

# Postmodernism, New Ethnic Literatures, Recent Developments: U.S. Literature from the Second World War to the Age of Hegemony

(Prof. Dr. Frank Kelleter)

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 1:

### "AGES OF ANXIETY: U.S. CULTURE DURING AND AFTER THE COLD WAR"

(Required Reading: Alfred Hornung, "Postmoderne bis zur Gegenwart," *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Hubert Zapf (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997), 304-375; and from the fifth edition of *The Enduring Vision*, ed. Paul Boyer et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004): Chapter 27 "America at Midcentury" (843-873), Chapter 29 "A Time of Upheaval" (905-932)

Suggested Further Reading: from *The Enduring Vision*: Chapter 26 "The Cold War At Home and Abroad" (815-841), Chapter 28 "The Liberal Era" (875-903); and from Richard Ruland, Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991): Chapter 11 "Strange Realities, Adequate Fictions" (369-429).)

1. Why has American Cold War culture frequently been labeled a culture of "anxiety"?
2. Compare postwar American culture to earlier periods of social upheaval in American history (concentrating on the differences)!
3. Explain and contextualize the phrase "The private is political"!
4. In how far does the postwar global order present a challenge to the historical self-understanding of the United States as it existed before the Second World War?
5. Define the term *post-industrial society* (Daniel Bell)!
6. Define the terms *baby boomer* and *suburbanization*!
7. Describe the suburbs as a new *cultural* space!
8. Define the term "suburban sadness" (David Riesman) and find examples in American literature!
9. Explain the phenomenon of "sociological bestsellers" in postwar American culture!
10. What did Martin Luther King mean when he said that Johnson's Great Society was "shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam"?
11. Discuss "the decline of the liberal consensus" (*Enduring Vision*) as a legacy of the 1960s!
12. Define the terms *identity politics* and *culture wars*!
13. In how far can aesthetic postmodernism be called a "legacy of the 1960s"?

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 2:

### "REPRESSION AND HISTORY: MODERNISM WITH A DIFFERENCE IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* (1947) AND ARTHUR MILLER'S *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* (1949)"

(Required Reading: Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Miller, *Death of a Salesman*.)

Suggested Further Reading: Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*)

#### General

1. Situate *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman* in the history of American drama!
2. The importance of Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players for Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller.
3. Describe the development of modernism after 1945!

#### ***A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)**

1. Which formal elements define *A Streetcar Named Desire* as a modernist play?
2. In how far can the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* be described as a typically modernist plot?
3. Interpret the character constellation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*!
4. In how far can *A Streetcar Named Desire* be described as a play about Southern culture?
5. The theme of play-acting and make-believe in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.
6. In how far is *A Streetcar Named Desire* dependent on its historical setting?

#### ***Death of a Salesman* (1949)**

1. Situate *Death of a Salesman* in its historical context, contrasting it to *A Streetcar Named Desire*!
2. Do you consider the term "American Dream" useful for understanding *Death of a Salesman*?
3. What does Arthur Miller mean when he calls his play "the tragedy of the common man"?
4. Inform yourself about Arthur Miller's political and intellectual background. In how far is this information relevant for understanding *Death of a Salesman*?
5. The theme of play-acting and make-believe in *Death of a Salesman*.
6. Sentimentalism and the theme of the past in *Death of a Salesman*.
7. Situate Miller's critique of American capitalism in its historical contexts! What socio-economic developments does the play comment on?
8. Interpret and contextualize Willy Loman's ethos of being "well liked"!
9. Interpret Willy Loman's search for "the secret"! What answer does the play provide?
10. Comment on the presence of household and entertainment machines in *Death of a Salesman*!
11. Interpret the final lines of *Death of a Salesman*!

### STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 3:

#### "IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL BATHROOM: JOHN UPDIKE AND J.D. SALINGER"

(Required Reading: from Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*: chapters 1-4, 6-9, 12, 16, 18, 21-23, 25, 26, Updike, "Separating.")

(Suggested Further Reading: Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* in its entirety or Updike, *Rabbit, Run*.)

