

## Comparative Ethnic Literature: Ghosts, Slavery and Colonialism

ETHN 168 / LIT 178

Summer Session I: June 28 – July 28, 2011

Maile Arvin

Class meets: Warren Lecture Hall 2209, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2-4:50pm

Office hours: Cross Cultural Center, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-2pm

### Course Description

This class engages literature on ghosts and haunting as a way to understand how historical and ongoing forms of violence are embedded in the lives of Indigenous peoples and people of color. As William Faulkner has famously written, “The past isn’t dead; it’s not even past.” How is literature able to address this point that “the past isn’t dead; it’s not even past,” in ways that other disciplines or genres cannot? What are literature’s possibilities and limits in representing the past, present, and future of those who are impacted by the logics of slavery and colonialism?

The two main texts the class will examine are the novels *Baby No-Eyes*, by Patricia Grace (1998), and *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison (1987). Each novel is sparked by a real-life news story, of instances of violence that have no easy explanation and refuse to be put to rest. In *Baby No-Eyes*, a contemporary New Zealand-based Maori family’s tragic miscarriage of an unborn child is made more violent by the hospital’s unauthorized scientific testing of its remains. In *Beloved*, a black mother who has run away from slavery and its aftermath following the Civil War makes an awful choice in order to keep her children from being subject to repeating her own past. Each text is therefore haunted in literal and figurative ways by past and *ongoing* processes of slavery and settler colonialism. The class will question what these texts, and their ghosts, may have to say to each other, and more broadly, how power, particularly in contexts of slavery and settler colonialism, works through distinct logics that are nonetheless interrelated. Issues of race, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, nation & science will all be important in our analyses. Ultimately, the class also questions: what role can ghosts play in the process of imagining a radically different future (perhaps, a future in which the ongoing violence of slavery and colonialism can be interrupted and transformed)?

### Course Objectives

To have students be able to:

- Critically examine issues of slavery and colonialism as both historical and contemporary structures.
- Assess the possibilities and limits of literature as a creative medium and scholarly discipline.
- Consider what is productive about paying creative/scholarly attention to absent presences—whether these are literal or figurative ghosts, histories that have been erased and silenced, or quiet hopes for a future one isn’t supposed to have.
- Analyze the concerns of the course through close readings of the novels *Beloved* and *Baby No-Eyes*, as well as through engagement with secondary texts.

## Required Texts

Available at the UCSD Bookstore:

- **Toni Morrison, Beloved**. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2004 (1987).
- **Patricia Grace, Baby No-Eyes**. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. This book is out-of-print. The Bookstore has ordered used copies, and will also reprint copies of the book for us as needed. Used copies are around \$18 at the bookstore and reprints will be around \$25.

Other readings will be made available in class and through WebCT at [ted.ucsd.edu](http://ted.ucsd.edu).

## Course Requirements

- Attendance and Participation 20%
- Presentation on class readings 20%
- Final Project Proposal 20%
- Final Project & Presentation 40%

All assignments must be completed, and no more than one class can be missed, in order to receive a passing grade for the course (including Pass/No Pass students).

**Accommodations:** I would like to make sure this class is accessible to all students. Please contact me (feel free to speak to me before or after class, in office hours, or email me) as soon as possible if you require any accommodations due to a disability or any medical needs.

### **Majoring or Minor in Ethnic Studies at UCSD**

Many students take an Ethnic Studies course because the topic is of great interest or because of a need to fulfill a social science, non-contiguous, or other college requirement. Often students have taken three or four classes out of “interest” yet have no information about the major or minor and don’t realize how close they are to a major, a minor, or even a double major. An Ethnic Studies major is excellent preparation for a career in law, public policy, government and politics, journalism, education, public health, social work, international relations, and many other careers. If you would like information about the Ethnic Studies major or minor at UCSD, please contact Yolanda Escamilla, Ethnic Studies Department Undergraduate Advisor, at 858-534-3277 or [yescamilla@ucsd.edu](mailto:yescamilla@ucsd.edu) or [www.ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu](http://www.ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu)

### **Assignments:**

#### **Presentation on class readings. To be scheduled in class.**

Every class, 2-3 students will make brief 10-minute presentations on assigned readings for that day. The presentations should address the main points of a theoretical text or the main themes of assigned pages from a novel, and raise 1-2 discussion questions to guide the class in talking about the readings. (More guidelines will be provided in class.)

