

Prof. Wen Jin
408D Philosophy Hall
Office Hours: MW 5:30-6:30 and by appointment

Spring 2009
CLEN W4930y Transnational Approaches to American literature
MW 4:10-5:25
201D Philosophy Hall

Course Description

Toward the end of the 19th-century, Robert Wilson Shufeldt, who became known as the opener of Korea in 1882, enthusiastically declared that the Pacific was the “ocean bride of America.” His was not alone in harboring this sentiment. This course is designed to explore the role of the Asia Pacific in the American literary and cultural imagination. We will seek to generate new readings of some important texts in American literature since the mid-nineteenth century by placing them in the context of U.S. entanglements with the markets, peoples, and cultures lying across the Pacific. We will also consider how transpacific approaches to American literature contribute to theories of translation and circulation, the capitalist world-system, and minority cultural production. More importantly, by focusing on social, political, and cultural networks that link the U.S. with Asia, this course offers a preliminary survey of the emerging field of Transpacific American Studies, which complements and complicates what has been conventionally known as Transatlanticism.

Texts

The following texts are available at the Columbia Bookstore. Please use the specified editions.

Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (9780394740676)
Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (9780691114194)
Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (9780140434880)
Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (9780143039716)
WEB DuBois, *Dark Princess* (9780878057658)
Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (9780295952895)
John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* (9780140187373)
Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (9780141180632)
William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (9780441007462)
Alex Kuo, *Panda Diaries* (9780880938655)

A course pack is available at the Village Copier at 118th and Amsterdam (starting on Wednesday, Jan. 21).

Syllabus

Readings with an asterisk can be found in the course pack.

Wednesday 21 January Introduction – America as empire
Donald Pease's essay on US exceptionalism, Parag Khana's "Goodbye, Hegemony"

Monday 26 January Said, *Orientalism*, Chapter One, Three (I, IV)
Wednesday 28 January *Qian Zhaoming, *Pound

Monday 2 February Melville, *Typee*
Wednesday 4 February: *Rob Wilson

Monday 9 February: London, *The Iron Heel*,
Wednesday 11 February: *London, "Goliath," "Unparalleled Invasion"; Colleen Lye's
America's Asia, Chapter One

Monday 16 February: Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*,
Wednesday 18 February: Colleen Lye, Chapter Four

Monday 23 February: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*,
Wednesday 25 February Colleen Lye, Chapter Five; *excerpt from Pearl S. Buck's *Good Earth*

Monday 2 March Pynchon, *Vineland*, Chapters 1-6
Wednesday 4 March Pynchon, *Vineland*, Chapters 7-8

Monday 9 March Pynchon, *Vineland*, Chapters 9-13
Wednesday 11 March Pynchon, *Vineland*, Chapters 14-15; *Giles

Monday 16 March spring recess
Wednesday 18 March spring recess

Monday 23 March Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Midterm essay due in class

Monday 25 March *Hayles

Monday 30 March Kuo, *Panda Diaries*,
Wednesday 1 April *Denning, *Venturino

Monday 6 April Du Bois, *Dark Princess*,
Wednesday 8 April *Bill Mullen

Monday 13 April Transpacific Area and American Studies: *Adam McKeown,
*Introduction to *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*; *Donald Pease
Wednesday 15 April: Genealogy of the Pacific Rim discourse: *selections from Arif
Dirlik's *What Is in a Rim?* *Aihwa Ong

Monday 20 April Theories of cultural translation: *Benjamin, *Naoki Sakai
Wednesday 22 April Transpacific Ethnic Studies: *Lisa Lowe, *Viet Nguyen

Monday 27 April Review
Wednesday 29 April Guest lecture by Amanda Claybaugh on Transatlanticism
*Laura Stevens, *William Boelhower, *Amanda Claybaugh

Monday 4 May: Final exam

Course Expectations

Course grade breakdown

Midterm essay (5-8) pages: 30%

Final exam: 40%

Online postings: 30%

Midterm essay: 1) Write an essay reviewing three critical essays or one academic book (can be an edited collection) that offer(s) transpacific perspectives on American literature. You are not allowed to use books or essays already included in the syllabus. 2) Write a close reading essay focusing on one or two passages from one of the literary texts read before the midterm.

Final exam: The exam involves an in-class essay on one of two given topics. You will be required to draw extensively on both literary and critical readings on the syllabus in addressing the topic you select. I will hand out a list of possible topics two weeks prior to the final and the two topics on the exam will be chosen randomly from the list. I will also discuss how to prepare for the final during the week following the Spring break.

Online postings: The Discussion Forum on CourseWorks is intended to offer a participatory supplement (or alternative) to the in-class discussion. You are required to post to the Discussion Forum, at minimum, **six** times over the course of the semester. In your postings, you should feel free to raise questions, ideas, interpretations of the readings of that week. Your postings do not have to be long or rigorously organized. They are meant to provoke conversations rather than offer complete arguments. The grade for your postings will be based on my overall impression of how thoughtfully you have contributed.