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ENGL 151-06, Basic Writing, Spring 1999

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**Words, Icons, Roles and Clips [W.I.R.C.]:
Representations of Power**

English 151: Rhodes College/ Spring 99

Instructor: Dr. Rob Canfield
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Required Texts:

The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Expository Prose. Ninth Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996.

Chipp, Herschel B. *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book for Artists and Critics*. Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 1968.

Cesaire, Aime. *A Tempest*. Richard Miller, trans. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969.

Friel, Brian. *Translations*. Boston, MA: Faber & Faber, 1981.

Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horseman*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

- Other readings will be assigned during the first unit of the course and will be distributed during class.

Overview:

The central project of this course, traditionally, is to teach students to write more effectively, to identify and mimic rhetorical strategies employed by the Great Orators, and to imbibe what academics have termed “the best of what has been thought and said.” In some senses, this is the objective of this course as well. Yet, rather than just analyze rhetorical formulae and hone our syllogisms, students in this course will be asked to invade the enthymeme at the heart of such traditional curriculum and inquire into the various implications of cultural work (or, WIRC), from epistles, eulogies, polemics, treatises, manifestos and satires to artistic representations to dramatic scripts to cinematic spectacles. Students will be asked to collectively interpret these culture texts in light of a central theme: **Representations of Power**, and in light of the diverse critical perspectives employed by cultural critics. Working through a series of critical arguments, the course asks students to develop crucial skills in critical thinking and persuasive interpretation by allowing them to engage in the foundational ideologies, central concepts, and current debates that comprise our own roles in the *teatrum mundi*.

Course Breakdown:

The course is divided into three main arenas of inquiry: expository prose, artistic imagings, and theater/film. Each unit includes at least one writing assignment to capitalize upon discussions, moving from initial writings that promote critical “brooding” to close readings, intertextual readings, contextual readings, and finally literary critique. The assignments will include peer reviews, conference workshops, and an oral presentation of research materials.

Unit 1: From Rhetorical Triangles to Critical Sites

The first unit invites students to engage cultural expression via the expository essay form, reading a variety of discursive acts from Pericles to Paul, Castro to Chief Seattle. Beginning with Aristotle, students will inquire into both the rhetorical mechanisms of a text and its ideological implications. Readings have been arranged in terms of rubrics of Power, from the cultural functions of the eulogy to patriachal figurations to master-scripts to resistance (w)ritings. Assignments include a critical brood (10%) and two critical analyses (10%, !5%).

Unit 2: Talking Pictures: The Ideology of Iconography

In this unit students will transfer their critical gaze to the work of visual art, “reading” a variety of artistic texts for their ideological implications and discussing a series of essays by artists concerning the role of art in cultural production. Readings will include epistolary exerpts and critical essays from VanGogh, Giacometti, Paul Strand, Henry Moore, Otto Dix, Matisse, Manet, Breton, Trotsky, Mexican Muralists, Munch et al. Students will pursue the contextual implications of a chosen artist, work, or artistic movement in their own documented critical arguments (20%) after having worked through ideas and research in an open forum that promotes collaborative exploration (oral presentation part of 20%).

Unit 3: Master-Scripts and Counter-Clips: The Stage/Set as a Site of Struggle

In the final unit of the course, students will make another critical shift from the power of the visual image to the theatrical in an attempt to unpack the role of drama and cinema in cultural work. Moving from the thesis-driven expository mode to the interpretation of thematic (or, tropic) representation, students will read four plays and view two films that center on some of the critical problematics we’ve raised throughout the semester. Irish playwright Brian Friel, Antillean playwright Aime Cesaire, South African playwright Athol Fugard, and Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka will be juxtaposed with Cuban cineaste T.G. Alea’s *Fresa y chocolate* and Michael Apted’s *Incident at Ogalala* . Students will be asked to write a final intertextual argument (20%) that promotes comparatist sensibilities as the course closes.

