

## **English 314: American Indian Literature** (Fall 2003)

**Instructor:** Prof. David Carlson

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**Office:** UH 301.40

**Office Hours:** MWF 2:30-4:00 and by appt.

**Section #** 01

**Days:** MWF 10:40-11:50

**Room:** UH 257

**Office Phone:** 880-7388

**Course Texts:** Keith Basso Wisdom Sits in Places

Louise Erdrich Tracks

Joy Harjo She Had Some Horses

N. Scott Momaday House Made of Dawn

Simon Ortiz From Sand Creek

Paul Radin The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology

Leslie Marmon Silko Ceremony

A brief course packet available on reserve in the Pfau Library

**Conceptions Behind Course:** As Jarold Ramsey points out in his essay *A Tradition and Individual Talents in Modern Indian Writing*, students of American Indian literature face a set of unique challenges. On the one hand, American Indian written literature historically has been a product of colonial contact and, as such, has been shaped by external cultural and political forces. On the other hand, Indian writers frequently have continued to incorporate elements from their traditional cultures into their work as a way of resisting assimilation and/or cultural extermination. Learning to read American Indian writing, then, requires us to develop an appreciation of the complex interplay between social and political forces, the traditions and customs of particular nations, and the imaginations of individual writers. In this course, students will work to develop such sophisticated interpretive skills by tracing the incorporation and re-articulation in written texts of elements from traditional Indian culture. We open with a general consideration of the nature of oral literature and the challenges facing non-Indian readers in studying such materials. Building on this foundation, we will then try to develop a basic understanding of (1) a mythic archetype [the trickster], (2) an issue of religious belief [the role of ceremonial practice in healing and identity formation], and (3) the adaptability of the oral tradition [reflected in contemporary American Indian poetry]. Using anthropological and oral materials as background, we will consider how several major Native American writers have combined old and new to develop innovative forms of expression.

To avoid making essentializing claims about American Indian peoples, the first two-thirds of course have been structured around two roughly drawn geographic culture-zones. In dealing with the trickster-figure, our focus will be on the Woodland cultures of the Great Lakes region. Students will study Winnebago trickster tales and then consider how two important contemporary Anishinabe authors, Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor, have made use of the trickster archetype in their fiction. In the second unit we will turn our attention to the Southwest, where students will have the opportunity to study a complete ceremony (The Navajo Night Chant). Our examination of ceremonialism will help set up subsequent discussions of two major novels by N. Scott Momaday (*Kiowa/Cherokee*) and Leslie Marmon Silko (*Laguna Pueblo*). The final unit, dealing with the poetry of Joy Harjo (*Muskogee Creek*) and Simon Ortiz (*Acoma Pueblo*), reflects these authors' broad engagement with American Indian history and culture.

### **Course Policies:**

**Attendance:** Attendance in class and participation in discussion are crucial parts of this course. As such, each student will be allowed no more than three absences during the semester without suffering a penalty on his or her final grade. For each absence beyond three, one-third of a letter grade will be deducted off the student's final average for the class.

**Tardiness:** Students who arrive late to class will be marked tardy. Three tardies will add up to an absence.

**Late work:** Unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor (owing to *extra-ordinary* circumstances), late work will not be accepted. Quizzes and short assignments also cannot be made up.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words or ideas. It constitutes a serious breach of the California State University Code of Student Ethics. Everything that a student turns in with his or her name on it must be his or her own work. Depending upon the severity of the case, plagiarism can result in failure for the assignment in question or for the entire course.

**Course Requirements:** Successful completion of this course requires the completion of all assignments. The grade breakdown is as follows:

Mid-Term Examination	20%
One Essay (8-10 pages)	35%
A final examination	25%
Five Sets of Reading Questions*	10%
Participation (includes quiz average)	10%

\* **Reading Questions:** Once every two weeks, each student will be required to turn in typewritten responses to a series of questions on the readings for one class session. At the beginning of each two week period, I will provide a list of questions for the next series of classes. Students may choose the day on which they would like to turn in their responses. Students should also be prepared to share their responses in class as a way of stimulating discussion. (These questions may also provide useful study materials in preparing for the exams.)

## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

### Introduction: Theoretical Overview/The Study of American Indian Traditional Literature

- Week One: Fri 9/26 Introduction to Course/Overview of Requirements
- Week Two: Mon 9/29 Reading Traditional/Oral Materials I  
Dennis Tedlock AThe Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation in American Indian Religion@ (CP)
- Wed 10/1 Reading Traditional/Oral Materials II  
Keith Basso Wisdom Sits in Places 1-35  
(skim Chapter 2)
- Fri 10/3 Reading Traditional/Oral Materials III  
Keith Basso Wisdom Sits in Places 105-149  
(skim Chapter 3)

### Unit One: Mythic Archetypes in American Indian LiteratureBThe Woodlands Trickster

- Week Three: Mon 10/6 The TricksterBAnthropological and Psychological Views  
Paul Radin The Trickster 132-154; 111-119
- Wed 10/8 The Winnebago Trickster Cycle  
Paul Radin The Trickster Tales 1-25
- Fri 10/10 The Winnebago Trickster Cycle  
Paul Radin The Trickster Tales 26-49  
Kathleen A. Danker ABecause of This I Am Called the Foolish One@ (CP)
- Week Four: Mon 10/13 The Trickster in Fiction I  
Louise Erdrich Tracks 1-61
- Wed 10/15 The Trickster in Fiction II  
Louise Erdrich Tracks 62-130
- Fri 10/17 The Trickster in Fiction III  
Louise Erdrich Tracks 131-191
- Week Five: Mon 10/20 The Trickster in Fiction IV  
Louise Erdrich Tracks 192-226
- Wed 10/22 Gerald Vizenor AAlmost Browne,@ AFeral Lasers@ (CP)
- Fri 10/24 **Mid-Term Examination**

### Unit Two: Ceremonialism in American Indian LiteratureB Momaday and Silko

- Week Six: Mon 10/27 A Navajo Ceremony  
John Bierhorst, trans. The Navajo Night Chant (CP)
- Wed 10/29 Ceremonialism in Fiction I  
N. Scott Momaday House Made of Dawn 5-54
- Fri 10/31 Ceremonialism in Fiction II  
N. Scott Momaday House Made of Dawn 55-102
- Week Seven: Mon 11/3 Ceremonialism in Fiction III  
N. Scott Momaday House Made of Dawn 102-152
- Wed 11/5 Ceremonialism in Fiction IV

N. Scott Momaday      House Made of Dawn 152-198

Fri 11/7      Ceremonialism in Fiction V  
Leslie Marmon Silko      Ceremony 1-63

Week Eight:    Mon 11/10    Ceremonialism in Fiction VI  
Leslie Marmon Silko      Ceremony 63-138

Wed 11/12    Ceremonialism in Fiction VII  
Leslie Marmon Silko      Ceremony 138-201

Fri 11/14      Ceremonialism in Fiction VIII  
Leslie Marmon Silko      Ceremony 201-262

**Unit Three: Orality, Ceremony, and Memory in Contemporary PoetryB Harjo and Ortiz**

Week Nine:    Mon 11/17    Joy Harjo      She Had Some Horses 1-23

Wed 11/19    Harjo      She Had Some Horses 24-46

Fri 11/21      Harjo      She Had Some Horses 49-74

Week Ten:    Mon 11/24    Linda Hogan      (Video of Reading)

Wed 11/26    Simon Ortiz      From Sand Creek 6-31

Fri 11/28      **ThanksgivingB No Class**

Week Eleven: Mon 12/1      Ortiz      From Sand Creek 32-65

Wed 12/3      Ortiz      From Sand Creek 66-95

Fri 12/5      Review for Exam  
**Long Essay Due in class**

**The Final Examination will be on December 12.**