American Literature (1945-Present): Mapping the Americas

To ask for a map is to say, “Tell me a story.”
--Peter Turchi, Maps of the Imagination

There are maps and there are maps and there are maps.

Instructor: Dr. Sharon Talley
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Office Hours: T 3:30-5:30, WTh 11:00-12:00 (and by appointment)
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Course Description:
In Jorge Luis Borges’s short story, “Exactitude in Science,” the narrator describes the work of a group of imperial cartographers whose map becomes so precise that it eventually covers the entire territory of the empire, nearly consuming the space it was meant to represent. The story points to the possibility that the act of description can come to be co-extensive with the thing itself—the empire merely a set of data compiled by cartographers—and that this new reality can somehow take the place of the thing it sought to represent. In more general terms, Borges’s story suggests the power of narrative to create the reality it seeks to describe, to give body to an otherwise imagined landscape. This class will examine alternative and sometimes competing visions of the hemispheric Americas to ask how multiple manifestations of truth and reality, memory and history have been used to define the cultural, social, and political spaces of the “New World.” Taking an interdisciplinary approach that examines a broad range of texts in a variety of genres and mediums, we will ask how authors from diverse locations have represented place and how those expressions of locality coalesce to create and deconstruct a transnational literature of the Americas.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:
• define American literature in a transnational/borderlands framework
• analyze American literature and other cultural texts in the context of critical theories, cultural differences, and historical changes;
• integrate knowledge from a variety of disciplines into the study of literature and other cultural texts;
• demonstrate competency in literary research at the graduate level; and
• integrate research with their own critical insights.

Required Primary Texts (if possible, please use the editions listed):


---. “Toward an Impure Poetry” (available on Blackboard).


**Required Secondary Texts (all available via Blackboard):**

Anderson, Benedict. Chapters 1-3 of *Imagined Communities* (rev. ed.).

Barthes, Roland. Excerpts from *Camera Lucida*.

Baudrillard, Jean. “The Precession of Simulacra” (from *Simulacra and Simulation*).


Clifford, James. “Palenque Log” (from *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*).


“Five Ways of Mapping the World” (Episode 110 of *This American Life*).

García Márquez, Gabriel. “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.”

Gilroy, Paul. Chapter 1 of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*.


Hubbard, Phil, Rob Kitchin, Brendan Bartley, and Duncan Fuller. “Geographies of Text” (from *Thinking Geographically*).

Lopez, Barry. “A Literature of Place.”

Massey, Doreen. “A Global Sense of Place” (from *Space, Place, and Gender*).

Moretti, Franco. “Maps” (from *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*).

Nora, Pierre. “Between History and Memory.”

Taussig, Michael. Chapters 1, 2, and 17 of *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*.

Turchi, Peter. “Metaphor: or, the Map” (from *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*).

**Course Evaluation:**

Participation 10%

Mapping Projects:

- Short story 5%
- Prezi presentation/facilitation 10%
- Photography project 10%
- Mimesis/simulation essay 10%
- Sense(s) of place portfolio 10%
- Literary map of the Americas 45%
  - Map 15%
  - Final essay 25%
  - Critical responses 5%
A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F=below 60

Course Requirements:

Participation and Attendance: The course format will consist of both teacher- and student-facilitated discussion, as well as independent research. In addition, students will work in small groups throughout the semester to discuss the readings, collaborate on projects, and perform related research. Not only is attendance required, but consistent and informed class participation is essential for full credit. You can miss one class without penalty; for every subsequent class you miss, two points will be subtracted from your final course grade.

Mapping Projects: During the semester, you will develop six projects in which you apply concepts related to sensory perception, memory and history, and cultural geography in the context of both our course readings and your own experience and research about American places and spaces. Some of these projects will be done individually, and some will be done in small groups. We will have workshop sessions for some of the projects, but most of the work for these assignments will take place outside of class.

1. Short Story: Using Borges’s “The South” as your creative stimulus, you will each write a two-page (typed and double-spaced) short story about place from your own experience or personal mythology of the Americas. With this story, you will also turn in a one-page (typed, single-spaced) artist’s statement in which you explain your approach and the effect(s) you sought to achieve, as well as the inspiration you took from Borges’s story. The artist’s statement will count for 25% of your grade for this assignment, and the story itself will count for 75%.

