

LT356 (Re-)Writing a Politics of Belonging: Race and Recognition in American Art and Literature

Module: Writer and World / Literary Movements and Forms

Seminar Leader: Kathy-Ann Tan

Course Times: Fridays, 14:00 – 17:15

Email: k.tan@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: to be arranged via email per individual requirements on Zoom

Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

Course Description

At the present time, we often hear claims that the United States is riven by intractable divisions of race, class, and gender. The arts and literature of the country have long reflected the conflicts and questions arising from such divisions, and have much to teach us about their historical foundations and development. Above all, art and literature succeed in staging a process of recognition, empowerment, and critique. Already in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, proponents of the reform and protest movements in America were aware that the “inalienable rights” of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” announced by the Declaration of Independence had not from the beginning been envisaged for all Americans, but for a white, propertied, male ruling class. In this seminar, we will discuss a selection of artworks and read a selection of texts from contemporary American art and literature that propose a struggle with this uneasy foundation, manifesting kinds of social, psychological, and stylistic predicaments imposed by exclusion and persecution. Our central question will concern the ways in which artists and authors reestablish a sense of belonging and collectivity through the processes of artistic production and literary creation. We will also look at the ways in which contemporary art and literature connect with and revise a sense of tradition, and generate new traditions and affiliations.

This course is being offered as an OSUN online course and will include students joining from other OSUN universities. ***** ZOOM-Links to access our weekly class sessions will be sent to everyone in ample time before class, so make sure to check your emails! *****

Requirements

active participation online, mid-term essay, final essay

Assessment

Your in-class participation grade will be based on your contributions to discussion in class.

Attendance

This class is taking place in digital format. Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8. Updates on any policy changes necessitated by COVID-19 will be sent to the college community by email.

Writing Assignments

Please consult the BCB Study and Exam regulations. The mid-term essay, due in week 8, should be 2,500 - 3,500 words long. The final essay, due at the end of the completion week, should also be 2,500 to 3,500 words long.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 20%

Mid-term essay: 40%

Final essay: 40%

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay: Friday March 26, 2021 at 23:59

Final essay: Friday May 21, 2021 at 23:59

All essays are to be submitted electronically by students to me via email: (k.tan@berlin.bard.edu).

Course Textbooks

Please purchase and read the following:

Claudia Rankine. *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). ISBN: 978-0241467107

Austin Channing Brown. *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (2018). ISBN: 978-0349014876

Yaa Gyasi. *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020) ISBN: 978-1524711771

Saidiya Hartman. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. ISBN: 978-0393357622

All additional material, including on the artworks and artistic projects we will be discussing, will be circulated via email. There will be no course reader for this class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

February 5: Introduction session 1. Outline/scope of course, central topics/issues, contextualization of U.S. American politics in a “post-Trump” era. Discussion of excerpt: “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (will be circulated in advance)

February 12: Introduction session 2. Discussion of selected essays collected in “Aftermath: Sixteen writers on Trump’s America”. Available here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/aftermath-sixteen-writers-on-trumps-america>. Please read the essays by Toni Morrison, Jill Lepore, Gary Shteyngart, Jia Tolentino and Junot Diaz for our session.

February 19: Black Lives Matter and its impact on literature, visual art/performance and other types of narratives.

February 26: Claudia Rankine. *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). Close reading of first half of the book: Central issues/motifs/topics: Black personhood, the racial imaginary, social intimacy.

March 5: Claudia Rankine. *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). Close reading of second half of the book: Central issues/motifs/topics: white privilege, social justice. We will also read Rankine alongside some poems by trans queer differently-abled **Filipino American Kay Ulanday Barrett (aka brownroundboi)**. Excerpts of poems will be provided.

March 12: Claudia Rankine. *Just Us: An American Conversation* (2020). We will discuss the talk: “Claudia Rankine in conversation with **Viet Thanh Nguyen** at Live Talks Los Angeles”. Please watch this in advance here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGscf-4plkM>

March 19: Austin Channing Brown. *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (2018). Central issues/motifs/topics: racial (in)justice, white supremacy, the memoir as literary genre.

March 26: Austin Channing Brown. *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (2018). Reception of the book and its reflection of U.S. American society in this present moment in the context of Joe Biden’s newly inaugurated presidency in January 2021. Please watch this video interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbRFv4t6ULA> and listen to this podcast conversation in advance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nXZYSSqWF4>

**** Mid-term essay due: Friday March 26, 2021 at 23:59 *****

***** April 2: No class (Spring Break) *****

April 9: Yaa Gyasi. *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020). Central issues/motifs/topics: the Black (Ghanian) immigrant experience in America and perceptions of the Black male body, intergenerational trauma, religion v. science, addiction, grief and depression.

April 16: Yaa Gyasi. *Transcendent Kingdom* (2020). Please watch the video interview with Gyasi here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lICR3OjN4>.

April 23: Race and Recognition in Art: the Works of Wangechi Mutu, Kerry James Marshall, Candice Lin, the artists' collective Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. (Eliza Barrios, Reanne Estrada, and Jenifer Wofford) and others. Links to artworks will be provided.

April 30: Race and Recognition in Music: the Works of Angel Haze, Mykki Blanco, Janelle Monáe, Amaarae, KOHINOORGASM ("Azaadi Is Freedom Is Fate"), and others. Links to the music and music videos will be provided.

May 7: Saidiya Hartman. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Topics: historical biography & fiction, the notion of the archive and the experiences of Black women, Black intimate and social life.

May 14: Saidiya Hartman. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Please watch the conference talks in this event, "Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: A Salon in Honor of Saidiya Hartman" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD_b8cXI0rk. We will be discussing these academic responses by Daphne Brooks, Aimee Meredith Cox, Macarena Gomez-Barris, Alexander G. Weheliye and Tina Campt to Hartman's book.

***** May 21: No class (Completion Week) *****

****Final essay due: Friday May 21, 2021 at 23:59 *****