

English 265 - Special Topics: Borders and Boundaries CRN 21185

Spring 2011 • 9am • Barret 214

Professor Rychetta Watkins

Office: 311 Palmer

Office Phone: 843-3445

Office Hours:

MW 11 – noon; T/Th 9-10 am

Email: watkinsr@rhodes.edu

Required Texts:

Danticat, Edwidge, *The Farming of Bones* (1999)

Diaz, Junot, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008)

Erdrich, Louise, *Love Medicine* (1984)

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1996)

Naylor, Gloria, *Mama Day* (1989)

Alexie, Sherman, *Smoke Signals* (1998)

Also Bookmark:

Oxford English Dictionary: www.oed.edu

MLA Formatting and Style Guides:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocMLA.html>

Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to several of the literary traditions of people of color writing in English in the Americas (whew!). Our investigations will center on the thematic concerns of culture, identity, and representation using “borders” and “boundaries” as tropes to frame our thinking. State and national borders carry the force of law and tradition, marking both inside and outside and defining who belongs and who doesn’t. This semester, we will read a selection of works that interrogate the seeming stability of the border, using it instead as a metaphor to critique naturalizing discourses of the self, race, and national identity.

As this is a writing intensive English course, we will also discuss the practice and process of discussing, analyzing, and writing papers about literature. We will attend to the elements of fiction, the skills of close reading and analysis as well as issues of mechanics, style, organization, and argument appropriate to literary studies. By the end of the course, I hope that you will have gained an appreciation for this body of work, developed a facility with the basic principles of literary studies, and received valuable practice in thinking and writing about literature.

Course goals and objectives

This course fulfills Humanities F4 and F2 requirements. What does that mean? Well, this course is considered part of the broader Foundations liberal arts curriculum that is designed to lend focus and cohesion to your undergraduate experience. The goal of any liberal arts curriculum is to create a well-rounded lifelong learner who has an array of interpretive, analytical, and critical thinking skills that will, hopefully, facilitate success through life.

This humanities course focuses on two aspects of that larger curriculum:

F2 “Develop excellence in written communication,” which the college’s catalog defines as “the ability to express concise and methodical arguments in clear and precise prose.”

F4 “Read and interpret literary texts.” As per the catalog description, the “critical and sensitive reading of significant works refines analytical skills and develops an awareness of the power of language.”

Additionally, this course is also considered writing intensive; thus, we will spend a significant amount of time discussing the process of planning, drafting, and revising essays about literature, as well as evaluating and including material gained from sources.

Based on these requirements, I have developed the following course objectives. By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

--Understand and think critically about literary traditions of some of the multi-ethnic peoples of the Americas.

- Develop an understanding of the basic concepts and principles of literary studies.
- Learn to use scholarly sources and research resources relevant to literary studies of this area.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills to assess meaning in texts and tackle problems of interpretation, especially those particular to the study the literary traditions of the multi-ethnic peoples of the Americas.
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills to assess argumentative and rhetorical strategies in scholarly texts and engage critical debates about meaning and interpretation.
- Develop ability to assess your own writing and develop a plan for revision.

Why do all of this? The hoped for outcome is that you end up better able to analyze and critically evaluate others' ideas while also developing a better understanding of and appreciation for this body of literature. At the end of the semester, we will all pause to consider whether these objectives have been met.

Grade Components

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Participation and attendance | 10% |
| Weekly Responses | 20% |
| Short Essay – 4 pages | 15% |
| Source Review | 15% |
| Final Essay w/Sources – 8 pp | 25% |
| Midterm Essay Exam | 15% |

Grade Scale

| | | | |
|----|--------|----|-------|
| A | 100-95 | A- | 94-91 |
| B+ | 90-88 | B | 87-84 |
| B- | 83-81 | C+ | 80-78 |
| C | 77-74 | C- | 73-71 |
| D+ | 70-68 | D | 67-64 |
| D- | 63-61 | F | 60 > |

from Faculty Guidelines for Accommodations of Students with Disabilities

“Students wishing to change an existing accommodation or request additional accommodations for a particular course should be referred to SDS, located on the fourth floor of Burrow Student Center, to complete the necessary paperwork. The request must be approved by the Disability Support Committee **before** it is implemented in the classroom.” For more information, contact Melissa McCowen at 843-3885.

Guidelines for Our Learning Community

Attendance is very important in a discussion-centered classroom. A successful student will strive to attend every class and be ON TIME. Since situations do arise that may cause you to be absent, you will be allowed up to three absences, or “personal days,” for the semester. After those three instances, only absences for documented illness and documented death or serious illness of immediate family members will be considered excused. Foreseeable absences for school related travel or activities require documentation and at least one week’s advance notice; otherwise, the absence will be counted as unexcused. If your absence IS excused, any in-class assignments you may have missed will not be counted against you. Students who have missed class time should get notes from a classmate, review the notes and consult with me to clear up any questions. **It is your responsibility to get class notes and set up and keep appointments to make up missed work. Missing an appointment or deadline for make-up work will result in failure of the assignment.** More than five **unexcused** absences will result in failure of the course.

