

Literature 181
The Literature of California
Fall 2009

Professor:

Jan Goggans

Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30 - 3

Other times by appointment

Office: COB 315

Course Description:

Whether the Gam Saan of mid nineteenth century Chinese pioneers, the manifest destiny of their Anglo counterparts, the failed Eden of Dust Bowl migrants or the land of fruits and nuts, California has been as much the product of dreams as it is geology. Imagined into existence, as Jack Hicks wrote in the introduction to *The Literature of California*, Volume I, the state has long carried the burden of its own representations of wealth and prosperity, and the conflicted histories of those who come in contact with them for better or worse. Those points of conflict have often resulted in some of the state's most poignant and well-known stories, as writers have crafted tale after tale of the often difficult path to finding home in California.

This course will attempt to sample the many literary responses to California's literary production, providing you with a number of ways to explore and understand how its past informed its present and continues to inform its future.

Objectives and Outcomes

This course will teach you to:

- Understand the relationship between the production of literature over time and the cultures that produced it;
- Understand the process of how literature responds to specific historical and geographical realities;
- Understand how and why underlying ideas of regional thought and behaviors are often shaped by cultural expression, including literature.

This will lead you to be able to:

- Interpret texts with due sensitivity to both the literary and cultural response to an historical moment;
- Appreciate the aesthetic qualities of texts as well as the contexts and cultural beliefs that form them;
- Judge the value(s) of texts and contexts;

- Apply the interpretive strategies developed in literary study to a broad historical perspective;
- Articulate, cogently and with sensitivity to context, in both speech and writing, your interpretations and evaluations.

Requirements

The course will ask you to willingly and actively engage in two forms of scholarship, written and oral.

Oral:

As a seminar, the course will require your active participation in discussion. I will take role daily, since you cannot engage in discussion if you are not here. More than four absences will result in automatic failure of the course unless you have cleared those absences with me well in advance or are able to produce documented medical reasons. Additionally, you will each be required to participate in a four person panel presentation to the class. Details to follow.

Written:

The course asks that you write three papers of 5 – 6 pages. No late papers. If you are sick, you will need a written medical excuse; if a close family member is sick, please let me know immediately.

Course Materials

Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*

Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*

Joan Didion, *Run River*

Dana Gioia et.al, *California Poetry from the Gold Rush to the Present*

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Childhood Among Ghosts*

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Three Californias*

Carolyn See, *Golden Days*

William Saroyan, *The Human Comedy*

John Steinbeck, *To A God Unknown*

Nathaniel West, *The Day of the Locust*

Additional readings on the UCMCROPS site.

Course Grade:

In class participation:	15%
Papers (15% each):	45%
Panel Presentation:	40%

Reading Schedule:

- 8/26 Course Introduction
Receive essay assignment #1
- 8/28 Early literatures and culture
Sacramento Valley Drainage, Maidu.
Girl and Coyote in Flood Time, Chamahuevi.
An Island Called California, Ordonez de Montalvo.
The Santa Barbara Coast, Father Juan Crespi.
All available UCMCROPS
Patrick Breen, Donner Party Journal
[http://content.cdlib.org/search?facet=type-
tab&relation=calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu
&style=cui&keyword=patrick+breen&x=18&y=8](http://content.cdlib.org/search?facet=type-tab&relation=calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu&style=cui&keyword=patrick+breen&x=18&y=8)
- 9/2 Early literatures and cultures
Life at the Mines, Louisa Smith Clapp, aka Dame
Shirley.
Madame Moustache, Duncan Aikman.
The Ballad of Joaquin Murrieta, Anonymous
Joaquin, John Rollin Ridge
Portrait of a California Girl, Ella Sterling Cummins
Mighels.
All available UCMCROPS
Joaquin Miller and Yone Naguchi, Gioia, pp16 –
18 & 45
- 9/4 Guest Jack Hicks, lead editor, *Literature of California, Volume I*, University of California Press.
- 9/9 *To A God Unknown*
9/11 *God*, continued
Robinson Jeffers, Gioia, pp 56 - 60
- 9/16 *The Human Comedy*
Wilma McDaniel, Gioia, pp 111 -112
Possible guest: Gerry Haslam
- 9/18 *Comedy*, continued
- 9/23 Field trip to Library!
From Hoboes to Street People, guest speakers Charles Wollenberg, Art Hazlewood.

