

## GRADES

Your grade will be based on your writing and your in-class participation. This seminar will have no final exam.

## OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT INFO

My regular office hours are from Wednesdays, 6 to 7pm before class in Adams Humanities 4117. My Email address is <memo@sdsu.edu>, but please only use this mode of electro-communication if it is urgent. I prefer the telephone where I can be reached at 594.1524. Even more than the phone, I like conversation.

## CLASS MENU

Wednesday, September 2: Introduction

Wednesday, September 9: Read Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. Write a one page, double-spaced and typed response the fills in the blank and finishes the following prompt: "The most curious sentence in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* is \_\_\_\_\_ (p. )." What makes it "curious" is the way...

September 16: Read the first three parts of Americo Paredes's *George Washington Gómez* up to page 175. As you read, recall the concept of osmosis, and look for moments of flux and exchange between domains "Mexican" and "American."

September 23: Finish reading Americo Paredes's striking novel--part V is rather singular, at least in my view. When you have finished the book, write a 2 to 3 page brief essay wherein you speculate as to the curious fracture/metamorphosis whereby Guálinto becomes George Washington Gómez.

September 30: Read Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Juan Felipe Herrera's *Love After the Riots*. Try not to let the apparent genre of each text get in the way of your reading; you are as welcome to read Herrera as a theorist and Anzaldúa as a poet, as the other way around.

October 7: Read Norma Cantú's *Canícula*. Attend to the play of word and image in this singular prose "album." Pictures, here, act as captions for prose as much as the prose supplements the photography.

October 14: Descending upon us like some unanticipated muse, Norma Cantú visits us from her current digs, running the Department of Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. We will likely have a reading, questions, conversation and a reception.

October 21: Read/Scan/See Gilbert Hernandez's unique vision of a talented Central American young artist and his encounter with a pathological deranged killer. One of the more remarkable examples of Chicano Literature of the last decade.

October 28: Bukowski's got nothing on John Rechy, brace yourself and prepare to brave the nightlife in *City of Night*, Rechy's first, and some would say best, novel. Read to page 244. Today you will receive a guide to your final essay assignment--it will be due Friday, December 9 at 12noon under the door of my office 4117 Adams Humanities.

November 4: Finish reading Rechy's *City of Night*.

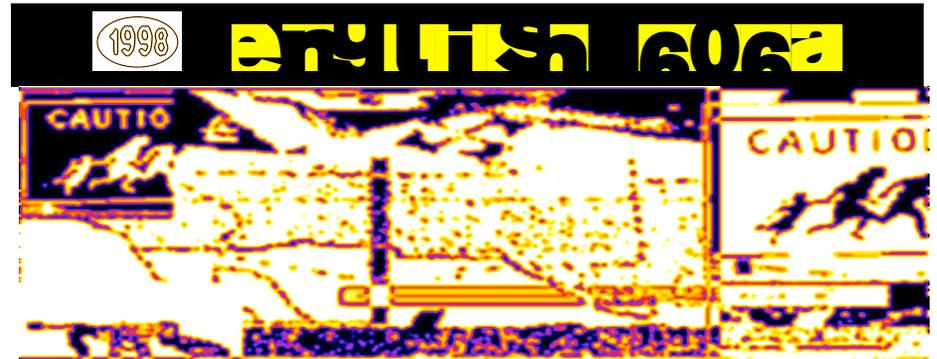
November 11: Read Arturo Islas's *The Rain God*. Here again, as with *Canícula*, the narrative is built around/upon the central image of a photograph. A novel intent on exploring the dialectic of denial and desire, Islas's *The Rain God*, is arguably one of the more powerful American novels of the late 20th century.

November 18: Read Alejandro Morales's *Barrio on the Edge*. How does Morales's fiction compare with that of Rechy? Islas? Cisneros?

November 25: Thanksgiving, no class will be held in observance our only domestic holiday glorifying Dionysian excess.

December 2: Read Michele Serros's *Chicana Falsa* and Lalo Alacran's *Pocho Magazine* collection. How does their satire compare with other literary genres we have encountered this semester. You are compelled to ignore the fact that this is my birthday and that I am holding the seminar anyway!

December 7. Almost adios, Tomas Rivera's in the house on this our final seminar gathering. Read *y no se lo tragó la tierra*. Party, fiesta?



# The Chicana/o Novel

## *L a n o v e l a c h i c a n a*

os mo sis \a:-'smo-s's, a:z-'mo-; osmotic \a:-'sma:t-ik\ n. [nl, short for *endosmosis*: alt. of obs. *endosmose*, fr. Fr. *end-* + Gk *osmos* act, impulse] of pushing, fr. *othein* to push; akin to Skt *vadhati* he strikes] 1. the tendency of a fluid to pass through a semi-permeable membrane, as the wall of a living cell... 2. the diffusion of fluids through a membrane or porous partition.