#### ***The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)**

1. Situate *The Catcher in the Rye* in American literary history! What are important models?
2. Holden Caulfield as narrator and character: Interpret the opening paragraph!
3. Relate *The Catcher in the Rye* to the history of adolescence (understood as a cultural concept)! In how far does *The Catcher in the Rye* tell an initiation story?
4. The cultural significance of the "prep school" environment in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
5. The function of New York City in Salinger's novel.
6. The act of spending money and its function in the novel.
7. Popular culture, mass culture, and youth culture in the novel.
8. Interpret the term "phony" as it is used by Holden Caulfield!
9. Relate *The Catcher in the Rye* to theories of social interaction and role-playing in the American 1950s and 1960s.
10. Authority figures in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
11. The lack of parental authority as a pervasive theme in Fifties-culture (consider David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* as a historical document).
12. Family structures in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
13. Interpret the novel's title!
14. Sexuality and (adolescent) physicality in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
15. The theme of (adolescent) violence in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
16. Childhood and adolescence in the novel.
17. Interpret the ending of the novel!

#### **"Separating" (1975)**

1. Compare Updike's "Separating" to Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*! In how far can both texts be seen as commenting on post-industrial conditions? What are the differences?
2. Situate Updike's literature in American literary history!
3. Relate "Separating" to David Riesman's concept of "suburban sadness"!
4. Interpret the opening passage of "Separating"!
5. What is the significance of Updike's title "Separating"?
6. Analyze Updike's syntax in "Separating"! In how far is the meaning of the story dependent on the author's way of constructing sentences?
7. Interpret the scene in which Richard exchanges the lock! In how far is this scene *culturally significant*?
8. Comment on the protagonist's name in the Rabbit tetralogy!
9. Identify the most important structural and thematic features of the Rabbit tetralogy!
10. Situate Updike's Rabbit tetralogy in postwar American culture!
11. The novelist as chronicler in Updike's Rabbit tetralogy.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 4:**

### **"AFTER MODERNISM: LIFE STUDIES AND CONFESSIONAL POLITICS IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT LOWELL, SYLVIA PLATH, AND ADRIENNE RICH"**

(Required Reading: Lowell, "Inauguration Day: January 1953," "Memories of West Street and Lepke," "Skunk Hour"; Plath, "Lady Lazarus"; Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter in Law.")

(Suggested Further Reading: Lowell, "Sailing Home from Rapallo," "Man and Wife," "'To Speak of Woe That Is in Marriage'," "For the Union Dead"; Plath, "Daddy"; Anne Sexton, "Sylvia's Death"; Rich, "Diving into the Wreck.")

#### **I. Robert Lowell**

1. Stages of Lowell's career as a poet.
2. The importance of *Life Studies* to contemporary American poetry.
3. What is "confessional" poetry (especially in comparison to modernist poetry)?
4. The structure of *Life Studies*.
5. Imagery in Robert Lowell's "Inauguration Day."

#### **II. Robert Lowell: "Skunk Hour" (1959)**

1. The structure of the poem.
2. Formal aspects (pay special attention to figures of sound!).
3. The speaker's self-presentation.
4. Interpret the ending of the poem: What is the meaning of the skunks?
5. Compare "Skunk Hour" with Allen Ginsberg's "Howl": stylistic differences and parallels.

#### **III. Robert Lowell: "Memories of West Street and Lepke"**

1. The private and the public in Lowell's poetry.
2. Explain the title of "Memories of West Street and Lepke"!
3. Irony in the poem.

#### **IV. Sylvia Plath: "Lady Lazarus" (1962)**

1. Who is the speaker of "Lady Lazarus"? Are there various personae?
2. The representation of suicide.
3. Imagery in "Lady Lazarus".
4. Interpret the title of the poem!
5. Interpret and evaluate the references to the Holocaust!
6. The private and the public in "Lady Lazarus."
7. Interpret the ending of the poem! What mythical references can be found?
8. Formal characteristics of "Lady Lazarus."

