

English 602.1 Reading Literature in the Age of Trump
Spring 2019
M W 3:30 - 4:45 p.m.
HUM 131

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Off. Hours: M W 10 -11 a.m.

Where were you on the night of November 8, 2016? For many in the U.S. (and elsewhere), it seemed this was the night - - to quote W.B. Yeats - - when all "changed, changed utterly." Obviously, things did change after Trump's election victory. But how much really changed? And, what remained the same?

The great U.S. cultural critic, Kenneth Burke, once opined that "literature is equipment for living," and in this course we're going to test his thesis. Over the semester, we'll read a variety of texts authored and published on the eve of November 8, 2016, or in its aftermath. For each, we'll ask a broad, basic question: how can literature offer us ways to make sense our current moment and its predicaments? That is: how can these texts both illuminate our current situation and offer us ways to think through Trump's America in all of its contradictions and complexities? This tour through some genres and artifacts of the literary present will also offer us the chance to enjoy some really great contemporary culture.

By the end of this class, you should be able to understand and use some basic critical terms in literary study like focalization, characterization, narration, and plot. You will develop your writing skills - - both informal and formal. Finally, you will tangle with some of the complicated but intellectually fascinating relations between social and cultural contexts and literary form.

I believe in the power of discussion and deep involvement with ideas and texts. We will use a variety of means (in-class writing, out-of-class writing, etc.) to fortify your active engagement with the class and literary texts.

Required Texts:

Daniel Alarcón, The King Is Always above the People (2017)

Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (2014)

J.D. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy (2016)

Jeff VanderMeer, Annihilation (2014)

Naomi Alderman, The Power (2016)

Rivers Solomon, An Unkindness of Ghosts (2017)

(Available in the SFSU bookstore)

The Walking Dead (2010 - 2019)

The Dark Knight Rises (2011)

(Available for rent or purchase online)

Course Requirements

You must complete all reading and writing assignments. Your success in this course depends on steady, authentic engagement with the texts we read. You can expect to write something for/or in each class.

You can't learn if you don't attend class. After two absences, your grade will be in jeopardy. If you know in advance that you'll be absent, discuss this absence with me beforehand. I don't accept late assignments.

Our course motherblog is located at <http://teaching.lfhanley.net/english602sp19/>. There, you'll find a copy of the syllabus, information about the texts and authors we read, announcements, assignments, and other important stuff. Check the blog frequently.

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without proper credit. Practicing plagiarism defeats the purpose of the academic enterprise. If you plagiarize an assignment, you will receive a grade of "F" for the assignment. Serial offenders will face more serious consequences. A detailed treatise on plagiarism and its consequences can be found at: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html>.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by these factors: attendance; in-class work; out-of-class work. Attendance includes **at least one visit to my office**, during office hours. If you know in advance that you will miss a class or two, notify me in advance of your absence. N.B. The class does not have a midterm or final exam.

Assignments in the class will include: writing for several minutes at the beginning of class – usually in response to a question I pose; a two-page, double-spaced essay for the class about once every four weeks; participation in a bookforum.

In-class work will be graded using the patented check/check plus/check minus system. Out-of-class work will be graded with the traditional A/B/C/D/F rubric with the additional grade of R (Revise).

All assignments must be submitted on the designated date or time. Except in the rarest circumstances and only with advance notice, **I do not accept late assignments**. Ever.

Policy

Disability access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

Student disclosures of sexual violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpasem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/
- Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>

- For more information on your rights and available resources:

<http://titleix.sfsu.edu>

Syllabus

Week 1 (1/28 - 1/30)

M First day of class

W Adam Curtis, "[Living in an Unreal World](#)" (YouTube)

Optional: Adam Curtis, "[Hypernormalisation](#)"

Week 2 (2/4 - 2/6)

M "The Dark Knight Rises" (2012) (YouTube/iTunes)

W J.D. Vance, [Hillbilly Elegy](#)

Week 3 (2/11 - 2/13)

M Vance, [Hillbilly Elegy](#)

W Vance, [Hillbilly Elegy](#)

Week 4 (2/18 - 2/20)

M Bookforum on [Hillbilly Elegy](#)

W Naomi Alderman, [The Power](#)

Week 5 (2/25 - 2/27)

M Alderman, [The Power](#)

W Alderman, [The Power](#)

Week 6 (3/4 - 3/6)

M Bookforum on [The Power](#)

W Daniel Alarcón, [The King Is Always above the People](#)

_____ Essay #1 due

Week 7 (3/11 - 3/13)

M Alarcón, [The King Is Always above the People](#)

W Alarcón, [The King Is Always above the People](#)

Week 8 (3/18 - 3/20)

M Bookforum on [The King Is Always above the People](#)

W Claudia Rankine, [Citizen: An American Lyric](#)

Week 9 (3/25 - 3/27)

M Spring Recess

W Spring Recess

Week 10 (4/1 - 4/3)

M Rankine, [Citizen: An American Lyric](#)

W Rankine, [Citizen: An American Lyric](#)

Week 11 (4/8 - 4/10))

M Bookforum on [Citizen: An American Lyric](#)

W Jeff VanderMeer, [Annihilation](#) (2014)

Essay #2 Due

Week 12 (4/15 - 4/17))

M VanderMeer, Annihilation

W VanderMeer, Annihilation

Week 13 (4/22 - 4/24)

M Bookforum on VanderMeer, Annihilation

W Rivers Solomon, An Unkindness of Ghosts

Week 14 (4/29 - 5/1)

M Solomon, An Unkindness of Ghosts

W Solomon, An Unkindness of Ghosts

Week 15 (5/6 - 5/8)

M Bookforum on An Unkindness of Ghosts

W The Walking Dead (online)

Essay #3 due

Week 16 (5/13 - 5/15)

M The Walking Dead (online)

W The Walking Dead (online)

Essay #4 due