

**English 139: Visiting Authors Seminar**  
“Literary shape-shifters, genre-benders, border-crossers, and groundbreakers”  
**Spring 2013**  
**T/Th 12-1:15, Health 405**

Dr. Kate Evans  
Office: FO 222  
Phone: 408-924-4491

Email: [kate.evans@sjsu.edu](mailto:kate.evans@sjsu.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30 and by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In this course, students will have the opportunity to study literature written by writers who are visiting campus through our Center for Literary Arts (as well as a few other campus literary events). In addition to exploring the literary aspects of these writers’ works, we will also discuss the biographies and writing processes of these writers, exploring what it might mean to live a literary life. (See: <http://www.litart.org>)

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric; 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to American Literature; 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject; 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

**Required Readings**

Gimenez, Carmen. *Bring Down the Little Bird.s* (memoir)  
Gioia, Dana. *Pity the Beautiful*. (poetry)  
Gioia, Dana. *Interrogations at Noon*. (poetry)  
Phillips, Jayne Anne. *Lark & Termit.e* (novel)  
Steinberg, Susan. *The End of Free Love*. (stories)  
Straight, Susan. *Between Heaven and Here*. (novel)  
Reader, Available from Maple Press, 481 East San Carlos St. (408) 297-1000

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.)
- 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature. (Objective met via reading assignments and discussion.)
- 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject. (Objective met via writing assignments and critical reflection.)
- 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively. (Objective met via Literary Event Research Paper.)
- 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.)

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### **Author Group Presentations:** [Objectives #2, 4 and 5]

In a creative, interesting format using visuals, present to the class (for approximately 30 minutes) the following information *in any order*. Include a one-page handout with copies for the class that a) outlines the key points, and b) includes an MLA Works Cited list of your sources. **Begin NOW researching the author and sharing information you're finding with your group by email and/or in person.**

- **WORKS.** A list of all the authors' books, in chronological order, with a short annotation that briefly describes *each book's plot and central themes/issues*. You can get this information from the author's website, Goodreads, Amazon, etc.
- **BIO.** *Important* biographical information—NOT everything; just *significant highlights*. Offer relevant information. For example, if you talk about where the author went to school, see if you can find which writer/s/he studied with or other writers who attended the same school. If you mention the author's hometown, see if you can find any information about how that place has influenced her/his writing. *Important* information about the author's literary achievements—NOT everything; just *significant highlights*. If you talk about prizes, explain the significance of the prizes (e.g., look them up to see what they prizes are for, who are past recipients, etc.)
- **ONLINE PRESENCE.** An introduction to the author's website, showing us what it includes and highlighting key portions. Also check to see if the author has any other online presence, such as being the developer of or contributor to another literary site, a Facebook page, Twitter account, etc.
- **VIDEO.** A clip of a video or audio interview with the author and/or video of a reading. Share with us one or two significant moments—followed by your insights/analysis. In other words, you will have seen/heard the whole thing; choose a "juicy" piece to share, and then analyze it in light of having seen/heard the whole piece. Use a librarian to help you find an interview if you can't find one on your own. If you can't find a video/audio, read print interviews and share with us some juicy quotes, again with analysis/insights.
- **INTERVIEW.** After you have done some research and have read at least some of the author's work (and therefore developed some good questions to ask, preferably with your group-mates), request to interview the author. (You can the author in person or by email, through her/his website, through Facebook, etc.) Interview the author (if in person, preferably with a partner). Share with us what you learned, focusing on specific quotes (things the author has said or written that you find intriguing about her/his work, the creative process and about writing in general) and say why they are intriguing and how they seem to connect to the writer's themes/obsessions. If you are unable to reach the author, get this information from printed interviews, which might overlap with some of the above (so make sure you are not repetitive). Another option is to contact the CLA Director, Professor Andrew Altschul to ask him questions about the author (or in the case of Dana Gioia, contact Professor Samuel Maio).
- **CRITICAL RECEPTION.** Explore the critical reception to some of the author's work. Share with us what critics have said about their major works, including the book/s we read. (Search for *book reviews and scholarly articles from professional sources*—e.g., not Joe Blow's blog or Amazon reader comments, etc. Use the library databases and librarian help if needed.)

### **Short Response and Analysis Papers** [Objectives #1, 2, 3 and 5]

For each CLA author, you will write a short (approximately 2-3 pages, double-spaced)

“Response and Analysis” paper. As the title indicates, you will include:

- your *personal response* to the book, with a focus on *one or two* key aspects (possibilities include: what your experience was like reading it, what connections you made to life experiences/other readings, etc., what resonated for you, what you liked/didn’t and why.)
- an *analysis of one or two elements* of any of the following: a) themes/motifs b) writing style/craft c) literary devices. Possibilities include: one or two patterns of images [motif] or ideas [theme] and their possible meanings/effects, foreshadowing, characterization, key conflicts, alliteration, personification, metaphor/simile, allusion, irony, parallel structure, hyperbole, lineation, etc.

