

## ENGLISH 445

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### The Literatures of America: Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Professor Viet Nguyen

Lecture: Tuesday + Thursday  
11:00 – 12:15  
THH 214

We live in a multicultural nation that is becoming part of a global society. This course's premise is that Americans need to wrestle with both their own diversity as well as the way that their actions affect other nations and help shape these nations' perceptions of the United States. The contemporary novel is a vehicle that helps us understand these issues of difference and perception. In particular, this course is concerned with the novel's development as a response to traumatic events in American history and changes in American society. Since the American war in Viet Nam is one way to mark the beginning of a contemporary United States concerned with the limits and possibilities of its own power, we will begin there, with Tim O'Brien's classic war novel *Going After Cacciato*, contrasted with one Vietnamese perspective found in Duong Thu Huong's *Novel Without a Name*. The war in Viet Nam was not the United States' only Pacific adventure; the U.S. was also a colonial power in the Philippines and Hawai'i, situations addressed respectively by Jessica Hagedorn's dizzying postmodernist masterpiece *Dogeaters* and Lois-Ann Yamanaka's account of Hawaii as anything but paradise, *Blu's Hanging*. After 9/11, two types of narratives and places with global significance have to be reconsidered: New York and the western (as in George Bush's use of western rhetoric such as "wanted: dead or alive"). For New York, we will read Paul Auster's puzzling story about a writer-turned-detective, *City of Glass* and Colson Whitehead's vision of an alternative New York in *The Intuitionist*, where the physics of elevators become metaphorical for race; for the western, there will be Cormac McCarthy's revisionist account, *All the Pretty Horses*, which extends the western to Mexico, and Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*, which looks at Mexican migrant workers in the American west.

#### INSTRUCTOR

Professor Viet Nguyen	Office Hours	T and Th 1-2 or by appointment
	Office Location	THH 442
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#### GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance and Participation	20%
Unannounced Quizzes (5 to 10)	20%
Midterm Paper	30%
Final Paper	30%
OR: Creative option in place of papers	60%

Attendance is mandatory. Only excused absences are allowed. Participation is both verbal and written; besides classroom participation, students are also expected to post weekly comments or responses that are *thoughtful* and *substantive* on Blackboard, an electronic resource for the class, which can be accessed at <http://learn.usc.edu>. See last page of syllabus for more information about online participation. Classroom and online participation is essential to the class, and will significantly impact your grade.

Unannounced quizzes will cover only factual questions that are related to the reading—both fictional and non-fictional. It is important that you keep up with the reading, as you will not be able to participate without having done so. The quizzes will have a significant impact on your final grade. The reading will be paced proportionally by the number of allotted days.

Quizzes cannot be made up, except in cases of documented illness and emergency.

Midterm and final papers will be 5-7 page research papers. There will be a later handout with further information about topics. Strict late penalties of 1/3 grade deduction per 24 hours of tardiness will apply, except in cases of documented illness and emergency.

The creative option is exactly that: a project that you define, whether it be a play, poems, short story, painting, video, performance, installation, musical composition, etc., that addresses the themes and/or issues of the course. Since creativity is rather hard to grade, the project will be assessed in terms of effort and revision. Instead of turning in two papers, you will develop your project over the semester, in discussion with me, and turn in at least two and preferably three versions of the project over the course of the semester. You must choose the creative option by the end of the fourth week.

Plagiarism will be prosecuted to the fullest extent allowed, including failure in the class and reporting to student conduct.

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Paul Auster, *City of Glass*  
Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters*  
Duong Thu Huong, *Novel Without a Name*  
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*  
Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*  
Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato*  
Han Ong, *Fixer Chao*  
Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*  
Lois Ann Yamanaka, *Blu's Hanging*