**Final Project Proposal: 3 double-spaced pages. Due Thurs., July 14.**

This proposal should describe the topic and medium for your final project (see below for the final project prompt). First, you should explain how your topic represents a kind of haunting, using Avery Gordon's theories (about 1 page). Next, explain what your main source(s) will be and how you want to reimagine the story you choose (about 1.5 pages). Finally, describe your plan for completing the project by July 30 (about half a page). Be imaginative but also be attentive to what you can complete within the period of our course.

During Week 4, we will schedule one-on-one meetings to discuss your final project, so I can offer suggestions and we can troubleshoot any issues.

**Final Project. Due Sat., July 30.**

Avery Gordon writes: "In between an event that did occur and a transferenceal haunting, a clipping that "stuck in my head," Morrison retells a story, reinscribes an event.... An event is passed on, reimagined, dictating different conventions" (Gordon 163).

What clippings have stuck in your head? What stories have you encountered that are asking to be retold and reimagined?

Pick a historical or contemporary news story, photograph, or other "real-life" case (whether from a newspaper, history book, or your family photo album) that holds some kind of absent presence. Your interest in these clippings may be sparked not only with the visible or primary concerns of the picture or text, but also by what you feel is left out, by what the picture or text does not focus on or explain.

Your main task for the final project is to retell the story. Reimagine how the story can be passed on in a way that is "neither simply description nor causal explanation, but something else. The something else is a ghost story, a story of enchantment, of "*knowing* the things behind things," as Morrison says" (Gordon 164).

Be attentive to how the absent presence produced in this case, and what its material effects are in the present-day. What logics of power are at work here? In other words: what is doing the haunting, where did it come from, and how does it exert its influence over those currently living? How can you tell the ghost's story without simply explaining it away?

Your final can be a short story, small poetry collection, memoir, or creative non-fiction. The length of these projects may vary but should substantially address all aspects of the prompt. A guideline for fiction or non-fiction might be 6-8 pages; for poetry, 3-4 full page poems.

This creative piece must be accompanied by a brief analytical explanation of your piece. This write-up should be 2-3 pages long, double-spaced. Relate your piece to at least two of the texts we have examined in class (Gordon, *Beloved*, *Baby No-Eyes*, or Teiawa). How is your story similar or different to the other ghost stories we have considered? How does addressing the story through creative writing set different possibilities and limits on how we understand the story?

During our final class, everyone will make a brief 5-7 minute presentation on their final project. (More guidelines will be provided prior to the final.)

### **Class Schedule**

Readings may be changed or added throughout the course, with advanced notice. Readings listed for the dates below should be read before that day's class.

#### **Week 1**

*Tuesday, June 28*

Introduction

*Thursday, June 30*

1. Avery Gordon, *her shape and his hand*, pp. 3-28
2. *Beloved*, pp. xvi-51 (including Foreword)

#### **Week 2**

*Tuesday, July 5*

1. *Beloved*, pp. 51-156
2. Avery Gordon, *not only the footprints*, pp. 137-151

*Thursday, July 7*

1. *Beloved*, pp. 157-256
2. Avery Gordon, *not only the footprints*, pp. 151-169

#### **Week 3**

*Tuesday, July 12*

**No Class:** Work on Final Paper Proposals

*Thursday, July 14*

Guest lecture by Angie Morrill & Film Screening

**Final Project Proposal Due**

#### **Week 4**

**One-on-one meetings scheduled this week, to discuss final projects**

*Tuesday, July 19*

1. *Beloved*, pp. 257-325
2. Avery Gordon, *not only the footprints*, pp. 169-190

*Thursday, July 21*

1. *Baby No-Eyes*, pp. 1-100

#### **Week 5**

*Tuesday, July 26*

1. *Baby No-Eyes*, pp. 101-172
2. Teresia Teaiwa, *bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans*, pp. 87-109

*Thursday, July 28*

1. *Baby No-Eyes*, pp. 173-251

#### **Scheduled Final Period**

*Saturday, July 30, 3-6pm*

**Part 1: Final Project Presentations & Final projects/papers due**

Part 2: Discussion of *Baby No-Eyes*, pp. 252-294 and class wrap-up