

Contemporary American Literature  
Autumn 2020  
Professor A. Soltysik Monnet  
Zoom link: <https://unil.zoom.us/j/96591462637>  
Password: overlook

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Moodle key: CAL2020

## Syllabus: Contemporary American Literature

**Objectives:** The main objective of this class is to expose students to a range of recent North American fiction, with a focus on the heterogeneity of the current literary scene. In order to make sense of the diversity of texts we read, we will examine them through the critical lenses offered by concepts such as postmodernism, post-postmodernism, ethnic American literature, neorealism and regionalism, performativity, utopian and dystopian fiction, and gender.

Sept. 16: Introduction to Contemporary American Fiction

Sept. 23: “Introduction” to *Postmodern American Fiction* & Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman” from *The Woman Warrior* (1975)

Class discussion organized by teacher, sign-ups for class discussion

Sept. 30: Toni Morrison, “Recitatif” (1983)

Critical reading: bell hooks, “Postmodern blackness”

Student-led class discussion:

Oct. 7: Margaret Atwood, excerpt from *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986)

Discussion:

Oct. 14: Octavia Butler, “Blood Child” (1984) and excerpt from *Imago* novel (1989)

Critical reading: Donna Haraway, “Cyborg Manifesto”

Discussion:

Oct. 21: Mathieu Donner, guest lecture on Octavia Butler and African-American speculative fiction

*First written assignment passed out*

Oct. 28: Ernest Callenbach, excerpt from *Ecotopia* (1975)

Discussion:

Nov. 4: Reading week

Nov. 11: Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

Chapters 2, 3 and 7 (especially 2 and 7)

Discussion:

*First written assignment due*

Nov. 18: Louise Erdrich, from *Four Souls* (2004)

Nov. 25: Louise Erdrich, from *Four Souls*, continued & critical essay by J. Peterson  
Discussion:

Dec. 2: Annie Proulx, “Brokeback Mountain” (1999)

Dec. 9: David Foster Wallace, short story

Discussion:

*2<sup>nd</sup> written assignment passed out (due Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> at the latest)*

Dec. 16 : Lydia Davis, “The Caterpillar” & final discussion

### **Course Requirements:**

1. active participation in discussions
2. one group discussion animation – preparing questions and leading the discussion
3. 2 take-home written assignments (answering questions with short essay answers)

**Group discussion:** Preparing questions on the readings and topics for the day, or a short presentation on material for the class, providing critical background information and raising pertinent questions for class discussion. The questions should be sent to me the night before. You will lead the discussion with a group of 3-5 students in a break-out room for 20 minutes and then report back to the class.

**Course Material:** Everything will be on Moodle.

**Take-home written assignments:** You will receive a set of questions, from which you will need to select 2 or 3 each time (plus a short passage analysis as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> assignment), and you will answer the questions in short essay form. These assignments will be completed at home and uploaded to Moodle. Due dates: Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> and Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>

### **Official course registration**

The deadline for registration for courses, evaluations and January exams is **Oct. 11, 2020**. Please note that you must register for both the class and the relevant *évaluation* in order to receive credits.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> year exam**

You may choose to present a 3<sup>rd</sup> year BA exam on this class. *Mobilitéé IN students are not required to take faculty exams*. If you plan to present the exam in **January** you need to sign up for the exam by the **11<sup>th</sup> of Oct., 2020**. You may choose between a 4-hour written and a half-hour oral exam. In either case the exam will require you to have knowledge of all the material covered in the seminar. You will also **present a personal reading list** of (around 8) primary and secondary texts (from your own library research). The deadline for submitting your reading list to me is Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>.

In the **written exam** you will be given a choice of three questions and you will answer one question only. In the **oral exam** there will be one question only, which will require you to closely analyze a passage of a text studied in the seminar, and then use that passage as a springboard for discussing the work it is from, and the themes of the class.

### **Extended essay**

You may choose to write an extended essay for an **extra 2 credits**. This essay involves independent research and requires in-depth treatment of a theme related to the seminar, and should

engage with primary and secondary texts not treated extensively during class time. Students will negotiate a topic with the teacher and then will work independently on the essay, which should be c. 4000 words long. This essay should normally be submitted by the **Jan. 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021**.

**Bibliography:**

Geyh, Paula, Fred G. Leebron, Andrew Levy. *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology*. New York: Norton and Co., 1998.