

ENGL-352g: BOOKPACKING LOS ANGELES

- *an immersive journey through the culture and literature of L.A.*

Spring Semester Saturday Class 2025

Section: 32850

This 4-unit class offers students a unique opportunity to dive deep into USC's vibrant and extraordinary home city.

This is an immersive class - meaning that we'll travel beyond the classroom. Every Saturday for 10 weeks in the Spring Semester, we will meet for a seminar on campus in the morning - and then, in the afternoon, we will head out in a minivan and explore a different facet of Los Angeles.

The class is an exercise in 'Bookpacking', a cross-humanities experience using novels as 'guidebooks' to places and people. Over the semester, we will read classic and contemporary L.A. fiction - from Raymond Chandler to Joan Didion - and we'll explore these fictional worlds both conceptually and on the ground. We'll walk the same streets as the characters in the stories, we'll dig into context and history - and we'll reflect on the intersection between literary landscapes and the contemporary cultures of L.A.

The class is led by Andrew Chater, a contemporary educator and award-winning BBC historian who has designed a variety of classes for USC students on the 'Bookpacker' model. Please visit www.bookpackers.com for a wealth of content on bookpacking at USC, and www.andrewchater.com for more information on the class instructor.

The class is accredited for General Education - all majors welcome.

When Spring Semester 2025 Saturdays 10am-5.30pm

Where Morning Seminar - (Location to be confirmed - check Schedule of Classes)
Afternoon - Off campus, exploring Los Angeles

Instructor Andrew Chater chater@usc.edu

Office hours by appointment Fall Semester 2024 - on Zoom
Spring Semester 2025 - THH-404G - Tu/Th 11am-1pm

LOGISTICS AND ATTENDANCE

12 students maximum enrollment

Daily Schedule as follows:

- 10.00am - 12.00am: Seminar, on campus - WPH-202
- *(lunch)*
- 1.00pm - 5.30pm: Immersive learning, out and about in L.A.
- Travel by minivan, accompanied by the class instructor. Estimate 3 hours of active immersion / investigation per afternoon session, plus 1.5 hrs travel time.

10 x Saturdays, as follows:

- Week 01 - Saturday January 18
- Week 02 - Saturday January 25 (deadline for reading *The Day of the Locust*)
- Week 03 - Saturday February 1
- Week 04 - Saturday February 8 (deadline for reading *The Big Sleep*)
- Week 05 - Saturday February 15
- Week 06 - Saturday February 22 (deadline for reading *Lithium for Medea*)
- Week 07 - Saturday March 1 (deadline for reading *Southland*, first half - up to p180)
- Week 08 - Saturday March 8 (deadline for reading *Southland*, second half)
- Week 09 - Saturday March 15 - *see note below** (deadline for reading *The Barbarian Nurseries*)
- *(Spring Break)*
- Week 10 - Saturday March 29
- Week 11 - Special Project 'Presentations' split between two afternoon sessions, April 1st & 2nd

Points to note:

- Please be aware this class wraps up at the start of April - leaving you to concentrate on your other classes in the busy final month of the Spring Semester.
- Saturday March 15th is the Saturday leading into Spring Break. Spring Break does not officially begin until Sunday March 16th. Your attendance on Saturday March 15th is expected if you wish to take this class.
- We will endeavor to return from our L.A. explorations by 5.30pm, but may be delayed in exceptional circumstances. If you have a regular Saturday evening commitment, this is not the class for you.



ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Required Reading

5x core novels:

- The Day of the Locust - Nathanael West, 1939 (127pp)
- The Big Sleep - Raymond Chandler, 1939 (251pp)
- Lithium for Medea - Kate Braverman, 1979 (2359pp)
- Southland - Nina Revoyr, 2003 (348pp)
- The Barbarian Nurseries - Héctor Tobar, 2011 (432pp)

Plus one 'free choice' L.A. novel for your 'Special Project'

Course Reader (300pp): *(not compulsory reading, but for your interest)*

- Excerpts from a host of classic and contemporary L.A. novels.
- Selected short stories, including Faulkner's 'Golden Land' (1935).
- Key essays on the politics and culture of L.A., from Willard Huntington Wright's 'Los Angeles the Chemically Pure' (1913) to John McPhee's 'L.A. Against the Mountains' (1988).

Assignments

Papers

- 2 x academic papers on themes emerging from the novels
- 1500 to 1750 words per paper = 3250 words total

Blog Posts

- 10 x blog posts, reflecting on our immersive explorations, delivered weekly
- 300 words per post = 3000 words total

Special Project

- Multimedia project 'bookpacking' an L.A. novel of your choice
- 2500 words + photos and interactive media

Presentation

- Oral presentation of your Special Project to the class

Grading

- Participation: 10%
- Paper1 - 20%
- Paper 2 - 20%
- Blog Reflections: 20%
- Special Project: 20%
- Special Project Presentations: 10%

More information on assignments and assessment, including a full briefing document on the Special Projects, is given later in this syllabus.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 01 (January 18) - The Golden Land

I loved the way she said 'LA'; I love the way that everybody says 'LA' on the Coast; it's their one and only golden town when all is said and done.

