

ENGL 390
Junior Seminar
Spring 2003

Dr. Bruce Mills

Office: Near a ketchup stain in the east half of the Quad Stop
Office Hours: 10:30-12 and 3-4:30 T, 2-3:30 W,
10:30-12 Th, and by appointment

Office: 337-7037

Home: 345-8508

bmills@kzoo.edu

Reflecting on the “conditions of creativity,” psychologist and educator Jerome Bruner writes that a creative endeavor can be seen as an “act that produces effective surprise” (*On Knowing* 18). He later speculates that “all the forms of effective surprise grow out of combinatorial activity—a placing of things in new perspectives” (20). For most of us, this way of understanding creativity and the creative life has the ring of common sense. When we enter into or travel to new places and situations, when we meet new people beyond the familiar landscape of our own memories and histories, and when we see “old” places through the lens of new perspectives, we feel the estranging chaos and exhilarating wonder of such surprise. Perhaps, then, we can see our various journeys as representing acts of creation as well as calling for creative acts. This course takes as its focus these transformative moments of “first contact,” of border-crossings and returns, of voyages out and voyages back. It will consider experiences, texts, and questions that try to make sense of and give order to unsettling shifts from old to new ways of knowing.

In addition to course content that invites a deeper and more creative understanding of your own experiences (in the context of very unsettling world events), the class seeks to orient you as English majors to the “journey” of the next academic year. Thus, our discussion, reading, and writing should also provide a solid foundation from which to travel forth as rising seniors.

QUESTIONS

In relation to the readings of the course, keep in mind the following questions:

- What is the nature of the chaos that ensues from the various journeys? In both content and form, how does the author choose to embody the thematic tension between the old and new, between familiar ways of knowing and unfamiliar cultural realities and expectations?
- How do the texts represent the “other”? To what extent do they reflect a receptivity to and/or discomfort with a “foreign” place or people? What scenes or incidents embody representative moments of contact and how do their rendering in style/form make them especially emblematic?
- What literary, historical, and cultural information deepens and/or complicates a reading of these contact or journey narratives?
- To what extent does the text reveal the central role of the imagination in mediating tensions? Explicitly or implicitly, does the text offer a “definition” of the imagination or of the particular power of creativity, of language, of storytelling? How might such definitions vary between authors, texts, time periods, and cultural contexts?

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In addressing various thematic issues, we will be guided by these course goals. We will seek to:

- Practice and refine close-reading and essay-construction skills
- Develop an understanding of selected literary periods or movements and their place in literary history
- Develop an ability to enrich analyses of texts by incorporating literary, historical, and/or cultural contexts
- Reflect on and articulate personal reading practices and theoretical orientations
- Understand selected critical perspectives and their place in a historical survey of literary criticism
- Develop authority as critical/creative writers through expanding skills in locating, integrating, and citing secondary sources

TEXTS

Booker, *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*
Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*
Morrison, *Beloved*
O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*
Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers
Two Course Packets (1 Resources; 2/3 Comps and Reflection Essay)

POLICIES

Department Attendance Policy:

The English Department believes that education depends on a relationship between students, teachers, and language. Because we know that we can engage more deeply in the reading and writing processes collectively than individually, we do our best to establish conditions in which community can grow in our classes. This project cannot succeed without the participation of all members. Consequently, we support each faculty member's right and obligation to establish strict guidelines for attendance and participation in all courses in our department.

Attendance, Promptness, and Participation:

I have been in classes both as a student and teacher where one person's contribution or one day's discussion transformed the community. Seemingly small gestures create meaningful shifts in understanding and commitment. For this reason, it is essential that you attend class and arrive on time. More than two absences (or 10% of the class meetings) for any reason except officially documented illness will lower your final grade by one third for each class period missed (i.e., A- to B+, B to B-). Illness must be documented by the Health Center or your personal physician/health practitioner, the Counseling Center, or the Dean of Students' Office. I reserve the right to lower final grades for consistent lateness (being late for class more than twice). I also reserve the right to raise grades one third, however, for any combination of the following: consistently constructive participation, consistently high level of preparation, and especially constructive leadership in group activities.

Deadlines:

Unless I have indicated differently on the reading schedule or you have negotiated an extension with me, papers should be submitted by no later than 5 pm on the agreed upon due dates. Writing assignments will be dropped one third for each day late. (Weekend days do count.) Extensions must be requested at least two days in advance of the deadline unless I have been officially notified of a medical or family emergency. All work must be completed to pass the class.

Plagiarism:

In this course, we all (students and teacher) will be held accountable to the College Honor System. If another's ideas or words enter a writing or presentation, they must be acknowledged. Incidents of plagiarism will be reported to the Student Development Office and result in failure on the individual assignment or, in egregious cases, failure for the class. Please talk with me if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to cite material. Use MLA style when citing research materials.

Disabilities:

Any student with a disability that requires special accommodation or other assistance please make an appointment with me within the first week of the quarter.