2. Prezi Presentation/Facilitation: With Nora’s essay as your starting point, you will work in groups of three (or so) to brainstorm ways to represent the fictional space of Condé’s novel. In doing so, consider how the novel extends the intertwined landscapes of memory, history, and literature to reflect our relationship with the past (both actual and imagined). Please go beyond a merely localized reading of the text to address ways in which it remaps the economic and cultural histories of North America and the Caribbean and to what purpose. Remember that we will have several groups making these presentations, so be sure to focus your insights in a way that will make them unique for us to consider. Do some outside research to help expand your understanding of one or more ways in which this text reorients past narratives. Then use your own ideas and your research to develop a 10-minute Prezi presentation that communicates both your representation and the rationale behind it. Each group will deliver its presentation to the class and then facilitate a 20-minute class discussion or activity to expand upon the presentation and the novel and mapping conventions for economic and cultural histories. Each group will post the Prezi presentation in the Discussion Forum in Blackboard and also turn in a hard copy of the Prezi and a write-up of the group’s plans for the facilitation segment (including one or more learning objectives). Each student in the group will turn in a description of what he or she contributed individually to the project (including the individual’s outside research). Your Prezi should document only the sources that were ultimately cited/used within the final presentation.
3. **Photography Project**: For this two-part project, you will pair with another student. Each of you will first work independently to create or gather a series of 10 digital photographs that you think represents a coherent narrative about some aspect of life in Corpus Christi (or some other American place of your choice). You will then exchange your ordered sets of photographs electronically (without any titles, captions, or explanations) and write a 3-4 page essay that engages the photographs of the other student both critically and creatively. The format for this response is open, but a successful essay will demonstrate a grasp of the issues raised by Agee and Evans, Barthes, and Daston and Galison. Students will be graded individually on the narrative quality of their own series of photographs (50%) and on their critical and creative responses to their partners’ photographs (50%).

4. **Mimesis/Simulation Essay**: Each student will write a 4-5 page (typed and double-spaced) essay that analyzes the fictional space and events in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in relation to Taussig and Baudrillard’s concepts of mimesis and simulation. A successful essay will create an argument that links the novel to these concepts in relation to García Márquez’s view of Latin American history and culture.

5. **Sense(s) of Place Portfolio**: For this project, you will select a historical site, area attraction, or personal getaway that you have visited before and that you can revisit again for this assignment. Prepare for your visit by reflecting on your past memories of this place and then by conducting research on it. Next visit the site and spend at least two hours at this location, carefully recording your experience with special attention to nonvisual sensory perceptions (i.e., sound, touch, taste, and smell). Alternatively, you may choose to focus on one nonvisual sense. It will be important to take extensive notes that record your visit with notations as to time. Be sure to make this visit alone so that you can focus on your own perceptions. To complete this project, you will create a chronicle of the visit that combines your own sensory perceptions, your past memories of the place, and your research to link this site/attraction’s present and past with your own. The format for your log and the point that you ultimately make with it are again open, but your work should be meaningful and informed by our reading and discussion of Clifford’s “Palenque Log,” Episode 110 of *This American Life* (“Five Ways to Map the World”), Lopez’s “A Literature of Place,” and Neruda’s *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*. Be sure to keep all of your notes, etc., and then organize everything together in a portfolio presentation with a reflective overview of two (or so) pages (typed and double-spaced) to orient and guide me through it.

6. **Literary Map of the Americas**: For this culminating project, you will draft a “map” that highlights one or more spatial, temporal, thematic, or structural elements of the literature of the Americas. The basis of your map will be a set of five (or so) literary texts taken from the MA Exam Reading List in Borderlands Studies and proposed with a rationale that you email to me by November 1 for my approval and feedback. (Alternatively, you may propose to map another set of literary texts from the Americas with transnational implications.) The map does not have to be cartographic; in fact, it is important to go beyond creating a faithful map of the “places” in these literary texts. Rather, think in terms of creating a narrative model or guide that connects all of these fictional spaces by
capturing their individual complexities in terms of the element(s) of your choice and by revealing a pattern or set of relations among them that a straightforward reading might overlook. In thinking about how to approach this assignment, consider Frank Moretti’s explanation of the purpose of such literary maps:

First, they are a good way to prepare a text [or a selection of texts] for analysis. You choose a unit—walks, lawsuits, luxury goods, whatever—find its occurrence, place them in space . . . or in other words: you reduce the text [or texts] to a few elements, and abstract them, and construct a new, artificial object. A model. And at this point you start working at a “secondary” level, removed from the text: a map, after all, is always a look from afar—or is useless, like Borges’s map of the empire. Distant reading, I have called this work elsewhere; where distance is however not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Patterns (New Left Review 26 [2004] 94).