Participation is determined by more than attendance. Students are expected to contribute regularly and significantly through in-class discussion and responses driven by an attentive reading of the materials assigned for each day. We are striving to build a discourse community based on our shared understandings of the texts we encounter, and our community is incomplete without your thoughtful contributions. Everyone begins the semester with 100 participation and attendance points, which may be reduced for a number of reasons. Examples include, but are not limited to: unexcused absences beyond three (-5 each instance), chronic lateness (-3 each instance after three times), lack of participation (-3), missed conferences (-10), missed class trip or activity (-10), and not logging on to or contributing to Moodle (-2).

Class participation will be graded using the follow rubric:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| *Insightful contributions to class discussions on a daily basis | A range (90-100) |
| *Thoughtful contributions to class discussions on most days | B range (80-89) |
| *Occasional contributions to class discussions | C range (70-79) |
| *Rarely contributes to class discussions or asks questions | D range (60-69) |
| *Rarely attends class and seldom contributes to discussions | F range (0-59) |

Note: Excellent attendance is not enough to earn an A. Students who are consistently present but who rarely contribute to discussion may receive a "C" or lower grade according to the scale above.

Communication. Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment. Most emails will be answered within 24 hours of their receipt (except those sent during the weekend), but do not expect an *immediate* response to *any* email, especially those sent between 8pm and 8am. I am happy to respond in conference or in writing to drafts received more than 48 hours before the due date within 24 hours of their receipt. Drafts submitted within 48 hours of the due date **will only receive** feedback in conference if my schedule permits.

Conferences. Throughout the semester, I will hold periodic conferences with portions of you to help you brainstorm for assignments, review feedback, and check your progress. Missing or being unprepared for a scheduled conference appointment will result in an unexcused absence and 10 point deduction from your participation grade.

Writing Assignments

Writing is an integral part of the learning process. Writing helps us engage ideas, retain information, and practice articulating our views on new material. However, writing is itself a process. Thus, the assignments this semester are structured to help us focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that must demonstrate the skills of analysis, interpretation and critique practiced over the course of the semester. **All written assignments must be submitted electronically prior to the class time of the due date.** Extensions must be arranged at least 1 week PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1 letter grade per day. All major written assignments must be completed and turned in under penalty of failure of the course. **Each assignment will have its own assignment sheet; these short descriptions are included for reference only.**

Moodle

If you miss class or need a handout, assignments, handouts and extra readings will be posted to the Moodle site. Consider the Moodle site as the virtual version of our in-class learning community. I also stress that you must be appropriate and respectful when using Moodle, abiding by the same guidelines for discussion as employed in class.

Weekly Responses

Responses should be thoughtful, relevant to the task at hand, exhibit knowledge of the reading and make frequent use of the text as evidence for your response, interpretation, and/or analysis. These responses are also a place for you to explore issues raised by the readings as you practice the skills of close reading, drafting, revision, and interpretation that are integral to literary studies.

Short Essay

The 4pp short essay will require you to focus on two skills vital to literary studies – close reading and interpretation.

Source Review

A source review or literature review critically summarizes previous scholarship on a particular topic. The source review will consist of a brief introductory paragraph that defines your topic and refines your thesis (think of it as a rough draft for the introduction to the research paper). Each annotated entry should include a correct MLA citation for the source followed by a paragraph that summarizes, evaluates, and analyzes your source as it relates to your project and the larger topic.

Final Essay

The **final essay** will bring to bear the skills of close reading and interpretation in an analysis of a work or works. The assignment will also involve reworking revising and extending previous writing into an 8-page essay that includes critical and scholarly sources.

Keep in Mind...