	(first essay due)
9/25	<i>The Day of the Locust</i> , Nathaniel West
9/30	<i>Run River</i>
10/2	<i>River</i> , continued “Fluvial Systems . . .” Jan Goggans essay, UCMCROPS
10/7	<i>The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Childhood Among</i>
	<i>Ghosts</i>
10/9	<i>Woman Warrior</i> , continued Angel Island poems, UCMCROPS
10/14	<i>The White Boy Shuffle</i>
10/16	<i>White Boy</i> , continued Eldridge Cleaver, unpublished poetry, UCMCROPS Ishmael Reed, Gioia, pp 203 - 205
10/21	<i>Golden Days</i>
10/23	<i>Golden Days</i> , continued Charles Bukowski, Gioia, 124 -127 (Receive essay assignment #2)
10/28	<i>The Parable of the Sower</i>
10/30	<i>Parable</i> , continued Wanda Coleman and Brenda Hillman, Gioia, pp 263 & 312
11/4	<i>The Wild Shore: Three Californias</i>
11/6	<i>Wild Shore</i> , continued Guest, Kim Stanley Robinson, author (Receive essay assignment #3)
11/11	Veterans Day Holiday
11/13	No class meeting: extended office hours 11 – 3 (second essay due via email at 12:00)
11/18	Panel #1
11/20	Panel #2
11/25	Panel #3
11/27	Thanksgiving Holiday
12/2	Panel #4
12/4	Panel #5

12/9 (third essay due)

Class conclusion

Essay Assignments:

Assignment: ONE

Length: Five – Seven pages

Due:

This assignment is designed to help familiarize you with three wonderful sites on California culture, heritage, and literature. By asking you to evaluate focused offerings on these sites, you will gain knowledge of how research works, knowledge that will help you later. In terms of this course, the assignment will assist you in developing your group research presentation topic and strategies, for while you may, as a group, select a different research topic than the one you look at for this essay assignment, the assignment will provide you with clarity, facility, and confidence in researching California. There are three primary sites available to you on California cultures and literatures. The links are provided below.

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/search?query=calheritage:group=Items>

<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/calcultures/>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/cubhtml/cichome.html>

Your first assignment asks you to look through one or all three sites, and to select a specific topic on ONE of them. This is, specifically, a TOPIC, not necessarily an individual site hosted or developed by one of the three larger sites. Thus, if you chose “Native Americans in California,” you might go to that in Calisphere, look at the material available, and choose Pre Columbian. Once you began to explore that site, you would find a handful of images as well as “Questions to Consider.” Also, you would find a sidebar link to an online essay, “Before 1768: Pre-Columbian California,” by Joshua Paddison, as well as additional links and suggested library books. On the OAC site, typing in ‘Precolumbian Native Americans’ would provide 35 links, all to collections, and would give you a clear understanding of what you would find, and where you would find it.

Once you have finished this online research, your assignment is to write up a clear narrative, NOT A LIST, describing and analyzing what you found, including an informed assessment of how useful your findings would be should you be engaged in research on the topic for a substantial paper or even a monograph. You may need to imagine the type(s) of papers or books the information could, or could not, assist. You may need to talk about what else you would need, beyond what you can access. You may need to think in terms of a disciplinary approach—a literary paper, an historical monograph, an anthropological presentation. Would your findings help you? And if so, how and why? Five pages is your limit, so do not cast too wide a research net. On the other hand, should you find yourself fascinated with a somewhat obscure topic, you should include in your essay some level of direct analysis to illustrate your point of the site’s usefulness or non-

usefulness. I have placed in your CROPS folder a guide to primary artifact assessment that you can use to try your hand at “reading” an image.