- Jack Kerouac, *'On the Road'*

SEMINAR

We'll explore L.A.'s foundational myth, a romantic world of haciendas and orange groves immortalized in Helen Hunt Jackson's wildly influential SoCal novel 'Ramona'. We'll discover how the so-called 'boosters' used the Ramona myth to package L.A. for subdivision and sale. We'll explore the character of the people - predominantly from the Midwest - who settled in L.A. in the decades of its early growth, from the 1880s to the 1920s - and we'll study how this colonization impacted and disenfranchised Southern California's Native and Hispanic populations.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

We'll drive north from campus up Figueroa, and discover how the early colonization of Los Angeles is reflected in the various architectural styles - from Victorian to Spanish Revival - in the immediate vicinity of USC.

From there, we'll drive to L.A.'s historic heart, the pueblo of Los Angeles. We'll explore Olvera Street, the Casa Avila Adobe, and The Church of Our Lady Queen of the Angels - and we'll debate the way the 101 freeway symbolically divides the pueblo from the civic heart of the modern city.

We'll then drive to Echo Park, and visit Angeleno Heights and the Angelus Temple - locations that will help us understand the character of the 'folk' that settled in L.A. in its formative decades.

Excerpts from -

- Ramona - Helen Hunt Jackson, 1884
- Angel's Flight - Don Ryan, 1927
- Los Angeles the Chemically Pure - Willard Huntington Wright, 1913

Week 02 (January 25) - The Cheated

'The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies. They have been cheated and betrayed.'

- Nathanael West, *'The Day of the Locust'*

SEMINAR

This week we'll explore the L.A. dystopia, epitomized in Nathanael West's coruscating satire, 'The Day of the Locust'.

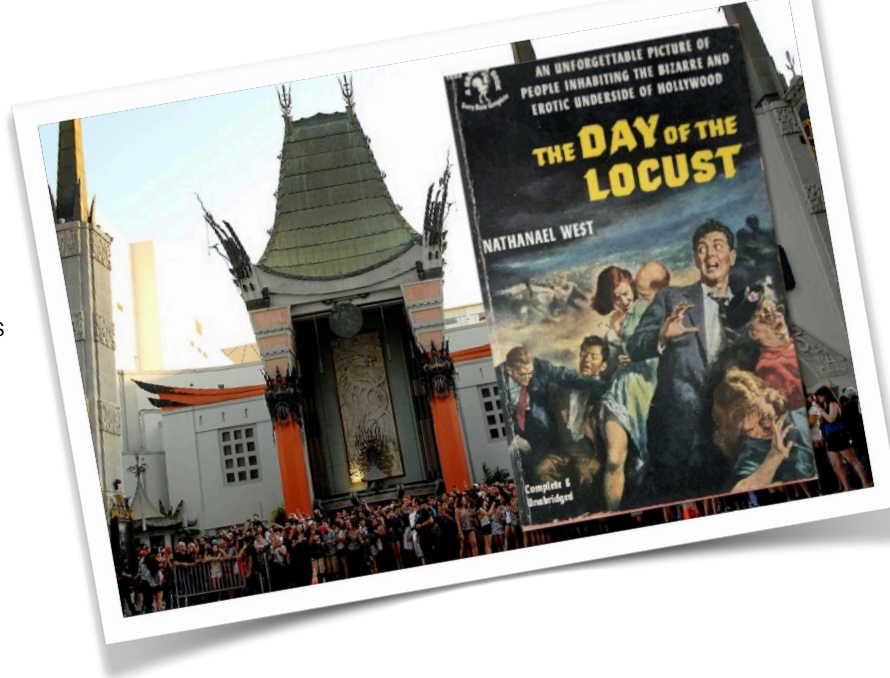
The novel tells the story of group of Hollywood transients, whose quest for the Golden Land has turned sour. We'll explore West's vision of L.A. as a place of rootlessness, fakery, spiritual hunger and bubbling anger.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

In the afternoon we'll 'bookpack' Nathanael West's L.A., exploring that small but symbolic slice of the city from Hollywood Boulevard, north east to Beachwood Canyon and the Hollywood sign. This is L.A.'s tourist heart, but despite the neon signage and the tourist tat, not much has changed since the '30s; it remains as West describes, a transient zone where dreams and harsh reality collide.

Core text -

- The Day of the Locust - Nathanael West, 1939



Week 03 (Feb 1) - Downtown, Downturn

'My God, here I was again, roaming the town.'

- John Fante, 'Ask the Dust'

SEMINAR

This week we'll look at L.A.'s historic Downtown, through the prism of John Fante's classic novel 'Ask the Dust'.

We'll focus on the 1930s, the era of the Depression, and we'll compare L.A. then and now - discovering how disparities of wealth have been a constant in this city over the past century; Skid Row, for instance, pre-dates the Depression.

We'll look, too, at crime and corruption - another constant in L.A. life, which first exploded into public consciousness in the 1930s. We'll discover the dark side of Los Angeles in these years - the rackets, the graft, the 'machine' of Mayor Frank Shaw and the compromised role of the LAPD. And we'll explore how hardship and civic corruption fed the literary imagination, with the emergence of new schools of 'realist' and 'Noir' fiction.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

We'll take the metro to the Civic Center, and visit City Hall. From there, we'll walk south to 3rd and Spring, and explore a variety of Downtown locations by foot - the Bradbury Building, Grand Central Market, Angel's Flight, and Bunker Hill.

