

ENGL 6451 Topics in American Literature
Winter 2017
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Course title: Decolonization through radical historiography and prophecy.

The focus of this course will be on two major American authors whose writing defies conventional genre classification. While Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* is marketed as a novel, this Laguna Pueblo writer's storytelling claims a direct connection to Native American chronicle and prophecy. We will therefore read it as a contemporary Native American chronicle bearing witness to historical and current human/environmental rights abuses, and as a prophetic enactment of restitution and decolonization. Charles Bowden's *Exodus* (photographs by Julián Cardona) is classified as photojournalism and therefore non-fiction, yet his telling of the history of the US/Mexico borderlands, and the largest mass migration in world history also reads like a work of literary art of the highest order.

These two books comprise over 1,000 pages of complex reading, so students are encouraged to get a head start on reading them before winter term starts, in order to allow time for research of theory and criticism. Active participation is required in each class; to help students become accustomed to regular interventions in discussion we will have scheduled seminar presenters and respondents. We will work on essay writing as a process of revision allowing students to edit and revise in response to comments in order to improve drafts. Student work will be posted on D2L to further encourage peer dialogue and collective thinking.

The central problematic will be to examine the expansion of Western literary genres, decolonization theory, and hybrid epistemology characterized by Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos as post-abysal thinking. We will consider the potential of storytelling and performative poetics, as both ancient and emergent hybrid forms of collective memory and prophecy.

Charles Bowden's *Exodus/Éxodo* is a hard cover large format book due to including photography and can cost as much as \$120, so students are encouraged to buy it online and to shop around for best prices both on Amazon and U of Texas P sites. It is imperative for each student to have a copy of this book, as it is one of the two core texts in the course.

Other tentative texts:

Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Barnett, Louise and James Thorson.

—See especially: Moore, David L. 'Silko's Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*;' Regier, Ami M. 'Material Points of Self and Other: Fetish Discourses and Leslie Marmon Silko's Evolving Conception of Cross-Cultural Narrative;' St. Clair, Janet 'Cannibal Queers: The Problematics of Metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*;' Irr, Caren, 'The Timeliness of *Almanac of the Dead*, or a Postmodern Rewriting of Radical Fiction;' Donnelly, Daria. 'Old and

New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary Entertainment; Powers, Janet M. 'Mapping the Prophetic Landscape in *Almanac of the Dead*.'

- Bowden, Charles, and Alice Leora Briggs (artist). *Dreamland: The Way Out of Juárez*
- Jacobs, Karen. 'Optic/Haptic/Object: Revisioning Indigenous Media in Victor Masayesva, Jr and Leslie Marmon Silko'
—related to this article, see preview of film: *Imagining Indians*:
<http://www.der.org/films/imagining-indians-preview.html>
- King, Thomas. "'You'll Never Believe What Happened" Is Always a Great Way to Start;' 'Godzilla vs Postcolonial'
- Nandorfy, Martha. 'Charles Bowden's Anarcho-Biotic Poetics.' *Literary Journalism Studies*.
- Root, Deborah. *Cannibal Culture*
- Saldaña-Portillo, María Josefina. The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 'Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges'
- Sarris, Greg. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*. U of California P
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*.
—See especially: 'Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective;' 'Fifth World;' 'Notes on Almanac of the Dead;' 'Tribal Prophecies;' 'Stone Avenue Mural'
- Shiva, Vandana. 'Monocultures of the Mind'
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*

Tentative method of evaluation:

2 Seminar presentations	10 % @
2 x Panel responses	5 % @
1 Annotated Bibliography & outline	10 %
Essay 1 (8-10 pp)	20 %
2 Annotated Bibliography & outline	15 %
Essay 2 (18-20 pp)	25 %