

ENGLISH 490: HONORS SEMINAR
THE CINEMATIC SOUTH: ENVISIONING SOUTHERNNESS
SIENA COLLEGE † SPRING 2010

Nowadays when a person lives somewhere, in a neighborhood, the place is not certified for him. More than likely he will live there sadly and the emptiness which is inside him will expand until it evacuates the entire neighborhood. But if he sees a movie which shows his very neighborhood, it becomes possible for him to live, for a time at least, as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere.

Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer* (1961)

Professor: Dr. Daniel Cross Turner

Office: Kiernan 215

Office Hours: MW 3:40 – 5:40 p.m., F 3:40 – 4:40 p.m., and by appointment

Office Phone: 783-4216

Email: dturner@siena.edu

Required Texts:

Natasha Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia* (2002)

Daniel Wallace, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* (1998)

Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)

Course Description and Objectives:

Often cast in contrast to the rest of the nation, the U.S. South has been construed as a place of cultural backwardness, religious fanaticism, economic destitution, and gender as well as racial intolerance. This Honors Seminar will explore a series of films—many of which are considered iconic—about the South and its purportedly oppositional role in the national narrative. We will investigate how Southern cultures and histories have been represented in films and the ways in which these depictions have altered over the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. We will also examine how the changing nature of the cinematic South speaks to national, even transnational transformations. In the films under scrutiny, we will encounter a spectrum of modes germane to Southern cultures, from the pastoral to the gothic and grotesque, and from the primitive to the “postsouthern” as well as the transnational or global South. Part of our task will be judging to what degree these modes match up to the shifting histories of the region. While the primary work of this seminar will be to interpret the South as reflected—or invented—onscreen, we will also read and discuss a number of the literature sources that directly influenced these cinematic representations, so matters of adaptation will also be crucial to our discussions. In addition, each week we will read and discuss scholarly sources relevant to the particular film under analysis and/or its socio-historical contexts.

Your “homework” for each week will include viewing closely the assigned film outside of class. I will place copies of our films on Reserve in Standish Library. In the past, seminar participants have arranged informal group viewings on campus for assigned movies.

*****All seminar participants will be required to attend the Greyfriar Living Literature Series reading by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Natasha Trethewey and you will have the opportunity to meet and talk with her during her campus visit. We will be analyzing Ms. Trethewey's *Bellocq's Ophelia* in connection with Louis Malle's film *Pretty Baby*.**

Attendance:

I expect you to attend every class meeting. You will be allowed a total of *one absence* before your final grade begins to suffer: *your final grade will be lowered by one grade level for each additional absence* (an “A” becomes an “A-,” an “A-” becomes a “B+,” and so on). If you must be absent from class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and fulfilling any

assignments due. Please find a reliable classmate and ask to borrow his or her notes for the missed day, then arrange to meet with me about the materials.

Late Work:

Unexcused late work will be penalized *one letter grade per day* including weekends and breaks. Extensions for assignments are rarely given. Only in extreme cases (serious illness, death in the immediate family) will you be permitted to turn in a late assignment without penalty. Be sure to notify me in advance if you feel you have a legitimate reason for missing a due date.

Academic Dishonesty:

I enforce a zero tolerance policy with respect to plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism cases will result in *an automatic "F" for the course* and possible suspension or expulsion from the College. Always acknowledge the source for any idea that is not your own, including of course any online sources. The number of students failing courses owing to internet plagiarism has been rising over the last few years. Cheating is the quickest and easiest way to fail this course. An essential part of a liberal arts curriculum is learning to interpret the world in your own terms; plagiarizing violates this deep responsibility to express your own ideas in your own language.

Class Email Messages and Handouts:

Before every seminar meeting, I will send class email messages containing detailed instructions, background information, and discussion questions about our viewing and reading assignments, so you will be required to check your email regularly (at least once before each class meeting). Because there will be a number of handouts on both primary and secondary texts, you will need to have a folder or binder in which to keep track of these.

Grades:

Your course grade will be determined as follows:

Short Essay (25%): You will write one short paper (5 pages) that analyzes one of the works on the first part of our syllabus. Your analysis should be cogently argued, mechanically proficient, and amply supported with detailed interpretations of textual evidence. You will receive an Assignment Sheet with detailed instructions for your Short Essay, Formal Research Essay, and Journals.

