Themes & Genres in the Literatures of the Americas: Border Crossings

“. . . being American today means participating in the drafting of a new cultural topography.”

--Guillermo Gómez-Peña
Warrior of Gringostroika

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Required Texts to Purchase:
Carlos Fuentes. The Old Gringo
Cristina García. Dreaming in Cuban
Harriet Jacobs. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
Joan MacLeod. Amigo’s Blue Guitar
Gabriel García Márquez. Of Love and Other Demons

Required Texts to Print:
Other required readings (noted below on the syllabus) will be available on Blackboard. You will be expected to print each of these readings (about 100 pages in total) and bring a hard copy of them to class on the day(s) that they will be discussed. I recommend that you print all of these texts, if possible, at the beginning of the semester so that you will be sure to have them when you need them. In addition, you should also print the course study questions (about 8 pages in total) and bring them to class.

Course Description:
Celia del Pino, a character in Cristina García’s novel Dreaming in Cuban, writes, “If I was born to live on an island, then I’m grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. At least I have the illusion of change, of possibility.” Taking a hemispheric approach, this course introduces students to literature in a variety of genres by major writers who “rearrange the borders” of the Americas to make room for the complicated story their diverse experiences tell. Our touchstone for the semester will be the theme of border crossings—of passing over borders, of crossroads or contact zones between cultures, neighborhoods, and nations, and of mixings within individuals and communities of ancestry and of ethnic, racial, and national heritages. In the era of globalization, we are becoming increasingly aware that cultures are not contained within national borders but instead spill over and exceed those borders, and the Americas as a region whose history is characterized by the dramatic uprooting,
mixing, and reinvention of cultures that resulted from the “discovery” and colonization of the “New World,” are especially well suited to such a transnational framework for literary and cultural study.

**Course Objectives:**
1. To examine the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts by reading texts by authors from a range of cultures and nationalities.
2. To explore the distinctive characteristics of relevant literary periods, genres, and writers.
3. To understand and use basic literary terms and concepts.
4. To develop analytic skills by close reading, class discussion, and writing.
5. To use writing as a tool for learning.

**Student Learning Outcomes**
Students who successfully complete ENGL 2335 will be able to:
1. recognize the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts;
2. respond critically to literary works.

**Course Evaluation:**

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation/Facilitation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary Analysis</td>
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<td>Border Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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<td>Quick Writes</td>
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A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = below 60

**Note:** One or more of your assignments for this course may be selected for program assessment purposes.

**Course Requirements:**

**Presentation/Facilitation:** Working in a group with two or three other students, you will prepare and present a group presentation related to our course concerns. Your primary tasks will be to research the topic assigned for the day, to relate it to the text we are studying, and to effectively “teach” what you learn to the class in a brief (ten-minute) format of your choosing. Groups must meet with me by the class period before their presentation. This will help me get to know you better and give me the opportunity to give us as much guidance for the project as you’d like/need. At the beginning of the class immediately following the presentation, each student must turn in a completed self-evaluation form (no exceptions). In grading the presentations, these self-evaluations will help me to judge the individual contribution of each group member. Additional information on this assignment in posted on Blackboard.

**Performative Project:** This project should respond to or interpret one of the literary texts on the syllabus by creating a visual and/or verbal “performative” or “act” that will provide us with a free, open, and multidimensional “portal” through which we can rethink fixed notions and boundaries of the Americas. With the project, which may take any form you wish that is not one dimensional, you will include a one-page (typed, double-spaced) reflection on the project. This reflection should explain how your performative and related literary text act to remap/cross traditional American borders. On the day
you choose to present your project (which may be any of the dates we will be discussing the related literary text), you will make a brief (3-5 minute) presentation to the class. Your project will be evaluated equally on the basis of the effort, imagination, and thoughtful insights that it demonstrates, as well as for its aesthetic qualities. Additional information on this assignment is posted on my website.

**Literary Analysis:** You will write one literary analysis on a *focused* topic of your choice that relates to our readings and thematic concerns. This analytical essay may be written on any *one* of the following literary texts: “States,” “Ode to Walt Whitman,” “Prayer of Columbus,” “They Come through the Islands (1493),” or *Of Love and Other Demons*. It should create an *argument* that is framed by a meaningful, interpretive thesis and organized by a series of key claims or assertions. You should provide textual evidence to support each of these claims, as well as analysis of the evidence. No secondary sources are required for this essay, which should be 3-4 pages in length (typed and double-spaced) and adhere to MLA format and documentation requirements. In evaluating your essay, I will consider the complexity, sophistication and originality of your thesis, the selection and strength of the evidence that you use to support your claims, the clarity and coherence of your interpretive argument, your personal engagement with the text, and your command of writing conventions and surface features (including MLA). Additional information about this assignment is available on Blackboard.