Moretti provides examples of this technique in our reading from his book, Graphs Maps Trees. The “HyperContexts” that Yamashita provides as an alternative table of contents for Tropic of Orange is also an example of literary mapping that transforms the conventional closed system of time and space and linear narrative into a more open system that serves as a map for us to use as we drive through the geography and events depicted in the novel. Your challenge is to expand this concept and technique by selecting and mapping one or more key elements in the “terrain” of these literary texts to create a “distant reading” of the literatures of the Americas that you can support with relevant theory. Drawing from other disciplines, Moretti talks in terms of literary “trees” or matrices to explain this concept. There are many ways to approach this assignment, and I encourage you to be creative and to make use of any style, tool, and/or format that seems appropriate or necessary. You can be as high-tech or low-tech as you wish; your map can be hand-constructed, or you can use sophisticated mapping software like Bubbl.us or CMap, or other digital data visualization tools. Feel free also to involve sensory perceptions beyond the visual. Whatever form your “map” takes, be sure to include a legend or key that explains the information represented.

Once your map and legend are complete, you will also write an 8-10 page (typed and double-spaced) thesis-driven essay that presents a theoretically framed argument as it explains and critically reflects upon what your map reveals about the literatures of the Americas. How does this abstract model of the literary texts you have chosen create a “distant reading” of the literature? How does the map reveal qualitative and/or quantitative aspects of the literary texts that would elude a typical “close reading”? Also, explain your thinking process in creating this map: what element(s) of the literary texts were you trying to convey, and why did your map take the shape it did? Finally, how does your map succeed and what are its limitations? Please support the claims and conclusions that your argument draws not only with relevant secondary sources that we read for class but also with at least six scholarly sources that we did not read for class. Your essay should conform to MLA documentation style.
The maps will be due (and shared with everyone) on the last day of class. You must post your final essay in the Discussion Forum on Blackboard by the time scheduled for the final exam to begin (no exceptions). During the exam period, you will read two of your classmates’ essays (as assigned) and post a critical response to each in the Discussion Forum. Guidelines for these responses will be distributed in advance.

**Student Communications:**
You are responsible for the material covered and assignments and announcements made in every class whether or not you are present. In addition, 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. To do so, I will use the email function in Blackboard unless I am responding to an email you have sent to me. I will expect you to act responsibly to ensure that you receive and, if appropriate, respond to all such communications in a timely manner.

**Late Assignments:**
Please contact me by e-mail or telephone if an emergency arises and you cannot attend class. I will not accept late assignments unless you have made previous arrangements, and the final paper will not be accepted late for any reason. An “Incomplete” will be given at my discretion only and must involve exceptional circumstances. To qualify for consideration, you must have satisfactorily completed two-thirds of the course requirements and met graduate standards for attendance and participation.

**Academic Advising:**
Upon entering the MA in English Program, each student is assigned a faculty mentor by the Graduate Coordinator. You should make an appointment to meet with your faculty mentor every semester to develop a degree plan and monitor your progress toward graduation. Your faculty mentor can also answer questions and provide valuable information about the comprehensive examination, other degree requirements, Ph.D. programs, and career opportunities. To finalize your degree plan and register for graduation, you must also meet with the Graduate Student Academic Advisor in the Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts. This office is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.

**Graduate Student Academic Integrity Statement:**
English graduate students are expected to “conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty” (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Graduate Catalog). The Student Code of Conduct defines Academic Misconduct as cheating, plagiarism, multiple submissions, complicity, fabrication, falsification, and misrepresentation; in addition to “any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion” (*Student Code of Conduct*, Article III, 1. Academic Misconduct). Academic misconduct is a serious offence that will result in the professor assigning a serious penalty, possibly including failure for an assignment, failure in a course, or recommendation for dismissal from a program (TAMUCC Graduate Catalog, Academic Honesty). For each Academic Misconduct case, the faculty member must file a record, including a description of the disciplinary action taken, along with any materials involved, with his or her college dean, who will forward a copy to the Office of Student Affairs. Further information regarding the judicial process is available on the website of the Office for Student Affairs.
Classroom/Professional Behavior:
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as an academic community, requires that each individual respect the needs of others to study and learn in a peaceful atmosphere. Under Article III of the Student Code of Conduct, classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program may be considered a breach of the peace and is subject to disciplinary sanction outlined in article VII of the Student Code of Conduct. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior may be instructed to leave the classroom. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including classrooms, electronic classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

Dropping a Class:
I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary. Please consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is the best thing to do. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. Friday, November 6 is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

Grade Appeals:
Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, 
cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean.