#### **V. Adrienne Rich, especially "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" (1960/63)**

1. Different stages in Rich's career as a poet.
2. New Criticism and the question of gender.
3. Rich's interpretation of motherhood in *Of Woman Born*.
4. Interpret "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" line by line, paying special attention to imagery, leitmotifs, speaker and addressee, pronouns, structure, intertextual references, and development of an overall argument!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 5:

### "From Beat to Pop (Ginsberg, Mailer, Warhol)"

(Required Reading: Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California," "Howl," "Footnote to 'Howl'"; from Norman Mailer, "The White Negro": sections I, II, V, VI; from Andy Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*: chapter 6 "Work" (excerpts), chapter 15 "Underwear Power." Suggested Further Reading: Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "I Am Waiting"; Joan Didion, "Slouching towards Bethlehem.")

#### I. Allen Ginsberg and the Beat Movement

1. Define the terms "Beat Poetry" and "San Francisco Renaissance"!
2. Stylistic innovations of Beat poetry.
3. Typical themes in Beat poems.
4. The importance of *Howl and Other Poems* for the Beat movement.
5. The publishing history of "Howl."
6. Metapoetic reflections in "Howl."
7. Interpret the title of "Howl"!
8. Ginsberg's use of vulgarisms in "Howl."
9. Juxtaposition as a rhetorical principle in "Howl."
10. The structure of "Howl."
11. Is there an affirmative side to Ginsberg's cultural critique?
12. Stylistic influences on Ginsberg (compare "Howl" to Whitman's "Song of Myself").
13. Situation and structure of "A Supermarket in California."
14. The significance of pronouns in "A Supermarket in California."
15. The presence of Walt Whitman in "A Supermarket in California."
16. What is Garcia Lorca doing down by the watermelons?

#### II. Norman Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster" (1957)

1. Describe Norman Mailer's cultural position in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s! How does he situate himself towards the Beat Movement and towards the counterculture?
2. Mailer's approach to subculture (and subcultural meaning) in "The White Negro."
3. What does Mailer mean when he says that the Hipster is "the American existentialist"?
4. The themes of violence and vitalism in "The White Negro."
5. Political radicalism in "The White Negro."
6. Describe and evaluate the image of African American culture in "The White Negro"!
7. Paranoia in "The White Negro."

#### III. Andy Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*(1975)

1. Compare Andy Warhol to the Beats and to the counterculture: What are similarities, what are differences?
2. Andy Warhol's "Underwear Power" and Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California": Different understandings of commodification and consumer culture.
3. Analyze Warhol's syntax! What are characteristic features?
4. Pop Art as an attempt to transcend romanticism and modernism. Would you describe Warhol's art and prose as "postmodern"? Why?
5. Cold War dichotomies (inside/outside; seeming/being) in Andy Warhol's prose.
6. Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum and the art and prose of Andy Warhol.
7. The question of artificiality, imitation, and kitsch in Andy Warhol's prose.
8. Popular culture in Andy Warhol's art and prose.
9. What is Andy Warhol's image of America? In how far are American culture and postmodernism related, according to Warhol?

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 6:

### "African American Literature from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) to Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship* (1967/69)"

(Required Reading: from Ellison, *Invisible Man*: "Prologue," "Chapter I. [Battle Royal]"; Langston Hughes, "Harlem"; Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool"; Baraka, *Slave Ship*.)

(Suggested Further Reading: Ellison, *Invisible Man* in its entirety, especially "Epilogue.")

#### Introduction

1. Review the major developments of African American literature before 1945!
2. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" and African American literature in the twentieth century.
3. The importance of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) for postwar African American literature.

#### Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

1. Explicate the metaphor of invisibility and relate it to Du Bois's concept of black selfhood!
2. Personal experience and African American history in *Invisible Man*.
3. The presence of Booker T. Washington in *Invisible Man*.
4. Stages in the narrator's/protagonist's development.
5. Interpret the grandfather's deathbed speech!
6. Interpret the Battle Royal! Pay particular attention to the narrative situation and style of narration! Explain the difference between "social responsibility" and "social equality" in the narrator's speech after the Battle Royal.
7. Liminality and subversion in *Invisible Man*: Interpret the narrator's underground existence (narrative situation) and his struggle against Monopolated Light & Power!
8. Interpret the narrator's jazz references in the "Prologue," especially concerning his way of listening to Louis Armstrong records!
9. What does the narrator mean when he says, "I am in a state of hibernation"?
10. Interpret the "Epilogue," especially its ending!

