

Fall 2015  
**ENGLISH 6700-101**  
**STUDIES IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
*Thematic Title: American Literature after the American Century*  
MW 3:30-4:45 PM  
Lalumiere Language Hall 222

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Office Hours: MWF 2:00 PM-3:00 PM or by appointment

In 1941, *Time* Magazine publisher Henry Luce called upon the twentieth century to be “the first great American Century,” and it’s been ending ever since. This course takes up American literary and cultural studies from the post-everything standpoint of the “after.” What is it to study American literature today, after the American Century, after American exceptionalism, after modernity, after the university, after the idea of the future itself? Our shared investigation into contemporary critical and scholarly practices will focus on key controversies in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary study, including the ongoing reevaluation of “the canon” (*Lolita*), popular culture studies (*The Body Snatchers*), identity and identity politics (*Dawn*), nationalism and transnationalism (*Tropic of Orange*), postmodernity and neoliberalism (the short stories of David Foster Wallace), and ecocriticism in the Anthropocene (*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*). Our reading will also draw heavily on recent scholarship in critical theory, especially “the new American studies” and the emerging discipline of critical university studies. Alongside weekly reflections and enthusiastic class participation, students in this course will produce a 15-20 page seminar paper on a subject of their choosing related to the themes of the course, as well as present their work to their peers in a conference-presentation format and develop a sample syllabus for an undergraduate course in American literary or cultural studies.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Investigate major concepts, methods, and theoretical movements that have shaped the practices of contemporary literary studies;
- Study and critically analyze major works of American literature, both from the perspective of their own cultural-historical moments and as they appear to us today;
- Self-reflectively consider our own role as scholars and teachers of literature and the place of our work within the contemporary university and the contemporary public sphere;
- Understand the role the idea of “nation” has played in the formation of literary studies, as well as recent challenges to the centrality of the “nation”;
- Write an original, self-directed scholarly essay in the field of 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century American literary studies that intervenes in these debates, with an eye towards conference presentation and eventual publication.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (available at the BookMarq on 16<sup>th</sup> Street)

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

Jack Finney, *The Body Snatchers* (1955)

Octavia E. Butler, *Dawn* (1987)

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (1997)

Karen Joy Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013)

Note: Any published edition of these texts will do.

Additional readings and course materials will occasionally be made available via D2L.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Class Participation	20%
Discussion Leader	10%
D2L Forums	15%
Syllabus (Group Project)	10%
Abstract	10%
Paper Presentation	15%
Final Paper	20%

These assignments break down as follows:

*Class Participation:* You are expected to attend every class having read the material and ready to discuss it, and to participate actively in our conversation. Please let me know in advance of our meeting if you find you will need to miss a session.

*Discussion Leader:* Beginning with Week 4, each member of the class will have two days in which they are expected to inaugurate our discussion based on the readings for that day. The requirements for this are necessarily very loose, as each day of the course will have a very different type of text to be discussed; in general, however, the discussion inaugurator will be asked to (1) succinctly describe the project of the text; (2) articulate a brief critical response to the material; and (3) direct our collective attention to one or two problems in, questions about, or particularly important moments in the text. I expect this introductory role to take approximately five to ten minutes. A signup sheet for this role will be distributed in class next week.

*D2L Forums:* This course will make extensive use of the forums on D2L, where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over. You are asked to contribute a short 1-2 page response on D2L under six of the eight thematic subheadings of the course: “American Literature after the American Century,” “Canons and Trigger Warnings,” “Popular Culture(s),” etc. I encourage you to think of your blog comments as possible “seeds” for the final paper; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there. You are also highly encouraged to kill two birds with one stone by posting a forum comment on the days you are scheduled to be the discussion inaugurator. These comments should ideally be completed either by 10

PM before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by 10 PM the night before the following class. Roughly half of the posts should be completed before Fall Break.

*Syllabus (Group Project):* In groups of two or three, you will develop a syllabus for a proposed college-level course in literary studies. (Your group will choose details like the academic level, the historical period or subdiscipline, and the theme.) These syllabi will be brought to class on Monday, November 30 to be workshopped by the group.

