ENG 4775-001: Studies in Literary Criticism: English Studies at the Crossroads

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Course Information:

English studies and all that comprises this field—for example, literary study and criticism, writing and composition studies, language studies, creative writing, pedagogy and curriculum—finds itself facing all sorts of complex but fundamental concerns as we make our way into the new millennium. It seems that everywhere an English major looks nowadays in newspapers, journals, and magazines, she or he is confronted by the question of the place of the humanities—for us, the study of literature, language, and writing—within rapidly changing priorities for college and university systems, within high school and community college curricula. How can or should we answer this question? It’s important because the issues are complex and the stakes high. Exploring the concerns and questions will be our errand and risking some answers will be our ambition.

Required Texts:

- Richter, Falling into Theory, 2nd ed.
- Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza
- Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk
- Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain
- Williams, Paterson
- A Course Packet of Readings (available at Copy Express)

• Recommended: a notebook, earmarked for this class, for use both in class and as a reading journal. I strongly encourage you to keep a reading journal throughout the semester.

Such an errand is ambitious; these crossroads represent a broad and varied field. We will move from broad overviews of the situation of English studies at the present time and work gradually toward more specific issues such as canon (literary history/periodization), cultural and multicultural studies (race/gender/ethnicity/class), pedagogy (what can or should be taught/preserved), and aesthetics and value. In our reading we’ll focus on, broadly speaking, American literature (although we may find ourselves rethinking the traditional sense of this term). But, these foci do not preclude critical work on composition, or creative writing, or the integration of technology in English studies, or British studies, should you wish to pursue any of these. It’s simply that the field is huge, and these foci provide just that—a means of focusing. My overall aims for this course are pretty straightforward: to read specifically, critically, and widely in the representative criticism and to bring such reading to bear upon the literary work of Williams, Anzaldúa, Du Bois, and Momaday.

Course Requirements:

1. **Written responses and oral presentations:** Each seminar member will choose two of the critical essays we’ll be reading and discussing—beginning with the Levine article in Week 3—one before midterm and one after. For each article, you will write a one-page, single-spaced, response/review of the article. Because there are more class members than articles, it may be possible for two people to work collaboratively on an article. The response/review will then function as the script for a presentation to the rest of us and will motivate our discussion of the piece. The response should end with at least one question whose answer would be, as you see it, a key to understanding the writer’s argument. The response will be duplicated and distributed to all of us. After the discussion of each article, you will then write a brief (no more than one-page, single-spaced) revision of your response, focusing on how class discussion changed (or verified) your response, due one week after the actual presentation. (25%)
2. **A 5-7 page critical essay** focusing on two of the critics and their articles which we have read up to midterm. In this paper you'll focus on points of contact, convergence and divergence in their arguments concerning the place, situation, problems, opportunities of English studies. Such a focus should help you develop your own working reading of, or interpretation of, how, where, and why English Studies is situated now as it is. You are also free (even encouraged!) to read and consider other work which either or both of these critics have written about this subject. Because this essay is due right after midterm, you can think of this essay as a kind of take-home midterm. (20%)

3. **A longer, critical research essay** (12-15 pages) on one or more of the literary texts (Williams, Anzaldúa, Du Bois, Momaday). This essay is due at the end of the semester. While the specific topic is open and of your choosing (in consultation with me—I will ask about and require a proposal and presentation of some kind) and the essay is one of interpretation and research, I am assuming your work will be underscored and informed by the reading and discussing we will have accomplished throughout the semester. (30%)

4. **A final (take-home) exam.** (15%)

5. Sustained, engaged, thoughtful and thorough, reading, participation, and contribution throughout the semester. Because we can proceed in a seminar format, we will rely on each other’s active involvement. (10%)

6. **Attendance policy:** Be here (see point #5 above).

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**SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

(all changes will be announced in class)

*FT = Falling into Theory*

*CP = Course Packet*

**Week 1**
8/27: Introductions; read Richer, *FT* 1-30
8/29: Richter, *FT* 121-36 & 235-52

**Week 2**
9/3: Menand, *FT* 103-10 & Scholes, *FT* 111-20

**Week 3**
9/12: Discussion of inquiry into EIU

**Week 4**

**Week 5**
9/26: *Paterson*

**Week 6**
10/1: *Paterson*
10/3: *Paterson*
Week 7
10/8: Ohmann, *FT* 89-95 & Guillory, *FT* 218-24
10/10: Sedgwick, *FT* 183-88 & hooks, *FT* 79-84

Week 8 – midterm
10/17: *Borderlands/La Frontera*

Week 9
10/22: Midterm Essay Due; *Borderlands/La Frontera*
10/24: continued discussion

Week 10

Week 11
11/5: Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
11/7: *The Souls of Black Folk*

Week 12
11/12: *The Souls of Black Folk*
11/14: Posnock, *CP* “After Identity Politics”

Week 13
11/19: Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
11/21: *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

Thanksgiving Break 11/25-29

Week 14
12/5: continued discussion

Week 15
12/10 &12: Presentation & discussion of research project

12/13: Critical Research Essay Due

Final Exam: