

American Studies 401T Literature and Culture

AMST 401T-01, #15410
California State University, Fullerton / Spring 2017
Mondays 7:00-9:45 PM / Room: UH-319

“Essentially, cultural history is the history of stories that people tell about themselves and their world. Such stories are manifested and transmitted in a variety of ways, the sum of which we broadly define as culture.”

--Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*

“Novels and stories should be studied... because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.”

--Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*

“All literature is intertextual. A specific piece of writing... has no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly into the works clustered around it.”

--Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*

“...criticism attempting to talk about the ideological function of literature in a specific period can most usefully do so only by seeing a specific work relationally—that is, by seeing how its representations stand in regard to those of other specific works and discourses. A work can only be said to contest, subvert, recuperate, or reproduce dominant ideologies... if one can place the work... in relation to others.”

--Jean Howard, “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies”

“One’s ability to generate accurate readings depends on one’s knowledge of the culture—on knowledge of the range of ideas and values it normally generates—and that, in turn, can come only from familiarity with a wide range of historical research and with numerous documents and performances, not all related in any obvious way to the text under consideration.”

--William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:00-2:00, and by appointment

Course Description

In this seminar, students will learn to analyze literature using American Studies theories and methods. We will work to connect our close readings to historical context, seeking to understand literary texts in relation to the broader cultural currents in which they were created, consumed, and canonized. In particular, we will focus on the cultural work of drama, prose fiction, and the graphic novel in the years since World War II. The main goal of this course is to guide students through the process of researching and writing a 15-20-page paper on a literary text of their choice. *Course Prerequisites: AMST 201 and AMST 301.*

Required Texts

Books

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
 Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (1963)
 Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
 Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (1986/1987)
 Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)

All books are available for purchase at Little Professor bookstore, 725 N. Placentia Ave.

Articles

There will also be several assigned articles for this course, collected in a packet and available on Titanium as a PDF file.

American Studies Learning Goals

Develop a rigorous concept of culture and cultural process as well as an interdisciplinary sensibility, becoming aware of connections among the social sciences and the humanities.

- Develop an interdisciplinary interpretive framework for studying American culture, cultural diversity, and cultural processes in ways that will enable students to solve practical and theoretical problems

Gain a thorough understanding of cultural diversity by examining the creative tension between unity and multiplicity in American experiences.

- Identify a variety of examples of cultural diversity and commonality in America's past and present, demonstrating an awareness of the similarities, differences, and relationships among the multitude of American groups
- Explain how categories of difference—including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality—are culturally constructed and vary according to historical, regional, and social contexts
- Understand and demonstrate how cultural beliefs and practices have played a role in both the exercise of and resistance to power throughout American history

Understand and interpret the ways in which culture creates meaning and guides behavior.

- Critically analyze and interpret a spectrum of cultural documents and expressive forms, ranging from popular to folk to elite expressions, from mass media to material culture
- Employ both historical and contemporary perspectives in order to situate these documents in relevant individual and social as well as local, national, and global contexts

Learn research, writing, and expressive skills to see connections among complex materials and to clearly communicate an understanding of the underlying meanings and causes of cultural/historical events.

- Design and carry out an original interdisciplinary research project on American culture
- Discover primary and secondary sources (hard copy as well as digital) using the library's resources
- Analyze and synthesize material from primary and secondary sources in order to create a coherent argument based on evidence
- Develop an original thesis and support that thesis through the thoughtful use of a variety of properly cited sources
- Communicate their research findings through clear, well-organized written and oral presentations
- Develop critical thinking, writing, and interpretive skills

Become informed and engaged American citizens, able to situate current political and social issues within their historical and cultural contexts.

