

ENGL265-02—What Is Ethnic Literature?

Professor Amanda Dykema

Fall 2015 – MW 2-3:15pm – Buckman 103

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Office: Palmer Hall 309B

Office Hours: Monday 12:30-1:30pm; Wednesday 3:15-4:15pm; Friday 9-10am; & by appointment

Required Texts & Materials:

The following texts have been ordered at the Rhodes Bookstore and are also available online. Please purchase the editions ordered. Please also note that there will be additional important readings, all available to be downloaded on Moodle (moodle.rhodes.edu).

Alexie, Sherman. *Flight* (2007). Grove/Black Cat. ISBN: 978-0802170378

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Aunt Lute. ISBN: 978-1879960855.

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Riverhead. ISBN: 978-1594483295

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *Woman Warrior* (1975). Vintage. ISBN: 978-0679721888

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). Vintage. ISBN: 978-0307278258

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony* (1977). Penguin. ISBN: 978-0143104919

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

This course will study the emergence of the category of “ethnic literature” in the United States—a vital, shifting, contested, incomplete, political, artistic site from which conceptions of literary expression are expanded and interrogated. To ask “What is ethnic literature?” presumes other questions: what is literature? What do we mean by the term “ethnic”? In this class, we will analyze these works for how they represent the cultures about which and within which they were written, being careful not to assume that these works tell the entire story about a culture or the experience of people of color in the United States.

Ultimately, this course will not attempt to cover the history of ethnic literature in the United States – this would be impossible in fifteen weeks. Instead, we will begin with the rise of ethnic literature as an object of study in the U.S. academy. Tracing the canon debates and creation of ethnic literature anthologies in the 1980s, we will examine the political and cultural contexts out of which Latino/a, Asian American, African American, and Native American texts were incorporated into the study of American Literature. We will analyze several exemplary early works, including Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, to consider the formal and political qualities that made them so attractive for study. We will investigate why literary canons matter—how they index not only questions of taste and value, but of power—and consider the stakes of including or excluding a given text from a canon. Finally, we will read 21st century works like Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Unaccustomed Earth* and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, considering how contemporary writers formally and politically negotiate the canons of American literature and ethnic literature in light of the legacies of the 20th century.

Under the Rhodes College Foundations curriculum, this course satisfies the F2 and F4 requirements. This means that our official learning outcomes include reading and interpreting literary texts and developing excellence in written communication. In more concrete terms, this course is designed to facilitate your practice of critical thinking, writing and reading to interpret texts, your skill in making arguments supported by textual evidence, and your familiarity with both the political histories that contextualize ethnic literature and various literary strategies U.S. ethnic writers employ in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Course Policies & Requirements

Papers. The essays in this course are designed to allow you to develop your own readings of our texts and to practice close reading – the careful analysis of the how the details of a text’s language and form shape its meaning. You will write one shorter paper (3-4 pages), a close reading of a single passage, and one longer paper (6-7 pages), a literary analysis of a novel. For each essay, I will provide specific assignment

sheets to explain the essays in greater detail. **All documents are due at the beginning of class on the date listed on the syllabus.** Unless alternate arrangements are made with me before the due date, late papers will lose one grade increment (ex. B to B- or C+ to C) per day.

Revision Opportunities. My teaching philosophy values revision opportunities – I prefer to offer comments on your writing during the writing process, while they can still be helpful to you, rather than after a final grade has been earned. Therefore, for each major assignment in this course, **papers will be due in two stages.** Both due dates are listed on the course calendar, and both versions are considered “final” drafts, in the sense that they must be finished and fulfill the requirements of the assignment. On the first version, you will receive thorough comments geared toward revision but no grade. The second, revised version will receive only a grade, no comments. Please note: the original version with my comments is required to be turned in along with the second version, so take care to keep track of it.

Submitting work. All out of class work for this course should be typed and submitted in **hard-copy form** (not email) unless you are otherwise instructed. Formal essays must use correct MLA format (title, page numbers, 1-inch margins, 11 or 12 point Times New Roman or Calibri font, etc.). All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any paper or test will result in a grade of F for the course.