# FRACTURE, Desire & the Chicana/o Trace



William A. Nerccio

Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature

# osmosis

fracture, desire and the Chicana/o trace"--what an awkward mouthful. And yet I am arrogant enough to believe this ungainly amalgamation of words will prove a valuable intellectual, cultural and political guide for an encounter with Chicana/a Literature.. For American Literature zealots, our course represents a rigorous survey of an engaging body of 20th century US literary work. For Comparative Literature mavens, my favorite enclave as it represents my own pedigree, the class represents a literary tour that requires a systematic and non-systematic analysis of diverse national literary traditions: a "Unitedstatesian" (*estadounidense*) literary legacy with its links to various motherlands including England and Germany, and a Mexican literary tradition, with its own attendant links to Spain among others--here Chicano/a Literature reveals itself as *the* quintessential comparative literary matrix. For MA English Literature acolytes, know that the authors assembled for this "Latino" literary cavalcade are as likely to have cut their teeth on Joyce and Dickens as on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos Fuentes, so that your UK-focused inquiries to date will profit you handsomely in this context--in addition, note that your attendant hermeneutic footman, W. Nericcio, while a "full-blooded" Chicano from Laredo, Texas, also has a London-born Great Grandmother's DNA spiraling through his chromosomes. MFA acolytes too, both poetry partisans and fiction junkys alike, will find much to gain from a careful reading of the assembled artists. Last but certainly not least, DRWS vassals, may also find provocative examples of rhetorical intrigue afoot in the code and culture switching shenanigans of these Chicana/o fabulists.



Osmosis: "Living cells," "Diffusion... through a semi-permeable membrane" "porous partition." These loaded phrases, culled from the metaphorically rich confines of the biological sciences, are not without some value in speaking to processes of the culturally informed textual production of Chicano and Chicana artists.<sup>1</sup> Mexico and United States, adjacent, cultural structures share common substances: histories, finances, and semiotic spheres. How appropriate that the biological sciences should provide for those of us who study the arts and culture, a ready model to describe processes to be found in the border *dividing*, but, also, and importantly, the borders which *define* the cultural dynamics between the United States and Mexico. In the works we will read this semester, we will witness a permeating flow, an exchange of bodies, ideas, canvases, and books between opposed cultural spheres, witnessing the synergy, the *mestizo* dynamics of this/'our' bordered world.

<sup>1</sup>This rendering of microbiological osmosis on the left derives from an archive in the Yale School of Medicine. Source: <http://info.Med.Yale/Educellimg/adenovirus.Gif>. An electron micrograph of adenovirus, a group of dna-containing viruses that cause upper respiratory tract infections in humans.

Why linger upon the process of osmosis? Mainly for a change of pace. Earlier scholarly and cultural studies this century have lingered upon the lands and people bordering northern Mexico and the Southwest United States as subjected sites--always tainted by the very real war which forever altered the geographic, not to mention the geopolitical, contours of the Americas--1848 looms as large for a study of the Southwest as 1776 or 1492 does for other regions of inquiry. The border is wound, the border as site of conflict, the border as hyphen or, even, following Derrida, as "hymen." All these terms are useful for describing processes, literatures, arts and communities at/on/from the border.

Osmosis, though, emphasizes another no less important characteristic of arts and artifacts produced by Mexican and Chicana/o artists and writers--the sometimes slow, sometimes fast processes of cultural secretion, ideological absorption and existential metamorphosis along the border dividing the United States and Mexico. To speak to the complexity of this osmosis is difficult; to trace how one artist, or a school of artists for that matter, saturate the vision of others working across the US/Mexican border is an exercise in a rigorous form of cultural, not to mention semiotic, archeology--consider in this regard how the prose fiction of William Faulkner, translated into Spanish, impacts upon the developing aesthetic sensibilities of Gabriel García Márquez and his circle of friends, only to then return to the United States as the Colombian Nobel prize winners fiction inspires the muse of Toni Morrison, only to have Morrison's powerful narratives foster literary issues from creative imagination of Marisela Norte (Chicana poet) and the late Arturo Islas (Chicano novelist). Across and back again, visual and literary seeds flow through the semi-permeable fixity of the border--here, the *migra* or aesthetic border patrol stops no vehicles (or, perhaps, only an occasional one), said artists yielding lasting impact upon computer screens, paper, and canvases on both sides of the border.

## REQUIRED READINGS

Sandra Cisneros	<i>The House on Mango Street</i>
Americo Paredes	<i>George Washington Gomez: A Mexicotexan Novel</i>
Gloria Anzaldúa	<i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i>
Juan Felipe Herrera	<i>Love After the Riots</i>
Norma Elia Cantú	<i>Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood En La Frontera</i>
Gilbert Hernandez	<i>Blood of Palomar</i>
John Rechy	<i>City of Night</i>
Arturo Islas	<i>The Rain God: A Desert Tale</i>
Alejandro Morales	<i>Barrio on the Edge: Caras Viejas Y Vino Nuevo</i>
Michele M. Serros	<i>Chicana Falsa : &amp; Other Stories of Death, Identity, &amp; Oxnard</i>
Lalo Alacran et al.	<i>POCHO! Magazine Second Back Issue Bundle</i>
Tomas Rivera	<i>Y No Se Lo Trago La Tierra/...the Earth Did Not Devour Him</i>

## WRITING AND PRESENTATIONS

You will be responsible for composing three writing projects during the semester: a 1-page typed prompt response, one 2-3 page analytical response; and one 10-12 page critical essay. Presentations are an option, but you must clear your proposal with me during office hours.