

American Studies 401
Literature and Culture Seminar
Summer 2004
Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday 6:00-8:50 pm
Humanities 124

John Ibson
Office: EC 674
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-4:30 pm
and Thursday 5:00-6:00 pm
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Required Reading

Jane Tompkins, “‘But Is It Any Good?’: The Institutionalization of Literary Value”
Michael T. Marsden, “The Popular Western Novel as a Cultural Artifact”
Elizabeth Ammons, “Introduction” (to *Conflicting Stories: American Women
Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*)
David Bergman, “Alternative Service: Families in Recent American Gay Fiction”
Josephine Hendin, “Fictions of Acquisition”

Bobbie Ann Mason, *In Country*
Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*
David Leavitt, *Equal Affections*
Frank Chin, *Donald Duk*

The articles will be passed out in class. The novels are available at the Little Professor Book Center, 725, North Placentia Avenue.

Course Requirements

The course will consider the relationship between fictional narratives and the larger cultural environment in which such narratives are created and received. More specifically, we will examine four fairly recent American novels in their cultural context, paying attention to the culturally significant characteristics of both the creators and the audiences of these works of the imagination. Cultural analysis of fiction assumes that no work of “art” simply happens and that the standards used in judging artistic merit are by no means absolute.

As befits a seminar, our class sessions will be largely devoted to discussion of reading that we will be doing together. I will give a brief lecture when we are about to begin discussion of a new novel, and you will help us conduct our analysis of a novel by reading your thoughts on a particular cultural aspect of that work. It is essential that you do the reading as it is assigned and that you attend class regularly. The pace is fast in summer school; falling behind in assignments is even more of a risk than it is in a regular semester. I have made assignments with our long weekends in mind.

You must prepare *a written response of no more than one page* to each of the four novels we will be reading together. Please bring one copy of your response paper

for each member of the class. We will devote three class sessions to each novel, with your responses due at the first meeting. At each of these meetings, I will ask some of you to read your papers aloud; we will then discuss what we have heard. Every student will eventually read her or his papers aloud for at least two novels. I'll discuss this assignment with you in more detail in class.

You must also prepare *a paper of at least 10 pages (15 pages for graduate students)* which in detail analyzes as a cultural document an American novel of your choice. This paper is due on Thursday, July 1, our last class meeting. I will be discussing my expectations for this project with you in class throughout the summer session.

The quality of your participation in classroom activities (discussion and response papers) will constitute 60% of your course grade. Your grade on the larger paper will count 40%.

COURSE OUTLINE

A novel should be read in its entirety by the first day that we discuss it.

Tu 6/1	Introduction to the Course
W 6/2	Literature in Culture, the Culture in Literature
Th 6/3	read: The five assigned articles
Tu 6/8	Battle Fatigue: American Culture in the Aftermath of Vietnam
W 6/9	read: <i>In Country</i>
Th 6/10	
Tu 6/15	More Than Victims? Charles Johnson's Blacks
W 6/16	read: <i>Middle Passage</i>
Th 6/17	
Tu 6/22	Family Values: David Leavitt's Gay Suburbanites
W 6/23	read: <i>Equal Affections</i>
Th 6/24	
Tu 6/29	Another Donald: An Asian American Dream
W 6/30	read: <i>Donald Duk</i>
Th 7/1	Papers Due