

M.A. in American Literature and Culture

7-538 Contemporary American Fiction:

Contesting the real in Postmodern writing 1960s-1990s

Dr Tatiani Rapatzikou

Winter 2009

Office: 308E

Office Hours: Wednesdays 14:00-15:00 & 18:00-19:00

Course Objectives

This course will attempt to explore postmodern American literature, culture and society between 1960s-1990s. The novels to be studied will be focusing on the hyper-real, the simulated and the mass-mediated nature of contemporary American reality. Some of the areas to be touched upon are: the mass media, virtual technologies, drugs and hallucinatory experiences. These will be examined in relation to the more general notions of spatiality and displacement, individuality and authenticity which are central to the whole postmodern debate. Alongside the works by Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, William Gibson, Chuck Palahnuik and Hunter S. Thompson, the course will bring to the attention of the students the theoretical works by Marshall McLuhan, Robert Scholes, Brian McHale, Jean Baudrillard Fredric Jameson, Rosemary Jackson and others.

Required Texts

Primary Reading

Coover, Robert. *Public Burning* (1977)

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise* (1984)

Gibson, William. *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988)

Palahnuik, Chuck. *Fight Club* (1996)

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965, 1966)

Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)

Secondary Reading (On Reserve)

Annesley, James. *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (1998).

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981).

---. *America* (1988)

---. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1988).

Denzin, Norman K. *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema* (1991).

Eco, Umberto. *Travels in Hyperreality* (1987).

Frus, Phyllis. *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative* (1994).

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981).

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987).

---. *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992).

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media* (1964).

Mendelson, Edward. *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1978).

- Prosser, Jay. *American Fiction of the 1990s: Reflections of History and Culture* (2008).
- Scholes, Robert. *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979).
- Seed, David. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (1988).
- Wolfe, Tom and E.W. Johnson. *The New Journalism* (1973).
- Wolmark, Jenny. *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace* (1999).

Films

- Fight Club*. Dir. David Fincher. 1999.
- Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Dir. Terry Gilliam. 1998.
- Matrix*. Dir. Wachowski Brothers. 1999.
- No Maps for these Territories*. Dir. Mark Neale. 1999.

Assessment

- a. **In-class presentations:** Each graduate student is required to prepare and deliver two 20' minute presentations (score: 10% per presentation – total 20%) on one of the literary and theoretical texts to be discussed in class. Each presentation should be followed by a written report (score: 15% per report – total 30%).
- b. **Essay:** Each graduate student is required to write a 5,000 words essay (score: 50%) on a topic which will be decided after consultation with the tutor. The essay should be handed in before the commencement of next semester (Feb. 15th, 2010).

Syllabus

Wed. 7 Oct. Introduction

Postmodern Contemporary Fiction
Questioning the Real

Wed. 14 Oct. Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message” and “The Written Word: an Eye for an Ear”; Edward Mendelson, “The Sacred, the Profane, and *The Crying of Lot 49*” from *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*.

Wed. 21 Oct. Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Mon. 26 Oct. – Wed. 28 Oct. 2009 NO CLASSES

Wed. 4 Nov. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, *New Journalism* and Bernard Mc Elroy, “The Paranoid Vision” from *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*.

Wed. 11 Nov. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

(playing film clips)

Student Presentations

Wed. 18 Nov. Robert Coover, *Public Burning*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Robert Scholes, "Fact, Fiction and Fallibilism," "The comedy of extremity" and "History as Fabulation" from *Fabulation and Metafiction*

Wed. 25 Nov. Robert Coover, *Public Burning*

Wed. 2 Dec. Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Jean Baudrillard, "Utopia Achieved" from *America* and Jameson Fredric from *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

Wed. 9 Dec. Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Wed. 16 Dec. William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Brian McHale, "At the Interface" from *Constructing Postmodernism* and Jean Baudrillard "Simulacra and Science Fiction" from *Simulacra and Simulation*.

Wed. 23 Dec. 2009 – Thurs. 8 Jan. 2010 CHRISTMAS BREAK

Wed. 13 Jan. William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*

(playing film clips)

Student Presentations

Wed. 20 Jan. Chuck Palahnuik, *Fight Club*

Student Presentations

Readings:

Rosemary Jackson, "The Uncanny" and "Disintegrated Bodies" from *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*; Jean Baudrillard "Towards a Theory of Consumption" from *The Consumer Society*.

Presentation

Wed. 27 Jan. Chuck Palahnuik

(playing film clips)

Student Presentations

Discussion prompts

Before each session you are all kindly requested to submit electronically (trapatz@enl.auth.gr) at least one question in relation to the primary text you have studied. All questions will be used as discussion prompts during our meetings.

****Wishing you all a creative semester****