#### The Civil Rights Era and Its End

1. Interpret Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem" (1951)!
2. Review and evaluate the major stages of the Civil Rights Movement!
3. Interpret Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "We Real Cool" (1960)!
4. Review and evaluate the emergence of the Black Power Movement!

#### LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka

1. Inform yourself about Jones'/Baraka's biography! In how far does it reflect general trends in American cultural history after World War II?
2. What is "the Black Arts Movement"? Name and explain its central aesthetic tenets!
3. Situate *Slave Ship* within the context of postwar experimental drama!
4. Formal features of *Slave Ship*. What does Baraka mean when he talks of "total atmosfeeling"? Why is the play called a pageant?
5. The rendition of Nat Turner's rebellion in *Slave Ship*.
6. Baraka's view of (African American) history in *Slave Ship*.
7. The presence of Martin Luther King in *Slave Ship*.
8. Interpret the final stage direction!
9. Situate *Slave Ship* in the larger context of (Western) cultural discourses in the 1960s and 1970s!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 7:

### "Jewish American Literature: Saul Bellow, Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth"

(Required Reading: Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green"; Ozick, "The Shawl"; from Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*: chapters "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," "Whacking Off," "The Jewish Blues" (excerpt), "In Exile," and "Punchline.")

(Suggested Further Reading: Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* in its entirety or *Sabbath's Theater*.)

#### I. Jewish American literature

1. Define the category *Jewish American* (comparing it to *African American* and *Native American*)!
2. Review the history of Jewish American literature before World War II! What are central themes and topics? What are common formal features?
3. What makes a piece of literature "Jewish American" today? Try to define thematic clusters and give examples!

#### II. Saul Bellow, "Looking for Mr. Green" (1951/68)

1. Is "Looking for Mr. Green" a short story about Jewish or Jewish American themes?
2. Explain the historical setting of "Looking for Mr. Green"!
3. "Looking for Mr. Green" as a story about signification.
4. Theological meaning(s) in "Looking for Mr. Green."
5. Interpret the ending of "Looking for Mr. Green"!
6. Situate Bellow's story within a larger (transatlantic) cultural context! After having done so, try to answer the question: What is specifically (Jewish) American about this story, compared to similar pieces of literature produced at the same time in Europe?

#### III. Cynthia Ozick, "The Shawl" (1980)

1. Aesthetics and Ethics: The Holocaust as a linguistic / artistic problem (inform yourself about Theodor W. Adorno's position).
2. Ozick's attitude towards sentimentalism.
3. The theme of dehumanization in "The Shawl."
4. The function of language in the story.
5. Define and evaluate Cynthia Ozick's notion of "Jewish sensibility"! Compare to similar concepts in postwar American literature!

#### IV. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969)

1. *Portnoy's Complaint* as a "scandalous" novel. What is scandalous about it? How can it be compared to earlier literary scandals? What is the author's implied position?
2. The rendition of sexuality in *Portnoy's Complaint*. Contextualize!
3. The theme of psycho-analysis in *Portnoy's Complaint*.
4. Alexander Portnoy's parents: What kind of characters are they?
5. Is there a thematic function to the theme of masturbation?
6. The theme of border-crossing in *Portnoy's Complaint*.
7. Compare Portnoy's attitude toward his Jewish identity with the author's implied position!
8. The theme of Holocaust remembrance in *Portnoy's Complaint*.
9. Interpret the title of the penultimate chapter ("In Exile")!
10. What is the function of Portnoy's "affair" with Naomi?
11. Would you describe Portnoy as a "postmodern ironist" (Richard Rorty)?
12. Interpret the final paragraphs of the penultimate chapter ("In Exile")!
13. Interpret the final chapter ("Punchline")!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 8:

### "From Pop to Postmodernism: American Poetry (especially from New York) in an Age of Casual Intermediality"

(Required Reading: John Cage, "25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey"; Robert Creeley, "I Know A Man"; Frank O'Hara, "Personism: A Manifesto," "Having a Coke With You," "A Step Away from Them," "The Day Lady Died"; Kenneth Koch, "Permanently," "The Circus" (1975); from Andy Warhol, *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*: chapter 10 "Atmosphere" (excerpt).

