

ENG 660: American Literature ETHNIC IMPERSONATION

Winter 2015
F 9:00a – 11:50a
PLC 253

Professor Tara Fickle
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Office: 372 PLC
Office Hours: Wed 1-2 pm; Fri 12–2 pm

I. Course Description

What is the relationship between “originality” and “authenticity” in contemporary literature (and between the implications of the terms’ respective scare-quoting)? Which comes first, authorship or authority? This course employs an unlikely pair of critical discourses — “radical artifice,” a term which Marjorie Perloff coined in 1994 as a way to talk about the relationship between poetry and media discourses, and “racial asymmetry,” which Stephen Sohn used in 2012 to describe the peculiar millennial trend of “postracial” literature — in order to frame questions of ethnic radicalism through the issue of literary impersonation. How do we read a novel that purports to be an “authentic” memoir of a Native American boy, but which later turns out to have been written by a former member of the KKK? What about a book by a renowned African American novelist that lacks even one discernibly “ethnic” character? How, too, do these issues engage with broader aesthetic notions of literary “truth” or “realism,” especially as they translate the stakes of race into simultaneously political terms (of gender, class, sexuality, and disability) as well as formal ones (of style, genre, and voice)?

Office Hours and E-mail

I check my e-mail frequently, but not constantly — and rarely on the weekends — so please allow 24 hours for a response during the week (48 hours during weeks when papers or projects are due). If you have a serious matter to discuss with me, arrange to meet me in my office.

Course Requirements

1. Course readings

(a) Required books available at the UO Bookstore and through Amazon.com, etc. Make sure you choose the correct edition; Kindle/ebook OK.

Styron, William. *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1992), Random House.

Lee, Chang-Rae. *Aloft* (2004), Penguin.

Hayles, N.K. *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), UC Press.

Carter, Forrest. *The Education of Little Tree* (2004), UNM.

Baldwin, James. *Giovanni’s Room* (2013), Random House.

Perloff, Marjorie. *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1991), UC Press.

Stalling, Jonathan. *Yingelishi* (2011), Counterpath.

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era* (2009), Triliteral.

Sohn, Stephen. *Racial Asymmetries: Asian American Fictional Worlds* (2014), NYU.

Hayot, Eric, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (2014), Columbia.

(b) Other texts available on Blackboard as PDF files under “Course Documents.” Please print out/download and bring to class.

2. Class Presentation. Each student will sign up to present at one class meeting. Presentations should be between 15-25 minutes, and should synthesize (not summarize) primary and secondary texts through insights and textual evidence. Presenters should conclude with 1-2 discussion questions to open full-class discussion; they will not be expected to lead the remainder of the meeting. You are encouraged to meet with me following your presentation to receive detailed feedback. For more information, see my “Success in Grad Seminar” (<http://goo.gl/vHpWIZ>).

3. Journal Article Presentation & Professionalization Q&A. To help students learn about the unique genre of academic journal articles, 2 class meetings will be dedicated to discussing strategies and best practices regarding publication and professionalization more broadly. At the beginning of the quarter, each student will choose from a list of major academic journals in the field of contemporary American and ethnic literature. They are responsible for reading the entirety of the assigned issue, summarizing the basic claims and topics of the articles within, describing general trends in topic and critical method in the issue as a whole, and sharing these observations with the class through a brief (10-15 minute) oral presentation. In Week 9, they will submit (via BB) 2-3 detailed questions about any aspect of academic professionalization to Professor Fickle, who will aggregate and lead a Q&A to help demystify the process.

4. Final Paper. A conference-length analytical paper (10-12 pages) will be due via Blackboard on Wednesday of Week 11 (3/18). A 6-7 page draft is due via BB on *Monday* of Week 9 (note this is not a class meeting day). This will allow me enough time to give you extensive comments on your draft by Wednesday of Week 10; you will then have a week to revise and complete your papers. Please note that paper drafts will receive detailed comments, while final papers will receive very minimal ones; you are strongly encouraged to contact and meet with me at early Spring quarter to discuss your final paper in person, with a focus on revising it for conference presentation or journal publication.

V. Grading Procedures

1. Attendance & Participation (10%)
2. Class Presentation (20%)
3. Academic Journal Article Presentation (5%)
4. Professionalization Discussion Questions (5%)
5. Conference-Length Paper (6-7pp Draft 10%, Final 50%)

VII. Accessible Education

In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

IX. Course Schedule (Reading listed is due that day)

Week 1 (1/9): Introduction

Week 2 (1/16): Race Crimes

Primary: Styron, *Confessions of Nat Turner*

Secondary: Clarke, *10 Black Writers Respond* (PDF)

Secondary: Schweiker, "Beyond Imitation: Mimetic Praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida" (PDF)

Optional: McGurl, *Program Era*, Introduction

Optional: Greenberg, *Confessions + Related Docs*

Week 3 (1/23): Race and/as/or Sexuality

Primary: Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*

Secondary: Gates, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" (PDF)

Secondary: McGurl, *Program Era*, Part 2, Ch 4: "Our Phonocentrism"

Secondary: Henderson, James Baldwin: Expatriation, Homosexual Panic, and Man's Estate (PDF)

Optional: Abur-Rahman, "Simply a Menaced Boy": Analogizing Color, Undoing Dominance in James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room" (PDF)

Week 4 (1/30): Racial Education

Primary: Carter, *Education of Little Tree*

Secondary: Gates, "Authenticity, or the Lesson of Little Tree"

Secondary: McGurl, *Program Era*, Ch 6 ("Instruction")

Secondary: Justice, "A Lingering Miseducation: Confronting the Legacy of Little Tree" (PDF)

Optional: Huhndorf, "The Making of an Indian: 'Forrest' Carter's Literary Inventions," from *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imaginary* (2001)

Week 5 (2/6): Racial Form

Primary: Lee, *Aloft*

Secondary: Sohn, *Racial Asymmetries*, Ch 1 ("White Flight")

Secondary: Lye, "Racial Form" (PDF)

Optional: Jerng, "Nowhere in particular: Perceiving Race, Chang-Rae Lee's *Aloft*, and the Question of Asian American Fiction" (PDF)

Week 6 (2/13): Journal Article Presentations

Week 7 (2/20): Racial Style

Primary: Jen, *Tiger Writing*, Introduction (PDF)

Secondary: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*

Secondary: McGurl, *Program Era*, Ch 3 ("Unreality")

Week 8 (2/27): Racial Character

*Griffin Guest Speaker & Lecture, **class begins 10a**

Primary: Stalling, *Yingelishi*

Secondary: Perloff, *Radical Artifice* Intro and Ch 5 ("Numerical")

Optional: Stalling, TED Talk (Link)

Optional: Liu Qian, *Yingelishi* Review (Link)

Optional: 3% Review (Link)

Final Paper drafts (6-7 pages) due by 5pm Monday 3/3 on Blackboard.

Week 9 (3/6): Post Race?

Primary: Chiang, *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* (PDF)

Secondary: Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, Preface, Chapter 1 (“Toward Embodied”), Chapter 9 (“Artificial Life”), and Optional: Conclusion

Optional: Chun, “Race and/as Technology, or How to Do Things to Race” in Nakamura, *Race after the Internet* (PDF)

Optional: Fan, “Melancholy Transcendence: Ted Chiang and Asian American Postracial Form” (PDF)

Submit questions regarding any aspect of professionalization, publication, prospectus or dissertation-writing, job market, or alternative career paths to Blackboard by 5pm Thursday 3/12

Week 10 (3/13): Academic Professionalization Q&A

Week 11: Final Papers due by 5p Wednesday 3/18 on Blackboard