- All assigned reading and assigned activities should be completed before the scheduled class meeting unless otherwise indicated.
 - Weekly responses should be posted to Moodle by 6pm the night before.
 - Be prepared for class discussion and activities. Before each class, you should: read each selection thoughtfully, jotting down any questions that may arise; read each selection actively, making notes where helpful; and complete any required writing exercises.
 - Have your book and any required materials. If you don't have them, you will be considered absent for the day.
 - Frankly, there is a lot of reading in this course. Please know that if you choose not to keep up with the readings your performance (and grade) will suffer because you will not be able to fully grasp and exercise the principles of close reading and interpretation at the heart of our inquiry. If you do not think that you can handle the reading load, you should "investigate your options."
 - Additionally, this class will include a lot of discussion. At times, we may not see eye to eye on the political, historical, social, or textual issues under consideration. We do not have to agree, but we will hold ourselves to the *sine qua non* of academic discourse -- considered, reasoned appeal based on evidence. Thus, we will not use or condone homophobic, racist, sexist, or otherwise denigrating language in our discourse community.
 - Please refrain from using "technodawdling" during class. These things vex me and detract from the classroom atmosphere, essentially robbing your classmates of the full learning experience and thus violating the Honor Code. Leaving the classroom for repeated cell phone breaks under the guise of bathroom visits also vexes me and will result in the severe curtailment of bathroom privileges for everyone.
 - Situations can and do arise that may require adjustments to the schedule of readings, discussion, or assignments. **Therefore, this syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.**
- N.B. : Please keep a copy of all graded assignments.**

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction

- W Jan 12 Introduction; review syllabus and policies
 F Jan 14 Introduction to terms and concepts
 Bulosan, "Be American" and "Homecoming" (M)

Week 2: The Fiction of Asian America

- M Jan 17 M L King, Jr. Holiday**
 W Jan 19 Angel Island Poems; Takaki, from *Strangers from a Different Shore* (M)
 F Jan 21 Gish Jen, "Mona Gets Flipped" (M)

Week 3: Writing Diaspora

- M Jan 24 Terry Eagleton, "Culture" (M); **Library Workshop - Meet in Library**
 W Jan 26 *Farming of Bones*, Ch. 1-11; Wucker "Race and Massacre in Hispanola" (M)
 F Jan 28 *Farming of Bones*, Ch. 12-21

Week 4: Writing Diaspora

- M Jan 31 **Workshop on Paper 1**
 W Feb 2 *Farming of Bones*, Ch. 22-28
 F Feb 4 *Farming of Bones*, Ch. 29-34; Rita Dove "Parsley" (M)

Week 5: Writing Diaspora

- M Feb 7 *Farming of Bones*, Ch. 35-end; Danticat "We Are Ugly, but We Are Here" (M)
 W Feb 9 **Short Essay Due; Workshop on Source Review - Meet in Library**
 F Feb 11 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, beginning - 75; Hanna "Reassembling the Fragments" 498-501 (M)

Week 6: Writing Diaspora

- M Feb 14 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 76 - 118
 W Feb 16 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 119 - 165
 F Feb 18 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 167 - 246; Danticat, "Interview with Junot Diaz" (M)

Week 7: Defining Reality

- M Feb 21 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 247 - 307
W Feb 23 *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 311 - 335
F Feb 25 **In-class Midterm Essay Exam**

Week 8: The Challenge of Slavery

- M Feb 28 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1 - 78; Manley "Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude" (M)
W Mar 3 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 79 - 140
F Mar 5 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 141 - 201; **Source Review Due**

Week 9: Islands and Internal Colonies

- M Mar 8 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 203 - 291; "Magical Realism" (M)
W Mar 10 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 293 - 354
F Mar 12 *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 355 - 417

Week 10: Spring Break - March 14 - 18**Week 11: Islands and Internal Colonies**

- M Mar 22 *Mama Day*, to page break on p. 59; from *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel* (M)
W Mar 24 *Mama Day*, from page break on p. 59 to page break on p. 123
F Mar 26 *Mama Day*, from page break on p. 123 to page break on 183

Week 12: Reservation Blues

- M Mar 29 *Mama Day*, from 183 to page break on p. 259; from Tucker "Recover the Conjure Woman" (M)
W Mar 31 *Mama Day*, from page break on p.259 to end
F Apr 2 **Conferences on Final Paper**

Week 13: Reservation Blues

- M Apr 5 *Love Medicine*, 1 - 67; Native American Talk Stories: "Stories of the Beginning of the World"; Allen, ed. "The Woman Who Fell from the Sky," "The Beginning and the End of the World" (M)
W Apr 7 *Love Medicine*, 68 - 121
F Apr 9 *Love Medicine*, 122 - 166; Barbara Cameron, "Gee, You Don't Seem Like An Indian From the Reservation" (M)

Week 14: Reservation Blues

- M Apr 12 *Love Medicine*, 167 - 229
W Apr 14 *Love Medicine*, 230 - 297
F Apr 16 *Love Medicine*, 298 to end

Week 15: Reservation Blues

- M Apr 19 *Smoke Signals*, vii to scene 75 p. 80; Mihelich "Smoke or Signals?" (M)
W Apr 21 *Smoke Signals*, scene 76 p. 80 to end
F Apr 22 **Good Friday Recess**

Week 16: Synthesis and Reflection

- M Apr 26 *Smoke Signals*, film
W Apr 28 Synthesis and Reflection **Final Paper Due: Wednesday, April 28 @ noon**