**Border Study:** In this essay, which should be at least four pages long (typed and double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman), you will create an original argument related to the course’s thematic focus by analyzing one effect that the border—as an abstract concept and/or a concrete reality—has had in shaping and complicating American literature(s), culture(s), and identity(ies). To support your argument, you should make significant connections to one of our major literary texts, as well as supporting connections to at least one of our contextual readings and at least two sources from your own independent secondary research. In addition, you may want to bring in information that you have learned from class discussions and presentations. You should also draw from your knowledge of historical examples and/or from images of (and responses to) the border in popular culture. The due dates for the proposal that is required for this project, the peer review session, and the final paper are listed on the schedule. Additional information on this assignment is posted on Blackboard.

**Exams:** We will have two in-class exams. The purpose of these exams will be to show:

- your critical understanding of key terms and concepts in objective and short answer responses,
- your ability to analyze critically what we have read and discussed through close readings of key passages, and
- your ability to draw thematic and contextual connections among the literary texts in short essay responses,

I do *not* provide study guides for the exams or post notes online, so it will be important to keep up with the readings and take notes during class. Exam questions will come from the reading assignments, class lecture and discussion, and group presentations.

**Quick Writes:** Throughout the semester, and usually at the beginning of class, you will write, informal, ungraded responses to the readings. The prompts for these writings will often come from the study questions that are posted on Blackboard, and—unless I tell you otherwise—you will be able to refer to your notes and the related text(s) in preparing them. You will typically write for about ten minutes, and—depending on the size of your handwriting—I will expect your responses to be about three quarters to one page in length. If you fulfill this expectation, and if it’s clear from your response that you have read the assignment carefully, you will receive 2 points. If you only write a few lines
related to the prompt, if your response is totally “off-base,” or if it is unclear from what you have written that you read the assignment closely, you will receive 1 point. If you are absent, you will receive a 0. Sometimes these writings will be done collaboratively in groups and sometimes they will be done individually. Quick writes may not be made up for any reason, but I will drop the lowest daily value at the end of the semester before totaling your points and creating a curve from these totals that will count as this portion of your grade.

Course Policies

Student Communications: From time to time, it may be necessary for me to contact you individually or to contact everyone in the class to communicate important course-related information. Please be aware that University policy requires me to use your Islander e-mail address for this purpose. I will expect you to act responsibly to ensure that you receive and, if appropriate, respond to all such communications in a timely manner.

Attendance: Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion is required for success in this class. Perfect attendance will result in a two-point increase in your final grade. You can miss two classes without penalty. For every subsequent class you miss—regardless of the reason—two points will be deducted from your final grade. Two tardies (i.e., arriving after I have closed the classroom door and begun class) will be counted as one absence. If you arrive late, you must talk to me or the grader at the end of class, or you will be counted absent for the entire class (even if you signed in on the attendance sheet). Do not waste your permitted absences. Save them for times when you are ill, have a family emergency, need to be out of town, have car trouble, etc. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from another student. You are responsible for all work and for keeping up with all assignments announced in your absence.

Computers, Cell Phones, and Other Electronic Devices: The use of electronic devices is distracting to those around you and, therefore, not permitted. All cell phones, other wireless devices, and laptops must be turned off and in your backpack, bag, or otherwise out of sight during class. If you fail to adhere to this policy, I will ask you to leave class, resulting in your being counted absent for the entire class.

Late Assignments/Make-up Work: I will not accept a late assignment unless you have made arrangements with me before the due date. Work done in class cannot be made up for any reason. Except in the case of unusual circumstances that are discussed with me in advance, you must attend class as a condition of any extension on an assignment. In-class exams can be made up only in cases of documented major illness or emergency. Any such make-up exams will be in essay form and must be scheduled and taken during my regular office hours within one week of the original exam date.

Academic Honesty: I will follow the university’s policy on academic honesty. Plagiarism, which is “the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work” is only one form of academic dishonesty, which also includes falsification (the intentional alteration of information), fabrication (the intentional invention of information), multiple submissions (using the same material for two separate assignments or courses without permission from the instructors), and abuse of academic materials (the intentional destruction of resource materials). Sometimes students commit unintentional plagiarism (not citing sources properly, for example) because they are unaware of the standards that apply. Therefore, if you have questions or doubts about what constitutes a breach of integrity or a violation of policies, it is important that you consult with me.
**Grade Appeal Process:** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Website at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Resources**

1. **Writing Center:** The Writing Center of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi provides free help for students at any stage of the writing process. Writing Center consultants are trained to work with writers one-on-one to help them find ideas, organize their thoughts, cite sources, and succeed at all aspects of the writing task. The Writing Center works closely with faculty across campus to understand the writing projects they assign and to help students meet the expectations of those assignments. The Writing Center is located in Bell Library 216 in the Tutoring and Learning Center. Both drop-in and scheduled appointments are available. More information is available at [http://falcon.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/](http://falcon.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/).