- Understand the historical origins and cultural significance of current movements for social change.
- Situate the historical and contemporary study of American culture in a global context, demonstrating an understanding of the ways American culture has been shaped by diaspora, colonialism, and globalization

Course Assignments and Grading Standards

Assignments

The major writing assignment for this course is a 15-20-page research paper on a literary text of your choice. You are expected to formulate a research project, progressively fine-tune your topic; conduct research using primary and secondary sources; formally present your findings to the class; and write a paper in which you lay out a clear argument supported by ample evidence. Because 401T is the capstone for the American Studies major and minor, you should view this process as an opportunity to demonstrate your acquired abilities in cultural analysis and interdisciplinary thinking.

You must meet with me one-on-one to discuss your topic before you turn in your proposal.

In addition to the research paper, there are two short essays that are required. These essays are designed to help you reflect on the course content and practice your analytical skills.

• **Research Proposal**

Your 4-5-page research proposal should...

- 1) describe the literary text you have chosen to write about, and why you chose this text;
- 2) discuss the themes this text explores;
- 3) discuss the context you plan to connect your text to: what issues, themes, events, and/or ideas in the larger culture are relevant to understanding your book?
- 4) Identify other stories that circulate in the larger culture that are related to your book (in literature, film, television, music, etc.) and explain how/why they are related;
- 5) In a formal bibliography, list at least 3 primary and 6 secondary sources you plan to consult as you conduct your research. Secondary sources should be scholarly articles and/or books about your author, text, and/or the broader historical context you are connecting it to. The primary sources should be other cultural documents (other books, films, TV shows, music, etc.) that you will relate your text to. Note: your final paper must include research into at least 12 sources. At least 2 of those sources must be full-length scholarly books.

• **Project Update**

You are required to turn in a project update that includes the following:

- 1) A section that describes how your topic has evolved since your proposal.
- 2) A rough draft of an introduction to your paper (not just a few sentences, but a fully developed, multi-paragraph introduction that describes your topic, articulates your thesis, and previews the organization of your paper,

- 3) A detailed outline of the rest of your paper
- 4) An updated bibliography of your sources

• In-Class Presentation

You are required to give a 10-minute in-class presentation on your research. Your presentation should include an audio, visual, and/or material source. Think of this as an opportunity to teach your findings to the class. I discourage reading from bullet points on a PowerPoint presentation.

• Research Paper

Your final research paper should be 15-20 pages long, double-spaced, 12-point font. You may format the paper in either MLA or Chicago style.

• Practice Papers (3-5 pages each)

Twice during the semester, you will turn in a paper responding to, analyzing, and contextualizing one of our assigned literary texts. The choice is yours, but you must write about two of our required texts (*Death of A Salesman*, *The Bell Jar*, *The House on Mango Street*, *Watchmen*, *The Underground Railroad*). This is not a book review. Instead, I want you to 1) respond to the text—what was your reaction reading it? What are your thoughts on it?; 2) analyze the text in context: offer a close reading of one or more themes in the text that connects the theme to an issue, event, or another text in the broader culture (either past or present). Your paper will be due on the last day we discuss the book, and it should not simply repeat what we have already talked about in class. You will be required to submit a copy through TurnItIn and bring in a hard copy to class.

• Additional assignment for graduate students

M.A. students are required to read one additional book for the course, selected in consultation with the instructor from the list below. You must write 5-7-page paper that 1) describes and evaluates the author's approach to studying the relationship between literature and culture (analyzes the author's theory/method), and 2) applies or relates the book in some way to one or more of the texts we read this semester.

Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (1986)

Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* (1989)

David Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America* (2012)

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (1996)

Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945-1970* (2002)

Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984)

Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (2008)

• Attendance and Participation

Attendance is required at every class meeting. Attendance and class participation make up 10% of your final grade. Upper-division seminars work best when students are actively engaged with the classroom community, concepts, and coursework. Please come to every class prepared to 1) describe

the central argument or theme of the assigned reading; 2) assess the reading for its relative strengths and limitations; 3) raise questions about the reading; 4) connect the course readings to one another; 5) connect the reading to your broader understanding of contemporary and historical issues in American culture; 6) relate the reading to your own experience and/or areas of expertise.