We'll trace Fante's L.A., walking in the footsteps of Arturo Bandini, Fante's fictional alter-ego. We'll descend down Olive from Bunker Hill to Pershing Square and then east to Main Street. And then, further east, we'll visit Skid Row, and talk to some of the residents, accompanied by community activist Tom Grode.

Excerpts from -

- Ask the Dust - John Fante, 1939
- Angel's Flight - Don Ryan, 1927

Week 04 (February 8) - Mapping Marlowe

'It seemed like a nice neighborhood to have bad habits in.'

- Raymond Chandler, *'The Big Sleep'*

SEMINAR

Our focus this week will be 'The Big Sleep', an L.A. classic, the first of Raymond Chandler's novels featuring the private eye Philip Marlowe. We'll dig deep into L.A. Noir, exploring Chandler's inspirations and antecedents, asking why such a distinctive and dark genre should flourish in this supposedly sunny city.

We'll discuss the characters in the novel and trace their historical parallels - discovering the connection between the novel and USC's Edward L. Doheny Memorial Library - a fascinating story of suicide and scandal in the oil fields of Southern California.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

In the afternoon, we'll 'bookpack' the Big Sleep, tracing on the ground the labyrinthine movements of Chandler's gumshoe hero. The journey will take us from Hollywood Boulevard, into the hills: Laurel Canyon, and the Greystone Mansion on Loma Vista, the model for General Sternwood's oppressive pile described in the opening chapters of the novel.

Core text -

- The Big Sleep - Raymond Chandler, 1939

Week 05 (February 15) - In the Stars

"I like Hollywood," I persisted.

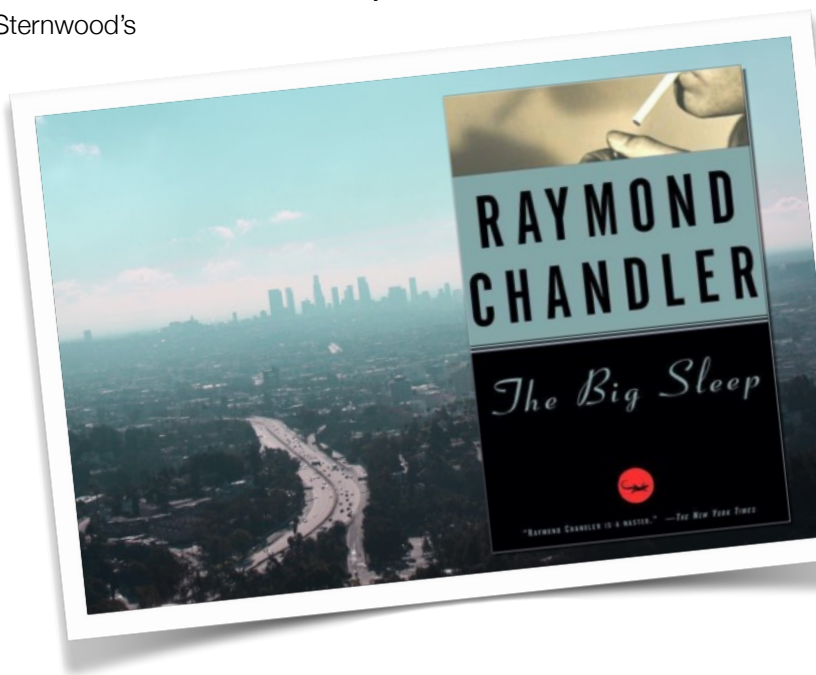
"It's alright. It's a mining town in lotus land."

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *'The Last Tycoon'*

SEMINAR

Today we look at Tinseltown, through the prism of the Hollywood Novel. Celebrity, glamour, masquerade, ambition, exploitation: this is L.A. distilled and dissected.

We'll look at a host of representations of Hollywood in fiction - most of them satirical and disparaging! - but we'll also focus on one fascinating text that breaks the mold. F. Scott Fitzgerald's unfinished novel 'The Last Tycoon' tells the story of Monroe Stahr, based on the producer Irving Thalberg, a man Fitzgerald idolized and respected. Rather than satirizing the movie business, in 'The Last Tycoon' Fitzgerald pays respect to the craft and genius of Hollywood.



IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

Our afternoon's immersion will take us to Culver City, a district of L.A. which originated as a movie town. We'll explore Culver's historic heart, and the Culver Studios, built by the silent movie director Thomas Ince. And then we'll enter the Sony lot, which (back in 1930s) was the home of MGM. Here, we'll trace the locations described in 'The Last Tycoon', and conjure up the career of Irving Thalberg, the 'boy wonder' who controlled the kaleidoscopic and creative world that was the MGM studio machine.

Excerpts from -

- Spider Boy - Carl van Vechten, 1928
- The Last Tycoon - F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1941
- What Makes Sammy Run? - Budd Schulberg, 1941
- The Player - Michael Tolkin, 1988

Week 06 (February 22) - Lost Souls

'Here the trail ends.'

