English 172F    Growing Up “Different”: Coming-of-Age Stories in a Diversifying America

Long Le-Khac
llekhac@stanford.edu
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3:30 and by appointment; Location TBD: ___

Course Description

Huck Finn, Holden Caulfield, Scout Finch—some of the most iconic protagonists in American literature are young people in search of identity. In this search, they join many others in one of the defining genres of the novel, the *bildungsroman*, stories of finding one’s place in the world. It’s a powerful and versatile story that probes questions immediately resonant for students, who are themselves in the exhilarating and confusing process of shaping their life narratives: Where do you fit in? How do you find your place? How does a sense of identity develop—is it built, chosen, discovered, learned, imposed? How do you navigate between the dreams of youth and the compromises of experience?

These are defining questions across many generations of youth in America. However, for marginalized youths, particularly during the social upheavals of the last fifty years, the *bildungsroman* has a particular charge: How is the story of finding your place complicated when social differences of race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and nativity stand between you and the dominant narratives of mobility and development in America? Furthermore, when the nation itself is transforming and diversifying radically, what different pathways open for forming your identity?

Focusing on American coming-of-age stories by minority writers (broadly defined) from the 1960s to the present, this course explores how the genre’s concerns with formation intersect with contemporary questions about identity, diversity, and nation. As a genre about socialization, the *bildungsroman* has a unique capacity to narrate the fit or misfit of individuals within the changing ideals and contradictions of a society. So the genre offers a fascinating lens on this dynamic period of Civil Rights struggles, identity movements, and new immigration. It is a period when many identities that weren’t seen to fit the norms of American life struggled to claim their places in the nation, and, in the process, reshaped the face of America. We’ll be following some extraordinary writers as they claim a powerful genre to probe the changing possibilities for young people of many different backgrounds to develop in contemporary America, which is simultaneously the fitful story of the nation’s own coming-of-age.

Goals

Beyond the important goal of giving you a chance to be pulled in by this rich body of literature, this course has six primary aims:

• To explore the diversity of coming-of-age experiences in the contemporary U.S. and link them to the history that has reshaped ideas of identity and belonging.

• To understand and apply narrative genre as a powerful lens on literature and the ideals, beliefs, and tensions of a culture in particular historical moments.
• To use tools of narrative analysis to understand how narratives are shaped and how they can shape us.
• To improve close reading, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills as you dialogue with these works.
• To gain a solid grasp of the characteristics and history of the bildungsroman.
• To write and reflect on your own coming-of-age story.

Primary Texts
Texts will be available for purchase at the Stanford Bookstore. Other readings will be posted on the Coursework site.

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)
Tomás Rivera, *...y no se lo tragó la tierra/...and the earth did not devour him* (1971)
Philip Kan Gotanda, *Fish Head Soup and Other Plays* (1991)
Monique Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth* (2011)
Noviolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (2013)

Course Format and Expectations

This is primarily a discussion-based seminar, but we’ll be varying the format with debates, workshops on critical reading and writing skills, peer teaching and feedback, group work, and more. Because much of the intellectual growth that will happen in this course will be communally driven, you’ll be expected to attend each class (pending health issues and emergencies of course; please be in touch if something comes up) and come prepared to discuss the readings. The more each person brings to the class, the more we all benefit.

Overview of Major Assignments

**Writing and Rewriting Your Own Bildungsroman**

2 page creative assignment with a revision; 2-3 page reflection and analysis

The history of the American coming-of-age story is not some dead thing from the past; it’s a history that’s still being written. Your unique and diverse experiences are absolutely part of this story. So to honor that, an ongoing project in this class will be writing, reflecting on, and rewriting your own bildungsroman. One of the best ways to understand the questions and challenges that go into the crafting of the narratives we’ll be reading is to try to craft such narratives ourselves. You’ll get to try your hand at the genre and get feedback on it. And as we encounter different strategies and variations for writing a bildungsroman in the literature, you’ll have a chance to totally rework your story employing one or more of these strategies. It’ll be fascinating to see how these choices of strategy and technique change the overall effect of your story.
**Final Paper**

5-7 page argument/analysis
In the culminating paper, you’ll synthesize the major themes of the class as you dig deep into one of the coming-of-age narratives we encounter. Using what you’ve gained over the quarter—a understanding of the bildungsroman, a grasp of the dynamic history of post-60s America, tools for narrative analysis—you’ll craft an original argument about one or more minority bildungsromane. How does they use or transform the genre? How does the classic shape of the coming-of-age story stretch or even distort in telling the story of a young person who doesn’t fit the norms of American culture? These are just some guiding questions; the paper will be a chance to explore the text(s) and issues that excite you most.

