English 373 – Contemporary Literature: Postmodernism and Its Others CRN 20606

"...[E]ducation can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor" – bell hooks

Spring 2010
Professor Rychetta Watkins
Office 311 Palmer
Office Phone: 843-3445

Office Hours: M & W 3:30-4:30
T & Th 11 – 12:30
Email: watkinsr@rhodes.edu

Required Texts:
Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon
Zadie Smith, White Teeth
Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid’s Tale
David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly

Ishmael Reed, Mumbo Jumbo
Kazuo Ishiguro, Remains of the Day
Jessica Hagedorn, Dogeaters

Please Bookmark:
Oxford English Dictionary: www.oed.edu
MLA Formatting and Style Guides:
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/

Course Description:
In this course, we will trace the decline of empire colonialism and the rise of neo-imperialism and globalization in a selection of post-WWII novels to consider how modern constructions of “nation,” “development,” “history,” “identity” and “self” are interrogated and revised in texts from a range of approaches from postmodern to post-colonial, feminist, and the literature of globalization. We will begin by situating postmodernism, which the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines as “a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning,” as a reengagement with, rather than a departure from, modernism. We will then consider how subsequent texts critique postmodernisms’ reification of unifying narratives of the self and the state in response to the rapidly changing social, political and economic landscape of the second half of the 20th century.

Course goals and objectives
The goal of any liberal arts curriculum is to create a well-rounded student who has developed an array of interpretive, analytical and critical thinking skills that will enable lifelong learning.

--Encourage contextual literary analysis. Understand the texts in relationship to relevant literary, social, historical, and political antecedents.
--Develop an appreciation for contemporary literature written in English.
--Further develop the skills of close reading, textual analysis, and the wise use of scholarly sources to formulate, develop, and communicate written arguments about literature.
--Use the principles of literary study to develop incisive interpretations that grow out of individual insights. Likewise, practice developing our individual “voice” to respond to texts imaginatively, thoughtfully, and effectively.
--Further develop the ability to develop an insightful and engaging interpretive argument; plan, draft, and revise an essay length writing project; and develop the ability to consistently produce clear, concise, focused, thoughtful prose.

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 the literature of this period. At the end of the semester, we will all pause to consider whether these objectives have been met and consider strategies to consolidate our strengths and develop our weaknesses.
**Grade Components**

- Participation and attendance: 20%
- 10 Written Responses: 20% (250-400 words)
- Short paper and revision: 20%
- Final Paper Project: 10%
- Source Analysis: 10%

**Final Draft - 12pp**

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**Guidelines for Our Response 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, documented death or serious illness of immediate family members, and school related travel that has been previously documented will be excused. If your absence is excused, you will be allowed one week to make up any in-class assignments you may have missed. Students who have missed class time should first, get notes from a classmate, then 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. You are expected to contribute regularly and significantly thru in class discussion and written responses. We are striving to build a response and learning community based on our shared understandings of the texts we encounter, and this community is incomplete without your thoughtful contributions. You will begin the semester with 100 participation and attendance points. These points may be reduced for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to: unexcused absences beyond three (-5), chronic lateness--more than three (-3), lack of participation(-3), missed conferences(-10), and not logging on to or contributing to Moodle(-1).

**Communication**

Your success is important to me. Please visit my office hours if you have questions or concerns about a reading or assignment. Additionally, I will answer most emails 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 orally 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 may receive oral feedback schedule permitting.

**Writing Assignments**

Writing is an integral part of the learning process that helps you to engage ideas, increase retention, and practice articulating your views in relationship to new material. However, writing is itself a process. Thus, the assignments this semester are structured to help you focus in on particular aspects of this process, culminating in a final essay that requires you to draw on the skills of analysis, interpretation, and critique practiced over the course of the semester.

**Keep in mind:** Extensions must be arranged PRIOR to the assignment due date. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 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.

**Written Responses**

Each response should begin with an original, analytical question that frames your topic. In 250 to 400 words (unless otherwise indicated), the entry should address the issues raised by the question, making frequent use of the text as evidence for your response, interpretation, and analysis. Responses should be thoughtful, relevant to the task at hand, and should exhibit a knowledge of the reading, making frequent use of the text as
evidence for your response, interpretation, and analysis.

Short Essay
The short essay requires students to focus on skills vital to literary studies – close reading, analysis, and research.

