



The Lester and Sally Entin הפקולטה למדעי הרוח
Faculty of Humanities ע"ש לסטר וסאלי אנטין
Tel Aviv University אוניברסיטת תל אביב

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES החוג לאנגלית ולימודים אמריקניים

Reimagining History in Contemporary American Literature

Dr. Sonia Weiner

Spring 2020

Tuesday 12-14

Gilman Room 277

This course will examine four events or periods within American history – Slavery, World War II, The Nuclear Era and the contemporary Native American Reservation – through novels by Colson Whitehead, Philip Roth, Lydia Millet and Sherman Alexie, respectively. The novels partake in the genre of alternate history, as they reimagine and reshape consensus history. Each employs different methods and techniques of representation with the aim of raising awareness to the way national narratives are constructed as well as the power they wield over us. We will examine how these techniques serve the purpose of the alternate histories they create, while exploring the significance of the gaps between the alternate histories and the ‘consensus history’ which they subvert.

Course requirements:

Class participation is mandatory

In-class Midterm = 40%

Moed A, May 8, 2020

Moed B, June 12, 2020

Final Paper = 60%

Submission date: July 29, 2020 (Late papers are not accepted unless approved by va'adat hora'a through the standard procedure.)

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Schedule

March 17 - Introduction and Mapping of the Field

Some theoretical material:

Carstocea, George. "Uchronia, Alternate Histories, and Counterfactuals." *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*, edited by Mark J.P. Wolf, 2017, pp. 184-191.

Cohen, Samuel. "Introduction: The End of History." *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s*, University of Iowa Press, 2009, pp. 1-29.

Gallagher, Catherine. "Introduction." *Telling It Like It Wasn't: The Counterfactual Imagination in History and Fiction*, The University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp. 1-15.

Hellekson, Karen. "Toward a Taxonomy of the Alternate History Genre." *Extrapolation*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2000, pp. 248-256.

Saldívar, Ramon. "Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Posttrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction." *American Literary History*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2011, pp. 574-599.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.

White, Hayden. "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing."

**March 24, March 31, April 5 (Sunday) – Slavery and Racism, Then and Now:
Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (2016)**

Additional Reading

Li, Stephanie. "Genre Trouble and Histories Miseries in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*." *MELUS*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1-23.

Reiss, Benjamin. "P.T. Barnum, Joice and Antebellum Spectacles of Race. *American Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1999, pp. 78-107.

Wood, Sarah. "Exorcising the Past: The Slave Narrative as Historical Fantasy". *Feminist Review*, vol. 85, 2007, pp. 83-96.

Passover Holiday April 7, 14

**April 21, May 5, May 12 – WWII, Ethnicity and Xenophobia:
Philip Roth: *The Plot Against America* (2004)**

(Yom HaZikaron/Memorial Day April 28 no class)

Additional Reading

Cooper, Alan. "It Can Happen Here, or All In The Family Values: Surviving *The Plot Against America*." *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, edited by Derek Parker, Praeger, 2005, pp. 241-254.

Obese, Stefanie. "'Those Two Years': Alternate History and Autobiography in Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*." *Studies in American Fiction*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2014, pp. 271-292,294.

Siegel, Jason." *The Plot Against America: Philip Roth's Counter-Plot to American History.*" *MELUS*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2012, pp. 131-154.

Sokoloff, Naomi. "Reading for the Plot? Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America.*" *AJS Review*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2006, 305-312.

**May 19, May 26 – Cold War and Atomic Warfare:
Lydia Millet, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* (Selections) (2005)**

Additional Reading:

Cohen, Samuel. "Fables of American Collectivity Circa 2005: Chris Bachelder's *U.S.!*, Lydia Millet's *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, and George Saunders's *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil.* *American Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2012), pp. 207-220.

Grausam Daniel. "Imagining Postnuclear Times." *Common Knowledge*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2015, pp. 451-463.

Jackson, Tony. "Postmodernism, Narrative, and the Cold War Sense of an Ending." *Narrative*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 324-338.

June 2 – Quentin Tarantino's Historical Revisions: *Django, Inglorious Bastards, Once Upon A Time in Hollywood.*

**June 9, June 16, June 23 – Native American Past-Present:
Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (1995)**

Additional Reading:

Janicki, Joel J. "The Art of Losing: Historical Allusions in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues.*" *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2015, pp. 23-41.

Molding, Martin. "'Anarchy on the Rez': The Blues, Popular Culture, and Survival in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues.*" *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2016, pp. 1-22.

Richardson, Janine. "Magic and Memory in Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues.*" *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, vol. 9, no. 4, 1997, pp. 39-51.

The syllabus like everything else in this world is subject to change