- Kate Braverman, *'Lithium for Medea'*

SEMINAR

This week we're focusing on the beaches and the freeways - two iconic and interconnected 'zones' within the L.A. experience. The beaches represent the end of the trail - where the westward migration ends and the sun sets. The freeways represent the onward desire for mobility, a frustrating loop of motion and gridlock.

We'll explore these twin spaces through a distinct genre of L.A. novels that one might describe as 'Lost Souls' fiction. We'll look at a variety of examples of the genre - Kate Braverman's 'Lithium for Medea', Christopher Isherwood's 'A Single Man', Joan Didion's 'Play It As It Lays' - and we'll ask how the beaches and the freeways are represented in each.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

In the afternoon we'll take the freeway west to what Faulkner called 'the rim of the world' - Santa Monica Beach. From there we'll walk south, down the boardwalk, to Venice. We'll explore Venice Beach, the Canals, and Abbot Kinney Boulevard - delighting in the vibe of this most enjoyable part of L.A.

But we'll try to discern, too, the melancholy and dysfunction that L.A. writers have detected in this very particular landscape. We'll talk to locals, attempting to understand what makes these communities different, and the impact of the shore on their identity.

Core text -

- Lithium for Medea - Kate Braverman, 1979

Excerpts from -

- Play It As It Lays - Joan Didion, 1970
- A Single Man - Christopher Isherwood, 1964
- Golden Land - William Faulkner, 1935



Week 07 (March 1) - Crenshaw Cultures

'The white folks win again, trying to laugh it off. But it stuck in my craw.'

- Chester Himes, 'If He Hollers Let Him Go'

SEMINAR

This week we'll explore L.A.'s African-American experience, from the Great Migration to the present. Our core text for the week is Nina Revoyr's 'Southland', a multi-character and multi-generational murder mystery set in Crenshaw. The novel focuses on the deaths of some children during the Watts Riots, and we'll dig into the historical forces that have led to significant flashpoint in L.A. race relations - and how those flashpoints (Watts, Rodney King, BLM) have impacted the culture of our city.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

This week's exploration will take in a swathe of Los Angeles south of the I-10, from the old historic heart of Central Avenue, west to Sugar Hill, and then to Crenshaw, where we'll bookpack locations mentioned in Nina Revoyr's novel. We'll meet local members of the community, including community activists from Destination Crenshaw who are fighting the ongoing gentrification of this traditionally Black neighborhood.

Core text -

- Southland - Nina Revoyr, 2003 (first half)

Excerpts from -

- If He Hollers Let Him Go - Chester Himes, 1945
- Devil in a Blue Dress - Walter Mosley, 1990
- Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned - Walter Mosley, 1998

Week 08 (March 8) - Global City

'It was impossible to walk through the neighborhood without seeing someone different from you.'

- Nina Revoyr, 'Southland'

SEMINAR

Los Angeles is a global city hosting myriad ethnicities in varied degrees of juxtaposition, competition and harmony. This week we'll celebrate and investigate that diversity. We'll look at the shifting patterns of ethnic settlement in the city, we'll examine immigrant enclaves and immigrant self-expression, and we'll touch on moments in L.A.'s history when racial disparity and intolerance have led to tensions, and worse.

We'll continue our exploration of Nina Revoyr's 'Southland', focussing on Revoyr's descriptions of Japanese-American culture, and the traumatic story of the forced internment of Japanese-American Angelenos during WW2.



IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

Our itinerary for this week covers a broad swathe of Midtown and Downtown, visiting Little Ethiopia, Koreatown, Historic Filipinotown, Chinatown and Little Tokyo. We'll end the afternoon at the Japanese American National Museum, where we'll research the story of Internment, and meet some Japanese American residents whose childhoods were marred by that hurtful experience.

Core text -

- Southland - Nina Revoyr, 2003 (second half)

Week 09 (March 15) - Eastside

'A thousand kids streaming through a barrio of palm trees and Mexicatessens...'

- Oscar Zeta Acosta, *'Revolt of the Cockroach People'*

SEMINAR

Half the population of L.A. County is Latino, of whom more than three quarters are Mexican-American. In the penultimate week of the course, we'll explore this latter culture - L.A.'s original culture, dispossessed in the mid-19th century, and struggling for economic and social parity ever since.

We'll explore the story of Chicano L.A. through the story of Araceli Ramirez, the protagonist of Héctor Tobar's powerful drama 'The Barbarian Nurseries', the story of a quiet Mexican-American woman thrust into a dramatic confrontation with the media, the police, and the crushing self-entitlement of white America.

IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

In the afternoon we'll explore East L.A. from Boyle Heights to Belvedere. We'll visit the locations of a series of iconic political murals, in locations across East L.A., each proudly proclaiming facets of Chicano politics and culture. We'll visit Self Help Graphics, a community print shop west of Mariachi Square where the political power of street art has been celebrated since the late 1960s.