#### **SCHEDULE**

Date	Class
<p>WK 1 Jan 14 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 1 Jan 16 Thursday</p>	<p><b>The American War in Viet Nam: Self and Other</b></p> <p>Introduction: What is American Literature(s)?</p> <p>Tim O'Brien, <i>Going After Cacciato</i></p>
<p>WK 2 Jan 21 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 2 Jan 23 Thursday</p>	<p>Tim O'Brien, <i>Going After Cacciato</i></p> <p>Class cancelled—CONTINUE reading O'Brien</p>
<p>WK 3 Jan 28 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 3 Jan 30 Thursday</p>	<p>Tim O'Brien, <i>Going After Cacciato</i></p> <p>Duong Thu Huong, <i>Novel Without a Name</i></p>
<p>WK 4 Feb 4 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 4 Feb 6 Thursday</p>	<p>Duong Thu Huong, <i>Novel Without a Name</i></p> <p>Class cancelled—CONTINUE reading Duong</p> <p><b>Deadline to choose the creative option</b></p>
<p>WK 5 Feb 11 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 5 Feb 13 Thursday</p>	<p>Class cancelled—CONTINUE reading Duong</p> <p>Duong Thu Huong, <i>Novel Without a Name</i></p>
<p>WK 6 Feb 18 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 6 Feb 20 Thursday</p>	<p><b>An American Empire?: The Philippines and Hawai'i</b></p> <p>Jessica Hagedorn, <i>Dogeaters</i></p> <p>Jessica Hagedorn, <i>Dogeaters</i></p>
<p>WK 7 Feb 25 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 7 Feb 27 Thursday</p> <p>WK 7 Feb 28 Friday</p>	<p>Jessica Hagedorn, <i>Dogeaters</i></p> <p>Lois Ann Yamanaka, <i>Blu's Hanging</i></p> <p><b>Midterm Paper Due Online, 8PM</b></p>
<p>WK 8 Mar 4 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 8 Mar 6 Thursday</p>	<p>Lois Ann Yamanaka, <i>Blu's Hanging</i></p> <p>Lois Ann Yamanaka, <i>Blu's Hanging</i></p>
<p>WK 9 Mar 11 Tuesday</p> <p>WK 9 Mar 13 Thursday</p>	<p><b>Spring Break Warm Up: Another View of Tourism</b></p> <p>Lois Ann Yamanaka, <i>Blu's Hanging</i>/Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i></p> <p>Jamaica Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i></p>
<p>Mar 17 – Mar 22</p>	<p><b>Spring Break</b></p>
	<p><b>Alternative New York: Imagining Race, Class, and Gender</b></p>

WK 10 Mar 25 Tuesday	Paul Auster, <i>City of Glass</i>
WK 10 Mar 27 Thursday	Paul Auster, <i>City of Glass</i>
WK 11 Apr 1 Tuesday	Paul Auster, <i>City of Glass</i>
WK 11 Apr 3 Thursday	Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>
WK 12 Apr 8 Tuesday	Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>
WK 12 Apr 10 Thursday	Colson Whitehead, <i>The Intuitionist</i>
	<b>The Significance of the Frontier: Revising the Western</b>
WK 13 Apr 15 Tuesday	Cormac McCarthy, <i>All the Pretty Horses</i>
WK 13 Apr 17 Thursday	Cormac McCarthy, <i>All the Pretty Horses</i>
WK 14 Apr 22 Tuesday	Cormac McCarthy, <i>All the Pretty Horses</i>
WK 14 Apr 24 Thursday	Helena Maria Viramontes, <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i>
WK 15 Apr 29 Tuesday	Helena Maria Viramontes, <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i>
WK 15 May 1 Thursday	Helena Maria Viramontes, <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> / Creative Project Presentations
WK 16 May 5 Monday	<b>Final Paper Due Online, 8pm</b>

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## Blackboard

1. Go to: <http://learn.usc.edu/>
2. Log in with your username and password (the same as for your USC e-mail account)
3. Go to English 445 (or it may be the case that you will be taken directly to step 4)
4. Go to "Discussion Board" (one of several choices)
5. There will be a weekly forum where you can post comments and responses; click on the forum for the week
6. Students must post 4 original comments (see schedule below) and at least 4 responses to others' comments or responses
7. Comments and responses should be at least 100 words, *thoughtful* and *substantive* in nature

8. Comments are due by Sunday midnight before the week in question. Sometimes I will post questions or topics for discussion; you may either respond to those, or you can address the readings to come on Tuesday, or address unresolved or unfinished topics of discussion from the previous week
9. Responses can occur any time in the semester
10. Comments and responses should be posted in a timely fashion in order to be useful for discussion, i.e., late comments will not be counted, and you should not expect to get credit if you post makeup comments, or save all your responses, for the very end of the semester
11. Periodically I will send announcements and documents out to the class via email, through Blackboard. Blackboard uses your USC email address. Check this address regularly, or change your email address through Blackboard through the "Tools" section. You can also check your grades here as well.

**Students will post comments on the following cycle:**

Weeks 2, 5, 8, 11    Ariathurai - Gallagher  
Weeks 3, 6, 9, 12    Gordillo - Mehrez  
Weeks 4, 7, 10, 13    Ohanessian - Turner