(Suggested Further Reading: John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"; Kenneth Koch, "Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams.")

#### I. The Black Mountain Poets

1. Why are the Black Mountain Poets called the Black Mountain Poets?
2. The significance of Charles Olson.
3. What is "projectivist" verse?
4. What does "composition by field" mean?
5. Modernist influences on "projectivist" verse.
6. John Cage's "25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey" as a realization of Olson's theory.
7. How does Robert Creeley's poetry relate to Olson's poetics?
8. Interpret Robert Creeley's "I Know a Man."
9. What is the meaning of the last stanza in Robert Creeley's "I Know a Man"?
10. Situate the Black Mountain School (in general) and Robert Creeley's "I Know a Man" (in particular) in American cultural history!

#### II. The New York School

1. Intermediality and *ekphrasis* in John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror."
2. The New York School of poetry and the visual arts (especially in New York)!
3. Define "Abstract Expressionism" and describe its importance for postwar American culture!
4. Abstract Expressionism and/or Pop Art as examples of postmodernism (pay particular attention to the question of mimesis!).
5. Interpret Kenneth Koch's poem "Permanently"!
6. Modernist representations of the city vs. postmodernist representations of the city (especially Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, and Warhol).
7. Interpret Frank O'Hara's "Personism: A Manifesto"! How does this text fit into / react to American poetic traditions?
8. Representation and life in Frank O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You."
9. Representation and life in John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror."
10. Explain Ashbery's line "the locking into place is 'death itself'!"
11. Why are there two poems by Kenneth Koch called "The Circus"? Describe their relationship!
12. What poetic genre does Kenneth Koch's "The Circus" (1975) belong to?
13. Interpret the last three stanzas of Koch's "The Circus" (1975)!
14. Why does Frank O'Hara call his poems *Lunch Poems*? Does this description fit a poem such as "A Step Away from Them"?
15. The presence of popular culture in the work of Frank O'Hara.
16. Why do you think "The Day Lady Died" is Frank O'Hara's most famous and most frequently anthologized poem?
17. Interpret the last line of "The Day Lady Died"!



## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 9:

### "Postmodernist Fiction: Paranoia and the Making of Sense/Signs in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965)"

(Required Reading: *The Crying of Lot 49*)

(Suggested Further Reading: "Entropy.")

#### I. Postmodernism and Postmodernity

1. Inform yourself about the history of the term *post-modern*!
2. From postmodern architecture to postmodernity (as a cultural state of existence).
3. What do various forms of postmodernism (in architecture, literature, philosophy, etc.) have in common?
4. Inform yourself about structuralism to poststructuralism (as methodologies in the Humanities)! Explain Jacques Derrida's critique of *structure*, Michel Foucault's notion of *discourse*, and Thomas Kuhn's concept of *paradigm-shift*!
5. Postmodernism in literary scholarship: The importance of the work of Roland Barthes (especially *S/Z*).
6. Leslie Fiedler's "Cross the Border, Close the Gap" as a founding document of American postmodernism.
7. John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion" as a founding document of American postmodern fiction-writing. (What is the "death of the novel"-controversy?)
8. Discuss the relationship of fact and fiction in American literature of the 1960s and 1970s.
9. Define the "New Journalism"!
10. Define "metafiction"! What are the most important non-American sources?

#### II. Thomas Pynchon

1. Try to situate Thomas Pynchon in the spectrum of American postmodern literature.
2. *Gravity's Rainbow* as the paradigmatic text of postmodern fiction.
3. Describe the structure of *The Crying of Lot 49*!
4. The importance of proper names in *The Crying of Lot 49*.
5. Characterize the narrative voice of *The Crying of Lot 49*!
6. Explain the second law of thermodynamics as a cultural metaphor (paying attention to Thomas Pynchon's short-story "Entropy")!
7. Intertextual references in *The Crying of Lot 49*.
8. The function of Richard Wharfinger's *The Courier's Tragedy* in *The Crying of Lot 49* (compare to earlier references to and parodies of Jacobean drama in American literature).
9. In how far is Pynchon's novel dependent on its Southern Californian setting? What is the function of San Narciso?
10. The presence of the media in *The Crying of Lot 49* (which media? why those?). Compare to modernist novels, such as *The Great Gatsby*!
11. Hyperreality and *The Crying of Lot 49*.
12. What is Tristero?
13. How does the novel define paranoia? What seems to be the author's implied standpoint?
14. The theme of "Puritanism" in *The Crying of Lot 49*.
15. Philological and historical research in *The Crying of Lot 49*.
16. Acronyms and anagrams in *The Crying of Lot 49*.
17. *The Crying of Lot 49* as an "anti-detective novel" (Tony Tanner).
18. Interpret the narrator's statement: "[Oedipa Maas] had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America."
19. The fate of the historical novel in postwar American literature.