Assignment: TWO

Length: Five to Seven pages

Due date, via email, 12:00 pm., November 13

The idea of a California canon, as we have discussed, is truly controversial. IS there such a thing, many writers, and literary critics, may ask, yet, the fact is that for nearly one hundred years, California writing has been compiled and collected and presented as a unique body of literature. Thus, we must look to what constitutes that body, what the *canon* of California literature entails.

In your folder, you have a variety of Table of Contents that I have photocopied from collections of California literature, beginning in 1918 and ending with 1981. There are more, and of course Jack Hicks’ overwhelming collection from UC Press, *The Literature of California, Vol. I*—only half of his planned project—came out in 2000. But, you’ll get a good sampling from what I’ve scanned.

Please read over the various tables carefully, paying close attention to their dates. Then, in five pages, write an essay in which you define the Literature of California as a canon. The basic question you will ask that will help you in your exploration and ultimate definition will be the changes and points of stasis that characterize the various articulations of Literature of California over time. How did collected works change, for example, from 1918 to 1944? How beyond that? What themes or ideas remained the same?

Just as significantly to your essay, you need to theorize why those changes have or have not occurred and what it signifies, overall. That is, you are rapidly becoming experts in the field of California literature—like it not! As a budding expert, to what do you attribute these changes and these points of stasis? How, in 2009, do you define the Literature of California?

Assignment: THREE

Due date: December 11, 2 pm.

Length: Five pages

Perceptions of California, both real and imagined, depend upon the visual experience of the region. Whether iconic images of wide open vistas and terrains of struggle and triumph over weather and geography; the flat and deceptively placid fields and rivers of the Central Valley; or the often surreal matrix of fire, destruction, and riot that repeatedly marks Los Angelean prose—all speak to the reality that California literatures are often as reliant on visual imagery and representation as word. In fact, as we can interpret from the amount of energy devoted to physical descriptions of the region and its people in our

course texts, the visual and the literary often work hand-in-hand in representing California.

With this in mind, for our final project I would like you to choose **ONE** of the following options and, depending on your chosen media, **design a visual representation of our course themes and/or texts.**

*1. Imagine our course texts as a giant anthology, representing a cross-section of the literature of California and exploring many of its key themes. What would the cover of the anthology look like? Design a cover that you feel would best represent the texts and themes that would be encompassed by the anthology. Accompany your image with a 5 page “process paper,” in which you explain your choices, making sure to elucidate what you hope to evoke through your design and (most importantly) **how** the aspects of your design work together to do so.*

*2. Design a brief (1-3 minute) video montage of images and/or clips that you feel best represents the texts and themes of the course. Accompany your image with a 5 page “process paper,” in which you explain your choices, making sure to elucidate what you hope to evoke through your montage and (most importantly) **how** the aspects of your video work together to do so. (NOTE: Your video may be silent or include audio elements; however, should you choose to include audio, you must be sure to explain this aspect within your paper as well).*

Bear in mind, this assignment is intended to be a bit playful, and you should feel free to be as creative as you like (and, hey!, have some fun...). At the same time, it is serious, and I am asking you to culminate, in one visual moment, what you have learned this semester. You need to develop—and make clear, in the brief write-up—reasons for your interpretations and choices, based on the texts and themes that we have covered in class.

Presentations: Requirements and Grading

Requirements:

Panel presentations

Each year, the American Literature Association--a loose network of scholarly organizations, publishers, and author societies--holds a conference. An author society is exactly what it sounds like: a society of scholars who are bound together by a common interest in a certain writer. That interest will usually encompass the time in which she or he wrote (19th century literature, for example), the racial, gender, or ethnic background (Chicana literature, for example), the genre (poetry, plays, etc), and the author's contribution to the canon of American literature. Often, author society members belong to more than one society, since various authors' work falls into the scholar's field of interest. A scholar member of the Jack London Society, might also belong to the Society for Study of Working Class Literature.