*Final Paper:* Your final paper will be on a topic chosen and developed by you with some connection (however tenuous) to the material discussed in this class. The project will move through several stages:

Abstract: You will submit an abstract for the paper you plan to me by Monday, November 2, alongside a call for papers, a journal special issue, a conference announcement, etc. that you might theoretically write the paper towards. You should get in the habit of watching the CFP clearinghouse for English studies at [call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu](http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu) in order to find a CFP that is a good fit.

Symposium: The last three meetings of our class will be a mini-conference with panels constructed from the abstracts you submit to me. You will all present a conference version of your paper in a conference-style presentation, with each participant having twenty minutes to speak, followed by audience Q&A. Ideally this discussion will help you develop your final paper in the following week.

Final Paper: The final 15-to-20 page paper is due to me by 10 AM on Friday, December 18, via D2L's Digital Dropbox. The final paper should endeavor to be an original scholarly intervention in a contemporary debate about literary studies, with an eye towards conference presentation and eventual publication. This means your final paper should demonstrate both its originality and participation in an existing scholarly conversation through appropriate citation of existing work (both primary and secondary sources). Such sources might include: other fictional or nonfictional works by the author(s) under consideration; secondary criticism of those or other literary texts; relevant cultural or literary theory and criticism; historical research and documents; scholarship from other academic disciplines on related issues and themes; popular criticism; research into patterns in the critical and popular reception of a text; fan scholarship. To produce an "A" essay, you must construct an essay that does more than simply summarize or comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

*Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for*

*you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.*

—Kenneth Burke, “The Philosophy of Literary Form”

## **OTHER COURSE PROCEDURES**

### **FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK**

Your final paper should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, yourlastname-finalpaper.docx.

Given the usual conventions of our discipline, I suggest either MLA bibliography or Chicago footnote style for citation.

### **DOUBLE SUBMISSION OF PAPERS**

I do not object to double submission of papers if that works for your course plan. However, you must ask for permission in advance from both professors and your proposal must satisfy the requirements of both assignments. Your paper should be approximately twice as long as a single-submitted paper to reflect its dual purpose.

### **INCOMPLETES**

Please talk to me, as soon as possible, if you feel as though you will not be able to meet the deadline for the final paper. Of course things happen, but I strongly advise against trying to use incompletes as a task- management strategy in graduate school.

### **TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!**

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

### **EMAIL**

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

## **LAPTOP POLICY**

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. **Please do not abuse this privilege or distract your fellow students.** I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. Except in unusual cases of personal emergency, cleared with me at the start of class, no use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

## **CONFERENCES**

In lieu of our scheduled classes on October 26 and November 13, **all students are required to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester** to discuss the course and your work within it. Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss work-in-progress in excess of this requirement, as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

## **ACCOMODATIONS**

Students with disabilities who believe they will require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met. Per university policy, you are required to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services. If you are unsure of what you need to do to qualify for services, you can begin by visiting the Office of Disability Services in Marquette Hall, Lower Level, Room 05, or by visiting <http://www.marquette.edu/disability-services.index.shtml>.

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in the university bulletin. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

## **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

## **RESPECT**

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your final grade.

## PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE

*Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.*

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

## GENERAL COURSE PLAN

WEEK 1: AMERICAN LITERATURE AFTER THE AMERICAN CENTURY

WEEK 2-4: CANONS AND TRIGGER WARNINGS: *LOLITA*

WEEK 4-6: POPULAR CULTURE(S): *THE BODY SNATCHERS*

WEEK 6-8: THEORIES AND IDENTITIES: *DAWN*

WEEK 8-9: POSTMODERNISM AND CONSUMER CULTURE: DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

WEEK 10-11: NATIONALISMS AND TRANSNATIONALISMS: *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

WEEK 11-12: ECOCRITICISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: *WE ARE ALL COMPLETELY BESIDE OURSELVES*

WEEK 13: AMERICAN LITERATURE AFTER EVERYTHING

WEEK 14-15: CLASS SYMPOSIUM

## DAY-BY-DAY SCHEDULE

M	Aug. 31	FIRST DAY OF CLASS Henry Luce, "The American Century" [D2L]
W	Sep. 2	<b>American Literature after the American Century</b> Henry A. Giroux, "Public Intellectuals against the Neoliberal University" [Web]  Michael Bérubé, "American Studies without Exceptions" [D2L]
<b>M</b>	<b>Sep. 7</b>	<b>LABOR DAY HOLIDAY—NO CLASS</b>
W	Sep. 9	<b>Canons and Trigger Warnings</b> <i>Lolita</i> , Foreword and Part One
M	Sep. 14	<i>Lolita</i> , Part Two (first half)
W	Sep. 16	<i>Lolita</i> (whole book including afterword)
M	Sep. 21	Jay Caspian King, "Trigger Warnings and the Novelist's Mind" [newyorker.com] Malcolm Harris, "Western Canon, Meet Trigger Warning" [aljazeera.com]  Ira Wells, "Forgetting Lolita: How Nabokov's Victim Became an American Fantasy" [newrepublic.com] "A Portrait of the Young Girl: On the 60th Anniversary of <i>Lolita</i> " [Los Angeles Review of Books]

W	Sep. 23	<b>Popular Culture(s)</b> Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture”
M	Sep. 28	<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (whole book)
W	Sep. 30	<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (whole book) Susan Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster” [D2L] Fredric Jameson, “Metacommentary” [D2L]
M	Oct. 5	<i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> (1978 film) Erika Nelson, “ <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> : Gender and Sexuality in Four Film Adaptations” [D2L] Marty Roth, “Twice Two: <i>The Fly</i> and <i>Invasion of the Body Snatchers</i> ” [D2L]
W	Oct. 7	<b>Theories and Identities</b> Octavia E. Butler, <i>Dawn</i> (first half)
M	Oct. 12	Octavia E. Butler, <i>Dawn</i> (second half)
W	Oct. 14	Octavia Butler, <i>Adulthood Rites</i> (excerpts) [D2L] Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto” [D2L] Donna Haraway, <i>Primate Visions</i> [excerpt] [D2L]
M	Oct. 19	Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [D2L]
W	Oct. 21	<b>Postmodernism and Consumer Culture</b> David Foster Wallace, “Octet” David Foster Wallace, “The Depressed Person”
<b>M</b>	<b>Oct. 26</b>	<b>CONFERENCES—NO CLASS</b>
W	Oct. 28	David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”
M	Nov. 2	<b>Nationalism and Transnationalism</b> <i>Tropic of Orange</i> (first half) <b>FINAL PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE</b>
W	Nov. 4	<i>Tropic of Orange</i> (second half)
M	Nov. 9	Gloria Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands</i> [excerpts] [D2L] Junot Díaz, “Monstro” [D2L]
W	Nov. 11	<b>Ecocriticism in the Anthropocene</b> <i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> (first half)
M	Nov. 16	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> (second half)
W	Nov. 18	Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History” [D2L] McKenzie Wark, “Critical Theory after the Anthropocene” [D2L]

M	Nov. 23	<b>American Literature after Everything</b> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” [D2L] Giorgio Agamben, “What Is The Contemporary?” [D2L] Natalia Cecire, “Humanities Scholarship Is Incredibly Relevant, and That Makes People Sad” [Web]
<b>W</b>	<b>Nov. 25</b>	<b>THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS</b>
M	Nov. 30	Syllabus Workshop <b>GROUP SYLLABUSES DUE</b>
W	Dec. 2	Class Symposium (day one)
M	Dec. 7	Class Symposium (day two)
W	Dec. 9	Class Symposium (day three)
<b>F</b>	<b>Dec. 18</b>	<b>FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 10 AM</b>

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On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/marquettefame](http://www.facebook.com/marquettefame)

On Twitter: @MarquetteFAME

And please note the following FAME events this semester:

*Sept. 15—Reading by Carolyn Forché*

4:30 pm, Eisenberg Reading Room, Sensenbrenner Hall

*Oct. 27—Panel: What ELSE You Can Do With An English Major Panel*

4:30pm, Marquette Hall 105

I will also be inviting you to events in the pop culture and pizza series I run periodically during the semester. I hope you can attend!