

Introduction to American Indian Literatures
Summer 2001

English 6339-001
Instructor: Dr. Roemer
M-TH, 1-3 p.m., 201 Carlisle

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Nature of the Course /Goals / Assessment

The working (and somewhat arbitrary) definition of American Indian (or Native American) literatures used in this course is the body of oral and written literatures created by Indians within the approximate boundaries of the United States. I attempt a balance between intensive study and broad survey by focusing on a highly selected group of texts (several from the Southwest), by selecting texts that represent five significant Native American genres and the mixing of several genres, and by assigning "overview" readings in Ruoff's *American Indian Literatures*. I chose a generic organization for the course instead of a chronological order because I wanted to examine important functions, aesthetics, audiences, and conventions associated with particular genres and because I wanted to emphasize the continuity of even the oldest genres (e.g., oral narratives are still being created and serve important artistic and cultural functions for Indians and non-Indians).

Although the course is a introduction and introductions tend to touch on many issues, two important and related questions will help to unify the course: what are the artistic, cultural, ideological, and ethical implications (1) of transforming oral literatures performed for particular family or tribal audiences into written literatures in English for either specialized or broad reading audiences? and (2) the implications of identifying such a diverse body of oral and written literatures as "Indian"? The emphasis will be on "primary" sources (videos in English, Hopi, and Navajo; English translations of oral materials, texts written in English) though the assigned short readings and the paper will offer opportunities to examine various critical and theoretical approaches to the texts.

By the end of the course students who have successfully completed the in- and out-of-class assignments should be able to: discuss intelligently, though certainly not exhaustively, the range, variety, and continuity of significant Native American oral and written genres (evaluation: classroom presentations and the exams); understand the importance of the two focal questions mentioned above (evaluation: class presentations, exams, and possibly the paper); and demonstrate the ability to define a significant research project related to the field and to write a research paper that incorporates relevant criticism into their analysis of (a) particular text(s) (evaluation: the prospectus and the paper).

Required Readings

Ruoff, *American Indian Literatures*
Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
Bierhorst, *Four Masterworks of Am. Indian Lit.* (Night Chant section; ON RESERVE)
Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*
Underhill, *Papago Woman*
Silko, *Storyteller*
Niatum, ed., *Harper's Anthol. of 20th Century Native American Poetry*
Tapahonso, *Saanii Dahataal* AND Alexie, *The Business of Fancy Dabcing*
Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* OR Welch, *Winter in the Blood*
Silko, *Ceremony*
Erdrich, *Love Medicine*
Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*
Short Readings (SR) as indicated in the outline below
Tentative Schedule of Topics, Readings, Exams, Paper

- 5/29 Introduction to the Introduction
Reading: skim Ruoff and Roemer "Introduction" in SR
- 5/29,30,31 A Multi-Genre Introd.: Transforming a Particular Personality, Family, Culture, and History into "Literature" and "Art": Kiowa Readings: *Rainy Mountain*; and *Rainy Mountain* section of SR; Ruoff (76-78, 177)
Suppl.: Slides
- 6/4 Performing/Transforming Oral Literatures: Hopi, Laguna, Acoma
Readings: Wife-Witch Narrative section of SR; p. 247 of *Ceremony*; pp. 140-54 of *Storyteller*; Ruoff (5-19, 39-52)
Suppl.: Silko's film, *Arrowboy and the Witches* ON RESERVE and a video of a Hopi trickster narrative performance)
- 6/5,6 Ceremonial Liturgies: Navajo Readings: Matthews' translation of the "Night Chant" in Bierhorst; Nightway section of SR; Ruoff (19-39)
Suppl.: "By This Song I Walk" (videotape)
- 6/7 **Examination (WTRM through Nightway)**

- 6/11-14 Creating Written Lives from Spoken Encounters: Lakota, O'odham, Pomo, Laguna
 Readings: *Black Elk Speaks* & SR section(6/11); *Papago Woman* and SR section (6/12); Mable McKay in SR
 (6/13);
Storyteller (6/13, 14); Ruoff (52-62)
 Suppl: "Running on the Edge of the Rainbow" video as a form of autobiography
- 6/18 Paper Prospectus Due**
- 6/18, 19 The Diversity of Written Poetry in English
 Reading: *Harper's Anthology* (6/18); Tapahonso AND Alexie (6/19); Ruoff (62-115, emphasis, poetry)
- 6/20-28 From Oral Performance to Fiction
 Readings: *House Made of Dawn* OR *Winter in the Blood* (6/20,21); *Ceremony* (6/25); *Love Medicine* (6/26,27);
 Lone Ranger (6/28); Ruoff(62-115, emp. on fiction); Roemer, "Introduction" & "Contemporary AIL" (SR)
 Optional Suppl. Greg Sarris's *Grand Avenue* HBO film and Alexie's film *Smoke Signals* will be ON RESERVE.
- 6/29 Paper Due**
- 7/2 Final Examination**

Examinations

During the class before each of the two exams, I will distribute detailed study sheets that will describe the essay question(s) options. The exams are "open book"; you can bring books, notes, and outlines. Grading criteria: I will be particularly interested in how well you develop coherent arguments directly related to the question(s) and how well you support your arguments with relevant and specific examples from the readings and class discussions.

Paper

The paper should focus on one or a small number of Native American texts. The critical approach to the text is up to you. In the past I have received excellent papers with New Critical, New (and old) Historical, anthropological-culture studies, biographical, and feminist orientations. Depending on the topic, the length may also vary greatly (from 12 to 20 pages). The two most important criteria are the ability to explain the significance of your topic and approach and the ability to integrate, in a convincing and well-organized manner, your positions and the positions of relevant critics (and theorists if that is relevant to your approach). I also expect no serious problems with writing "mechanics" (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.) The prospectus (one or two pages; due 6/18) must include: (1) definition of the scope and significance of the topic; (2) indication of the primary critical approach(es); (3) tentative indication of the organization; (4) indication of the most important critical sources.

