

# **Máster en Estudios Avanzados de Literatura y Cine en Lengua Inglesa**

## **61654 - Main trends in contemporary U.S. fiction**

**Course 2015 - 2016**

**Curso: 1, Semestre: 2, Créditos: 7.5**

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### **Basic information**

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#### **Teachers**

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#### **Recommendations to attend this course**

The main objective of this subject is the study and practice of critical analysis within the context of contemporary North American literature and its relationship with Anglo-American culture. This subject focuses on the analysis of the most important characteristics of present-day North American fiction, paying special attention to its metafictional features, intertextuality and ideology within a broad framework: its connection with scientific theories, and the impact of factors such as race, class and gender, globalization, mass media and popular culture. Furthermore, this subject offers students the possibility to improve their use of English and their critical capacity, providing in-depth analysis from a variety of theoretical perspectives and useful methodologies for the study of literary texts. Finally, this subject provides a complementary background to the study of other optional subjects devoted to film and cultural studies, as well as literary texts from other countries.

#### **Course Schedule and Deadlines**

- 1) Presentation and discussion of the theoretical approaches and critical aspects included in the program.
- 2) Application of these theoretical and critical approaches to the analysis of a selection of literary texts (see course schedule)
- 3) Group analysis of the literary texts in the light of the critical and methodological approaches discussed in the theoretical sessions (see course schedule)
- 4) Presentation of brief essays and presentation of a 3,000-word essay. Deadline: the date fixed in the exam calendar of the Faculty.

  

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## Home

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### Learning outcomes that define this course

**The student, in order to pass the course, will have to show her/his competence in the following skills:**

**1:**

The student knows how to develop and apply original ideas in the field of English Studies, and more specifically, in the research context of North American literature

**2:**

The student acquires skills to carry out an original research essay on contemporary North American fiction

**3:**

The student understands the notions of Postmodernism and of the diverse poststructuralisms and their reflection on the North American fiction of the last few decades

**4:**

The student analyses present-day North American fiction, its metafictional features and ideology within a broad context: its relationship with scientific theories, globalization, mass media and popular culture

**5:**

The student understands the concepts of posthumanism and posthumanity and analyses the factors that have contributed to undermining traditional humanist discourses in present-day North American Literature

**6:**

The student knows and analyses postmodern rewritings of canonical North American texts in the light of notions such as parody and intertextuality

**7:**

The student knows and distinguishes the specific elements that have contributed to the development and consolidation of a distinctive North American Gothic narrative in the light of the formal and thematic transformations associated with Postmodernism

**8:**

The student understands and analyses the key features of metaphysical detective fiction, its North American manifestations, its ideological implications and subversion of genre conventions

### Introduction

#### Brief presentation of the course

The course focuses on the critical study of a selection of contemporary North American literary texts analysed from a variety of theoretical perspectives and supplemented with filmic texts. The literary texts are analysed in the light of their relationship with Anglo-American culture. The analysis emphasises the most important characteristics of present-day North American fiction, paying special attention to its metafictional elements, intertextuality and ideology within a broad context: its connection with scientific theories, the impact of factors such as race, gender and class, globalization, mass media and contemporary culture as a whole.

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### Competences

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#### General aims of the course

## **The expected results of the course respond to the following general aims**

The main objective of this course is to offer the students a theoretical and practical knowledge that will allow them to understand and analyse contemporary North American literature in a critical way. To do so, the course will focus on scientific, anthropologic and critical theories and on a methodology of text analysis (narratology) applied to the written and filmic narrative corpus. The objectives of this subject are: i) to provide the student with the basic critical tools to understand and analyse the selected texts in the English language, ii) to familiarise the student with the most relevant critical approaches and methodology to study the selected corpus, iii) to test the critical capacity developed by the students in this second part of the master, iv) to improve the skills of the students regarding the use of English in an academic and critical context.

These objectives are essential to successfully conduct research in the field of English Studies. The capacity to develop and apply original ideas in an academic and research context is also key to carry out research in literary studies in English. Similarly, specific skills such as the capacity to relate concepts from different subjects, to handle complex information, to apply appropriate methodologies and theoretical approaches, to express a critical vision, to reach relevant conclusions using the English language in a clear and suitable way both for a specialized and non-specialized audience and to know how to develop a research line in an autonomous way are key skills for the future researcher.