Disabilities Accommodations:
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 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Statement of Academic Continuity:
In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane, as a result of which classes cannot be held on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, this class will continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails,
web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

**Blackboard:**
To log into Blackboard, go to: [http://bb9.tamu.edu](http://bb9.tamu.edu). You must have a NET ID (also known as an Active Directory account or “Islander ID”) to log in. For instructions on how to get this account and more information about using Blackboard, go to: [http://distance-education.tamu.edu/student_resources.html](http://distance-education.tamu.edu/student_resources.html). If you need additional help at any time to access, download, or print course materials on Blackboard, please contact the Island Online (IOL) Help Desk by telephone at (361) 825-2825 or by email at iolsupport@tamucc.edu.

**Tentative Class Schedule (subject to change):**
To facilitate meaningful discussion and analysis, please bring a hard copy of assigned readings to class. Blackboard readings = BB

### Introduction: Place, Memory, and History

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment Due/Class Focus</th>
<th>Writing Assignment Due</th>
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<tr>
<td>T 9/1</td>
<td>Course Overview; Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, Power” (BB); Turchi, “Metaphor: Or, the Map” (BB)</td>
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<td>T 9/8</td>
<td>Hubbard et al, “Geographies of Text” (BB); Anderson, chapters 1-3 from <em>Imagined Communities</em> (BB); Borges, “Exactitude in Science,” “Funes the Memorious,” and “The South” (BB)</td>
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### Between Memory & History

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment Due/Class Focus</th>
<th>Writing Assignment Due</th>
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<td>T 9/15</td>
<td>Condé, <em>I, Tituba</em> (all); Gilroy, chapter 1 from <em>The Black Atlantic</em> (BB); Caldeira, “Who Was Tituba?” (BB)</td>
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<td>T 9/22</td>
<td>Condé, ctd.; Nora, “Between Memory &amp; History” (BB); PREZI PRESENTATION/FACILITATION WORKSHOP</td>
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<td>T 9/29</td>
<td>PREZI PRESENTATION/FACILITATIONS – Post your group’s Prezi presentation in the Discussion Forum on Blackboard before 5:30</td>
<td>Hard copy of group’s Prezi presentation and facilitation plan; individual descriptions of contributions/research</td>
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### Archiving the Body: Issues of Objectivity & Response

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<td>T 10/6</td>
<td>Agee &amp; Evans, <em>Praise</em> (through page 193); Barthes, excerpts from <em>Camera Lucida</em> (BB); Daston &amp; Galison, “The Image of Objectivity” (BB); handouts on Realism and Modernism (BB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>T 10/13</td>
<td>Agee &amp; Evans, <em>Praise</em> (194-416)</td>
<td>Series of 10 digital photographs</td>
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### Remaking the World: Copies of Copies?

| T 10/20 | Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” (BB); Taussig, chs 1, 2, and 17 from *Mimesis and Alterity* (BB); García Marquéz, *100 Years* (1-180—segments 1-9); handouts on Postmodernism, Magical Realism, Myth, and Archetypes (BB) | Photos with Responses |
| T 10/27 | García Marquéz, *100 Years* (181-417—segments 10-20); Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (BB) | Email me the proposal and rationale for your literary map by 11/1 |

### Sensing Places in Ethnographic Accounts

| T 11/3 | Clifford, “Palenque Log” (BB); “Five Ways of Mapping the World” (BB); Lopez, “A Literature of Place”; Neruda, *Macchu Picchu* | Mimesis/Simulation Essay |

| T 11/10 | Neruda, ctd. | |

### Networks of Time & Space: Globalizing the Local/Localizing the Global

| T 11/17 | Yamashita, *Tropic* (through ch 28); Moretti, “Maps” (BB) | Sense(s) of Place Portfolio |
| T 11/24 | Yamashita, *Tropic* (chs 29-49); Massey, “A Global Sense of Place” (BB) | | |
| T 12/1 | Share maps | Literary Map (with legend) |

### Date of Final Exam

| Post your final essay in BB Discussion Forum by 7 pm. Each student will then read and post responses to two other students’ essays (as assigned). Responses must be posted by midnight. | Final Essay on your Literary Map and Critical Responses |

### Final Essay on your Literary Map and Critical Responses
Suggested Resources Available on Campus (representative sources only):

**Bell Library:**


**Blackboard:**
A variety of other resources are also posted on Blackboard.