One of the most valuable on-campus resources for research on American Indian literatures is **UTA's Minority Cultures Collection** on the second floor of the Central Library. The written and electronic sources are many. Here is a sampling.

Reference resources include: A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's *American Indian Literatures*; Kenneth Roemer's *Native American Writers of the United States* (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 175); Andrew Wiget's *Handbook of Native American Literature*; Andrew Wiget's *Native American Literature*; Janet Witalec's *Native North American Literature*; Daniel Littlefield and James Parin's *A Bibliography of Native American Writers*; H. David Brumble, *An Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies*; Louis Owens & Tom Collonese's *American Indian Novelists*; Kay Juricek and Kelly Morgan's *Contemporary Native American Authors*; **(historical / cultural / political contexts)** Jack Utter's *American Indians* (rev. ed. fc. 2001-2002). **Critical sources** include **(general)** Abraham Chapman, *Literature of the American Indian*; Paula Gunn Allen's *Studies in American Indian Literature and The Sacred Hoop*; Arnold Krupat's *Voice in the Margin* and *Ethnocriticism*; David Murry's *Forked Tongues*; Brian Swann's *Recovering the Word* and (with Krupat) *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*; Roger Dunsmore's *Earth's Mind*; **(oral literatures)** Karl Kroeber, ed. *Traditional Literature of the American Indian*; Jarold Ramsey, *Reading the Fire*; Dell Hymes, *In Vane I Tried to Tell You*; Brian Swann, *Smoothing the Ground*; **(life stories)** H. David Brumble, *American Indian Autobiography*; Arnold Krupat's *For Those Who Come After*; Hertha Wong's *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years*; Kay Sands's *Telling a Good One*; **(poetry written in English)** Michael Castro's *Interpreting the Indian*; Kenneth Lincoln's *Sing With the Heart of the Bear* and *Native American Renaissance*; Norma Wilson's *Native American Poetry*; **(drama)** Hanay Geiogamah's *New Native American Drama* and *Stories of Our Way*; **(fiction)** Charles Larson's *American Indian Fiction* (out of date), Kenneth Lincoln's *Native American Renaissance*, Louis Owens' *Other Destinies* and *Mixedblood Messages*, Richard Fleck's *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, James Ruppert's *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction*, Catherine Rainwater, *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, Eric Gary Anderson, *American Indian Literature and the Southwest*, Sid Larsen, *Captive in the Middle*, Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez, *Contemporary American Indian Literatures and the Oral Tradition*, Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ethnocriticism*, Craig Womack's *Red on Red*, and Jace Weaver's *That the People Might Live*. Important **journals** include: *SAIL (Studies in American Indian Literatures)*, which has its own excellent Web site (see the inside front cover of the current issue), *American Indian Culture and Research Journal (AICRJ)*, *American Indian Quarterly (AIQ)*, and *Wicazo Sa Review*. Some excellent articles have also appeared in less specialized journals such as *Critical Inquiry*, *College English*, *American Literary History*, *PMLA*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, and *American Literature*. **Bibliographical guides** to articles and books on specific authors can be found in recent issues of

American Literary Scholarship, the PMLA Bibliographies, SAIL, AICRJ. The First Search internet resource available in the Library can also be helpful. Many **Web sites** can provide information on Native writers in general and on specific authors. Besides the *SAIL* site mentioned above (<<http://www.richmond.edu/~rnelson/SAI Lns/>>) which does have a good Listserv for ASAIL members, one of the best general sites is <www.anpa.ualr.edu> , the American Native Press Archives. Another excellent Web site is the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers (<www.wordcraftcircle.org/>). For a sampling of the hundreds of **individual author** Web sites, see <google.com> . See also: <<http://nativeauthor.com>>, <<http://www.ipl.org/ref/native/>>, <www.english.uiuc.edu/maps> (Momaday homepage), and <<http://users.mwci.net/~lapoz/MBio.html>> . There is a general "American Indian Resources" Web site: <<http://jupiter.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~krkvis/naindex.html>>. The Fall 1998 issue of *Wicazo Sa* (13.2) offers an overview of internet resources in Native American studies. For information on how American Indian literatures have become part of the American literature canon, see <www.uta.edu/english/mal/e/roemer> -- a resource guide for American literature anthologies.

Approximate Grading Weights

First Exam (20%); Final Exam (30%); Prospectus & Paper (50%).

Important note: For each class, after the first class, each student will be asked to focus on a particular part of the next week's reading or on a particular question related to the reading. Often these will be small group assignments. Your responses to these questions (informal oral presentations) can be an important factor in your semester grade. If by the end of the semester your exam and paper average is a B(+), but you have made consistently good presentations in class, I can raise your semester grade to an A-, which on your transcript will appear as an A.

Class and University Policies

Warnings: (1) Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be handled according to University policies. (If you are confused about what constitutes academic dishonesty, especially plagiarism, contact me or consult the Graduate School's manual for theses and dissertations Web site (<www.uta.edu/etd>). (2) A student who wishes to withdraw must follow Graduate School and University procedures. To avoid receiving a computer generated F, a graduate student who wishes to withdraw must do so before mid-semester. (3) Three unexcused absences will result in a half grade lowering of the semester grade. More than three unexcused absences will cause further grade reductions.

Encouragement: (1) I respect improvement. If you receive a less-than-sterling grade on the first exam, but your class presentation and written work improve, I will weigh the latter work more heavily. (2) As indicated above, consistent and strong class participation can improve your semester grade significantly. (3) In cooperation with the Counseling and Student Disabilities Offices, I am very willing to work with disabled students.