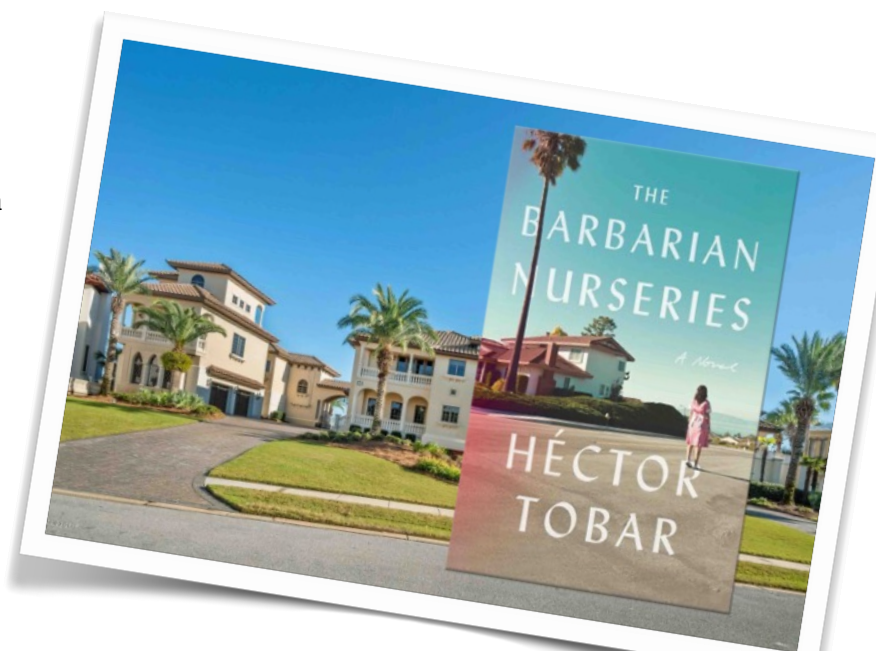
We'll then head back west, to visit Homeboy Industries, an inspiring not-for-profit which works with ex-gang members, creating job opportunities and removing tattoos, expunging both the physical and mental evidence of an often violent past.

Core text -

- The Barbarian Nurseries - Héctor Tobar, 2011

Excerpts from -

- The Revolt of the Cockroach People - Oscar Zeta Acosta, 1973
- Locas - Yxta Maya Murray, 1997
- What It Takes To Get To Vegas - Yxta Maya Murray, 1999



Week 10 (March 29) - Apocalypse

'There was no heat like this, no furnace, no bomb, no reactor. Every visible thing danced in the flames...'

- T.C. Boyle - *'The Tortilla Curtain'*

SEMINAR

T.C. Boyle's 1995 novel *'The Tortilla Curtain'* is the story of the growing disconnection between an affluent, liberal White couple, and a Latino couple sleeping rough in Topanga Canyon. A breakdown of empathy between them builds to a point of Apocalypse.

The novel touches on so much explored in the course thus far: the limits of the dream; disparities of wealth; race and racial conflict. And it adds an extra dimension - what L.A.'s prophet of doom, Mike Davis, has called "the ecology of fear". In *'The Tortilla Curtain'*, we witness the environmental consequences of our settling in communities where fires and mudslides are an annual threat. We'll dissect this powerful L.A. novel as we draw the threads of the course together.

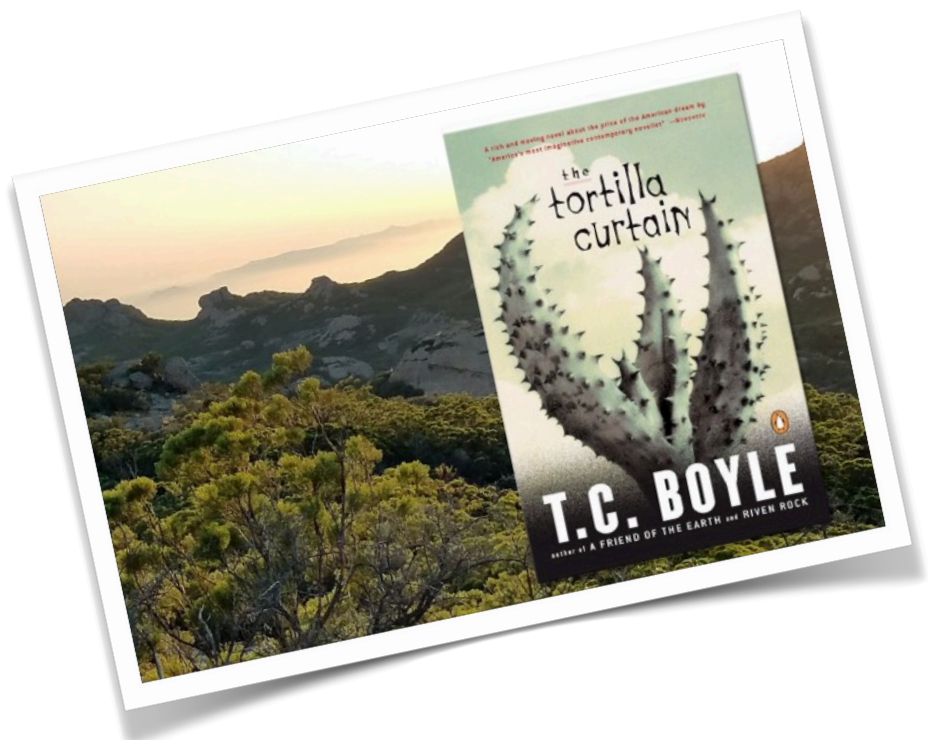
IMMERSIVE EXPLORATION

This final afternoon's exploration will take us to the Santa Monica Mountains - wild, beautiful, and scarred with the effects of environmental catastrophe.

