

LT356 "(Re-)Writing a Politics of Belonging in Contemporary American Literature"

Class times: Fridays, 9am – 12:15pm (online)

Zoom link (same every week):

<https://us05web.zoom.us/j/85807753299?pwd=UDhTZWd1R1VsU2Y4TFF3bTJES0Zndz09>

Meeting ID: 858 0775 3299

Passcode: B3t41X

Seminar Leader: Kathy-Ann Tan

Email: k.tan@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

How much has changed in the USA since President Joe Biden's inauguration in January 2021? While certainly a relief for many following the years of the Trump presidency, have the promises of "repair", "building" and "healing" the nation made in Biden's inauguration speech been followed through? In this seminar, we will read a selection of texts from recent US-American literature that seek, through the act of writing, to reconfigure a sense of belonging and collective identity in turbulent times of global pandemic and political struggle. We will also examine how selected works of literature by queer writers and writers of color lay bare and critique the intersectional structures of oppression, exclusion and marginalization that are still prevalent in America. Above all, our goal will be to understand the fraught, creative dynamics of "belonging" in America and the role of literature in shaping the social.

Texts (* = required purchase):

Just Us by Claudia Rankine*

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates*

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo*

The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers*

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett*

Minor Feelings: An Asian-American Reckoning by Cathy Park Hong

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong*

Content Warning: Everything by Akwaeke Emezi

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

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. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2022: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Assignments

This course has two essay assignments: one mid-semester and one end of semester essay (**5000 – 7000 words in total**). It also has informal assignments, including giving presentations on readings and writing reading responses and/or discussion questions in advance of seminar meetings. Since this is a seminar, active and informed participation in class is a required and graded element of the course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Assessment and Grade Breakdown:

Class Participation: 30%

Mid-term essay: 30%

Final Essay: 40%

Essay Deadlines

Mid-term essay: Friday October 21, 2022 at 12 noon

Final essay: for graduating students: Wednesday December 14, 2022 at 12 noon
for all other students: Friday December 23, 2022 at 12 noon

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

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: September 2

Introduction: 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)

Week 2: September 9

Discussion of essay by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, and the Limits of Representation”. Please read this in advance here:

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/joe-biden-kamala-harris-and-the-limits-of-representation>

Week 3: September 16

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.

Week 4: September 23

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 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>

Week 5: September 30

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Central issues/motifs/topics: narrative structure of the text, racism, Black masculinity. Watch the HBO film adaptation of *Between the World and Me* here: <https://series2watch.tv/watch-movie/watch-between-the-world-and-me-hd-65053.5494804>

Week 6: October 7

Colloquium session: discussion of topics and outlines for your mid-term essays. short 15 min presentation of your essay outlines – you may use powerpoint, prezi, .pdf, etc. You will be asked to give feedback on your classmates’ topics and outlines. Both your own presentation and your feedback will count toward your class participation grade.

Week 7: October 14

So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo. Central issues/motifs/topics: racism, white supremacy, curricula and institutionality in the US

Week 8: No Class (Fall Break)

***** Mid-term essay due: Friday October 21, 2021 at 12 noon *****

Week 9: October 28

The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers. Central issues/motifs/topics: life in the American South, the American civil war and slavery, the Civil Rights Movement

Week 10: November 4

The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers. Central issues/motifs/topics: narrative structure of the text, identity and place

Week 11: November 11

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett. Central issues/motifs/topics: Segregation in the south, racism, racial passing, colorism

Week 12: November 18

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett. Central issues/motifs/topics: Black femininity, coming-of-age, narrative technique

Week 13: November 25

Excerpt from *Minor Feelings: An Asian-American Reckoning* by Cathy Park Hong and first half of *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. Central issues/motifs/topics: home and belonging, migration and refugeeism, Asian-American experience

Week 14: December 2

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous by Ocean Vuong. Central issues/motifs/topics: narrative structure of the book, narrative style. Watch this interview here with Ocean Vuong: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjTiLodYG3Y>

Week 15: December 9

Selection of poems from *Content Warning: Everything* by Akwaeke Emezi. Central issues/motifs/topics: home, chosen family, desire, domestic abuse

Week 16: Completion Week (no class)

Final essays due: for graduating students: Wednesday December 14, 2022 at 12 noon
for all other students: Friday December 23, 2022 at 12 noon