

Winter Quarter 2010
English 398: Critical Writing
Professor C. Allen

Office: 520 Denney
Office hours: Wed, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00
p.m. & by appointment
Office phone: 247-7988
email: allen.559@osu.edu

Focus: Re-reading the Popular Western

COURSE POLICIES & SYLLABUS

English 398 is designed to help students develop their critical reading, analysis, and writing skills for the English major. In this section of 398, we will focus on approaches to reading a number of iconic narratives of U.S. frontiers, including the first Daniel Boone narrative from the late eighteenth century, two popular “dime novels” from the mid- and late nineteenth century, and Owen Wister’s classic western novel *The Virginian* from the turn of the twentieth century. We will also look at a late twentieth-century response to these earlier, dominant representations of U.S. frontiers, the novel *Fools Crow* by the American Indian writer James Welch. Requirements include informal writing assignments as well as several formal essays, in-class workshops and exercises, a library assignment, and brief oral presentations.

Since the focus of English 398 is on developing and enhancing essential skills for the English major, we will be doing a lot of reading and a lot of writing this quarter, both inside and outside of class, in order to practice, practice, practice.

Required Texts

Brown, Bill, ed., *Reading the West: An Anthology of Dime Westerns* (Bedford Cultural Edition)
Graulich, Melody and Stephan Tatum, eds., *Reading The Virginian in the New West* (University of Nebraska Press)
Welch, James, *Fools Crow* (Penguin)
Wister, Owen, *The Virginian* (Oxford World’s Classics edition)

Books available from SBX, 1806 N. High Street (291-9528)

Other readings available through Carmen.

Useful Addresses and Phone Numbers

Department of English

Main Office, 421 Denney Hall, 292-6065
www.english.osu.edu

Undergraduate Advising for the English Major

Sharyn Talbert, 413 Denney Hall, 292-6735
talbert.2@osu.edu

Writing Center

475 Mendenhall Lab, 688-4291
www.cstw.org (on-line appointment scheduling and on-line tutorials)

Course Policies

Attendance. You should plan to attend every meeting of this class. Regular attendance is required, and I will take attendance every class period. Students who miss more than two class meetings without providing an excuse recognized by the university as legitimate (such as documented proof of a serious illness, or participation in a university-sponsored event) will have their final course grades lowered by one third of a letter grade for each unexcused absence over two. **Five or more unexcused absences are grounds for failure of the course.**

Preparing Essays. When you turn in your essay assignments you are required to 1) type or word process your essay in a readable, 12 point font, 2) double-space your text and provide one-inch margins, 3) place your name and the course number on the first page, 4) number your pages after page one and place your last name next to the number on each page, 5) title your essay, 6) edit and proofread the final version, and, for formal essays, 7) turn in *all required drafts* with the final version of your essay. **NOTE: Formal essays will not be accepted for grading unless accompanied by all required drafts.**

Late Essays. Late essays will lose a letter grade for every day late. Please speak to me ahead of time if you anticipate problems meeting essay deadlines.

Academic Integrity. The basic idea of academic integrity is that the university holds you accountable for the work you hand in for assessment. All work is expected to be your own. When quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing the work of others, you are expected to cite your sources. The university considers plagiarism—using someone else’s words or ideas as if they were your own—a serious and punishable act of academic misconduct. It is also an act of academic misconduct to hand in recycled or revised work originally produced for another course without the permission of both instructors. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Students With Disabilities. The Office for Disability Services, 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact ODS at 292-3307.

Assignments

1. Class Participation. 10%

Students will be rewarded for actively contributing to class discussions and for listening attentively, as well as for coming to class on time, well prepared, and with a positive attitude. In-class workshops and in-class writing will count as part of the participation grade.

2. Informal Writing Assignments. 2 pages, typed. Due regularly (see syllabus). 10%

Five times during the quarter you will be given a prompt on the syllabus for an informal writing assignment. Please address the prompt directly and give your essay a title. Make sure that your essay contains an argument that includes a clear thesis statement and detailed support. The purpose of these short papers is for you to practice writing thesis statements and structuring and supporting arguments, as well as for you to practice

writing *concisely*. They are also opportunities to experiment with your writing style. Do not write more than 2 pages in a standard, 12 point font. Your challenge is to produce an engaging, well-focused, detailed, and persuasive argument in two pages or less.

Reader. Each student will sign up to read one of his or her informal essay assignments out loud to the class. *When it is your turn to serve as a Reader, please email me your essay by noon of that day.* I may want to make an overhead transparency or copies for the class.