Long Essay
The final essay will bring to bear the skills of close reading, analysis, and research to offer a coherent interpretation of a text. The paper should be 12 pages and must include a bibliography that contains at least 8 outside sources not included in your readings this semester. The essay should be fundamentally analytic, positing a thesis that draws on a particular critical or theoretical approach to build a sound critical interpretation of the text.

Conferences
I will hold conferences at several points during the semester to discuss your individual progress in the course and on your writing assignments. Missing or being unprepared for a scheduled conference appointment will result in an unexcused absence and 5-point deduction from your paper grade.

Keep in Mind... 
- 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 in the modular building behind McCoy Theatre, 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 843-3994.

  • All assigned reading should be completed before the scheduled class meeting. In order to be prepared for class discussion, you should: read each selection thoughtfully, jotting down any questions that may arise; read each selection actively, making notes where helpful; and reflect on the discussion questions.

  • 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 cell phones, texting, emailing, myspacing, warring, facebooking or whatever 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.

N.B.: Please keep a copy of all graded assignments.

Schedule of Readings (THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT MY DISCRETION.)
Week 1: Introduction
W Jan 13 Introduction; review syllabus and policies; “Postmodernism”

Week 2: Postmodernism
M Jan 18 M L King, Jr. Holiday

Week 3: Postmodernism and Feminism
M Jan 25 The Handmaid’s Tale, Atwood (to 90); Tolan, “Feminisms”
W Jan 27 The Handmaid’s Tale, Atwood (to 161)

Week 4: Postmodernism and Feminism
M Feb 1 The Handmaid’s Tale, Atwood (to 161); Keller, “Feminism, Science and Postmodernism”
W Feb 3 The Handmaid’s Tale, Atwood (to 266)
Week 5: Black Postmodernism
M Feb 8 Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed (to 18); Gates, “The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifying”
W Feb 10 Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed (to 28)

Week 6: Black Postmodernism
M Feb 15 Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed (to 51); Paper 1 Due
W Feb 17 Mumbo Jumbo, Ishmael Reed (to end); Dubey, “Contemporary African American Fiction and the Politics of Postmodernism”

Week 7: Black Postmodernism and Feminism
M Feb 22 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to 55, C1-2); Morrison, “Black Matter(s)”
W Feb 24 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to 89, C3)

Week 8: Black Postmodernism and Feminism
M Mar 1 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to 172, C4-7); Baker, “Belief, Theory, and Blues”
W Mar 3 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to 216, C8-9)

Week 9: Black Postmodernism and Feminism
M Mar 8 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to 285, C10-11); Paper 1 Revision Due
W Mar 10 Song of Solomon, Toni Morrison (to end)

Week 10: Spring Break - March 13 - 21

Week 11: Post-colonialism
M Mar 22 The Remains of The Day, Kazuo Ishiguro (to 141, Prologue through Day Three); Tamaya, “Ishiguro’s ‘Remains of the Day’: The Empire Strikes Back”
W Mar 24 The Remains of The Day, Kazuo Ishiguro (20 245, Day Three though end); Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, “Re-placing Theory: Post-colonial Writing and Literary Theory”
Final Paper Proposal Due

Week 12: Post-postcolonialism
M Mar 29 White Teeth, Zadie Smith (C1-6); Wood, “The Smallness of the ‘Big’ Novel I”
W Mar 31 White Teeth, Zadie Smith (C7-10)

Week 13: Post-postcolonialism
M Apr 5 Research Colloquium Day; Source Analysis Due
W Apr 7 White Teeth, Zadie Smith (C11-15); Moss, “Politics of Everyday Hybridity”

Week 14: Transnationalism
M Apr 12 White Teeth, Zadie Smith (C16-end)
W Apr 14 Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn (to 89); Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern”

Week 15: Transnationalism
M Apr 19 Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn (to 152); Lowe, “Decolonization, Displacement, Disidentification: Writing and the Question of History”
W Apr 21 Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn (to end)

Week 16: Gender, Sexuality and Transnationalism
M Apr 26 M. Butterfly, David Henry Hwang (all); Lye, “M. Butterfly and the Rhetoric of Antessentialism”
W Apr 28 Course wrap-up and Conclusion

Final Paper Due: May 3 @ 5pm

Response Portfolio Due: April 28