

ENGL 376 – ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE AMERICAS

Fall 2012

Section 1

Tues/Thurs: 3:30-4:45 pm, Combs Hall 237

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Office Hours (Combs Hall 324):
Tues/Thurs: 2:15-3:30 pm & 4:45-6:00 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This special topics course is an elective in the English major and is designed to develop your analytical thinking, speaking, and writing skills through an examination of literatures from the Hispanic, Francophone, and Anglophone Americas. The three masterpieces we will spend the semester reading—Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues*, and Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*—all undertake to assume the place of a “Great American Novel” within, and beyond, national traditions. While exploring the formal dimensions of these encyclopedic novels, we trace topics pertaining to the cultural impact of the “discovery” of America, the conquest and colonization of the “New World,” and the American Indian resistance generated by the encounter between Europe and the western hemisphere starting in 1492.

COURSE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

To provide a sustained analysis of American literature, including (post)colonial works from outside of the recognized canon as well as that produced by historically marginalized people.

To prepare students to take an independent role in the research and presentation of contextual materials to form a better understanding of authors, literary texts, and cultural movements.

To prepare students to demonstrate independent critical thinking skills measured in a variety of ways, including through written work and an oral presentation relating to the course topics.

To promote a substantial mastery of all course materials and prepare students to contribute to class discussion in ways that further our understanding of the major course topics.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at the University Bookstore)

Fuentes, Carlos. *Terra Nostra* (Dalkey)
Poulin, Jacques. *Volkswagen Blues* (Cormorant)
Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Almanac of the Dead* (Penguin)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course has a constant and sometimes demanding workload. Active participation during class discussion is essential to doing well. At a minimum, I expect you 1) to have excellent attendance, 2) to arrive and leave on time, 3) to have done assigned readings carefully before class, 4) to turn in your work on time, 5) to bring the necessary materials and texts to class, 6) to listen respectfully to me and to your classmates, and 7) to contribute to class discussion and activities on a regular basis. **It is your own responsibility to find out what you miss when you are not in class.** I suggest that you exchange email

information with at least one other classmate in order to ensure that you are always prepared. Note that you will receive an *unsatisfactory* mark on your mid-semester report if you fail to comply with these requirements and/or have a working course grade lower than a C. **I will accept no late submissions of any kind unless you have a medical note.**

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

Please be assured that I want students to learn and to receive the good grades they deserve. Therefore, make an appointment with me should you have undue difficulty in the course. Written assignments include: 1) four 1-page reading responses, 2) a midterm comprised of one 2-page essay, 3) a final comprised of one 4-page essay. Oral assignments include one 20-minute co-presentations prepared in consultation with the instructor. You will receive detailed directions for completing each one of these assignments well in advance of their due dates. The following is the course grade distribution:

Attendance & Participation: 20%

Co-Presentation: 20%

Reading Responses: 20%

Midterm: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

GRADING CRITERIA

Students often complain that they do not understand “what professors want” when it comes time to complete required assignments. I have designed the following criteria guidelines to help you grasp how I conduct a large part of the grading. I divide formal written assignments in the following ways:

**Papers: Content and Analysis (70%)*

An average paper (C) demonstrates a superficial understanding of the topic; it is usually based almost exclusively on class notes. It generally relies too much on summary rather than explicit analysis of textual points, and uses quotations ineffectively.

A better paper (B) incorporates readings that have been assigned in other contexts (including in-class assignments), analyzes literary and film devices as they are employed in a text, and uses specific quotations from texts in order to illustrate the grounding of its analysis.

A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a “B” paper, and includes a more sophisticated understanding of the chosen topic. That is, an “A” paper uses the tools of textual analysis, apt use of quotation, concise and explicit remarks justifying that analysis, while drawing on all the available resources of the course.

