



## (De)Construction of Identities in Literatures and Cultures in English

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Code 569580

### Contents and Aims

The foundational myth of the United States is based upon the representation of the nation as “the land of the free”. This narration, which upholds the idea of “all-inclusiveness”, has shaped the construction of American national identity. The course will analyze the discursive interventions of U.S. literary and cultural texts, produced from the late 19th to the 21st centuries, which have both reinforced and contradicted this hegemonic notion of what it means to be American. We will focus on textual representations of identities which destabilize normative notions of race, gender, desire and social class, thus (de)constructing hegemonic renderings of U.S. identity. The aim of this course is to enable students to develop the necessary skills to identify and analyze the strategies used in U.S. literary and cultural texts to propose a (re)construction of “Americanness” based upon a real plurality of identities.

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### Syllabus

“[T]here is no power relation without the correlative constitution of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”

(Michel Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned”, 1977)

The course will open by introducing and engaging students into the rich theoretical debate on the discursive construction of identities and its political implications. This theoretical discussion will illuminate and accompany us throughout the course as we analyze the interventions of literary and cultural U.S. texts, spanning from the late 19th to the 21st centuries, which have come to both posit and (de)construct the hegemonic representation of American identity.

1. “I fly the flight of the fluid and swallowing soul” (W. Whitman): Essentialism, Constructionism and the Hegemonic Representation of “Americanness” in U.S. Culture.
2. “How it feels to be colored me” (Z. N. Hurston): (De)Racializing Otherness in U.S. Culture.
3. “I am she: I am he” (A. Rich): Destabilizing Normative Gender and Desire in U.S. Culture.
4. “How should a good man live; what ought he to do?” (S. Bellow): Social Class and New Models of Masculinity in U.S. Culture.

N.B. This course is taught entirely in English. Exceptionally, written and oral work in either Catalan or Spanish will be accepted from students whose first language is not English and/or whose first degree is not English Studies.

### Methodology and course plan

The teaching methodology will include the following components:



1. Short lectures where the students will be introduced to the materials that will be worked on in class and the thematic concerns from which said material will be analyzed. In these lectures, students will also be introduced to the key bibliographical references, as well as to the main critical controversies which they broach.
2. Seminars where students will discuss the class material that they will have come to the sessions having read and prepared. Students are expected to participate in the discussion of the texts they will be assigned for each lesson.
3. Tutorials where the lecturer will supervise them on the assessment exercises described in the following section.
4. Seminars in which students share their work on the primary text of their choice with their peers and which will be geared towards receiving productive feedback. Each student will choose one from the list of texts suggested by the lecturer.

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## Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of three components:

1. Attendance and participation in the taught sessions: 15%
2. Final paper proposal to be prepared by students according to the following procedure:
  - (i) Week 6: One individual preliminary consultation with the course teacher; the aim is for the student to select one primary text from the suggested list (see point 4 in “Methodology and Course Plan” and “Key Bibliography”) and a theoretical standpoint from which to analyze it;
  - (ii) Week 10: Oral presentation and discussion of the proposal before the group;
  - (iii) Week 12: Revision and submission of the proposal in writing (400 words): 25%.
3. Final paper (2,500 words approx.) to be handed in on the official date indicated by the Faculty: 60%.

## Key Bibliography

The list of primary texts will include a selection of essays, poems, photographs, songs, short stories and novels by Diane Arbus, Paul Auster, Judith Butler, Bob Dylan, Michel Foucault, Judith Halberstam, Zora Neale Hurston, bell hooks, Allen Ginsberg, Shirley Jackson, Bernard Malamud, Carson McCullers, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Jacob Riis, Anne Sexton, Simon & Garfunkel, Susan Sontag, among others. A selection of episodes from popular TV series such as *The Twilight Zone* or *Mad Men* will also be worked on in class.



In order to write the final essay, each student will choose one of these texts:

(This is a provisional list; new titles could be added to it.)

#### NOVELS

*The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1926).  
*Passing*, Nella Larsen (1929)  
*The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck (1939).  
*The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Patricia Highsmith (1955).  
*The Hours*, Michal Cunningham (1998)  
*What I Loved*, Siri Hustvedt (2003)  
*Nemesis*, Philip Roth (2010)  
*Super Sad True Love Story*, Gary Shteyngart (2010).

#### MOVIES

*Rear Window*, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1954)  
*The Graduate*, Dir. Mike Nichols (1967)  
*Do the Right Thing*, Dir. Spike Lee (1989)  
*Glengarry Glenn Ross*, Dir. James Foley (1992).  
*The Hours*, Dir. Stephen Daldry (2002).  
*Mulholland Drive*, Dir. David Lynch (2001).  
*Revolutionary Road*, Dir. Sam Mendes (2008)  
*The Wrestler*, Dir. Darren Aronofsky (2008).  
*A Serious Man*, Dir. Ethan Coen (2009).  
*The Great Gatsby*, Dir. Baz Luhrmann (2013).