Grade Distribution. Your grade in this course will be determined out of 1000 possible points.

Participation	100
Quizzes & Homework	100
Discussion Questions	50
Midterm	100
Paper 1 – Close Reading	200
Paper 2 – Literary Analysis	300
<u>Final Exam</u>	<u>150</u>
Total:	1000

(A: 930-1000, A-: 900-929, B+: 880-899, B: 830-879, B-: 800-829, C+: 780-799, C: 730-779, C-: 700-729, D+: 680-699, D: 630-679, D-: 600-629, F: 500 or below)

Class Participation. You are expected to come to class prepared for discussion, which means reading the assigned text carefully and marking significant pages/paragraphs before class so you can contribute to the discussion using specific textual evidence (quotes, references to specific page numbers, etc.). Please **bring your copy of the assigned text** to every class. If there is a reading assigned from Moodle, you should print it and bring it to class as well. In-class discussion may often include your general reaction to a text – always a good way to begin – but is ultimately meant to lead you to the ability to construct literary arguments that reflect the complexity of each assigned text. Participating and listening carefully to your classmates on a regular basis should help you strengthen your ability to develop and support an argument about a literary text, skills you will need to succeed on the papers and exams.

Discussion Questions. Twice during the semester, you will submit a discussion question that responds to the assigned reading. A thoughtful, well-crafted discussion question has no clear right answer and cannot be answered by basic factual or plot information. Discussion questions should aim to generate conversation and will generally require several sentences of setup. You should present the parameters of your question (give a sentence or so of context), ask the question, and point out one or two moments in the text that could inform discussion. In total, your prompt should be the length of a short paragraph. Remember to think thematically; in other words, avoid plot questions (“what will happen?”).

Class Climate. Please be respectful of everyone’s opinions, presence, and person in this course. A primary purpose of this class is to give you the opportunity to practice developing interpretations of the texts, and while you are encouraged to offer differing ideas, you should do so in a thoughtful manner.

Further, I am committed to creating an academic climate that is safe, respectful, and appreciative of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic background, ability, religion, or any other aspect of one's identity. A climate of mutual respect allows us to ask difficult questions and to participate in honest discussions, even in the context of strong disagreement. Creating this kind of open, honest, and respectful climate is our mutual responsibility.

Quizzes. I will often give short quizzes as incentive for staying current on the reading. Most of these quizzes will be in class, but I may administer certain quizzes via Moodle. If so, these will be announced ahead of time and will go live at 5 p.m. the day before class.

Attendance. Please come to class on time. Regular attendance and class participation are essential for this course. In general, I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. **Each absence after the third class missed will lower your final course grade by 50 points (half a letter grade).** Students with college-sanctioned extracurricular activities (athletics, mock trial, etc.) or religious observances that will require them to miss one or more classes during the semester should talk to me in advance of their anticipated absence.

Technology. **Turn off cell phones** and other electronic devices before class. I expect that computers will be used only for class-related work. Get in the habit of regularly checking your email, as I will send out announcements and assignments this way. Email is also the best way to contact me (though please give me up to 24 hours to respond). Depending on your question, I may recommend that we discuss it in person. Please also regularly consult our course space on Moodle at www.moodle.rhodes.edu. Moodle will enable you to view the syllabus, access assignments and other course materials, and communicate with me and your classmates.

Intellectual Honesty. All work turned in for this course is to be completed in accordance with Rhodes' Honor Code; it must be your own work, produced exclusively for this course. Plagiarism is a violation of the integrity of the occupation of learning and a serious act of disrespect toward me as professor and toward your fellow students. "Plagiarism" means directly copying someone else's work, paraphrasing someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit, or having someone else do your work for you. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, failure to cite the source of quoted/paraphrased/borrowed text and ideas) may likewise result in failure of the course, regardless of the Council hearing outcome. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not intentional plagiarism, will be penalized as I deem appropriate. **If you have any concerns that your actions might violate this course's academic integrity policies, speak with me early in the assignment for help and clarification.**

Special needs. If you have a registered disability that will require accommodations, please see me within the first two weeks of class so we can arrange for the resources you need. If you have a disability and have not yet registered with the Office of Student Disability Services, you should do so immediately (901-843-3885, <http://www.rhodes.edu/disabilityservices/>)

Course Calendar

Readings should be completed by the day on which they are listed. This calendar may be subject to change during the course; all changes will be announced in class and via Moodle. Readings marked (M) can be accessed on Moodle at moodle.rhodes.edu.