**Thought Pieces**

2 one-page informal responses posted to our website
Because this is a seminar, your thoughts, questions, and interests are integral to shaping the class discussion. To make sure we’re all primed to make the most of our time together, you’ll sign up for 2 one-page “thought pieces” over course of the quarter. These will be informal pieces posted to our course website by 5PM the day before class. In them you can flesh out your responses to the literature, ask provocative questions, pose a controversial position, or analyze a passage you found striking. Your classmates and I will be reading your posts before class, and they’ll help drive our conversations.

**Participate in the Course Discussion Board**

Brief questions or comments posted to our website
Starting in week 2, for the classes when you are not posting a thought piece, join the pre-class conversation by posting something brief to our online forum. Please have it posted by 11:59PM the day before class. It can be a question that came out of the reading, a passage or point in the text that you want us to examine together in class, a comment, just something short and sweet that can help start the conversation. Responding to someone else’s post or thought piece also counts as a post. Like the thought pieces, these brief posts will help set the ground for a great conversation in class, and it will let me get a sense of what everyone is interested in.

**Evaluation**

Writing and Rewriting Your Own Bildungsroman 30%
Final Paper 40%
Thought Pieces 10%
Participate in the course discussion board 10%
Contributions in class* 10%

Aside from the final paper, all of the assignments give you multiple opportunities to demonstrate growth, which is what matters most. That means the arc of your intellectual progression in the course can positively impact your grades. Improvements, revisions, engagement with feedback—all are very welcome.
Sometimes participation grades seem to be just about how many times you speak in class. But I know we all have different styles of contributing and I’ll be looking for that.

**Schedule**
Secondary readings (ones that are not listed as primary texts above) may change and can be found on the coursework site: coursework.stanford.edu

**Introduction - The Social Stakes of a Genre: The Bildungsroman, Minority Narratives, and the Struggle for a Place in America**

**Week 1**
- Mon 6/23 Introductions and overview
  (in-class reading: Franco Moretti, “The Bildungsroman as Symbolic Form”)

- Wed 6/25
  Joseph Slaughter, “Becoming Plots: Human Rights, the Bildungsroman, and the Novelization of Citizenship”
  Patricia Chu, “Myths of Americanization”

**Unit 1 - Social Margins at the Heart of the American Bildungsroman**

**Week 2**
- Mon 6/30
  Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, part 1 pg. 1 - 128
  DUE in class: Your own bildungsroman, first version

- Wed 7/2
  Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, part 2 pg. 129 - end

**Week 3**
- Mon 7/7
  Monique Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth*, pg. 1 - 125

- Wed 7/9
  Monique Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth*, pg. 126 - end
  Seymour Chatman, selections from *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*
Unit 2 - What It Takes to Build a Self

**WEEK 4**
Mon 7/14
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pg. 1 - 93

Wed 7/16
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, pg. 94 - end
Hazel Rose Markus and Paula Moya, selections from “Doing Race: An Introduction”

**WEEK 5**
Mon 7/21
Maxine Hong Kingston, selections from *The Woman Warrior* - “No Name Woman,” “White Tigers,” and “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”
Anne Cheng, selections from “The Melancholy of Race”

Unit 3 - Growing Apart, Leaving Home: Family, Community, and Mobility

**Wed 7/23**
Philip Kan Gotanda, *Fish Head Soup* (just this one play not the whole volume)
DUE in class: Your own bildungsroman, second version with reflection

**WEEK 6**
Mon 7/28
Tomás Rivera, …y no se lo tragó la tierra/…and the earth did not devour him
Alex Woloch, selections from *The One vs. The Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*

Wed 7/30
Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*
Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, “The Politics of Mobility”

Unit 4 - Finding Your Place in the World: Lives between Nations

**WEEK 7**
Mon 8/4
Junot Díaz, selections from *Drown*
Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”
Wed 8/6
Noviolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, pg. 1 - 148

Week 8
Mon 8/11
Noviolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names*, pg. 149 - end

Wed 8/13
Reflections, Conclusions and Celebrations
DUE in class: Final paper

**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: 723-1066, [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae](http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae)).

**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.

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. 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.