REQUIREMENTS

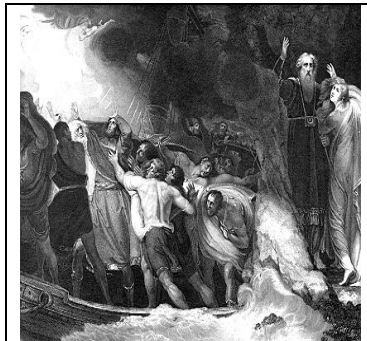
Reflection Essay (6-8 pages)		15
Research Essay (10-12 pages)		35
Prospectus	5	
Annotated Bibliography	10	
Final Draft	20	
Midterm (20) and Final (20)		40
Participation		<u>10</u>
		100 total points

More about the requirements:

Reflection Essay (6-8 pages): In part, the various transitional experiences embodied in your junior year invite a fuller understanding of your interest in and commitment to the study of literature and writing. To give shape to this understanding, you will be asked to reflect on central experiences (curricular and extracurricular) and thus to work toward a clearer sense of the critical, philosophical framework that guides your critical and/or creative work. *Due by 5 pm on Friday of 6th week (May 9).*

Research Essay (10-12 pages): At this point in your major, you should be ready to enter into a broader conversation regarding a particular writer, literary period, matters of fictional or poetic craft, etc. This essay asks that you select a topic that enables you to engage in a question or issue of particular interest and that you synthesize your own textual analysis with the voices of other critics and writers. I encourage you to think of this work as contributing in some way to your SIP. For instance, if you are planning to do a study of a specific novelist, you could focus this paper on a text that may form a central part of your larger project. If you are considering a creative SIP such as a collection of poetry or short fiction, you could envision this essay as a preface or part of a preface to your work. That is, you could explore key aspects of poetic and fictional craft and how an influential writer (and critical assessments of this writer) clarify important questions or issues. *Due by 5 pm on Friday of 10th week (June 6).*

Midterm and Final: In your senior spring, you will be asked to demonstrate essay-construction skills as well as an ability to integrate close reading of selected texts within particular historical/literary/cultural contexts. To hone these writing skills, help broaden an understanding of literary history, and help develop the ability to consider the relationship between texts and their various contexts, this class will require the completion of a midterm and final modeled after the comprehensive exam format. Course readings and discussion will focus on two literary periods (and thus involve some consideration of definitive features of those periods). The midterm is currently scheduled for Thursday, May 1. Final exam times are Monday, June 9 from 1-4 pm (12:40 section) and Wednesday, June 11 from 1-4 pm (8:30 section).



Reading Schedule

In addition to the assignments noted below, you should also be ready for supplementary reading from Booker, from the accompanying material in the editions of *The Tempest*, *The Interesting Narrative in the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, and *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, and an occasional handout. This flexibility will allow us to focus on particular interests, issues, and theoretical perspectives that may be of more relevance to a text and/or our evolving discussion of it.

I. Journey Narratives—The Dramas of Otherness

Week 1

- 4/1 Introduction
Key Issues/Questions/Goals
- 4/3 Contact Narratives
The Tempest (Introduction and Acts I-II 3-50)

Week 2

- 4/8 Guest: Amy Smith
The Tempest (Acts III-V)
“Why Study Critical Controversies about *The Tempest*?” (*Tempest* 91-115)
“The New Criticism” (Booker 13-23)
- 4/10 *The Tempest*
Brown, “‘This Thing Darkness I Acknowledge Mine’:
The Tempest and the Discourse of Colonialism” (*Tempest* 203-229)
Prospectus for research essay due by 5 pm on Friday, April 11

Week 3

- 4/15 Guest: Amelia Katanski
The Sovereignty and Goodness of God (63-112)
- 4/17 *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (Introduction 1-55)

Week 4

- 4/22 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (Intro/Chaps. 1-6, 1-23, 33-115)
- 4/24 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (Chaps. 7-12, 115-96)
Preliminary Bibliography (with questions/concerns) due by 5 pm, Friday, April 25

Week 5

- 4/29 Research Session
Review
- 5/1 **Midterm Exam**
- 5/3 Poetry Hop (See schedule)

II. Inward Journeys—Memory, History, and Healing

Week 6

- 5/6 selected poems
- 5/8 Guest: Diane Seuss
selected poems
Reflection Essay Due by noon on Friday, May 9
Hilberry Symposium: May 9-10

Week 7

- 5/13 *Beloved* (Book 1, 3-165)
- 5/15 *Beloved* (Book 2, 169-235)
Annotated Bibliography due by 5 pm on Friday, May 15

Week 8

- 5/20 *Beloved* (Book 3, 239-75)
Perez-Torres, “Knitting and Knotting the Narrative Thread—
Beloved as a Postmodern Novel” (Handout)
- 5/22 *The Things They Carried* (To be announced)

Week 9

- 5/27 *The Things They Carried* (TBA)
- 5/29 *The Things They Carried* (TBA)

Week 10

- 6/3 To be announced
- 6/5 Conclusions
Research Paper due by 5 pm on Friday, June 6

Finals Week

Final Exam Times

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| Monday, June 9 (1-4 pm) | Section 2 (12:40-2:30) |
| Wednesday, June 11 (1-4 pm) | Section 1 (8:30-10:20) |