We'll trek in the Charmlee Wilderness Park, where a ranger will describe the fierce and untamable forces of nature with which our city co-exists. In Topanga Canyon, we'll visit affluent gated communities and study the psychology and risks of this kind of development.

Excerpts from -

- *The Tortilla Curtain* - T.C. Boyle, 1995
- *L.A. Against the Mountains* - John McPhee, 1988
- *Let Malibu Burn* - Mike Davis, 1996



MORE INFORMATION ON ASSIGNMENTS / ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Participation

Participation is defined as:

- attendance at all seminars and immersive explorations
- reading fully the required texts
- thoughtful contribution to discussions
- active participation in the Special Project Presentations

Attendance will be noted each Saturday of the class. Any unexcused absences over the Semester will negatively impact your overall grade. Two unexcused absences will result in a failure for the class regardless of your performance in the papers and the Special Project.

2x Papers

Each paper should be 5 or 6 pages long (1500 to 1750 words), double spaced. Please proof-read for clarity, substance, and style.

Papers should be emailed to me in Pdf format.

Late delivery of papers without my permission or OSAS accommodation will incur a grade reduction. Papers delivered more than five days late without my permission or OSAS accommodation will not be graded.

Paper 1

- Due: 6pm, Friday February 14th
- (Focus on either 'The Day of the Locust' or 'The Big Sleep')
- Write a critical review of your chosen novel

- Notes on Paper 1

This first paper invites a personal response. What did you think of the novel?

Essentially, what I'm looking for here is the kind of thing you might find in the books section of a contemporary newspaper. Such reviews balance objective criticism with personal reflection. They give the reader both a sense of the book, and what the reviewer thought of the book.

'Criticism' is usually understood these days in the negative sense, but the word is actually neutral - you can just as well write positive criticism. What I'm looking for is an honest, personal, interesting response. I

want to know what you thought, and I want to see you back up your thoughts with considered and insightful argument.

Don't google around the subject. Don't quote any secondary sources. I have no interest in what other people think about the book, or what received wisdom is about the book. I am interested in you, and what's inside your head, and the originality, honesty and clarity of your thinking.

Don't give lengthy descriptions of plot. You might want to describe the plot briefly in broad overview, enough to give the reader a sense of what the book is 'about'. And you're likely to give some details of plot, to illustrate some of the points you're making. But I don't want a synopsis of 'what happens'.

Work out the 'big picture' of what you're trying to say, and structure your work accordingly, using paragraphs as the building blocks of good structure. The reader wants to be interested in the detail, but also to have a sense of where we're 'going'.

Quote from the text, enough to back up your arguments. Choose interesting and apposite quotes; find the quotes that are really telling and nail what you're trying to say, and to give a sense of the 'reader experience'. Please don't feel obliged to include citations; think more journalistically, and quote the text as a newspaper reviewer might quote the text - rather than as an academic might quote the text!

Obviously, you're writing about books which are not contemporary. Keep in mind when they were written, and let that sense of period be a part of what you're reviewing. How well does the book hold up? How significant is the book as a historical artefact?

Paper 2

- Due: 6pm, Friday March 14th
- (Focus on either 'Lithium for Medea' or 'Southland')
- How well does your chosen novel succeed as a novel of place?

- Notes on Paper 2

This second paper invites a discussion of a novel from a 'bookpacking' perspective. What aspects of regional place, culture, geography and history emerge from your chosen book?

Feel free to absorb ideas from our seminars into this second paper - but strive, too, for originality and unique perspectives.

- General notes on Writing Style and 'Voice'

You'll have gathered, from what I'm outlining above, that I'm suggesting you break from the norms of academic writing. What you write for me might be very different in tone from what you write for other professors, and I'm inviting you to shake off some of the academic strictures you may be used to.

Last semester, I had a student who wanted to compare two novels, and he began a paragraph, “In the context of an intertextual paradigm...”. Yuk! This is not how people speak in the real world. This kind of language is alienating and elitist. In the real world we want clarity, and we want ‘voice’.

Your voice matters. The way you write is an opportunity to discover your voice. So - write with personality. Translate the way you speak to a written style that flows on the page. That doesn't mean abandoning good grammar; grammar is incredibly useful. But rules are meant to be broken, provided you break the rules in your ‘voice’, and with style (or what the French call ‘panache’).

So. Loosen up your style, and write for the real world - without being lazy or slapdash.

It's a challenge, and you may find it hard after years of ‘academic’ thinking. But please, enjoy the process!

(If you want further inspiration on how to write well, read George Orwell, one of the great prose stylists of the 20th century. His inspired and important essay “Politics and the English Language” is available online).

- What am I looking for when I'm grading papers?