Formal Research Essay (35%): You will write one formal research essay (10-12 pages) for this course, due at the end of the semester, which will analyze one or more of the assigned films on our syllabus. Again, your analysis should be cogently argued, mechanically proficient, and amply supported with detailed interpretations of textual evidence, but it should also make use of outside research. Your final essay should contain a minimum of three legitimate scholarly sources (books, book chapters, scholarly articles) that you incorporate into your own argument about the work(s) under study. You do not necessarily have to agree with your secondary sources; instead, you can critique their arguments in order to lend your interpretation more validity. To make sure you are headed in a fruitful direction before the paper is due, I will ask that you turn in a formal one-page prospectus outlining your intended topic for your research essay, along with a list of potential secondary sources.

Journals (20%): On two occasions during the course, you will be required to turn in five journal entries, for a total of ten entries for the semester. Each journal entry should be *one page in length*. I will suggest or even assign some topics, while you will be able to supply your own ideas for some of the entries. Topics may range from analyses of our films/primary texts, to summaries and critiques of secondary sources, to creative responses.

Individual Presentation (10%): Each student will sign up to do an individual presentation (ten minutes maximum) based on a particular film we are analyzing. Your presentation should detail relevant background on the text under study and help establish the parameters of our discussion for that class period. You may elucidate critical perspectives on your chosen film/director as well as present trenchant close readings of particular scenes and motifs. You should discuss the particular topic of your presentation with me ahead of time.

Class Participation/Quizzes/Informal Writing Assignments (10%): Vigorous and fruitful contribution to in-class discussion is not only requested, it is required...and graded. I

expect you to participate actively and productively in class discussions. You should use this course to develop your oral communication skills in addition to your writing skills. Reading quizzes as well as informal writing assignments may be given at any time to gauge your level of preparation and your comprehension of the assigned texts. I may also give you informal writing assignments (sometimes during class, other times for homework) that will be recorded as part of your participation grade.

Pandemic/Emergency Preparedness:

You are instructed to bring all texts and a copy of the syllabus/course schedule home with you in the event of a College closure. The Academic Calendar will be adjusted upon reopening, so be prepared for the possibility of a short mini-semester, rescheduled class/exam period, and/or rescheduling of the semester, depending on the length of the closure. If your situation permits, you should continue with readings and assignments to the best of your ability, per the course schedule. You will be given instructions regarding how to deal with paper assignments requiring library or other research by me, as needed. Online office hours will be used by me in order to maintain contact with my students. You will be able to “check-in” with questions that you have. If you do not have internet access available, I will also provide my home phone number and home address, as needed. Remember, internet, mail delivery, and telephone services may also be impacted by a pandemic or other emergency event. Finally, stay connected with information regarding the College’s status and reopening schedule by monitoring the Siena website, www.siena.edu.

Final Disclaimer:

The professor claims the right to make slight adjustments to this syllabus when necessary. Listed above are the general terms of our contract for this semester. Exceptions to the rules of the course are rarely given, so see me in advance if you feel you have legitimate extenuating circumstances. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the course or these policies during the semester, please feel free to get in touch with me in person, by phone, or by email. If you are not available to meet during my office hours, we’ll find a mutually agreeable meeting time.

Assignment Schedule:

- M 1/25: **Old Times There Are Not Forgotten: Unlosing the War**
†D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)
Thomas Dixon, Jr., from *The Clansman* (1905)
Alan T. Nolan, from “The Anatomy of the Myth” from *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (2000)
Robert A. Armour, “History Written in Jagged Lightning: Realistic South vs. Romantic South in *The Birth of a Nation*” from *The South and Film* (1981)
Sidney Lanier, “The Dying Words of Stonewall Jackson” (1865)
Andrew Hudgins, selected poems from *After the Lost War* (1988)
- M 2/1: **Fables of the Reconstruction/Reconstruction of the Fables**
†John Ford, *Judge Priest* (1934)
Irvin S. Cobb, from *Old Judge Priest* (1915)
Gilberto Perez, “Saying ‘Ain’t’ and Playing ‘Dixie’: Rhetoric and Comedy in *Judge Priest*” *Raritan* (2004)
Henry Louis Gates, Jr., from *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988)
- M 2/8: **(Post)Plantation Airs**
†George Cukor/Victor Fleming, *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
Margaret Mitchell, from *Gone with the Wind* (1936)
Alice Randall, from *The Wind Done Gone* (2001)
Melvin B. Tolson, “*Gone with the Wind* Is More Dangerous Than *Birth of a Nation*” *Washington Tribune* (1940)

Brannon Costello, from *Plantation Airs: Racial Paternalism and Transformations of Class in Southern Fiction, 1945-1971* (2007)

M 2/15:

New Place or No Place?

