ENG 4775 001: Literature Culture Theory

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We often speak of a literary text as a work of imagination, yet just as often leave unquestioned what work the imagination does and how it goes about doing that work. If such work usually proceeds in a complex, maybe even systematic way, and yields something meaningful (a poem, for example), then there is a relation among inquiry, method, and imagination in literature that’s well worth pursuing and studying.

**Required Texts:**
- William Carlos Williams, *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* and *Spring and All* from *Imaginations*
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Robert Fagles
- Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

- A *Course Packet* available in the [EIU Bookstore](http://www.eiu.edu/bookstore), in the MLK Jr. Union, containing work by Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, Kant, Coleridge, Peirce, Searle, and Damasio.

The primary focus of this course is on the relation between inquiry and imagination in poetry as it concerns both writer and reader. Speaking of inquiry, Coleridge asserted the importance of “method.” Method, he says, “becomes natural to the mind which has been accustomed to contemplate not *things* only, or for their own sake alone, but likewise and chiefly the *relations* of things, either their relations to each other, or to the observer, or to the state and apprehension of the hearers.” What is the relation between the poem and the world or experience, between poet and poem, between reader and poem? How can an understanding of these relations help us understand the function, the work, of imagination? William Carlos Williams, for example, insists that “Imagination is not to avoid reality, nor is it description nor an evocation of objects or situations; it is to say that poetry does not tamper with the world but moves it.”

We will read a variety of thinkers and writers—ancient to contemporary—who have influenced how we perceive such issues. From our close attention to specific readings, we will try to draw reasonable hypotheses concerning the shifts, changes, and differences in our ways of thinking about—and thinking with—imaginative writing.

I may incorporate D2L into this class. More on that later.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, then 1) please inform me as soon as possible, and 2) contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
Course Requirements:

1. Careful reading, engaged discussion.

2. Newspaper (recommended): Read, regularly, a newspaper or other reputable news source (sorry, the DEN doesn’t count).

3. Commentaries: Over the semester, you will write four commentaries focused on various readings and our study of them. Basically, you’ll be locating a passage, identifying why it is important in terms of the work itself and its context, and what ramifications the passage has for our continued study. More instructions to follow, but due dates are listed on the class schedule. You will submit these electronically.


5. A longer, critical, research essay, due closer to the end of the semester, focusing on one or more of the literary texts we’ll be reading and studying. This essay should be written in accordance with standard practice as described in the *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition.

6. A final, exam—probably of the take-home variety.

7. Sustained, engaged participation throughout the semester. This means more than simply being here: read like crazy, turn in assignments on time, and contribute thoughtfully and often to class discussion.

Grades & Evaluation:

1. The following percentages make up the total of the final grade: Commentaries=30%; Shorter essay=15%; Longer essay=40%; Final exam=15%.

2. You are expected to complete all, not just part, of all assigned work.

3. A brief note on academic dishonesty: cooperation among all of you is encouraged, but submitting others’ work as you own is plagiarism. And plagiarism is not tolerated. No exceptions or excuses. Plagiarism will result in an immediate failure of the course and a report filed with the Office of Student Standards.

Themes:

The English Department has recently identified a set of themes that students may choose to explore across multiple courses with the same theme. In each course, the theme may be explored differently. In this course, you may choose to design a research project that engages one of the following three themes: (1) Genre, Form & Poetics; (2) Law & Social Justice; (3) Identity & Culture.
Schedule of Meetings
[ALL CHANGES WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS]

Week 1
8/22: Introduction / Welcome / Some thoughts on where we are and where we’re heading / Begin reading Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse
8/24: William Carlos Williams, Kora in Hell: Improvisations

Week 2
8/29: Kora in Hell
8/31: Plato, selections from Republic

Week 3
9/5: selections from Republic
9/7: Aristotle, selection from Poetics

Week 4
9/12: Poetics
9/14: Sophocles, Oedipus the King
Commentary #1 due

Week 5
9/19: Oedipus the King

Week 6
9/26: Francis Bacon, from The New Organon
9/28: René Descartes, from Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences

Week 7
10/3: continued work with Descartes and Bacon
10/5: Shakespeare, The Tempest
Commentary #2 due

Week 8
10/10: The Tempest
10/12: Immanuel Kant, selections from The Critique of Pure Reason;

Week 9
10/17: The Critique of Pure Reason
10/19: Discussion – To the Lighthouse, Part 2, “Time Passes,” 125-143

10/20: Midterm paper due

Week 10
10/24: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Essays on Method” from The Friend
10/26: continued discussion of “Essays on Method”

Week 11
10/31: Charles Sanders Peirce, “On a New List of Categories”
11/2: continued discussion of “On a New List of Categories”
Commentary #3 due

Week 12
11/7: Leroy F. Searle, “From Inference to Insight: A Peircean Model of Literary Reasoning”
11/9: continued discussion of “From Inference to Insight”

Week 13
11/14: Antonio Damasio, “Living with Consciousness,” from Self Comes to Mind
11/16: continued discussion of “Living with Consciousness”
Commentary #4 due

< Thanksgiving Break >

Week 14
11/28: Discussion – To the Lighthouse, Part 3, “The Lighthouse” and entire novel
11/30: Continued discussion – To the Lighthouse

Week 15
12/5: William Carlos Williams, Spring and All
12/7: Spring and All
12/8: Final Paper Due

Final Exam: Monday, 11 December, 10:15 am-12:15 pm