

**English 588: Studies in Latino/a Literature and Culture**  
**“On the Borders of Form and Identity in Chicano/a Literature”**

Professor Frederick Luis Aldama  
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By appointment

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**Course Description**

This course will examine how contemporary Chicano/a novelists, poets, short story writers, and playwrights use a variety of different storytelling forms to create characters and events that open readers' eyes to new ways of perceiving the world. The goal will be to balance close literary readings with larger socio-political concerns specific to the Chicano/a experience. As such, we will not only direct our attention to issues of form--such as how a given author employs specific narrative voices and point of view, for example--but also how each author addresses issues of Chicano/a identity and experience at the thematic level. We will explore how Chicano/a writers expand our understanding of race, gender, class, and sexuality as constituted within the Chicano/a community (and that varies from region to region, from urban to rural, for example) and within a larger U.S. mainstream. We will also pay attention to the difference between how a given text is organized according to the rules of its corresponding genre and aesthetic and shaping of the "real" world by verifiable material and social factors outside the text.

**Required Texts**

Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*  
Arturo Islas, *The Rain God*.  
Cherrie Moraga, *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays*  
Alfredo Véa Jr. *La Maravilla*  
Ana Castillo, *So Far from God*  
Dagoberto Gilb, *The Magic of Blood*  
John Rechy, *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*.  
Luis Rodriguez, *Republic of East L.A.*  
Francisco X. Alarcón, *From the Other Side of Night* (selections)  
Cop-ez packet of materials

**Week 1**

Introduction to course

Arturo Aldama and Naomi Quinoñez, “Peligro! Subversive Subjects: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century” (cop-ez packet)

Gilbert Gonzalez, excerpt from *A Century of Chicano History* (cop-ez packet)

Selections from Alarcón's *From the Other Side of Night*

**Week 2**

Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*

Gloria Anzaldúa, excerpts from *Borderlands* (cop-ez packet)

**Week 3**

Arturo Islas, *The Rain God*

#### **Week 4**

Cherrie Moraga, *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays*

#### **Week 5**

##### **Paper #1 Due**

Ana Castillo, *So Far From God*

Fiona Mills, "Creating a Resistant Chicana Aesthetic: The Queer Performativity of Ana Castillo's *So Far From God*" (cop-ez packet)

#### **Week 6**

Alfredo Vea Jr., *La Maravilla*

#### **Week 7**

John Rechy, *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez*

#### **Week 8**

Dagoberto Gilb, *The Magic of Blood*

#### **Week 9**

Luis Rodriguez, *Republic of East L.A.*

##### **Essay #2 Due**

#### **Week 10**

Course Conclusions

Go over final exam

Class evaluations

#### **Exam Day: Final Exam**

#### **Assignments and Grade Distribution**

Two five-seven page essays: 30% each

Final Exam: 30%

Class Participation 10%

#### **Essay Topics (each essay counts 30% of your grade)**

Choose one of the following topics as a springboard to develop your own argument and analysis. If you should choose to develop a thesis spinning out of a

topic of your own devising vis-à-vis the novels listed below, make sure it has my approval. The essays should present a concrete, manageable argument followed with close readings and analysis that will substantiate and develop fully your thesis. Please limit your essay to 5-7 typed double-spaced pages (right/left margins 1"). Papers are due at the beginning of lecture. Late papers will not be accepted.

### **Suggested Topics for Essay #1:**

1. Felix's murder and mutilation make for one of the most poignant moments in *The Rain God*. The narrator tells us that the body "was unrecognizable. There was no face, and what looked like a tooth was sticking out behind the left ear. [. . .] The rest of the body was purple, bloated, and caved in at odd places. One of the testicles was missing." Examine ways in which *The Rain God* puts race, sexuality, gender, and class under a microscope, and consider the effects of these on those characters who choose not to conform to macho, patriarchal, and heteronormative codes of conduct.

2. In an interview, Cherríe Moraga describes her play *Shadow of a Man Ghost* as a "family play" where "gayness is all over the place subtextually and that we as gay people have come out of." Choose two or three characters from this play and analyze how they uncritically uphold and/or destabilize the heteronormative conventions of family. You might ask how these characters, actions, and sense of self speak to and/or against restrictive notions of being as racially constructed subjects--Chicanos and Chicanas--within society at large.

3. Each novel or play we've discussed deals with one or more characters' relationship to a gendered and racialized role determined largely by social and cultural circumstances; some characters resist and others fall into a socialization process that rigidly determines what it means to be masculine or feminine, Chicano or Chicana. Compare and contrast the portrayal of race and gender and how they are "performed" in one of the following: Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, Islas's *The Rain God*, Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost*. You might explore how characters resist or those who succumb to models of existing in the world that inhibit identity; you might also analyze the overall significance of a given character's choice of self-identification. How does the narrative you choose to analyze interrogate the representation of race, gender, and sexuality? How does its characters and/or narrator play into larger themes of identity and consciousness?

4. Death can perform several different functions in a narrative; it can be a device of destruction or of (re)generation, in both literal and figurative senses. Develop your own approaches for considering the ways attitudes towards death shape characters, communities, and events in one of the texts we've read.

### **Suggested Topics for Essay #2**

As with the last essay, use the following topics as prompts to develop your own argument and analysis. Please limit your essay to 5-7 typed (Times Font 12/Margins 1"). Papers due at the beginning of lecture. Late papers will not be accepted.

1. The novels, short stories, and poetry we will have read since writing the first paper use a variety of storytelling and poetic techniques to engage readers. Choose one of the following texts to explore how a given author uses specific forms and techniques to engage readers and convey central themes. You might explore how Castillo uses magical realism in *So Far From God* to fuse fact with fiction or to texture the spectacle vs. ceremony/carnavalesque; or you might consider how Rechy plays with time (flashbacks), language, and/or uses interior monologue and stream of consciousness in *Miraculous Day* to complicate the representation of a Chicana living in LA; you might also consider how Gilb or Rodriguez use different writing styles and points of view to texture different Chicano/a communities.

2. Examine the ways in which traditional notions of romance and love are defined and redefined in one of the following: Rechy's *Miraculous Day*, Castillo's *So Far From God*, a short story by Gilb or Rodriguez.

3. Pick two of Rodriguez's short stories that we read for class and compare the ways he uses different narrative techniques—syntax, grammar, point of view, description, chronology, for example—to complicate our vision of different communities—old and young, worker and slacker, male and female, writer and gang member—that make up his vision of East LA.

**Final Exam:** The exam will be comprehensive. It will consist of identifications of key passages from the works we've read and one essay.

**Participation and attendance:** More than three unexcused absences will be cause to lower your final grade by ½ (e.g., from B+ to B-). You must also contribute regularly to class discussion. The quality of your comments is just as important as the quantity. Students who miss a class are responsible for finding out what they missed and should not expect me to repeat a lecture during my office hours.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work or ideas as one's own. It includes the unacknowledged word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of another individual's work as well as the inappropriate unacknowledged use of someone's ideas. In accordance with university rules, I will report all cases of suspected plagiarism to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. Being held accountable for plagiarism can result not only in failure of the assignment you plagiarized but also in failure of the course.

**Accessibility:** I am committed to making the classroom accessible for all enrolled students. The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact: 292-3307.