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 10:

### "Is There A Postmodern Stage? American Drama from Edward Albee and Megan Terry to Adrienne Kennedy and David Mamet, with a Close Look at Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983/84)"

(Required Reading: Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross*.)

(Suggested Further Reading: Adrienne Kennedy, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* or Sam Shepard, *True West*.)

#### I. American Theater and Drama after Williams and Miller

1. Define the "theater of the absurd"! Are there American examples?
2. Would you describe the "theater of the absurd" as modernist theater?
3. Define the "open theater"! Give examples and contextualize them!
4. Comment on the importance of Konstantin Stanislavski for American postwar theater and film!
5. Define the following terms, trace them to their origins, and comment on their importance for American postwar drama: "theater of cruelty", "poor theater", "minimalism."
6. Situate the oeuvre of Sam Shepard in the spectrum of postwar American drama!
7. The presence of popular culture and the media in the work of Sam Shepard (especially *True West*).
8. Situate the oeuvre of Adrienne Kennedy in the spectrum of postwar American drama!
9. The presence of popular culture and the media in the work of Adrienne Kennedy (especially *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*).
10. Situate the oeuvre of Robert Wilson in the spectrum of postwar American drama!

#### II. David Mamet

1. David Mamet as a playwright and as a filmmaker.
2. Comment on the performative qualities of Mamet's plays!
3. Speech acts in Mamet's plays, especially *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
4. The role of the vernacular in David Mamet's plays, especially *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
5. Harold Pinter's influence on David Mamet: parallels and differences.
6. David Mamet and the Midwestern tradition (pay special attention to *American Buffalo* and its original reception).
7. Explain Christopher Bigsby's concept of "artificial realism," as he applies it to the work of David Mamet!
8. Compare Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* with David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*: What are the most important differences? In how far are both plays (despite their superficial similarities) situated at opposite ends of the aesthetic and ideological spectrum?
9. Phatic communication in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
10. Discourse in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
11. Interpret the last lines of *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
12. The author's implied attitude towards the real estate salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross*.
13. The con-man theme in the oeuvre of David Mamet (take into account his movies as well).
14. What is *Wilson: A Consideration of the Sources* about?

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 11:

### "Beyond Postmodernism: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987)"

(Required Reading: Morrison, *Beloved*)

#### I. Toni Morrison and the Question of the Canon

1. Situate Toni Morrison's oeuvre in the history of African American literature!
2. Inform yourself about Morrison's argument in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992)! In how far do her essays contribute to the canon debates of the 1980s?
3. Compare Morrison's approach in *Playing in the Dark* with poststructuralist theories (especially Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault)! What are similarities? What are differences?

#### II. The New Historicism

1. What is the New Historicism? What is "new" about it? What are important American sources?
2. What does Clifford Geertz mean by "thick description"? In how far is this methodology relevant in contemporary Cultural Studies?
3. What is meant by "cultural poetics" in the New Historicism?
4. In how far does Morrison's theoretical approach resemble a New Historicist position?
5. The New Historicism and postcolonial theory.

