Adoption has been central to literature from its origin. But despite this centrality, adoption as a theme, a plot device, and/or inspiration has often been overlooked or misread entirely. Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, for example, has been understood to be a play about incest. However, the play also suggests that incest is a consequence of what we might now call a “closed adoption,” and it sometimes seems as if literary scholars have been social workers sworn to keep that secret. This course investigates adoption as a central source for literature, looking in particular at the role it plays in dramatic literature, poetry, and novels. Moreover, we will consider how socio-political understandings of adoption have influenced its literary treatment.

**Requirements:** All students must participate in class discussion. To participate meaningfully, you must do all readings. I have organized the syllabus with the novels at the end so that you will have ample time to read them. Do not wait to read them until the end of the quarter. The poetry section will require “light” reading – in terms of time – so be sure you are making your way through the longer texts as well.

**4 SHORT PAPERS:**

1. **2 READING RESPONSE PAPERS (2-3 pages each):** Students are required to write two responses to two different class readings. These papers should be close-readings of particular passages in the text. Your aim is to explore how issues of literary style and genre inform and/or distort the affective and experiential dimension/s of adoption. Examples will be discussed in class before the first assignment is due.

2. **2 PEER RESPONSE PAPERS (1-2 pages each):** Students are required to write responses to two of their peers’ reading response papers (to encourage dialogue with your peers’ ideas). Here you must briefly summarize the argument (usually in one paragraph), and then explore what you find interesting and/or provocative about it.

You can select the readings and peer papers that interest you, but you must complete at least one of each **BEFORE November 18**. Your remaining reading response and peer response papers can be posted as late as **December 8**. The idea is to use your peers’ response (and mine) to help you improve your second reading response paper.

**CLASS PRESENTATION:** Each student will give a presentation to the class on either:

a) one of the readings, which must be on a different text than the two short papers.
b) An aspect of the social, political, or historical dimension of adoption that interests you. (Examples of topics that might be of interest include: statistics on adoption and
foster care in California; the so-called “foster care to prison pipe-line” or educational assignments and trauma for primary school children).
These presentations should be about 12-15 minutes long. They should begin with a critical examination of the text or issue and then should open up into a broader discussion of the class themes. Please send me an email two days prior to your presentation outlining what you plan to do.

FINAL PROJECT: Each student will write a final paper of 10-15 pages. (If you are enrolled for 3 units it is fine to keep the paper shorter; if enrolled for 5 units, I will expect a longer paper. However, I dislike “filler” and meandering prose. I’d rather have an excellent short paper than a loose long one). These papers can be either critical-scholarly or they can be creative nonfiction. If they are critical-scholarly, please focus on the text/s and its relation to the themes of this class. It is not necessary for you to do a research paper and read all the critical literature on the text, but your essay should reflect the readings we have done together. Final projects that are creative nonfiction can include visual/textual meditations, as in graphic memoirs. One act plays or poetry devoted to adoption are also possible. All final projects must be approved by me in advance.

Course Goals and Methods:
1) The class will be taught as a seminar. This means that the format will be that one of us-in the beginning mainly me, but then when the presentations begin, one of you -- will offer a short lecture on the readings and then the rest of the class will be devoted to a rigorous discussion of the texts and the presentation/s. The class aims to increase your awareness of the complexity of adoption in relation to literary structures, through close readings of literary texts and through an examination of some historical and political aspects of what is usually called (not unproblematically) “the adoption triangle”
2) To raise questions about how literature might become more experimental when challenged by new formations of family – note, for example, how many different literary genres Jackie Kay employs to explore her own adoption narrative/s; what do different literary genres illuminate and obscure about life stories? And what do life stories “adopt” from literary genres?
3) Consider the expressive resources of film for documentary explorations of adoption and ask (again) how fiction and truth intermingle in these “searches”
4) To enhance understanding about historical and contemporary adoption, especially as reflected in significant literary and critical texts on topics including transracial and queer adoption that we will read, view, and think through together
5) To promote your capacities to assess how fictional forms structure life stories. This will be accomplished through careful reading, inner reflection, rigorous discussion, and writing short and long(er) essays and/or creative texts

Grading:
Attendance and participation: 25%
Four short papers and presentation: 35%
Final project: 40%
Please note well: no assignments will be accepted after the deadline/s.
Class Schedule

Note about readings: “C” refers to readings available on Canvas and “P” refers to readings in the books available for purchase.

