English 247: American Literature and Popular Culture

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Office Hours: Wednesday 5:45-6:30, or by appointment  
Class Hours: Wednesday 7-9:50

English 247 examines the intersection of American literature and popular culture in the post-WWII period. How might we characterize the interaction between so-called "high" culture and "low" culture? In what ways has literary theory interrogated these distinctions? The course considers such distinctions through a series of encounters with broad thematics in American literature and pop culture: The West, The Road, The (Vietnam) War, The Sacred, The Female, The Male. We will consider how popular genre fiction (western novel, horror film, war film) can be used self-reflexively, to expose generic assumptions, or in an explicit encounter with "high" culture, to blur the boundary that separates them. We will look at texts that reinforce the reactionary politics of the American imagination (Left Behind), and that explode progressive idealism (Fear and Loathing). Some of these texts use "low" culture forms (journalism, diary) to deconstruct "high" culture assumptions. We are also interested in how different media interact with each other: novels, comics, television, film, and journalism, for example.

Texts  
LaHaye, Tim, and Jerry Jenkins. Left Behind. Tyndale, 2005.  
* ENGL 247 Course Reader

Tests and Assignments  
Mid-Term Test (October 18) – 25%  
Final Exam (TBA) – 35%  
Research Paper (due November 29) – 40%

Essay Policies: Essays will be handed in to me at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. Essays that are not handed to me directly must be signed and dated by a department secretary and placed in the English Department Drop Box. Your name, my name, and the course name must appear clearly on the front page of your essay.  
Late essays will be docked 2% per day starting the day the assignment is due, including weekends.  
Extensions are at my discretion for serious medical and/or family emergencies only. Budget your time and plan on handing in your assignments on time. Please do not negotiate late penalties with me. If you have a medical emergency, simply attach a doctor’s note to your essay and the late penalty will be averted.

Please note: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be dealt with according to the University of Waterloo Disciplinary Code (see Policy 71 in Undergraduate Calendar). All quotations, paraphrased material and ideas which are not your own MUST be properly cited and referenced. Failure to do so may result in a mark of "0" on the assignment, or a failing grade in the course, or expulsion from the university.
Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction: Literature, Theory, and Popular Culture

Week 2: Hombre

Week 3: The Good, The Bad & The Ugly (film)

Week 4: On The Road

Week 5: Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas; *The Daily Show*

Week 6: Midterm Test; Apocalypse Now (film)

Week 7: The Waste Land*

Week 8: Left Behind

Week 9: Ghost World; *Comic Book Confidential*

Week 10: Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

Week 11: The Shining (film)

Week 12: The Shining (discussion)