At the yearly conference, author societies invariably present a panel on their author. For example, at last year's ALA in Boston, the Jack London Society presented a panel on Jack London, and the preliminary call for papers [CFP] they sent out looked like this:

The Jack London Society will sponsor a panel at the **2009 ALA Conference at the Westin Copley Place, Boston, Massachusetts, May 28-31, 2009**. Papers are welcome on any aspect of London's life and work. Send one-page abstracts or completed papers to Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Executive Coordinator, at jeanne.reesman@utsa.edu by the proposal deadline of December 31, 2008. Include complete mailing and email information, affiliation, and paper title. Papers are to be no longer than 15 minutes, about 8-9 double-spaced 12 pt. font pages. Chairs are also sought for the panels. If you wish to propose an entire panel, include information on all participants. Graduate students are encouraged to submit proposals.

For your assignment, you and 3 or 4 other students in this class will form a temporary author's society. Your choices of authors are limited to those who wrote the first seven novels we read and discussed in this class: John Steinbeck, William Saroyan, Nathaniel West, Joan Didion, Maxine Hong Kingston, Paul Beatty, Carolyn See. Together, your society will formulate a panel to present at the ALA. Conference panels are 70 minutes long, and they always include time for questions. Thus, time will be a factor for you. Additionally, you will need to decide on an approach. While the approach is entirely up to you, you might consider a few of these suggestions; even if you don't use them, they will give you an idea of how to get started and what I am expecting.

1. You could present ONE paper, and follow that paper with two respondents. One respondent could explain what the paper's findings add to our understanding of the novel; a second could counter the paper's stance. Thus, you would have the classic point/counterpoint responses, and the fourth member of the panel would be charged with mediating a discussion, writing intelligent questions, and figuring out how to draw in the audience.
2. You could present three papers, with a panel 'chair' who writes questions to ask the panel and is charged with bringing in the audience, asking questions that will stimulate wide engagement.
3. You could present three 'off novel' research projects—that is, research on topics within the novel that open it up to further understanding and for further discussion. A fourth panel member would be charged with pulling together the full view of the novel the research gives.
4. You could respond to the novel in different media—visual, aural, textual. Your panel chair could moderate the various responses into a holistic understanding of the novel or the author.
5. You could research the author, rather than the novel, presenting background and analyses of her or his other works, including how the novel we read in class fits into his or her canon, and how that canon fits into American literature as a whole.

In all cases, and in those I have not imagined, your responsibility is to provide intelligent, insightful, responses. In most cases, those responses will need to be grounded in secondary sources, people who have written about the author and the text. And you will need to work closely together. Your chair has a large charge, for it is up to that person to make the panel work, to provide a means by which the class really sees the points the panel is making, but also really sees the overall point that the separate presentations lead to as a whole. The other members have the responsibility of working on their own, but in concert with other members, doing their “own thing,” so to speak, but doing it in the company of and in communication with others. And, they will need to get drafts to the chair, and to others, so everyone knows what everyone else is doing.

We will draw slips to see who goes when. You will each have the entire class period and I will expect you to strictly follow the protocol for panels that I have included in your essay folder. It is sent to members of the Modern Language Association [MLA], the premiere association for literary scholarship, when their essays have been accepted for presentation at the annual conference.

TIMELINE

I will give you two meetings in class, 20 minutes apiece, in which to confer.

On October 30, you must submit an abstract. On the abstract, you should describe your society’s outline for the presentation. You do not need to have any work complete at this point, but you do need to commit each person in the group to a specific task, and explain how each will work with the rest. You should also designate a contact person for your society.

On November 18, panel presentations begin. On Nov. 6, I will give you clear grading standards.

