

Carleton University, Department of English
English 3702A Winter, 2020
American Culture: The Literature of California
Prerequisites: second-year standing or department permission.
Precludes additional credit for ENGL 3703 (no longer offered).
Time: 1:05-2:25 Monday and Wednesday
Place: 3101 CB
(Please verify on Carleton Central)
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Office hours: Wednesdays: 11:45-12:45

California is a place which Umberto Eco described in terms of its “hyper-reality.” The term may stand for a great deal more than he intended insofar as the historical and contemporary place has influenced the imaginations of those who have given it felt consideration ever since it emerged in world consciousness. The name itself is drawn from romance. Inevitably, those who have felt enough about California to integrate the place into their literary narratives have explored the many ways in which that place, with its myths and dreams as well as its experienced realities, have oriented, warped, and even corrupted the imaginations of those who have sojourned there. None of the works proposed for study in this course have been neutral towards what that place became for those whose lives were spent there. Curious, for Eco, was the degree to which Californians indulged in assorted fantasies which they sought to make real in their bizarre architectures, kitsch attractions, grandiose cemeteries, fantasy amusement parks, and their penchant for importing from other parts of the world sundry cultural styles which they then hodgepogged into messy fusion cultures (witness Hearst’s Castle, the old Getty Museum, or the Madonna Inn). But behind the material manifestation of dreams are the very dreams themselves of Hesperidean escape, the dissipated life in the sun, the glamour of capitalist success, endless material self-advancement, Hollywood fame, a paradise of fauna and flora, an adobe lifestyle in the image of Old California, surf culture, drug culture, cult culture, alternate reality culture, end-of-the road culture—all of them in some sense hyper-real. Everyone there carries a code obliquely related to promise and place, desire and fantasy, and the fiction merely follows in the wake of those codes, concentrating far more upon failed dreams, disillusionment, mental torment, loneliness, the lost self, settlement brutality and hostility, racial tensions, and so much more that seeks to beggar the truth of those who have found happiness, wonder, fulfilment, or contentment in a place advertising its abundance, relaxed lifestyle, climate, diversity of amusements, rich culinary options, and social infrastructures. So what happened? The fiction writers try to explain, but it is not easy. Thus, the place and its fiction, wedded as they inevitably are, have also created the paradox of California from Summerland to Haight Ashbury to institutions of incarceration to asylums for lost souls. Of these matters, the course will search and explore.

Choosing the readings was not easy. Time is limited and the choices are rich. Where are the classics of Richard Henry Dana, Jack London, Ginsburg, Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Aldous Huxley? Where are *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Joy Luck Club* or *The Octopus*? All are casualties to the pressures of choice. The last forty years have witnessed a literary explosion, with more Hollywood, drug, cult and asylum demises that can even be imagined. But here are the survivors.

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona*
Frank Norris, *McTeague, A Story of San Francisco*
John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*
Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*
Joan Didion, *Play it as it Lays*
Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*
(Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-reality*) optional

Course assignments: Term paper, 9-12 pages, due on the 7th of April 50% of total
Final Exam, 3 hours, with questions on all readings. 50% of total

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Term papers: your choice of topic; make it problem oriented, critically grounded, methodologically transparent, the topic fitted to the paper length, arriving at your own argued conclusions to the declared problem, logically and cogently presented, using any style sheet of your choice, consistently employed. The same thing in alternate terms: dialogue with reliable critics; maintain your own argument; treat a significant problem arising from the nature, themes, and modes of imaginative fiction; use a precise and integrated critical method; but avoid canned and politically agenda-driven templates taken over from warrior critics; find your own academic and considered critical style; showcase your own argument-building acumen—that is the only part that can be evaluated. Please take early note of the due date and schedule your production accordingly. In extremis, the Registrar's Office, I think, has terms and conditions for work that must be submitted late as well as missed exams, with bona fide documentation, casts, or crutches.

This is a lecture course—there is a great deal to cover—but there will be time for discussion as well on topics of genuinely mutual interest to the class. Please make your interventions contextually complete and boldly audible. Feel free to shout if you're at the back! If not, I may need relay interpreters. Also consider coming around during office hours for a chat, for amplification of lecture points, for concerns about the course, or for strategizing term paper topics. I'm keen to help if I can, or just to listen. I much prefer those encounters to e-mails, which I encourage you to use sparingly and essentially only. You might also consider forming discussion groups among yourselves to explore your thoughts and impressions together.

Reading Schedule:

Jan. 6: Introduction

Jan. 8: Ramona
Jan. 13: Ramona
Jan. 15: Ramona
Jan. 20: Ramona
Jan. 22: McTeague
Jan. 27: McTeague
Jan. 29: McTeague
Feb. 3: McTeague
Feb. 5: Cannery Row
Feb. 10: Cannery Row
Feb. 12: Cannery Row
Spring Break
Feb. 24: Cannery Row
Feb. 26: Slouching Towards Bethlehem
Mar. 2: Slouching Towards Bethlehem
Mar. 4: Slouching Towards Bethlehem
Mar. 9: Slouching Towards Bethlehem
Mar. 11: The Day of the Locust
Mar. 16: The Day of the Locust
Mar. 18: The Day of the Locust
Mar. 23: The Day of the Locust
Mar. 25: Play it as it Lays
Mar. 30: Play it as it Lays
Apr. 1: Play it as it Lays
Apr. 6: Play it as it Lays

More in class about writing essays.

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;

- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;

- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

VII. Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: <https://carleton.ca/equity/contact/form-pregnancy-accommodation/>

Religious obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/discrimination-harassment/religious-spiritual-observances/>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, visit the Paul Menton Centre Website: carleton.ca/pmc

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/sexual-violence-prevention-survivor-support/>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>