27 September 2016
• Introduction: Why Adoption and Literature at all?

29 September 2016
• Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex
  o http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/oedipus.html
• Margaret Homans “Adoption Narratives. Trauma, and Origins,” Narrative, 14, 1 (January 2006): 4-26. (C)

4 October 2016
• Shakespeare, The Winter’s Tale
  o http://shakespeare.mit.edu/index.html

6 October 2016
• Samuel Beckett: Endgame (P)
• Paul Lawley, “Adoption in Endgame:” Modern Drama (1988), 31 (4): 529. (C)

11 and 13 October 2016 (two classes)
• Edward Albee: Tiny Alice, The American Dream and The Play about the Baby (P)
• Jules Glenn, “The Adoption Theme in Edward Albee's Tiny Alice and The American Dream.” The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, Vol 29 41, 1974, 413-429. (C)

18 October 2016
• Tanya Barfield: The Call (P)

20 October 2016: Poetry and Adoption
• Jackie Kay: The Adoption Papers (P)
• Excerpts from Susan Ito and Tina Cervin, A Ghost at Heart’s Edge: Stories and Poems on Adoption (North Atlantic Books, 1999) (C)
• John McLeod, Life Lines: Writing Transcultural Adoption (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015): 210-24. (C)
25 and 27 October 2016 (two classes)
• Edith Wharton: *Summer* (P)

1 and 3 November 2016 (two classes)
• Henry James: *What Maisie Knew* (P)

8 November 2016: Documentary and Memoir
• Screen DVD: *First Person Plural*, Deann Borshay Liem
• Screen DVD: *Closure*, Bryan Tucker.
• Readings: David Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas.” *Social Text* (2003) 76,21, 3: 1-37. (C)

10 November 2016:
• J.J. Trenka: *The Language of Blood* (P)

15 and 17 November 2016 (two classes)
• **FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE**
• Chang-rae Lee: *A Gesture Life* (P)

**AT LEAST ONE SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER and PEER RESPONSE must be posted to CANVAS by November 18.**

22-24 November 2016: Thanksgiving Recess (no classes)

29 November 2016
• Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (P)

1 and 6 December 2016 (two classes)
• Toni Morrison: *Tar Baby* (P)
• Cynthia Callahan, *Kin of Another Kind: Transracial Adoption in American Literature* (U of Michigan Press 2011): 82-85, 93-103. (C)
• **FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE**

8 December 2016: Queer Adoptions
• Excerpt from Dan Savage, *The Kid* (C)
SECOND SHORT READING RESPONSE PAPER and PEER RESPONSE must be posted to CANVAS by December 8.
FINAL PROJECTS DUE December 15th at 5pm. Email to me: pphelan@stanford.edu OR drop off in 239 Littlefield.

Books to Purchase (available in the campus bookstore):
Note: Plays are usually cheap and it is okay to purchase used copies for any of these texts.
- Beckett, Samuel: Endgame
- Albee, Edward: Tiny Alice, The American Dream and The Play about the Baby
- Barfield, Tanya: The Call
- Kay, Jackie: The Adoption Papers
- Wharton, Edith: Summer
- James, Henry: What Maisie Knew
- Lee, Chang-rae: A Gesture Life
- Trenka, J.J.: The Language of Blood
- Erdrich, Louise: Love Medicine
- Morrison, Toni: Tar Baby

Course Material Support
Stanford University and its faculty are committed to ensuring that all courses are financially accessible to all students. If you are an undergraduate who needs assistance with the cost of course textbooks, supplies, materials and/or fees, you are welcome to ask the Diversity & First-Gen Office for assistance by completing their questionnaire on course textbooks & supplies: http://tinyurl.com/jpqbarn or by contacting Joseph Brown, the Associate Director of the Diversity and First-Gen Office (jlbrown@stanford.edu; Old Union Room 207). Dr. Brown is available to connect you with resources and support while ensuring your privacy.

Honor Code
The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

**Students with Documented Disabilities:**
Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 650-723-1066; URL: [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae](http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae)).