2. **Students with Disabilities and Veterans:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact Disability Services for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

3. **Academic Advising Center:** If you are majoring, or plan to major, in a field taught in the College of Liberal Arts, and if you have not yet obtained a signed degree plan, you should meet with an Academic Advisor immediately. Degree plans are important and useful in ensuring successful progress toward graduation. The Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.

**IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT READING ASSIGNMENTS:** Readings should be completed by the date noted on the schedule below, and **you are expected to bring a hard-copy of all reading assignments and the related study questions to class.** Some of the readings are lengthy. To avoid falling behind, you will need to determine how much time you require to get the reading done and build that time into your schedule. It is a good idea to use the weekends (and class days without reading assignments) to get ahead in your reading. I recommend that you print all of the Blackboard assignments at the first of the semester to ensure you have them when you need them.

**Tentative Course Schedule (subject to change):**

BB = Blackboard
Approaching Borders

R 01/12 Course Overview

T 01/17 Diana Taylor, “Remapping Genre through Performance: From ‘American’ to ‘Hemispheric’ Studies” (BB)

R 01/19 Walt Whitman, “States” and Sections 1-3 and 34 of Song of Myself (BB)

T 01/24 José Martí, “Our America” (BB); Rubén Darío, “Walt Whitman” and “To Roosevelt” (BB); Pablo Neruda, “Ode to Walt Whitman” and “Toward an Impure Poetry” (BB)

R 01/26 Walt Whitman, “Prayer of Columbus” (BB); Pablo Neruda, “They Come through the Islands (1493)” (BB); presentation/facilitation on Christopher Columbus in the Americas

Borders of Self & Community: Belonging & Alienation

T 01/31 Gabriel García Márquez, Of Love and Other Demons (chapters 1-2); presentation/facilitation on the history of the Spanish Conquest in South America

R 02/02 Gabriel García Márquez, Of Love and Other Demons (chapters 3-5); presentation/facilitation on the Spanish Inquisition in the Americas

T 02/07 Continue discussion of García Márquez; Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (BB); excerpts from the writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (BB); presentation/facilitation on Latin American colonial culture and the Enlightenment

Borders as Barriers

R 02/09 Harriet Jacobs, Incidents (Note, preface, introduction by editor, appendix, chapters 1-10); Thomas Jefferson, excerpt from Notes on the State of Virginia (BB); presentation/facilitation on slavery in the U.S. LITERARY ANALYSIS DUE

T 02/14 Harriet Jacobs, Incidents (chapters 11-13); W. E. B. DuBois, “The Sorrow Songs” (BB); presentation/facilitation on black spirituals and other songs from slavery

R 02/16 Harriet Jacobs, Incidents (chapters 14-29); Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” (BB)

T 02/21 Harriet Jacobs, Incidents (chapters 30-41); Nathan McCall, “Nigger” (BB); presentation/facilitation on the U.S. civil rights movement; review for midterm exam

R 02/23 MIDTERM EXAM

Borders & Frontiers: La Frontera

T 02/28 Carlos Fuentes, The Old Gringo (chapters 1-10); presentation/facilitation on Pancho Villa and the Mexican Revolution of 1910
R 03/01 Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo* (chapters 11-23)

T 03/06 Continue discussion of Fuentes; presentation/facilitation on *corrido* music or poetry

R 03/08 Continue discussion of Fuentes; Patricia Nelson Limerick, “The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century” (BB)

SPRING BREAK – 3/12-3/16

**Negotiating Borders: The Dynamics of Difference**

T 03/20 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (“Ordinary Seductions”); presentation/facilitation on the Cuban Revolution; PROPOSAL DUE FOR BORDER STUDY

R 03/22 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (“Imagining Winter”)

T 03/27 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban* (“The Languages Lost”); presentation/facilitation on Santería

R 03/29 Continue discussion of García; presentation/facilitation on Cuban music or poetry

T 04/03 Joan MacLeod, *Amigo’s Blue Guitar* (all); presentation/facilitation on El Salvador’s Civil War; presentation/facilitation on the history of Canada’s asylum/refugee system

R 04/05 PEER REVIEW BORDER STUDY – YOU MUST BRING TWO COPIES OF YOUR COMPLETE DRAFT TO CLASS TO BE COUNTED PRESENT TODAY

T 04/10 Wallace Stevens, excerpts from “The Man with the Blue Guitar” (BB); BORDER STUDY DUE

R 04/12 Continue discussion of MacLeod and Stevens

**Globalization & the World’s New Borders**

T 04/17 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (chapters 1-14); presentation/facilitation on NAFTA


R 04/26 Continue discussion of Yamashita; Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The ‘90s Culture of Xenophobia: Beyond the Tortilla Curtain” (BB)

T 05/01 Final thoughts and review for final exam

**THE FINAL EXAM WILL BE GIVEN ON THE DAY & TIME SCHEDULED BY THE UNIVERSITY.**