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T/Th 1-2:20, Huma 120
Office Hours: T/Th 2:30-3:30
Wed. 12- 1

English 369
Literature & Culture of the American West

Topic for Fall 2004
Contemporary Coming of Age Narratives

Paying close attention to the conventions of coming of age narratives, we study a range of very different contemporary western works. The questions organizing the course include: what does it mean to come of age in a region that is itself historically associated with youthfulness? How might we make sense of the curious fact that, in fiction, youthful literary speakers often are accorded significantly more social status and intellectual credibility than are actual young people in everyday social institutions like schools and families? We also think about the clash of bildungsroman traditions with "minority" literatures and peoples, whose narratives often challenge "the West" as a logical or final destination for young subjects deemed deserving of literary attention. What alternative resolutions to lifecycle (coming of age) issues might these texts suggest?

Literature & Film (all on reserve)

Packet of Critical Readings denoted by **

A.B. Guthrie, *The Way West* (1949)
Frederick Kohner, *Gidget* (1957, reissue 2001)
Film Version, *Gidget* (1958)
Jean Stafford, *The Mountain Lion* (1947)
Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima* (1973)
Leslie Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)
Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (1986)
Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (1989)
Larry Watson, *Montana, 1948* (1995)

Assignments: Two essays + midterm.

General Course Policies and Assignments (3 essays):

Papers can be submitted in class or to my mailbox in English Department Office, 2nd floor Herring Hall by 4pm. Do not arrive late or the office may be closed and locked. Also, be aware that the "in box" and "out" boxes are different. Papers should be submitted to the "in" box. The outbox, which is for pick up not submissions, is located outside the department offices in 2nd floor Herring Hall.

Essay #1. 3-4 pages, due 9/16, on the conceptual issues we've covered in class. I will provide a handout with instructions on 9/9. You may be asked to discuss how to define place, or how to think about coming of age narratives. This short essay permits students to hand in an early assignment so as to familiarize themselves with professor's grading style and writing expectations. **This essay may be revised, within a week or two of the date you receive it back,** Essay should present material from class discussions, combined with readings, to discuss topic. I will hand out a more detailed description as the assignment date nears. 20% of grade.

Assignment # 2. October 7 Midterm applying conceptual materials to one or more of the film or literary texts we study. Study sheet will be provided 9/30. 25% of grade.

Essay #3. 8-10 pages, due last day of exams, December 15th, which addresses texts and theoretical issues of the final portion of the class (materials after midterm). A handout will be provided on 11/23. 40% of grade.

4. Participation and attendance. 15%. It is always best to come to class, prepared or not, sleepy or not, late or not. Even when you haven't read, even when you are distracted by other things, you will learn things in class that you are less likely to learn by yourself. Coming to class keeps you connected to other people, connected to me, and you will perform better especially in parts of the semester where people are overwhelmed with work and feel isolated. If I don't hear from you or don't see you for long periods in the semester, do not expect to pass this class.

5. Profile of an "A" Student: An "A" student attends class, is prepared, contributes to discussion, does not distract anyone during class by whispering or making private jokes (I consider both of these behaviors a request for attention

and I like to stop the class until people can pay attention fully), and someone who does well on papers. An "A" student is not someone who does well on papers even though they don't come to class or contribute thoughts to discussion. The classroom is a community space, and doing well on papers is not the only or final measure of exemplary accomplishment. Students have both a chance and a responsibility to share thoughts, share the confusions of the learning process, and to listen as openmindedly as they are able.

Other Notes: Written assignments should remain within page limits, since discipline is a big part of writing competence. Due dates are firm, unless you clear it with me first. Late penalties will apply to late work, at my discretion, usually a half grade for each date late (weekends count 2 days). **Do not email papers**, since my time is better spent reading, not printing, your work.

Syllabus

Part I: Conceptual Frameworks

August 24 T Introductions.

Board Discussion. Who, What, Where, Why the West?

August 26 Th How do we think about "places"?

Joan Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," and "Notes from a Native Daughter" ** (1968)

Selections from Wallace Stegner, "Introduction," and "Coming of Age: The End of the Beginning** (1992)

August 31 T How do we think about "places?"

Selections from Raymond Williams from *The Country and the City*** 1973 (1-12, 289-306)

September 2Th How do we think about "coming of age" stories?

Moretti, "The Bildungsroman as Symbolic Form" (3-13)**

September 7 T Coming of age into what?

Read from May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*, (1-26 **)

Part II: Coming of Age into The American Century

September 9 Th Masculinity & Cold War Coming of Age

begin A.B. Guthrie's *The Way West* (1949)

Handout for 1st Paper

September 14 T continue Guthrie

September 16 Th conclude Guthrie

1st Response Paper due, 3-4pages: Topic: Conceptual Issues

September 21 T Femininity & Cold War Coming of Age

Read Fraiman, from *Unbecoming Women* **

begin Stafford's *The Mountain Lion* (1947)

September 23 Th conclude Stafford (1947)

September 28 T Continuing Cold War Coming of Age

begin Frederick Kohner, *Gidget* (1957)

September 30 Th Screen video version of *Gidget* (1958)

Study Sheet Provided for Midterm

October 5 T Discussion of both film and novel versions of *Gidget*

October 7 Th **In class midterm:** Covering conceptual issues and also three literary/film texts

October 12 T midterm recess

Part III: Coming of Age in the Wake of Global Civil Rights Movements

October 14 Th What Constitutes "Maturity/Modernity?"

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me Ultima* (1973)

October 19 T finish Anaya

October 21 Th New Forms of "Development"

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

October 26 T Conclude Silko

October 28 Th Youth Culture and Gen X

Read Moore, "Tomorrow is Just Another Crazy Scam" **

November 2 T begin Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (1986)

November 4 Th conclude *Less Than Zero*

November 9 T "The West" as a destination for adulthood?

Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (1989)**

November 11 Th con't *Jasmine* (1989)

Also, Rosemary George, "But that was in Another Country," from *The Girl* **

November 16 T conclude *Jasmine*

November 18 Th 1948 and the "new West"

Larry Watson, *Montana 1948*

November 23 T conclude Watson

Handout for Final Projects

November 25 Thanksgiving

November 30 T Overview: Discussions of Final Projects

December 1 Th Concluding Remarks

Final Papers due December 15