AUGUST

Wed 26 Class Introduction/Syllabus Overview
What is “canonical”?

Mon 31 **Literary Study—What, Why, How**
Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, “No Name Woman” pp. 3-16
Writing assignment due

SEPTEMBER

Wed 2 **Canons and Canonicity**
Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind* excerpt (M)
Lauter, “Reconstructing American Literature” pp. 101-08, 110-12 (M)

Mon 7 Morrison, “Black Matters” pp. 3-17 (M)
Moraga, Preface to *This Bridge Called My Back* (M)
Lorde, “The Master’s Tools” (M)

Wed 9 **Asian American Literature**
Keywords: “Ethnicity” (M)
Woman Warrior, “White Tigers” pp. 17-54

Mon 14 *Woman Warrior*, “Shaman” and “At the Western Palace” pp. 55-160
Chin, *Aiiieeeee!* Preface pp. xi-xxii (M)

Wed 16 *Woman Warrior*, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” pp. 161-209
Yamada, “Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster” and “Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism” (M)

Mon 21 **Native American Literature**
Keywords: “Indian,” “Indigenous” (M)
Silko, *Ceremony* pp. 1-54

Wed 23 *Ceremony* pp. 55-105
Cameron, “Gee, You Don’t Seem…” from *This Bridge* (M)

Mon 28 *Ceremony* pp. 105-186

Wed 30 **Close Reading Paper Due Date 1**
Ceremony discussion continued

OCTOBER

Mon 5 *Ceremony* pp. 187-244

Wed 7 **In-Class Midterm Exam**

- Mon 12 Chicano/a/Latino/a Literature**
 Keywords: “Latino/a” (M)
 Moraga, *This Bridge* intros and “La Guera” (M)
 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* pp. 17-35
- Wed 14 Close Reading Paper Due Date 2**
Borderlands/La Frontera discussion
- Mon 19 FALL BREAK – No Class**
- Wed 21** *Borderlands/La Frontera* pp. 75-86, 99-113
- Mon 26 Contemporary Ethnic Literature**
 Smith, “What Does Soulful Mean?” (M)
 Diaz, “MFA vs. POC” (M)
 Alexie, “Superman and Me” (M)
 Lahiri, *Unaccustomed Earth*, “Unaccustomed Earth” pp. 3-59
- Wed 28** Lahiri, “Only Goodness,” pp. 128-173
- NOVEMBER**
- Mon 2** Lahiri, “Once in a Lifetime,” “Year’s End,” pp. 223-93
- Wed 4** Lahiri, “Going Ashore” pp. 294-333
- Mon 9** Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* pp. 1-75
- Wed 11** *Oscar Wao* pp. 77-118
- Mon 16** *Oscar Wao* pp. 119-201
- Wed 18** *Oscar Wao* pp. 203-61
 HW: Two-page draft of Literary Analysis due in office hours conference
- Mon 23** *Oscar Wao* pp. 263-335
- **Tuesday, Nov. 24, 5 p.m. -- Literary Analysis Paper Due Date 1**
- Wed 25 THANKSGIVING BREAK – No Class**
- Mon 30** Finish *Oscar Wao* discussion
 Alexie, *Flight* pp. 1-35
- DECEMBER**
- Wed 2** *Flight* pp. 36-106
 Paper Introductions Mini-Workshop
- Mon 7** *Flight* pp. 107-181
- Wed 9 Literary Analysis Paper Due Date 2**
- FINAL EXAM: 5:30pm, Tuesday December 15**