Being involved in discussion and taking notes will help you in writing these papers. Because these papers are short, they must be narrow in scope and focused. While they may be written in an informal style (e.g., using first person), they must be organized, thoughtful, and well-edited.

### **Author Event Paper** [Objectives #1, 2, 3 and 5]

Write a paper (approximately 3-5 pages) in which you briefly describe what happened and give your thoughtful reaction to one of the literary events you attended. The more you can include specific things the author said, questions that were asked, etc. the better—especially if you link what was said to an *analysis* (e.g., what meaning you make from what the author said). What new insights did you get into the writer and the writer’s work? What did you think of the way the author presented her/his work, and why? What connections did you make between what the author read/had to say, and why we discussed in class?

**Extra Credit:** You may do up to 2 more Author Events papers for other events featuring authors we’ve read this semester. Each one, depending on quality, can count for approximately 2% of the final grade.

### **Final Project:** [Objectives 1, 2 and 3]

#### Choice #1: Editorial Analysis of One Book

- Choose one of the books you’d like to write about. (Stolen from Kurt Vonneget, and slightly altered): “You are a minor but useful editor on a good literary magazine. ... Take three stories [or poems] that please you most and three that please you least, six in all [or refer to the whole novel/memoir manuscript], and pretend that they have been offered for publication. Write a report on each of the six stories/poems [or on the novel/memoir manuscript] to be submitted to a wise, respected, witty and world-weary superior. Do not do so as an academic critic, nor as a person drunk on art, nor as a barbarian in the literary market place. Do so as a sensitive person who has a few practical hunches about how stories [poems/novels/memoirs] can succeed or fail. Praise or damn as you please, but do so rather flatly, pragmatically, with cunning attention to annoying or gratifying details. Be yourself. Be unique. Be a good editor. The Universe needs more good editors, God knows.” (Approximately 7-10 pages, double-spaced.) *CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.*

- ***Include a cover sheet*** that reflects on the following: a) What did you learn/discover/struggle with writing this paper and studying author’s work? b) What do you feel you got out of this course this semester? c) Which book(s), author(s) and/or literary event(s) had the most impact on you, and why? d) What questions and/or insights about reading, writing, authors and/or the literary life have developed for you as a result of this course? e) What would you like to see changed and/or kept the same in this course?

Choice #2: Creative Project

- Write a creative project that is “springboarded” off one of the writers explored in this course. The poems can be any length. The prose should be approximately 7-10 pages double-spaced. Your choices are:
  - 5-8 poems in the style of Dana Gioia
  - A first chapter of a novel in the style Jayne Anne Phillips or Susan Straight
  - A story or two in the style of Susan Steinberg
  - A portion of your memoir in the style of Carmen Gimenez
  - An alternate last chapter of one of the novels
  - A first chapter of an imagined sequel to one of the course books
- ***Include a cover sheet*** that reflects on the following: a) Explain how you engaged with the style of one of the writers: What did you learn/discover/struggle with writing this project? b) What do you feel you got out of this course this semester? c) Which book(s), author(s) and/or literary event(s) had the most impact on you, and why? d) What questions and/or insights about reading, writing, authors and/or the literary life have developed for you as a result of this course? e) What would you like to see changed and/or kept the same in this course?

Grading of papers and presentations will be based on:

- **thoroughness** (you “unpack” your claims by digging into them and offering examples; you explain and analyze the significance of your examples)
- **thoughtfulness** (you offer your own personal insights as related to and contrasted with any outside sources used)
- **organization** (ideas move logically from one to the next; you choose examples and quotes that aren’t too long and that are incisive and purposeful)
- **fulfillment of requirements**
- **correctness** (format, editing, MLA citations)

Quizzes	15%
Author Group Presentation	15%
5 Short Response and Analysis Papers	30%
Literary Event Paper	15%
Final Paper or Creative Project	15%

**Late Assignments:** Late assignments will be reduced a grade for every class session they are late. At the top of Late Assignments write “LATE BY X [number of] CLASS SESSIONS.” This policy helps you to avoid habitual late work and to be prepared to contribute to class discussion. All assignments will be accepted *only in class*, not in my office or mailbox, and not as email attachments. *Please do not ask for exceptions to this policy because you put me in an awkward position.* I know we all have emergencies occasionally. One reduced grade on one assignment will not be the end of the world. Do Extra Credit if you’re concerned about your grade.

QUIZZES CANNOT BE MADE UP.

**Absences:** If you are not in class, contact classmates to get assignments, directions, handouts, notes, etc. Please do not make your absences extra work for me.

### Classroom Protocol

Being on time, participating in class discussions and listening to and taking notes on class lectures are necessary for the successful completion of this course. Cell phones are shut off and put away.

Protocol for written work requires that all quotations must be enclosed in quotation marks or, when more than three lines, put in an indented block. Full citation of the original author and source must also be included. For all papers, review a writing handbook for help with quote integration, formatting and proper citation (most of you will have purchased one for your Freshman comp. classes). Also see the University policy on “Academic Integrity” below for help defining and avoiding plagiarism of all kinds.