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## **Context/Importance of the course for the master degree**

This subject is included in the range of the master subjects focusing on the knowledge and analysis of contemporary literature, on its role in contemporary society and on the ideological framework that provides the means to critically evaluate that society. It specifically focuses on contemporary North American texts, foregrounding the impact of US literature and culture on the globalised contemporary world. Therefore, the subject complements and is directly connected to the compulsory subjects of the first semester dealing with film, cultural and literary studies as well as their respective optional subjects, especially those in the "Literary Studies" itinerary: "Main Trends in Contemporary British Fiction" and "New Literatures in English".

## **After completing the course, the student will be competent in the following skills:**

**1:**

CG4: Develop and apply original ideas in the research context of English literary studies

**2:**

CE1: Capacity to understand the notions of Postmodernism and the various poststructuralisms and their reflection on North American fiction of the last few decades

**3:**

CE2: Capacity to analyse present-day North American fiction, its metafictional features and its ideology within a broad context

**4:**

CE3: Capacity to understand the concepts of posthumanism and posthumanity in present-day North American literature

**5:** CE4: Capacity to know and interpret the different elements which have contributed to the development and consolidation of a distinctive American Gothic narrative

**6:** CE5: Capacity to understand and analyse the keys to the metaphysical detective novel in contemporary North American literature

**7:** CE6: Capacity to know and analyse the postmodern rewritings of North American canonical texts

### **Relevance of the skills acquired in the course**

The proposed objectives for this subject are essential to offer the students a theoretical and methodological knowledge that will allow them to successfully undertake research in the field of English Studies. Similarly, the specific objectives of the subject (that is, the use of critical tools for the understanding, analysis and interpretation of texts in English, the application of critical approaches to a literary corpus, and the development of a critical response to those texts) are essential skills for the successful development of research in English Studies. The capacity to develop and apply original ideas in an academic and research context is also key to undertake research in the English language. Similarly, specific skills such as the capacity to relate concepts from different fields; the processing of complex information; the application of essential methodologies and theoretical approaches; the expression of a critical view; the reaching of relevant conclusions using the English language in a clear and appropriate way in order to reach both specialized and non-specialized audiences; and the capacity to develop a research line independently are key skills for the future researcher.

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## **Evaluation**

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### **Assessment tasks**

**The student will prove that he/she has achieved the expected learning results by means of the following assessment tasks:**

**1: I. First Official Announcement**

- a) Ongoing assessment (if applicable)
- b) Global examination (to be determined in the academic calendar)

**Assessment Task 1: Prepare and write brief critical essays on the required readings and films that have been set during the course.** Students will be assessed on their capacity to understand theoretical concepts and to apply them to the texts to be analysed, as well as on their correct use of academic English (at a C1 level). These activities are directed towards achieving learning objectives 1, 2, and 3 = 10%.

Deadline for the submission of the brief written essays: as per exams schedule of the Faculty.

**Assessment Task 2: Write an essay in English.** Students are required to write a 3000 word essay on an aspect related to the contents of the course using correct English (at a C1 level). The topic of the essay will be previously agreed on with the teacher. This essay is expected to demonstrate that the students have achieved the course's global objectives (1, 2, 3, and 4). The essay will be graded 0-10, and will account for 90% of the student's final mark.

Deadline for the submission of the essay: as per exam schedule of the Faculty.

### **Assessment criteria**

- Definition of key concepts. Initial hypothesis. Use of a theoretical framework and methodology. Use of primary sources. Literature review. Well-argued discourse and relevant conclusions = 40%.
- Independence, originality and critical examination = 10%.
- Information structure and organization of the essay. Text layout. Correct use of English language and style appropriateness = 20%.
- Reasoning capacity to exemplify, illustrate, propose textual evidence and defend the student's own point of view critically = 30%.

## **II. Second Official Announcement**

**Assessment Task 1: Prepare and write brief critical essays on the required readings and films that have been set during the course.** Students will be assessed on their capacity to understand theoretical concepts and to apply them to the texts to be analysed, as well as on their correct use of academic English (at a C1 level). These activities are directed towards achieving learning objectives 1, 2, and 3 = 10%.

Deadline for the submission of the brief written essays: as per exams schedule of the Faculty.

**Assessment Task 2: Write an essay in English.** Students are required to write a 3000 word essay on an aspect related to the contents of the course using correct English (at a C1 level). The topic of the essay will be previously agreed on with the teacher. This essay is expected to demonstrate that the students have achieved the course's global objectives (1, 2, 3, and 4). The essay will be graded 0-10, and will account for 90% of the student's final mark.