Grading Standards

	<u>Undergraduates</u>	<u>M.A. Students</u>
Proposal	10%	5%
Practice Papers 1 & 2	20% (10% each)	20% (10% each)
Project Update	10%	10%
In-class Presentation	10%	10%
Final Research Paper	40%	40%
Participation	10%	10%
Book Analysis (M.A. students)	N/A	5%

Late Assignments

An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Late assignments will be lowered one mark **per day** (NOT per class meeting) after the due date (for example, C to C-). Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis for legitimate reasons and only when a student asks for an extension at least 24 hours before an assignment is due.

Grading

For this course, +/- grading will be used. No extra credit will be offered. Keep all graded work so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out.

Community Policies

- It is unacceptable to arrive late or leave class early. If you must leave class early because of an appointment that cannot be missed, make sure that you tell me before class begins.
- Cell phones must be on silent (not vibrate), or preferably turned off. They must be stowed away out of sight.
- Laptops may only be used for notetaking; going online with your laptop is not permitted in class.

A+ 97-100; A 93-96; A-90-92; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F 0-59

A Note to Graduate Students

In keeping with university-wide requirements for graduate study, graduate students enrolled in this 400-level course will be expected to demonstrate, in both written and oral performance, quality higher than that expected of an undergraduate. Graduate students should demonstrate an advanced level of competence in interdisciplinary cultural analysis and synthesis.

Student Accommodations

CSUF complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing a process for disclosing disabilities and arranging for reasonable accommodations. On the CSUF campus, the Office of Disability Support Services has been delegated the authority to certify disabilities and to prescribe

specific accommodations for students with documented disabilities. DSS provides support services for students with mobility limitations, learning disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, and other disabilities. Counselors are available to help students plan a CSUF experience to meet their individual needs. Prior to receiving this assistance, documentation from a qualified professional source must be submitted to DSS. For more information, please contact DSS in UH 101; phone 657-278-3112. <http://www.fullerton.edu/DSS/>

Academic Integrity

Integrity is an essential component of all students' academic experience. Students who violate university standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the university, policies on academic integrity are strictly enforced. I expect that you will familiarize yourself with the CSUF academic integrity guidelines: <http://www.fullerton.edu/senate/documents/PDF/300/UPS300-021.pdf>

Campus Emergency Procedures

Students should be familiar with campus **emergency procedures**: <http://prepare.fullerton.edu>

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Date	Topic	Due
M, Jan. 23	Introduction to Course	
M, Jan. 30	Ways of Reading: Story, Theme, Character, Response, Context (production, reception, resonance), Cultural Work	
M, Feb. 6	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> : Family, Work, the Rootless Self, and the American Dream	-- <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (all)
M, Feb. 13	<i>The Bell Jar</i> : Coming of Age in the Cold War	-- <i>The Bell Jar</i> , Chs. 1-8
M, Feb. 20	NO CLASS —Presidents' Day	
M, Feb. 27	<i>The Bell Jar</i> : Gender, Counter-Memory, and the 1950s	-- <i>The Bell Jar</i> , Chs. 9-20 --Source packet: Gender in the 1950s (available on Titanium)
M, Mar. 6	<i>The House on Mango Street</i> : Space, Place, and Race	-- <i>The House on Mango Street</i> (all)
M, Mar. 13	<i>Watchmen</i> : Heroes and Anti-Heroes	-- <i>Watchmen</i> , Chs. 1-5 • Research Proposal due
M, Mar. 20	<i>Watchmen</i> : The Comic Book as Literature	-- <i>Watchmen</i> , Chs. 6-12

M, Mar. 27	Spring Recess – No Class	
M, Apr. 3	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> : States of America	-- <i>The Underground Railroad</i> , pp. 1-196
M, Apr. 10	<i>The Underground Railroad</i> : History and Fiction	-- <i>The Underground Railroad</i> , pp. 197-end
M, Apr. 17	Writing Workshop	• Project Update due
M, Apr. 24	Student Presentations	
M, May 1	Student Presentations	
M, May 8	Student Presentations	
Finals Week		• Research Paper due, TBD