Course Policies:

- Never miss class. Given our quick pace and heated discussions, absence will not only make my heart grow colder, it will also leave you in the proverbial lurch as you attempt to write. Students are expected to be on time and *prepared* for each discussion, save the two absences allowed by the Law.
- Never turn in late papers. Since I tend to comment a great deal on papers, a batch can take up to 10 days to grade and return. Late papers set that back considerably, and often skew the entire process. Don't skew me, therefore. Papers are due on the assigned date at the beginning of class.
- Grading is conducted on a 15 point system: 15 = Aplus; 1= Fminus. I have found that the most effective grading system assumes that students begin with a 0, and then earn their way to a fully persuasive and powerful essay, rather than the current belief that students begin with an Aplus and then are demerited from there. I view the C grade as an evaluation of adequate/average/o.k., and the A grade as exemplary/brilliant/fully developed/revised/edited/etc. I also grade on improvement, however, so don't abandon hope should you have problems early on. All course work must be submitted in order to receive a grade higher than an F for the course . . . so, never skip an assignment.
- I expect all technology to run magically and without hindrance. Please do not scapegoat your printer, your hard drive, or your power source. Get me your paper even if it means that you stoop to the archaic level of the typewriter.
- As this course depends upon discussion, students are, again, expected to be prepared for each class. This means not only perusing a text once, but perhaps conducting a second reading before class, preparing questions, comments, interpretations, and even a working thesis. Should students come unprepared, we will cancel class, and you will miss out on the discussion before writing. Moreover, students are expected to demonstrate respect while discussing these often intense issues, and to refrain from attempting to clarify my ideological positionality. Remember that my role is often that of advocate, even agitator. I'll instigate; you interpret.
- During conferences and research times, students are expected to be either in the library or in another similar site of academic engagement. Please do not form roving bands of brigands if we have cancelled class. It scares the townspeople.

Daily Calendar:

Jan. 14: Begin discussing general theme of course. Introductions. Read Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book I, ch. 1-4; Book II, ch. 1-11, 19-25.

Jan. 19: Discuss Aristotle and cultural critical triangle.

Jan. 21: Discuss Aristotle and Selassie's Address to the U.N.

Unit 1: Powerful Words.

Jan. 26-28: Power of Death. Read and Discuss.

Thucydides, "Pericles Funeral Oration"
Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" and "Second Inaugural Address"
Padraic Pearse, "At the Grave of O'Donovan Rossa"
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, "On the Fear of Death"
Ken Saro-Wiwa, "Eulogy"

Feb. 2-4: Power of Property. Read and Discuss.

John Locke, selections from *Second Treatise*
Alexis de Tocqueville, selections from *Notebooks*
Upton Sinclair, "Chicago Slaughterhouse"
Anthony Burgess, "Is America Falling Apart?"
Karl Marx, selections from *The German Ideology*

Feb. 9-11: Power of Patriarchy. Read and Discuss.

Freud, selections from "Civilization and Its Discontents"
Paul, *I Corinthians*
Wolstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Woman"
Toni Morrison, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech"
Angela Carter, "On Pornography"
Jayne Cortez, "Rape"

Assign Critical Argument #1: Choose one of the discursive acts we have discussed and interpret. 5-7 pages. Due Feb. 23.

Feb. 23-25: Power of Mastery. Read and Discuss.

Thucydides, "Mytilinean Debate" and "Melian Dialogue"
George Fitzhugh, "Slaves without Masters"
Andrew Jackson, "On Indian Removal"
Thomas Carlyle, selections from *Past and Present*
Caesar, selections from *Conquest of Gaul*

March 2-4: Power of Resistance. Read and Discuss.

Castro, "Words to the Intellectuals"
MLK, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
Chief Seattle, "Letter to President Pierce" and "Address"
Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

Assign Critical Argument #2: Choose two of the essays we have examined and interpret them in light of each other. 5-7 pages. Due Mar. 16.

Mar. 5-15: Spring Break. Get to an Art Museum. Read selections from Chipp.

Unit 2: Powerful Images

Mar. 16-18: Read and discuss selections from Chipp. Begin to decide research pursuits.

Mar. 23-25: Group research in library. Classes cancelled.

Mar. 30-April 6: Group Presentations. [Easter break]. Documented Critical Argument due April 8. 7-10 pages.

Unit 3: Powerful Roles.

April 8: Césaire's *A Tempest*.

April 13: Fugard's *Master Harold*.

April 15: Friel's *Translations*.

April 20: Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

April 22-29: Film viewings. [schedule TBA]. Classes cancelled.

May 3: Final paper due. Intertextual analysis of two of the texts in Unit 3. 5-7 pages.