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ENG 4300-4390-002_098: Senior Seminar: Authors and Authorship

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Senior Seminar: Authors and Authorship
English 4300—Spring, 2007

Instructor: Tim Engles
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Office hours (Coleman 3831): Tues & Thurs, 5:00 – 6:00, and by appointment
Course listserv: 4300s07@lists.eiu.edu

Course Description:

We will begin with an historical overview of the notion of authorship, then venture through and beyond 20th-Century declarations of "The Death of the Author." Our journey will take us down many related paths of inquiry, such as the following: How do we receive or register different authors in relation to their texts? Are differently raced, classed, and gendered authors perceived differently? Do some types of authors have more implicit "authority" than others? How do we read characters in relation to their authors? What happens when authors of fictional texts insert their apparently real selves into those texts? Why are we so much more likely to identify fiction with one authorial figure than we are movies with one writer or director?

We will examine significant primary and secondary texts that are centrally concerned with such issues. More specifically, we will address these issues by using critical and theoretical texts as aids to interpreting literary texts—and vice versa. Students will emerge from this course with a solid grounding in established and recent modes of scholarly inquiry into the complex connections between authors and their works. The course will be organized as a conversation on these matters, with your daily participation central to our work. (Therefore, the rule regarding attendance is simple: be here. If you have more than three absences this semester, your course grade will drop a full letter grade for each absence beyond four.)

Required Texts from Textbook Rental:

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own
Michael Collins, Death of a Writer
Percival Everett, Erasure
Tim O'Brien, In the Lake of the Woods
Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts
Art Spiegelman, Maus (volumes I and II)
Course Requirements:

1. **Written response and oral presentation**: Each seminar member will choose one of the readings listed on our Daily Schedule and write a one-page, single-spaced response/review. This written response will be duplicated and handed out to each of us on the day of your presentation, and it will function as your guidelines for leading class discussion of the piece for a significant portion of the session. Suggestions: you could focus attention on a problem or set of problems, and the writer's apparent solution(s); or make connections, within the text, and/or with others; zero in on a significant or surprising aspect of the text. The written response should end with at least one question for which the answer is, as you see it, a key to understanding something significant about the text. You might find it helpful to include reference to outside writings related to the day's reading, but this is not required. Don't plan on talking by yourself for long—your primary goal is to stimulate discussion. After the discussion of the day's reading, you will then revise your response (into something no more than two pages, single spaced) to include your reaction to how well the class discussion went, and how it changed (and/or verified) your response. This revision will be due one week after the in-class presentation. (15%)

2. **5-7 page critical essay**: This paper will focus on notions of authorship as portrayed in any one of the writings listed on the first half of our syllabus. Like the longer essay, this one will follow traditional conventions for literary scholarship (e.g., unity, coherence, proper formatting and MLA-style documentation, and so on). You are also allowed (but no, not required) to read, consider, and perhaps incorporate other work, either or by this writer or others. As with the longer essay, you are welcome at any point to discuss your ideas (or lack thereof) with me. (20%)

3. **10-15+ pages research essay**: This paper will focus on one of the texts on our syllabus and another of your choosing, with my prior approval. The topic is open, as long as it relates directly to some of our readings and discussions and to the topic of authorship; a 250-400 word proposal will be required beforehand. The paper must reflect your close attention to and understanding of key insights and interpretive concepts that will have arisen throughout the semester. (30%)

4. **A bit more about essays**: All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due, whether the student is in class or not. Late-paper penalty: fifteen points for each day late.

5. **A final, take-home exam** (20%)

6. **Active, thoughtful class participation**: I will not deliver lectures in this class; because we will proceed in a seminar format, we must contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Doing so will call for your careful concentration before class on each assigned reading, and your
willingness to share your thoughts, questions, and feelings with others about what you read and hear. Occasional reading quizzes will constitute a major portion of this part of your final grade. (15%)

Other Matters:

E-mail activity: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently for messages pertaining to the course. E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Using e-mail is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message (write to tdengles@eiu.edu) by Friday, January 12 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, 1) identify which course you are in (English 4300); 2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your career aspirations, and 3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and requirements.

Academic honesty: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility (once again) to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”
ENGLISH 4300: DAILY SCHEDULE

This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading and writing assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate book or books to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day’s reading assignment may be marked absent.

T JAN 9  Introduction to the course and to each other; in-class reading: Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I” (1956)

R JAN 11  Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” (handout from Tuesday)

F JAN 12  By 5 p.m. today, carefully read the policies and procedures for this course, and then:

send a message to Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu): 1) explain which course you are in (English 4300); 2) describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations; 3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the course policies and procedures; and 4) be sure that, as with all e-mail messages, you “sign” it by adding your name at the end.

T JAN 16  Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” (1969)

R JAN 18  Collins, The Death of a Writer

T JAN 23  The Death of a Writer

R JAN 25  The Death of a Writer

T JAN 30  The Death of a Writer

R FEB 1  Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926); poetry by Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen

T FEB 6  Everett, Erasure

R FEB 8  Erasure

T FEB 13  Erasure

R FEB 15  Erasure
T FEB 20  O’Brien, In the Lake of the Woods

R FEB 22  In the Lake of the Woods

T FEB 27  In the Lake of the Woods

- Paper One Due

R MAR 1  In the Lake of the Woods

T MAR 6  Woolf, A Room of One’s Own

R MAR 8  A Room of One’s Own

March 12 – March 16: Spring break!

T MAR 20  Amy Ling, “Creating One’s Self: The Eaton Sisters” (from Reading the Literatures of Asian America. 1992)

R MAR 22  Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior

T MAR 27  The Woman Warrior

R MAR 29  The Woman Warrior

T APR 3  The Woman Warrior

R APR 5  Spiegelman, Maus I and discussion of final essays

T APR 10  Maus I

R APR 12  No class meeting—conferences on final essays

T APR 17  No class meeting—conferences on final essays

R APR 19  Maus II

T APR 24  Maus II

R APR 26  Last day of class

Final Paper Due (final paper due at the beginning of class, in folder with notes, earlier drafts, and so on)

Final Exam Period: Thursday, May 3, 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.