3. Presentation Teams. Presentations during Week 8. 10%

The class will be divided into six Presentation Teams. Each team will present one of the essays from *Reading The Virginian in the New West* to the class. Each team will be responsible for 1) reading their assigned essay outside of class, 2) meeting either in person, over the phone, or electronically to discuss the assigned essay, 3) preparing a well-organized and effective presentation of their essay of 25 – 30 minutes, to be presented during Week 8, and 4) preparing a one-page handout of their main points to distribute to the class. *In addition, each member of the team should write a brief statement of her or his contribution to the team, to be handed in on the day of the presentation.*

Each presentation should 1) give a summary of the essay's main arguments, 2) discuss the essay's critical methodologies and use of textual evidence, outside research, and/or theory, and 3) offer an assessment of the essay's persuasiveness and/or effectiveness, as well as its potential usefulness for further study of *The Virginian* or other literary texts.

4. Fools Crow Reading Comprehension Exam. In class Tues, 3/2. 10%

The purpose of this exam is for you to see how well you read a work of literature on your own. The in-class exam will cover the novel's major plot and sub-plots, main characters, narrative structure and point of view, dominant symbols and themes, and style.

5. Library Assignment. Due Tues, 3/9. 10%

For the library assignment, your task is to locate four scholarly sources—one book, two articles in scholarly journals, and one internet site—relevant to writing about James Welch's novel *Fools Crow*. You should find one of your articles in JSTOR and the other by using the MLA International Bibliography. Our library session will cover how to use these (and other) databases. The library assignment has two graded components: *correct citations* and an *argument for relevance*. Write a complete and correct scholarly citation for each of your four sources, following MLA style. Then write a brief argument for how each source could be relevant to writing an academic essay about *Fools Crow* (from a couple of sentences to a short paragraph).

6. Essay #1. 3 - 4 pages. Due Thurs, 1/28. 15%

For the first formal essay, I want you to focus on developing your close reading skills. Choose a brief passage from one of the dime novels in Brown's anthology (of a length between, say, a couple lines and a page) that you find intriguing, significant, and/or problematic. Your essay should offer a reading of this passage that 1) clearly identifies

where the passage fits into the larger plot and structure of the novel; 2) offers a close reading and interpretation of the passage that addresses its role in the development of the novel's plot and theme(s), its specific structure, its use of language, and its development of symbolism, imagery, and/or metaphor; and 3) makes an argument about the passage's interest or significance.

7. Essay #2. 3 - 4 pages. Due Tues, 2/16. 15%

For the second formal essay, I want you to continue to develop your close reading skills. Choose a scene from *The Virginian* that you find intriguing, significant, and/or problematic. Your essay should offer a reading of this scene that 1) clearly identifies where the scene fits into the larger plot and structure of the novel; 2) offers a close reading and interpretation of the scene that addresses its role in the development of the novel's plot, sub-plot(s), and theme(s), its specific structure, its use of language, and its development of symbolism, imagery, and/or metaphor; and 3) makes an argument about the scene's interest or significance.

8. Essay #3. 4 – 5 pages. Due Mon, 3/15. 20%

For the third formal essay, I want you to practice responding to another critic's arguments and/or synthesizing research and analysis.

Option A. Find an interesting critical essay or book chapter that makes an argument about Wister's *The Virginian*. You may choose one of the essays from *Reading the Virginian in the New West* or an essay or book chapter you locate on your own. Your essay should 1) offer its own argument about some aspect of Wister's novel, 2) respond to the published article as part of its analysis and argument (note that "respond" is a neutral term—you may agree or disagree with the article, or partially agree, and so on), and 3) provide a full citation for the article or book chapter in a list of Works Cited that follows MLA style.

Option B. Find an interesting critical essay or book chapter that makes an argument about Welch's *Fools Crow*. (You may use your research from the Library Assignment.) Your essay should 1) offer its own argument about some aspect of Welch's novel, 2) respond to the published article as part of its analysis and argument (note that "respond" is a neutral term—you may agree or disagree with the article, or partially agree, and so on), and 3) provide a full citation for the article or book chapter in a list of Works Cited that follows MLA style.

Option C. Write a comparative essay on some aspect of *The Virginian* and *Fools Crow* that also responds to the work of at least one critic. Your essay should 1) offer its own, comparative argument about some aspect of the two novels, 2) respond to the published article as part of its analysis and argument (note that "respond" is a neutral term—you may agree or disagree with the article, or partially agree, and so on), and 3) provide a full citation for the article or book chapter in a list of Works Cited that follows MLA style.

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to minor adjustments over the course of the quarter. It is each student's responsibility to keep up with changes announced in class.

Grading. Below are the general guidelines I follow for grading formal essays:

An “A” paper is considered “excellent.” Its features include:

- * a clear focus and purpose that not only meet the basic requirements of the assignment but surpass them—it presents a fresh way of looking at or thinking about the chosen subject;
- * a clear organizational and argumentative strategy that engages the reader’s attention;
- * detailed, concrete evidence to support each of its assertions;
- * a coherent, controlled, individual, and rhetorically appropriate style of expression;
- * no (or very few) grammatical or mechanical errors.

A “B” paper is considered “good” or “very good.” Its features include:

- * a clear focus and purpose to meet the requirements of the assignment, and an attempt to push beyond the basic requirements;
- * a clear organizational and argumentative strategy that attempts to engage the reader’s attention;
- * detailed, concrete examples or illustrations;
- * an attempt to develop a controlled, individual, and rhetorically appropriate style of expression;
- * a mastery of grammatical structures.

A “C” paper fulfills all of the basic requirements of the assignment. Its features include:

- * a clear focus and thesis statement that meet the expectations of the assignment;
- * an accessible organizational and argumentative strategy;
- * evidence to support its assertions;
- * no persistent grammatical, mechanical, or structural errors.

A “D” paper is considered “poor.” Its features may include:

- * lack of a clear focus or thesis;
- * failure to fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment, including the minimum page requirement;
- * no clear organizational or argumentative strategy;
- * unsupported generalizations;
- * persistent grammatical or mechanical errors that make the paper inaccessible to the reader.

An “E” paper is considered “failing.” Its features may include:

- * failure to fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment, including the minimum page requirement;
- * failure to turn in a completed or appropriate essay;
- * inaccessibility due to persistent grammatical or mechanical errors.

Daily Syllabus**Week 1**

Tu 1/5 Introduction to course and syllabus.
Sign up for Readers.

Th 1/7 Read Filson, "The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon" (Carmen).
In-class writing assignment.

Week 2

Tu 1/12 Review Filson, and read Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (Carmen).
Informal writing assignment #1: Use Turner's definitions of the frontier and its significance to analyze some aspect(s) of Filson's Boon narrative.
Readers: _____

Th 1/14 Review Filson and Turner, and read Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers" (Carmen).
Informal writing assignment #2: Use Kolodny's definition of frontier literature to analyze some aspect(s) of Filson's Boon narrative. Also, discuss the differences between employing Turner's and Kolodny's ideas and methodologies to this text.
Readers: _____

Week 3

Tu 1/19 Read Brown, "Reading the West: Cultural and Historical Background," and Stephens, *Malaeska; The Indian Wife of the White Hunter*.
Informal writing assignment #3: Compare either 1) how the hero is handled in *Malaeska* to how the hero is handled in Filson's Boon narrative, or 2) how the landscape is handled in *Malaeska* to how the landscape is handled in Filson's Boon narrative.
Readers: _____

Th 1/21 Read Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick, Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills*.
Informal writing assignment #4: Choose some aspect of the dime western and compare how it is handled in Stephens and Wheeler.
Readers: _____

Week 4

Tu 1/26 **Draft of essay #1 and 2 copies due in class.**
In-class workshop.
Sign up for Presentations (for Week 8).

Th 1/28 Library: Sources and Technologies. Class meets in Thompson Library, Room 149 (computer lab) at our regular class time.

Week 5

Tu 2/2 Read Shulman, "Introduction," and Wister, *The Virginian*, through chapter 12.

Essay #1 due in class.

Th 2/4 Read Wister through chapter 28.

Informal writing assignment #5: Thus far, is Wister's hero similar to or different from the heroes of the dime novels we read? Be specific.

Readers: _____

Week 6

Tu 2/9 Read Wister through end.

Th 2/11 **Draft of essay #2 and copies due in class.**

In-class workshop.

Week 7

Tu 2/16 Read Graulich, "Introduction," and Tatum, "Pictures (Facing) Words," in *Reading The Virginian in the New West*.

Th 2/18 Read Owens, "White for a Hundred Years," and Tuttle, "Indigenous Whiteness and Wister's Invisible Indians," in *Reading The Virginian in the New West*.

Essay #2 due in class.

Week 8

Tu 2/23 Presentations on *Reading the Virginian in the New West*.

Team 1: Handley essay: _____

Team 2: Lamont essay: _____

Team 3: Papanikolas essay: _____

Th 2/25 Presentations on *Reading the Virginian in the New West*.

Team 4: Scharnhorst essay: _____

Team 5: Campbell essay: _____

Team 6: Kollin essay: _____

Week 9

Tu 3/2 Read Welch, *Fools Crow*.

In-class exam on *Fools Crow*.

Th 3/4 Research and writing day. No class meeting.

Week 10

Tu 3/9

Review Welch. Bring both *The Virginian* and *Fools Crow* to class.
Library Assignment due in class.

Th 3/11

Draft of essay #3 and copies due in class.
In-class workshop.

Mon 3/15

Final Essay due in my mailbox, 421 Denney, by 3:00 p.m.