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog (“The Grading System”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

In written assignments for English 117, this scale is based on the following criteria:

A [90-92=A-, 93-96=A, 97-100=A+] = Excellent: The "A" essay is articulate and well developed with fluid transitions and a clear and persuasive use of evidence, which is drawn from the literary text itself, lecture materials (when appropriate), and research materials. An "A" essay contains a fresh insight which teaches the reader something new about the subject matter.

B [80-82=B-, 83-86=B, 87-89=B+] Above average: The "B" essay demonstrates a good understanding of its subject, a clear and persuasive use of evidence, a certain level of ease of

expression, and solid organization. However, it usually lacks the level of originality and creativity that characterizes the insight found in an "A" essay.

C [70-72=C-, 73-76=C, 77-79=C+] = Average: The "C" essay makes a good attempt at all the assignment's requirements. It has a reasonable understanding of its subject matter but its ideas are frequently simplistic or over-generalized. The writing style is also more bland and repetitive than the style shown by "A" and "B" essays and it often contains flaws in grammar, punctuation, spelling and/or word choice. It may also use textual evidence out of context.

D [60-62=D-, 63-66=D, 67-69=D+] = Below average: The "D" essay is poorly organized and generally unclear. It has inappropriate or inadequate examples, is noticeably superficial or simplistic, and/or contains some serious mechanical and grammatical problems. A "D" essay may also reveal some misunderstanding of the assignment requirements.

F = Failure: An "F" essay has not addressed the requirements of the assignment and is unacceptable work in terms of both form and content.

### **University Policy on Academic Integrity**

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial\\_affairs/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy\\_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

### **Dropping and Adding**

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html). [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/). Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes. Note that February 4 is the last drop without a "W." **The instructor of this course will not automatically drop you if you do not show up. Dropping is your responsibility.**

### **Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

### **Library Liaison for English & Comparative Literature:**

Contact Toby Matoush via email: [Toby.Matoush@sjsu.edu](mailto:Toby.Matoush@sjsu.edu), or phone: (408) 808-2096 if you have library research questions that have not been answered in class.

### **Student Technology Resources**

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Clark Hall and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library.

## Schedule

(Subject to change, with notice; if you are absent, *it is your responsibility* to check with classmates about possible changes in the schedule.)

Tuesday

Thursday

1/29  
Intro to Jayne Anne Phillips  
Presentation sign-ups, groups meet

1/24: Introductions, syllabus

1/31  
*Lark & Termite*, p. 1-76

2/5  
*Lark & Termite*, p. 77-169

2/7  
*Lark & Termite*, p. 170-end  
**Phillips Paper due**

Jayne Anne Phillips events: Tues. 2/5 @ 7 p.m. and Wed. 2/6 @ 12 noon, Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

2/12  
**Susan Straight Author Presentation**

2/14  
*Between Heaven and Here*, p. 1-79

2/19  
*Between Heaven and Here*, p. 80-186

2/21  
*Between Heaven and Here*, p. 187-end  
**Straight paper due**

2/26  
**Susan Steinberg Author Presentation**

2/28  
*The End of Free Love*, p. 1-74

Susan Straight and Susan Steinberg, Thurs. 2/28 @ 7 p.m., Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

3/5  
*The End of Free Love*, p. 75-189

3/7  
*The End of Free Love*, p. 191-end  
**Steinberg paper due**

3/12  
**Dana Gioia Author Presentation**

3/14  
*Interrogations at Noon*, p. 1-39

3/19  
*Interrogations at Noon*, p. 40-end

3/21  
*Pity the Beautiful*, p. 1-31

3/25-3/29: Spring Break

4/2  
*Pity the Beautiful*, p. 32-end  
**Gioia paper due**

4/4  
Class meets at Dana Gioia event.

Dana Gioia events: Wed. 4/3 @ 7 p.m. (Engineering 189), Thurs. 4/4 @ 1 p.m. (venue TBA)

4/9  
**Carmen Gimenez Smith Author Presentation**

4/11  
*Little Birds* p. 1-41

4/16  
*Little Birds*, p. 42-end

4/18  
**Smith paper due**

4/23  
**Cathleen Miller Author Presentation**  
Read Miller piece in Reader

4/25  
Cathleen Miller visits class

Cathy Miller Reading, Wed. 4/23 @ 7 p.m., Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
(Reception follows in Steinbeck Center, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor)

4/30  
Read Steinbeck Fellow pieces in Reader

5/2  
Steinbeck Fellows visit class

Steinbeck Fellows Reading, Wed. 5/1 @ 7 p.m. Steinbeck Center, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor

5/7  
Event Papers due.  
Choose a “gem” to share.

5/9  
Share drafts of Final Papers.

FINAL: Final Papers due by Thursday 5/16.

Author Group Presentation Sign-Ups

Feb. 12: Susan Straight

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April 9: Carmen Gimenez Smith

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Feb. 26: Susan Steinberg

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April 23: Cathleen Miller

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March 21: Dana Gioia

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