literary texts according to three critical approaches: Formal, Historical, and Cultural.
- Demonstrate advanced proficiency in written English.
- Write short critical papers about literary works that consist of a strong, original thesis and supporting evidence from the text.
- Deliver honest, constructive feedback to peers during peer review and workshop sessions.
- Thoughtfully revise essays based on incorporation of peer and instructor feedback.

Required Texts:

Provided on my.nes.ru

Assessment:

Reading Quizzes – 15%

Group Discussions – 15%

Short Assignments – 30%

Final Project – 30%

Final Presentation – 10%

Attendance:

Regular and timely attendance is essential to doing well in this class. You are counted absent if you miss more than twenty minutes of any given class period. You are allowed 4 "free" absences for the

entire semester. Each subsequent absence will result in the deduction of 1 point from your final grade. The only absences that are excused are those that have been documented and approved by the Joint Program office.

Late Papers:

Short Assignments – All papers are due by midnight on the day listed on the syllabus. Papers submitted by the deadline will be graded and returned to you promptly and may be revised and resubmitted once for a better grade. Papers submitted after the deadline will be graded whenever I get to it and may not be revised.

Final Project – The deadline for the final project is absolute. In extraordinary circumstances, requests for an extension may be made *in writing* at least *one week* before the deadline. Just because a request is made does not mean it will be granted.

Make-up Work:

If a student receives a failing grade in the course, he/she must complete any major assignments that resulted in the failing grade. These assignments must be completed during the designated make-up period and will be assessed by a three-member panel, including the course instructor. To determine the student's final grade, the make-up assignments will be plugged into the regular assessment formula with all grades previously earned in the class. Some assignments (participation, peer reviews, proposals, and select short assignments) cannot be made up and will stay recorded as zeros for the purpose of final assessment.

Electronics:

Unless use is authorized during group activities, laptops must be put away during class. Phones and tablets may be used as dictionaries, to access assigned readings, and to record lectures but must be kept silent. Suspected inappropriate use of electronics will result in points deducted from your participation grade.

Classroom Etiquette:

Students are expected to observe the following basic rules of classroom decorum:

- You must come to class on time.
- When the instructor or another student is talking in front of the class, you should not be talking.
- If discussion is happening in class, you should not be conducting side conversations with your friends.
- If you find yourself becoming sleepy during class, you are permitted to leave the room for a few minutes to collect yourself. Under no circumstances should your head be on your desk.

Blatant violations of these rules (talking during student presentations, excessive lateness, sleeping during class) may result in an unexcused absence or deductions from your participation grade.

Academic Honesty:

This course seeks to uphold the Joint Program's commitment to ensuring academic honesty. All work submitted in this class must be the student's own. Assignments calling for the use of outside sources must contain both a Reference page and in-text citations or footnotes. APA and MLA are the standard citation formats for this course. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Joint Program administration.

Communication:

Students should check their nes.ru email accounts regularly, as important information about the course (emergency cancellations, deadline changes) may be communicated in that way. Email is also the best way to reach me, though you should understand that I generally do not respond to email after 22:00 or before 9:00. If you have a question about an assignment, you should not wait until the night before it is due to ask.

The Writing and Communication Center

The WCC is a free student support service designed to assist you with all your writing needs during your time in the program (and even after you graduate). Consultants (both English and Russian speakers) are available to meet with you for 45-minute sessions. You may sign up for a consultation using the “WCC” tab on my.nes.ru. Limited walk-in hours are also available. For further information, see the WCC’s website at wcc.nes.ru and follow the WCC’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/neswcc).

Schedule (*subject to change*):

Homework assignments and required readings are listed on the date they are due. All written assignments are due online by 23:59 pm on the date listed.

Week 1 (Jan 10 - 13)

T – No class (conference)

Th – Introduction – What does it mean to have a national literature?

Week 2 (Jan 16 - 20)

T – Excerpts from Smith, “The General History of Virginia”; Bradford, “Of Plymouth Plantation”

Th – Anne Bradstreet, selected poems; excerpts from Mary Rowlandson, “A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson”

Week 3 (Jan 23 - 27)

T – Benjamin Franklin, “The Way to Wealth”; The Federalist 1&10

Th – William Apess, “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man”; Phyllis Wheatley, selected poems

Week 4 (Jan 30 – Feb 3)

T – Washington Irving, “Rip van Winkle”; Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” (Group Discussion)

Th – Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”; Henry David Thoreau, excerpt from *Walden* (Cancelled)

Week 5 (Feb 6 – 10)

T – Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (up to p. 1172 in scan)

Th – Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (whole novella) (Group Discussion)

Short Essay 1 Due

Week 6 (Feb 13 – 17)

T – Walt Whitman, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”, “The Wound Dresser”

Th – Emily Dickenson, selected poems

Week 7 (Feb 20 – 24)

T – Mark Twain, *Puddn’head Wilson*, Ch. 1-5

Th – Federal Holiday – no class

Week 8 (Feb 27 – March 3)

T – Mark Twain, *Puddn’head Wilson*, Ch. 6-17 (Group Discussion)

Th – Mark Twain, *Puddn’head Wilson*, Ch. 18-end

Short Essay 2 Due

Week 9 (Mar 6 - 10)

T – Henry James, “Daisy Miller: A Study”
Th – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Group Discussion)

Week 10 (Mar 13 - 17)

T – Zitkala-Sa, “Impressions from an Indian Childhood”
Th – Jack London, “To Build a Fire”; Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat” (Group Discussion)

Week 11 (Mar 20 - 24)

T – Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, Book I, Chs. 1-15
Th – Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, Book I, Ch. 16 – Book II, Ch. 5 (Group Discussion)

Short Essay 3 due

Week 12 (Mar 27 - 31)

Consultation Week - no classes

Week 13 (Apr 3 – 7)

T – Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, Book II, Ch. 6 – Book IV, Ch. 4 (Group Discussion)
Th – Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, Book V – end (Group Discussion)

Final Project Proposal Due

Week 14 (Apr 10 – 14)

T – Gertrude Stein, selected poems
Th – Wallace Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West”

Week 15 (Apr 17 – 21)

T – Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”, “After Apple Picking”
Th – Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (Group Discussion)

Week 16 (Apr 24 – 28)

T – Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, Ch. 1-6
Th – Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*, Ch. 7 – end (Group Discussion)

Week 17 (May 1 – 5)

Spring Holidays – no class

Week 18 (May 8 – 12)

T – Spring Holidays – no class
Th – Presentations on recent works

Week 19 (May 15 – 19)

T - Presentations on recent works
Th - Presentations on recent works

Final Projects due

Week 20 (May 22 – 26)

Exam Week – no classes