Grading is subjective. There is no formula for writing good essay. My grading style will differ from that you may be used to with other professors.

But let me reiterate some of the key points I've outlined above:

- What I'm looking for is an honest, personal, interesting response. I want to know what you thought, and I want to see you back up your thoughts with considered and insightful argument.
- I am interested in the originality, honesty and clarity of your thinking.
- Write with personality. Let me hear your ‘voice’. Translate the way you speak to a written style that flows on the page.

Blog Posts

Every week, I will expect you to send me a very brief blog post reflecting our on immersive exploration.

These are intended to be brief - just 300 words. Send them in Pdf format within 48 hours - in other words, by 6pm on each Tuesday following our Saturday class.

The way you handle this assignment is up to you - but I'm interested in your thoughts and reflections, not what we ‘did’. This isn't a diary entry. Let me know, rather, what you observed - something that interested you, something that struck you as remarkable or telling or particularly noteworthy - and why. Let me know how the places we visited made you feel.

If you wish, you may respond to this challenge in a creative way. Students in the past have sent me poems as their blog posts, and experimented with formats: a letter to a newspaper, for instance. That would be welcome. But remember - keep it brief, make it significant, and don't sweat over it. 300 words, that's all.

Special Project

As the culmination of this class, you will research and deliver a multimedia project on the experience of 'bookpacking' an L.A. novel of your choice.

Your Special Project will describe how the novel you have chosen helps us understand a particular region or sub-culture of L.A.. But more than that - it will describe the immersive experience of 'bookpacking' the novel - meaning, that you'll have visited the locations described, and will report back on the interplay between text and reality.

This is a 'summative' project, in that it will involve you incorporating new skills learnt over the course of the class. You will be expected to think, and work, in a cross-humanities way, as befitting the 'bookpackers' idea - weaving together place, people, and text, and forging connections between past and present, making sense of complex cultural phenomena through this cross-disciplinary lens.

On Blackboard, you will find an 'Inspiration List' of Los Angeles novels, with a brief description showing how each ties into a particular district or culture of the city. Choose one that interests you and let me know your choice, and this will then become 'your' subject for the semester. The sooner you make a choice, the more choice available - don't leave it too late or your options will become much reduced.

Once you've chosen your book, start reading it. Plot the locations, visit the settings, interact with the locals. Live the book as 'immersively' as you can. The more immersive your experience, the more vibrant and interesting your final project.

It will be up to you to plan when and how you will visit the L.A. locations in the novel. Discuss the logistics with me if you are concerned about this. Some L.A. locations are safer than others. Be wise, and keep me abreast of your plans.

The project will be delivered as a combination of prose (approx 2500 words) and other media - photos, video, audio, maps. Delivery format will depend on the media used. If you intend to deliver words + pictures, Pdf format is best; if incorporating video and audio, we will discuss the best format for delivery on an individual basis.

My intention - with your consent - is to publish the best of these pieces on the bookpackers website, and you can visit bookpackers.com to get an idea of what students have delivered in the past - you will find a variety of styles and formats represented.

- Special Project Schedule

- Feb 1st - deadline to select Special Project novel
- Feb 15th - Special Project briefing during seminar time
- Mar 31st 8pm - Special Project delivery deadline

- Final Presentations

There is an oral element to the Special Projects.

During the final week of this class (Week 11), you will attend a session with a group of your peers, during which time you will present your projects to the group, highlighting key elements of your original research, and fielding questions.

The Final Presentations will be held on April 1st and 2nd, from 4-6.00, in the Ide Room (THH Room 420)

Each student will be given 20 minutes - 15 mins to present, and 5 mins to answer questions.

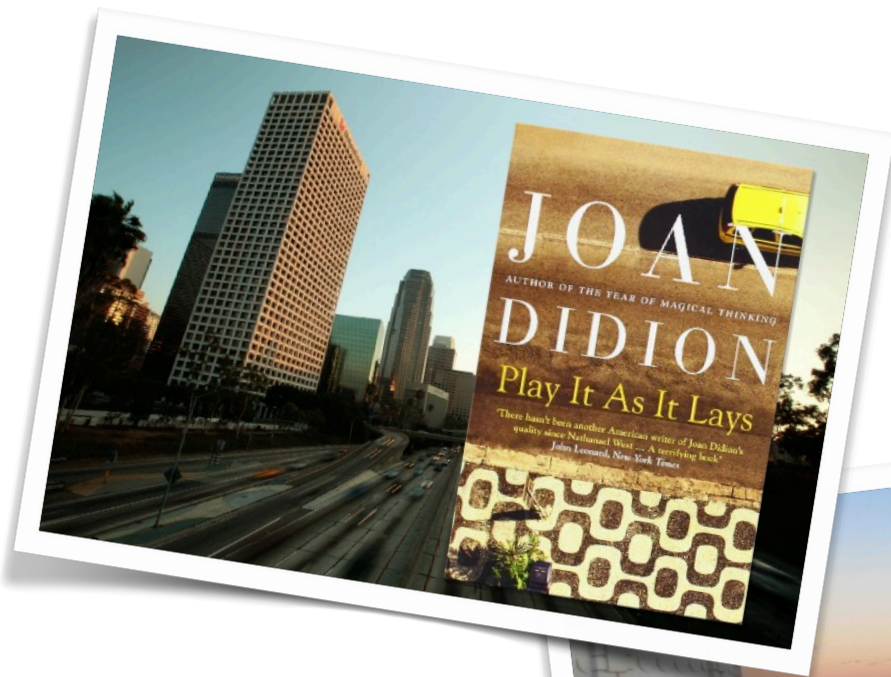
L.A. NOVELS INSPIRATION LIST

You may chose any suitable L.A. novel for your Special Project. Please consult with me early in the semester, and share with me your thoughts about L.A. cultures or literary genres that interest you, and I can help you make a suitable selection.

