

English 086: Critical Approaches to Literature:

ENGS 086 A: 10:00-11:15pm, T/R, Billings MLK

ENGS 086B: 11:30-12:45 PM, T/R., Hills 234

Course Description:

What is literature? How and why do we read it? What factors control our interpretation of the texts we read before we've even finished the first page? What does it mean to study literature? This course will examine these questions and more through a number of theoretical approaches to the study of literature, and in particular Michael Ondaatje's novel In the Skin of a Lion and Jacques Poulin's Volkswagen Blues. By looking at both of these texts through the lenses of postmodernist and postcolonial theory, the literary institution, and the history of books and the teaching of literature, we will examine many of the key factors that profoundly shape our readings of these texts.

Required Texts:

Culler, Jonathan. Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford UP 1997

Richter, David. Falling into Theory. 2nd edition. Bedford St. Martins. 2000

Poulin, Jacques. Volkswagen Blues. Cormorant Books, 2002

Ondaatje, Michael. In the Skin of a Lion. Vintage

Course blog

Publicly accessible, this blog has already been used by my past English 086 classes since Fall 04 and we'll be adding to that over the term. Check the blog regularly for updates on readings, for online discussion assignments, and some of the links related stories and sites that each of us discover online over the course of the term. Your contributions to the blog will count for 10% of your grade.

Assignments

- Response paper (500 words) 10% (Feb 12)
- Midterm exam 15% (Date February 26)
- Term paper (1200 words) 25% (April 23)
- Blog responses (each response due within one week of the discussion prompt) 10%
- Participation (in class and online) 10%
- Final exam 30%

Tentative Schedule

Jan 13-15: Introduction; The study of "œEnglish" and its functions; Richter 1 - 48

Jan. 20-22: Essays by Eagleton & Viswanathan (1/20); Freire, Hooks, and Barthes (1/22)

Jan. 27-29: Ohmann, Menand, & Scholes (1/27); the canon (Richter 121-136), essays by Tompkins and Robinson (1/29)

Feb 3-5: What is literature? What is theory? Culler 1-54;

Feb 10-12: Culler 55-120; **Response paper due (Feb 12)**

Feb. 17-19: Ondaatje: In the Skin of a Lion (Have the novel read by Feb 17); intro to postmodernism

Feb 24-26: In the Skin of a Lion **MIDTERM 2/26**

March 3- NO CLASS (TOWN MEETING DAY)

March 5: No class (conference)

March 9-13: Spring Recess

March 17-19: In the Skin of A Lion

March 24-26: Critical approaches to In the Skin of A Lion

March 31-April 2: Readings from online reserve; Postcolonialism

April 7-9: How we read: Richter 235 - 267; 301-339

April 14-16: Poulin, Volkswagen Blues (have the entire book read by April 14)

April 21-23: Volkswagen Blues **TERM PAPER DUE APRIL 23**

April 28: The future of "English" (Readings from Richter: Guillory and Bloom)

ENGS 086 A Final exam: 08:00 AM - 11:00 AM, Friday May, 01 2009; BLLNGS MLK

ENGS 086 B Final exam: 08:00 AM - 11:00 AM, Thursday May, 07 2009; HILLS 234

LATE POLICY:

Late assignments will be penalized one grade increment per day past the assigned deadline, unless accompanied by a doctor's note outlining medical reasons for the delay. Extensions are available, but must be requested in writing one week in advance of the original due date.

Participation and blog grades:

Here's the rubric for how I determine grades for your participation and for blog assignments (if applicable)

Participation

A: Nearly 100% attendance, unless due to illness or family emergency AND active participation in class. Clearly on top of the reading and regularly speaks in class. Always engaged in the discussion, whether vocally contributing or not.

B: Missed very few classes (2 or 3 max), unless due to illness or family emergency. Participated in class vocally on a fairly regular basis, but, more importantly, is always listening and attentive to the ongoing discussion. Unprepared for class occasionally, but usually caught up on the reading and willing to contribute.

C: Misses more than three classes for reasons other than illness or family emergency. Clearly behind in the reading on at least several occasions. Mostly attentive and speaks in class several times over the course of the semester. Makes a good effort to stay involved in class discussion and appears interested.

D: Regularly missing from class and/or frequently appears disinterested. Routinely behind on reading and fails to bring books to class. Leaves class from time to time to take phone calls thinking that the professor thinks they are using the restroom, continually passes notes back and forth with someone else, works on other homework or reads the newspaper during class, checks

e-mail or text messages while instructor or classmates are speaking, all of which, I should add, are apparent to the instructor and your classmates and immediately qualify you for a D.

F: Attendance and participation not worthy of a D or higher. Failure to attend most classes and/or to participate in any meaningful way.

Blogs

A: To earn an A on the blog component of the course all assignments must have been completed and comments posted by the assigned deadline (in this case, within one week of the date of the blog posting). Comments are thoughtful, fully answer the question asked, and, if specified, take into account the comments of other students.

B: All assignments completed, mostly on time. Thoughtful comments, though perhaps briefer and less engaging than those that merit an A.

C: Most assignments completed, primarily at the end of the semester and/or comments are short, perfunctory answers to the blog prompt with little consideration of the comments of others.

D: Only partial completion of the assignments and comments show little commitment to making a contribution to the discussion.

F: Failure to complete more than 50% of the assigned blog questions.

N.B. Late assignments will be penalized one grade increment per day past the assigned deadline, unless accompanied by a doctor's note outlining medical reasons for the delay. Extensions are available, but must be requested in writing no later than one week in advance of the original due date. There are no exceptions.

Academic integrity

Offenses against the Code of Academic Integrity are deemed serious and insult the integrity of the entire academic community. Any suspected violations of the code are taken very seriously and will be forwarded to the Center for Student Ethics & Standards for further investigation.