†Elia Kazan, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)
Constantin Stanislavski, from *An Actor's Handbook: An Alphabetical Arrangement of Concise Statements on Aspects of Acting* (1924)
Steve Vineberg, section on "Tennessee Williams" from *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style* (1991)
Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Montieth, from *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* (2002)

†M 3/1:

Southern Expressionism

†Charles Laughton, *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)
Davis Grubb, from *The Night of the Hunter* (1953)
Mary E. Papke, "The Failure of Narrative and the Efficacy of Dreams in *The Night of the Hunter*" from *Agee Agonistes: Essays on the Life, Legend, and Works of James Agee* (2007)
Thomas F. Haddox, from *Fears and Fascinations: Representing Catholicism in the Contemporary American South* (2005)
Journals #1 due (5 pages; 10%)

M 3/8:

Southern + Primitive

†John Boorman, *Deliverance* (1972)
James Dickey, from *Deliverance* (1970)
Fredric Jameson, "The Great American Hunter, or, Ideological Content in the Novel" *College English* (1972)
Casey H. Clabough, from *Elements: The Novels of James Dickey* (2002)

†M 3/15:

The Reel/Real South: Southern Documentaries

†Christine Choy, Worth Long, and Allan Siegel, *Mississippi Triangle* (1984)
†LeAnne Howe, *Spiral of Fire* (2005)
Larry J. Griffin, "Southern Distinctiveness, Yet Again, or, Why America Still Needs the South" *Southern Cultures* (2000)
Eric Gary Anderson, "Rethinking Indigenous Southern Communities" *American Literature* (2006)
Short Essay due (5 pages; 25%)

M 3/22:

Image/Text: Framing the Past

†Louis Malle, *Pretty Baby* (1978)
Natasha Trethewey, *Bellocq's Ophelia* (2002)
Images from *E. J. Bellocq: Storyville Portraits* (1970)
Roland Barthes, from *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980)
Susan Sontag, from *Where the Stress Falls* (2001)
Charles Henry Rowell, "Inscriptive Restorations: An Interview with Natasha Trethewey" *Callaloo* (2004)

M 3/29:

Magic Realism and Mythic Southernness

†Tim Burton, *Big Fish* (2003)
Daniel Wallace, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* (1998)
Harry Haun, "Hooked on a Fantasy: The Tale's the Thing for *Big Fish* Producers," *Film Journal International* (2004)
Studio Daily Interview with Director Tim Burton, Director of Photography Philippe Rousselot, and Visual Effects Supervisor Kevin Mack (2003)
Daniel Cross Turner, "The Magical Work of Fiction: An Interview with Daniel Wallace" *storySouth* (2009)

- †M 4/12: **Postsouthern Dynamics: Region at Writ's End**
 †Robert Zemeckis, *Forrest Gump* (1994)
 Michael Kreyling, from *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998)
 Martyn Bone, from *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (2005)
 Allison Graham, "Finale: *Forrest Gump* Reclaims the South," from *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle* (2001)
Prospectus due (1 page)
- M 4/19: **O Faulkner, Where Art Thou?: Branding the TranSouth**
 †The Coen Brothers, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000)
 Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, from *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004)
 Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, et al. "The U.S. South in Global Contexts: A Collection of Position Statements" *American Literature* (2006)
Journals #2 due (5 pages; 10%)
- ***F 4/23: **Greyfriar Living Literature Series: Natasha Trethewey**
12:00 n. Luncheon
1:30 p.m. Class visit
6:30 p.m. Poetry reading and book-signing
- M 4/26: **Apocalypse No!: The End(lessness) of the Road**
 †John Hillcoat, *The Road* (2009)
 Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)
 George Monbiot, "Civilisation Ends with a Shutdown of Human Concern: Are We There Already?" *The Guardian* (2007)
 Leigh Anne Duck, from *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (2006)
- †M 5/3: **Open Forum: The Cinematic South and Popular Culture**
 Choose a cinematic/literary/historical/pop culture item associated with Southern film and/or the culture or history of the South more broadly (e.g., film clip, advertisement, TV show, jazz, country, R.E.M., Gulf Coast, Blue Ridge, blues, Red States, rednecks, Borat, monument, memorial, GWTW action figure, brochure, Southern rock, NHL hockey, pick-up truck, painting, flag, Robert E. Lee's horse's grave, fiction, photograph, billboard, Robert Johnson, comic book, sharecroppers, BBQ, The Gourds, cowboy boots, Civil War re-enactor, Civil Rights marker, poem, quilt, South of the Border, college football, Dirty South, website, t-shirt) and help us understand its significance.
Formal Research Essay due (10-12 pages; 35%)