Students in previous years have found this 'inspiration list helpful -

- Oil! - Upton Sinclair, 1927
- Spider Boy - Carl Van Vechten, 1928
- The Postman Always Rings Twice - James M. Cain, 1934
- They Shoot Horses, Don't They? - Horace McCoy, 1935
- Mildred Pierce - James M. Cain, 1941
- What Makes Sammy Run? - Budd Schulberg, 1941
- Double Indemnity - James M. Cain, 1943
- If He Hollers Let Him Go - Chester Himes, 1945
- In a Lonely Place - Dorothy B. Hughes, 1947
- The Loved One - Evelyn Waugh, 1948
- The Grifters - Jim Thompson, 1963
- A Single Man - Christopher Isherwood, 1964
- Post Office - Charles Bukowski, 1971
- The Revolt of the Cockroach People - Oscar Zeta Acosta, 1973
- Sex and Rage - Eve Babitz, 1979
- Less Than Zero - Bret Easton Ellis, 1985
- The Black Dahlia - James Ellroy, 1987
- The Player - Michael Tolkin, 1988
- Get Shorty - Elmore Leonard, 1990
- L.A. Confidential - James Ellroy, 1990
- Devil in a Blue Dress - Walter Mosley, 1990
- Snow Crash - Neal Stephenson, 1992
- Always Running - Luis J. Rodriguez, 1993

- The Tortilla Curtain - T.C. Boyle, 1995
- The White Boy Shuffle - Paul Beatty, 1996
- Locas - Yxta Maya Murray, 1997
- Angel's Flight - Michael Connelly, 1998
- Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned - Walter Mosley, 1998
- White Oleander - Janet Fitch, 1999
- Be Cool - Elmore Leonard, 1999
- What It Takes To Get To Vegas - Yxta Maya Murray, 1999
- Assumption and other Stories - Daniel Olives, 2003
- Set Up, Joke, Set Up, Joke - Rob Long, 2005
- Inherent Vice - Thomas Pynchon, 2009
- The Barbarian Nurseries - Hector Tobar, 2011
- Dead Stars - Bruce Wagner, 2012
- The Sellout - Paul Beatty, 2015
- Gold, Fame, Citrus - Claire Vaye Watkins, 2015



COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The practical objective of this course is to reach a critical and empathetic understanding of the eclectic cultures of Los Angeles. What are the particular characteristics of the city and of its people, and what makes it different to other cities of the US? How was this distinctive character forged, and how has it evolved over time?

The course offers an exciting and unconventional approach to the study of Literature. The idea behind 'bookpacking' is to use novels as guidebooks to place and people, as much as for their literary value. It shows how the study of text can interact with the real world. This is truly a cross-humanities course, weaving together literature, history, geography, politics and social studies - a holistic form of study which will push students to think in surprising ways.

The course is immersive - half in the classroom, half 'on the road'. Immersive study involves a different set of learning parameters - logistically, academically and pedagogically. It involves physical and personal interaction with places and with people. It involves an element of journalistic inquiry. It encourages and necessitates respect for the environment. And it can provoke a more active sense of understanding and empathetic reflection than can be achieved, we believe, in a purely academic context.

The assessment elements of this course - especially the blog and 'special project' - have been tailored especially to encourage these elements of empathetic reflection.

Other Learning Outcomes

1 – Critical and creative. Students will learn:

- to understand in depth the complex relations between a culture and its representations
- to grasp the skills and theories of interpretation and to see how interpretive interests shift with time and place
- to study a range of contrasting narratives from the perspective of several disciplines
- to engage in self-directed research
- to exercise their own skills in writing, generating new ideas by controlling and shaping language

2 – Philosophical and empathetic. Students will learn:

- to study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values, weighing human costs and human benefits
- to test attitudes and understandings that are beyond their own immediate experience
- to engage with complex literatures as a preparation for understanding complex lives

3 – General Education (Humanistic Inquiry). Students will:

- cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of human expression, including literature, language, philosophy, and the arts, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge;
- read and interpret actively and analytically, think critically and creatively, and write and speak persuasively;
- evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance in today's global world;
- collaborate effectively through traditional and new ways of disseminating knowledge.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty - **including any use of content generated by AI** - are equally unacceptable. Students who submit papers which I suspect include AI generated content will be subject to a viva. Failure in the viva will result in a failing grade for that paper.

See additional information in SCampus and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office](#) webpage for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Adjustments to this Syllabus may be made during the course of the semester.