Deadline for the submission of the essay: as per exam schedule of the Faculty.

### **Assessment criteria**

- Definition of key concepts. Initial hypothesis. Use of a theoretical framework and methodology. Use of primary sources. Literature review. Well-argued discourse and relevant conclusions = 40%.
- Independence, originality and critical examination = 10%.
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## Activities and resources

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### Course methodology

#### **The learning process that has been designed for this course is based on the following activities:**

The learning process for this course is based on the following: the subject is mainly oriented towards the formation of researchers in the field of contemporary North American literary and cultural theory and criticism, as well as the impact of these factors on today's global society. In this respect, the proposed activities (the analysis of literary and filmic texts through commentaries/presentations/reflections from a series of theoretical frameworks) are focused on the application of key theoretical and critical principles to a series of representative texts of present-day North American literature. Thus, the course is organised into three stages: 1) revision of the methodological frameworks and critical tools; 2) application of the acquired concepts by means of discussion and analysis of texts in English; 3) writing of a individual research essay applying the studied theoretical approaches and methods, as well as the specific resources that are necessary for the development of the chosen research topic.

### Outline of the Programme

#### **The programme offered to the students to help them achieve the learning results includes the following activities :**

**1:**

1) The course syllabus is articulated around a series of representative North American literary narrative texts published in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, which reflect the various thematic and formal transformations associated with Postmodernism, understood in its broadest sense. In this respect, the syllabus is divided into several sections, each of which analyses some of the most relevant trends in contemporary North American literature: the new Gothic, metaphysical detective fiction, narratives that explore racial traumas, metafictional writing that parodies and rewrites classical texts, and the post-apocalyptic genre. Each section is preceded by a brief introduction that locates the literary text in its historical and social context and establishes the most adequate theoretical and critical framework for the analysis, relating the fictional text to its corresponding intertexts. For that purpose, the course tackles the most relevant events that have taken place in the US since the 1960s, as well as the resulting globalising impulse, emphasising the diverse ideological responses raised in the text, the blurring of genre boundaries, and the relationship of all these factors with globalisation, the media and contemporary culture as a whole.

2) The course syllabus is structured as follows:

#### **a) Class activities:**

-Lectures (30 hours/ 1,2 ECTS), where the teacher will offer a presentation of the various theoretical frameworks and methodological tools for the critical analysis.

-Problem and case resolution (30 hours / 1,2 ECTS) (face-to-face class), where the teacher and students will undertake the analysis and commentary of the compulsory reading texts included in the course syllabus. Such commentary may be done in several ways: collective guided commentary; work in small student groups who will discuss specific elements before they are presented to the rest of the class; or individual writing of responses to questions asked by the teacher, and which some students will present to the rest of the class for common commentary. It is taken for granted that the student has read and worked on the texts by herself/himself before attending class.

#### **b) Guided activities:**

Essays: 45 hours/ 1,8 ECTS

#### **c) Autonomous activities:**

Study: 82,5 hours/ 3,3 ECTS

## **Syllabus**

1. The concept of "human being" within the frame of postmodernism and the poststructuralisms: 1.a. The response of the U.S. novel to the demands of metafiction, contemporary scientific theories, and the redefinition of the concept of humaneness. 1.b. The notions of posthumanism and posthumanity in the generic crossroads, and their relationship to globalisation, the mass media and present-day culture.
2. Analysis of a selection of literary texts which in different ways reflect the formal and thematic transformations associated with postmodernism: 2.a. American Gothic: mutations of terror in contemporary U.S. fiction. 2.b. The subversion of generic conventions in the metaphysical detective novel. 2.c. Intertextuality and parody: formal, thematic and ideological implications in the current rewritings of canonical texts.

## **Course planning**

### **Calendar of actual sessions and presentation of works**

The theoretical and practical sessions of this course will take place in the second semester. These sessions will alternate theoretical instruction with practical commentary based on the compulsory reading corpus and the recommended filmic texts.

In a typical ten-week course, approximately two weeks (four two-hour sessions) will be devoted to each of the five units in the program. The date for the essay presentations will be fixed in the exam calendar of the Faculty.

Sessions 1 and 2 of each unit: These sessions will be devoted to the analysis of the theoretical framework and to the establishment of the basis for their application to a series of North American literary texts.

Sessions 3 and 4 of each unit: These sessions will be devoted to textual commentaries applied to the corpus, and to group and individual tutorials focused on the preparation of the essay.

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## **Bibliographic references of the recommended readings**