**Papers: Form, Style, Mechanics and Usage (30%)*

An average paper (C) demonstrates a reasonable control of basic English syntax, verb and subject (including pronoun) agreement, tense consistency, proofreading, paragraph organization, etc.

A better paper (B) demonstrates an ability to vary sentence structure, has few if any proofreading errors, employs careful transitions and organization in a more sophisticated way, and controls grammar.

A superior paper (A) demonstrates all the qualities of a “B” paper, and in addition demonstrates an ability to control complex sentence structure, vary verbs effectively, and contains no proofreading errors.

**Reading Responses*

I will grade these: √+ (very good), √ (satisfactory), √- (has weaknesses), or 0 (insufficient/not completed). At the end of the term, I will total these for your overall reading-response grade.

**Presentations*

I will grade these based upon the outside work you conduct in preparation, the quality of your written reading summary, the amount of effort exhibited by your performance, and the effectiveness with which you answer questions from me and from your peers about your critical reading summary.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The Office of Disability Services has been designated by the University as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you already receive services through the Office of Disabilities Services and require accommodations for this class, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Please bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in the strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you have not contacted the Office of Disability Services and need accommodations, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), I will be happy to refer you. The office will require appropriate documentation of disability. Their phone number is 540-654-1266.

Engl 376—Encyclopedic Fiction of the Americas

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Week #1 Tues 8/28 Thurs 8/30	HEMISPHERIC AMERICANISM Introduction to the course Herbert Eugene Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America” (1933) http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/~w3his490/A-Bolton-Greater.America.pdf
Week #2 Tues 9/4 Thurs 9/6	MEXICO: The Reinvention of America Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Old World: 9-75] Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Old World: 75-157]
Week #3 Tues 9/11 Thurs 9/13	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Old World: 157-228] Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Old World: 228-295] Reading Response #1 Due
Week #4 Tues 9/18 Thurs 9/20	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Old World: 295-347] Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The New World: 351-419] Reading Response #2 Due
Week #5 Tues 9/25 Thurs 9/27	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The New World: 419-485] Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Next World: 489-552] MIDTERM DUE VIA EMAIL AT 3:30 PM
Week #6 Tues 10/2 Thurs 10/4	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Next World: 552-628] Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Next World: 628-676] Reading Response #3 Due

Week #7	
Tues 10/9	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Next World: 676-734]
Thurs 10/11	Carlos Fuentes, <i>Terra Nostra</i> (1975) [The Next World: 735-778] Reading Response #4 Due
Week #8	CANADA: The Transamerican Road Novel
Tues 10/16	Fall Break
Thurs 10/18	Jacques Poulin, <i>Volkswagen Blues</i> (1984) [I-IX: 1-72]
Week #9	
Tues 10/23	Jacques Poulin, <i>Volkswagen Blues</i> (1984) [X-XXI: 72-149]
Thurs 10/25	Jacques Poulin, <i>Volkswagen Blues</i> (1984) [XXII-XXXIII: 150-221]
Week #10	THE UNITED STATES: Hemispheric Indigeneity
Tues 10/30	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: 17-41]
Thurs 11/1	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: 42-100] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #11	
Tues 11/6	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: 101-167]
Thurs 11/8	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: 168-253] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #12	
Tues 11/13	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [MEXICO: 255-302]
Thurs 11/15	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [MEXICO: 303-346] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #13	
Tues 11/20	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [AFRICA: 347-404]
Thurs 11/22	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [AFRICA: 404-463] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #14	
Tues 11/27	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE AMERICAS: 465-565]
Thurs 11/29	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE FIFTH WORLD: 567-627] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #15	
Tues 12/4	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [THE FIFTH WORLD: 628-705]
Thurs 12/6	Leslie Marmon Silko, <i>Almanac of the Dead</i> (1991) [ONE WORLD, MANY TRIBES: 707-763] Student Presentation: Critical Reading Summary
Week #16	
Thurs 12/11	FINAL EXAM DUE VIA EMAIL AT 6:00 PM