

Amerika-Haus-**B**ibliothek Schülervortrag

April 17, 2012, 5:30 p.m.

The 20th-Century American Novel

Speaker: Dr. Sascha Pöhlmann, Amerika-Institut, LMU München

This lecture aims to give a general overview of 20th-century American fiction. We will discuss major thematic concerns and formal methods as well as the respective sociopolitical contexts of the texts, attempting to give a broad survey over a large variety of novels.

Starting with canonical Modernist novels by writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, we will address the radical break with earlier literary movements and seek to characterize just what Ezra Pound could have meant when he told Modernists to "Make it new!" Building on this discussion, we will then move to the second half of the 20th century, to Postmodernism and its continuities and discontinuities with Modernism in novels by Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, John Barth, Don DeLillo, Vladimir Nabokov, and Bret Easton Ellis. We will take in the Beat Generation and Jack Kerouac along the way, and speak about some of those that fall through the meshes of these broad categories, such as Sylvia Plath, John Steinbeck, or Leslie Feinberg.

Special emphasis will be placed on African-American writers such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison; we will also address the role of the ethnic novel using Maxine Hong Kingston as an example. Genres such as science fiction (Philip K. Dick) and horror (Stephen King) that have been unduly ignored by literary scholars for a long time are included as well, just like the graphic novel (Art Spiegelman). The overview ends with an outlook on contemporary fiction, exemplified by writers like Richard Powers or Mark Z. Danielewski.

The lecture targets an audience that is not familiar with any or most of these texts. It provides basic information about the major developments in American fiction in the 20th century by presenting and discussing selected passages from all of the texts, aiming to make them accessible as well as memorable even to those who have not read them while placing them in their respective literary, historical, cultural and socio-political context.

Fee: 1 Euro

Registration for students of the "Gymnasiale Oberstufe" and teachers:

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