#### III. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)

1. Would you describe *Beloved* as a novel that moves beyond postmodernism?
2. Compare Toni Morrison's *Beloved* with Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl"!
3. Interpret the epigraph of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*!
4. Fiction and fictionality in *Beloved*.
5. Is *Beloved* a historical novel?
6. Gothic elements in *Beloved*.
7. Would you describe *Beloved* as a novel of magic realism?
8. What is Toni Morrison's attitude toward sentimentalism?
9. The relationship between ethics and aesthetics in *Beloved*.
10. Apply the concept of a "usable past" to *Beloved*!
11. Interpret the historical and geographical setting of *Beloved*!
12. *Beloved* and the genre of the slave narrative.
13. What does Sethe mean by "rememory"? What is the author's implied view of history?
14. Who is *Beloved*? Describe the relationship between Sethe and *Beloved*!
15. Explicate the theme of love in Morrison's novel, distinguishing between various characters.
16. Explicate the concept of property in Morrison's novel, distinguishing between various characters.
17. Keyterms in *Beloved*.
18. Interpret the monologues in chapter 2!
19. Interpret Paul D's final speech!
20. Interpret the final paragraphs of Morrison's novel!

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 12:

### "Native American Literature as a 'New' Ethnic Literature: N. Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor"

(Required Reading: from Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (excerpts in Norton); from Erdrich, *Tracks*: "Fleur"; Vizenor, "Almost Browne.")

#### I. Native American Culture after World War II

1. Define the category *Native American* (comparing it to *African American and Jewish American*)!
2. What does Gerald Vizenor mean when he says, "We're all invented as Indians"?
3. How have Western literatures / discourses romanticized Indian cultures?
4. Does it make sense to speak of postwar Indian literature as a "new" ethnic literature?
5. Indian political alliances and demands after World War II.
6. Indian cultural alliances and demands after World War II.
7. What is the "Red Power" movement? Compare it to other forms of minority activism in the 1960s and 70s!
8. Popular stereotypes of Indians in American postwar culture (especially after 1968).
9. What is the Native American Renaissance?

#### II. N. Scott Momaday

1. Apply the notion of a "usable past" to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*!
2. Typical plot patterns in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.
3. The function of the grandmother in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.
4. Comment on the narrator's linguistic competences in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*!
5. Contextualize and evaluate in its historical contexts the narrator's image of pre-reservation Kiowa culture!
6. The function of textual columns in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.
7. Evaluate *The Way to Rainy Mountain* as an autobiographical text, comparing it to other autobiographies (and their self-understanding as autobiographies).

#### III. Louise Erdrich

1. In how far is Erdrich's understanding of ethnicity related to her self-understanding as a fiction-writer?
2. Comment on Michael Dorris's collaboration with Louise Erdrich! Why is Dorris such an important figure in contemporary Native American Studies?
3. Formal features of Erdrich's Turtle Mountain-novels.
4. Compare Erdrich's Turtle Mountain novels to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels!
5. Interpret the character of Fleur in "Fleur"!
6. The human world and the animal world in "Fleur."
7. Identify and evaluate the interpretation of Western colonialism underlying the plot of "Fleur"!
8. Characterize the narrative situation in "Fleur". What is the function of Pauline? In how far is she a typical character of postwar minority literature?
9. Describe Pauline's relationship to Fleur's story!
10. Distinguish between character, narrator, and implied author in "Fleur"!
11. Louise Erdrich and the new regionalism of the 1980s.

#### IV. Gerald Vizenor

1. Define Vizenor's concepts of "postindian" and "crossblood" literature!
2. Vizenor's "Almost Browne" and postcolonial theory.
3. Explicate the significance of the keyword "almost" in "Almost Browne"!
4. The importance of living on the border (liminality) in "Almost Browne"!
5. Characterize the trickster-figure and explain its importance for the oeuvre of Gerald Vizenor!
6. Vizenor's attacks on the Red Power movement in his theoretical writings.
7. The function of Drain in "Almost Browne."
8. The significance of reading and writing in "Almost Browne."
9. The significance of blank books in "Almost Browne."

10. "Almost Brown" as a commentary on Native American Studies.
11. Define the concept of *hybridity*! What is its function in postcolonial theory?
12. Inform yourself about Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the *contact zone*! What is its meaning in postcolonial theory? Why is *negotiation* such a central concept in postcolonial theory?

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 13:**

**CHICANO LITERATURE: GLORIA ANZALDÙA, SANDRA CISNEROS, RICHARD RODRIGUEZ**  
in preparation

**STUDY QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 14:**  
**RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: LANGUAGE POETRY, BLANK FICTIONS, NEW HISTORICISM IN**  
**LITERATURE**  
in preparation