Grading:

Research Presentation

The purpose of your research assignments has been to help you, and your classmates, understand the novels in the class in new, and newly focused, ways. For many years, literary texts were studied via a process of explication. While the term “explication” was most often associated with poetry, as you can see from the following definition, the extension to prose was not a large jump: explication: “a relatively short analysis which describes the possible meanings and relationships of the words, images, and other small units that make up a poem. Writing an explication is an effective way for a reader to connect a poem's plot and conflicts with its structural features.” For a funny example of poetic explication, you can check the following link, if you are interested.

<http://www.geocities.com/lrampey/2131/explicate.htm>

In general, then, we understand explication as a standard by which readers are able to read more deeply into literature, to go beyond the surface, or the apparent, meaning. In recent years, literary explication has expanded in quite wonderful ways, moving from the strictly “structural” standards (i.e. what are the major symbols? What are the sentence

patterns?) to encompass a much broader meaning. This shift is likely the result of a broader categorization of “literature.” If we see it as one of a host of cultural productions, then it only makes sense to explicate texts not on a static set of expectations, but on the terms of the culture that produced it. Thus, literature leads us to understandings that are political, historical, anthropological, and sociological as well as artistic, aesthetic, even musical. Whole papers have been written, for example, on the role of bebop jazz in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

Your assigned topic should help you, and the class, to understand your chosen text in new ways by giving greater insight through an increased understanding of your topic.

Format:

Please begin with a clear identification of the following:

Book

Topic

Relationship between the two

You should, the above makes clear, have some kind of “thesis,” as to how the information you have gathered affects the class’s understanding of the book.

Beyond that, you might consider taking on some of the following questions. Some may not be useful to you, and you should not take the list below as a requirement. It is only a tool you can use to help you focus what I assume is a large body of research material.

How was your own response to the book affected by learning about your research topic?

Is there anything about your topic that the book needs its readers to understand in order to be effective?

How would the book be different if you didn’t know what you knew about your topic?

How, and to what extent, is the book’s protest strengthened by understanding your topic?

Are there specific passages in the book that “read” differently if you have the knowledge your topic offers?

Does your research affect your attitude toward the author of the book?

Does your research affect your opinion of the book’s intent and its ultimate success or failure in achieving that intent?

What might you say to readers, knowing what you know, about the book?

Grading:

I understand grades are important to all of you. I would encourage you to keep in mind that I am actually rooting for each and every one of you. Learning the social/cultural/political/etc underpinnings of a book is, in my opinion, a wonderful thing to do, and I am glad each of you has the chance to do this. I understand that some of you will be quite comfortable speaking to your classmates, and some will anguish over it well in advance. Please be assured that you will not be graded on your performative abilities. You do not need to memorize data, quote off the top of your head, sing or dance. I will grade you based on two distinct criteria:

How thorough is your research
How well do you use it to explicate the novel.

I will break the two questions down into the following categorical expectations:

introduction	A clear statement of task
information	Organized and appropriate
interpretation	Comprehensive discussion of results and conclusions
validity	Serious attempt to comment on interpretations/conclusions drawn
Structure and communication	Coherence and acknowledgment of audience
commitment	A clear indication of full commitment to topic

Additionally your ability to structure and keep time will affect your grade. You must include discussion time, and you must prepare questions that will invite and stimulate discussion. Trust that your classmates will engage with your panel as long as you provide good questions that respect their intelligence and offer them food for thought.

The Grade:

You will receive two grades. One will be a panel grade, and a second will refer only to your presentation, your role, your work. The first grade I will assign based only on what happens in class. The second will come from the following documents all of which are due on the day you make your presentation:

Papers read: submit your paper to me

Individual media projects: submit any materials you used to prepare you project and write a one page explanation of what you did and how you did it.

Panel leader: submit your questions and a 3 page explanation of what you intended and assumed your questions would do to pull all presentations together and what overall statement your panel sought to make about the book or author. Your explanation must include the key point(s) you feel your panel must make, and the specific ways in which your panel has sought to get those points across to the audience; it should also include brief explanations what you expect or hope for from your discussion questions.

We will proceed with presentations on Nov. 18