

CMLT 2500: Comparative Ethnic American Literatures

J. Stephen Pearson, T.A. – Summer 2007

*Is not American literature the minor
literature par excellence, insofar as America
claims to federate the most diverse minorities,
"a Nation swarming with nations"?
—Gilles Deleuze*

*There are thousands of American-born who
need Americanization just as much as do the
foreign-born. —Edward Bok*

Time: M-F 10.30-11.30

Room: 220 Joe Brown Hall

Credits: 3

E-Mail: Please use Web CT e-mail

Office Hours: MTWR 10.00-10.30 (x2.2144)

Office: 125 Joe Brown (next to the vending machines)

Course Description: A comparative study of ethnic literatures in the United States, including African-, Arabic-, Asian-, Hispanic-, Jewish-, and Native-American literatures. This course can be used to fulfill the undergraduate multicultural requirement.

Pre-Requisites: None, though you should have completed ENGL 1101 & 1102, as 70% of your grade is based upon your ability to write.

Topical Outline: This course will examine ethnic American literature from the first half of the 20th century, before the "big names" were published. Most of the works studied will be short-story collections, but there will be some drama and long-form fiction as well. Through close reading of these works, we will address the thematic concerns of the authors and the stylistic means used to address these concerns. In addition, we will use contemporary scholarship to place these works within the authors' historical contexts.

Course Objectives:

1. To increase the students' ability to read and analyze a text closely, including its thematic and literary aspects.
2. To teach students how to use critical literature to interpret a work according to its historical context.
3. To improve the students' ability to participate in academic discussions about literature.
4. To improve the students' ability to write about literary texts.

Key Terms:

1. Question (v. Theme): Why does the author bring up certain themes and what does s/he say about them? What questions is the author addressing? Or, What questions are raised for you by the text?
2. Represent (v. Symbolize): Everything included in a story represents something larger than itself, even if it is not itself a symbol. What do the characters and situations represent?
3. Function (v. Meaning): Some elements may have ambiguous and/or multiple meanings. How are these elements used within the larger context, e.g. what do they do?

Required Texts:

1. **Primary Texts** (in alphabetical order); buy these before the bookstore sends them back:

- Abraham Cahan: Yekl & The Imported Bridegroom
- Fray Angélico Chávez: Short Stories of Fray Angelico Chavez
- Kahlil Gibran: The Broken Wings
- Toshio Mori: Yokohama, California
- Richard Wright: Uncle Tom's Children
- Zitkala-Ša: American Indian Stories, Legends, & Other Writings

2. **Secondary Text:**

- CMLT 2500 Coursepack, available at Bel-Jean (on Broad St. next to Coldstone)

3. **Recommended Reference Works:**

- Joseph M. Williams: Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace.
 - (A more complete, but also more expensive edition is Williams' Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace.)
- A good dictionary and a non-topographical atlas (I recommend Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and the Hammond Citation World Atlas).
 - If you study with a computer, Dictionary.com and Google's image search are useful for looking up words and maps.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Grading Scale: A = 92, A- = 90; B+ = 86, B = 82, B- = 80; C+ = 76, C=72, etc.

Quizzes (30%): Every Tuesday and Friday at the start of class, testing basic knowledge of the text as well as your ability to make interpretive judgments. I drop your lowest grade, in case you need to skip a quiz. But, if you take all the quizzes, I add one point to your final score.

- If you miss two quizzes in a row without contacting me, I will drop you from the course.
- Do not be late. If you arrive after I have begun collecting the quizzes, you will not be allowed to take it.

Exams (40%): Three exams (including the final), one after every two texts, each composed of three essay questions that examine your ability to a) compare texts and b) to use historical articles. Essays are graded on a 10-point scale, based on the quality of your argument and your understanding of the texts. The final exam will also include a cumulative question. Some questions will be based upon texts we have not discussed in class.

- **Exams are due by 5 p.m. on the day assigned, using WebCT.**
- If you miss the first exam, I will drop you from the course.
- You must take all 3 exams (incl. the cumulative essay) to qualify for a B in the course.
- Anyone going into the final with a 95+ average will only have to write the cumulative.

Writing Assignments (30%): We'll be writing on a daily basis, and these assignments will form the basis for longer essays (around 2 pp.), one for each author we discuss. These assignments are designed to increase your ability to develop an academic argument about literature, to use textual evidence and to compose persuasive essays. I drop your lowest score, in case you need to sit one essay out. But, if you write all the essays, I will add one point to your final score.

- **All essays will be due by 5 p.m. on the day assigned, using WebCT.**
- If you do not turn in the first essay, I will drop you from the course.
- You must do 4 essays to qualify for a B in the course.

Extra Credit: As stated above, extra credit for this class consists of writing 5 papers and taking all the quizzes. Doing so allows you both to drop your lowest scores, and to receive 2 extra points to your final grade, so you double the benefits.

Make-up Policy: If you contact me ahead of time about missing a quiz, I will allow you to make it up within one week. In general, I understand that your life does not come to a standstill for my course, and I am more than willing to work with you should disaster strike during the semester. However, I can only do this if you inform me of the problem and keep me up to date on your situation.

Attendance: The UGA Policy reads as follows: *Students are expected to attend classes regularly. A student who incurs an excessive number of absences may be withdrawn from a class at the discretion of the professor.* Otherwise, I have no formal attendance policy; if you can read all the work on your own and pass the course, congratulations. However, attendance does play a role in class participation (see below). You should always show up for class at least twice a week, if only to take the quizzes.

Participation: Consistent attendance, participation, completion of assignments, etc. will count in your favor should you be on the border (i.e., between letters) at the end of the term.

Course Withdrawals: I will not offer a WF to anyone who disappears after the second exam. As stated above, I do drop people from the course for missing exams or consecutive quizzes, but I only give WFs prior to the second exam.

Academic Honesty—UGA Policy:

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” All students are responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

What that means in this class: If you cheat on a quiz, you earn a zero on the quiz and will not be allowed to drop that quiz. If you cheat on an exam, you earn a zero for the exam. If you plagiarize small portions of a paper, you earn a zero for that paper and will not be allowed to drop that paper. If you plagiarize substantial portions of your paper, you will fail the course.

Classroom Policies: Remember that teachers and other students are only human, and are influenced by your appearance and behavior. And as in any workplace, you want people to give you the benefit of the doubt. Lateness, disruptiveness, rudeness, inappropriate clothing, etc. are counter-productive to your relationships with your instructor and with your classmates. A few tips:

- Turn off cell phones and pagers before entering the class room. If you need to keep them on (due to an emergency, etc.), let me know ahead of time, and sit near the door.
- If you need to leave early, let me know ahead of time, and sit near the door.
- If you arrive late, take your books, etc. out of your backpack and remove your coat before you enter the room in order to minimize the disturbance to the class.
- Watch your grooming: your safest bet is to treat the class as if it were your job—bathe, dress appropriately, and try to look as though you put some effort into your appearance.
- Treat your classmates with respect, especially when you disagree with them: do unto others, &c.

About the Instructor: I am a Ph.D. student in Comparative Literature here at UGA; my focus is on similarities between minority literature and religious literature. I have both a B.A. in Liberal Arts and an M.A. in Eastern Classics from St. John’s College (NM), and an M.A. in Comparative Lit from U of Georgia.