

FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR
MULTICULTURALISM AND THE POLITICS OF REVISION

Dr. Steven Thomas

office phone: x3193
office: SJU Quad 352-B
e-mail: swthomas@csbsju.edu
office hours: odd days 1:15—2:15 pm
and also by appointment

FYS 100 – 54A, fall 2011

time: even days 2:40—3:50 pm
place: Quad 342

THE IDEA OF THIS COURSE

All writing and speaking has political, social, and cultural implications. Sometimes these implications are obvious, and sometimes they aren't, but one thing is for sure—how we go about representing other people matters to the people we are representing, and how we go about representing ourselves affects how others see us. This course proposes that we think carefully about how representation works with the goal that we become better writers. This course also proposes that writing occurs in a very complex world that is rapidly changing and whose economy and social organization is often hard to understand. The economy is more global than ever before, and the tools of communication and media (such as iPhones and Facebook) are faster and more prevalent. Consequently, as the societies of small towns are increasingly linked to the economies of faraway places, local cultures are increasingly transformed by global politics. In this context, the attitude of openness to the other cultures you may encounter is called multiculturalism, and the practice of rewriting old stories so that they are more attentive to the diversity of cultures and the realities of history is called revision. Hence, multiculturalist revision is an ethical practice that leads not only to a better and more human understanding of others but also a better and more divine understanding of oneself.

We will read and discuss imaginative literature and history that raises questions about the practice of writing and its relationship to the world in which we find ourselves. We will begin by learning about the recent conflicts and political movements in Northern Africa and watch one of the classic movies about an older revolutionary struggle, *The Battle of Algiers*. As we further consider the concepts of multiculturalism and revision, we will focus attention on how the same story gets repeated and revised, starting with Daniel Defoe's famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, and its revision by the Nobel Prize winning novelist, J. M. Coetzee. We will then learn the histories of several recent immigrant cultures that have recently become a significant and important part of Minnesotan society. Finally, we will read a new novel by an Ethiopian-American, Dinaw Mengestu. As we read, we will engage in active discussions about the literature and the questions it raises, and—most importantly—we will practice writing. At the end of the semester, your final project will be to imagine your own Crusoe-like story from a multicultural perspective. As you do all of these assignments, you will meet the general goal of all FYS classes, which is to develop your writing, critical thinking, and academic discussion skills.

BOOKS IN BOOKSTORE

- Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
- J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*
- Gregg Aamot, *The New Minnesotans*
- Dinaw Mengestu, *How to Read the Air*

WEBSITES AND OTHER TEXTS

Some of the course content and your assignments will be posted on-line through Moodle. In addition, useful websites such as the Writing Center and a citation style guide will be on Moodle. The Moodle can be found by going to the CSBSJU Current Students page or this URL here: <<https://moodle.csbsju.edu/login/index.php>>.

EVALUATION

Essay on North African Country	10%
In-Class Essay on <i>Battle of Algiers</i>	10%
Test on <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	5%
Test on <i>Foe</i>	5%
Essay on Crusoe and the Politics of Revision	15%
Test on <i>New Minnesotans</i>	5%
Essay Critically Imagining New Crusoes in the Age of Globalization	20%
In-class Discussions	15%
Attendance, Miscellaneous Assignments, and Participation	15%

POLICIES

All students have the right of non-discriminatory access to the programs at the colleges. If you have a disability and require special consideration, you must inform me as soon as possible.

Any act of plagiarism can result in an F for the course and can go on your permanent academic record. Please see The College of St. Benedict and St. John’s University’s official policy on plagiarism:

<<http://www.csbsju.edu/Academics/Academic-Catalogs/2009-2011-Catalog/Programs/Rights/Plagiarism.htm>>.

I reserve the right to change this syllabus at any time during the semester and will inform you of all changes in a timely manner.

WRITING PROCESS

Writing is a process that includes imagination, research, sketching, experimentation, conversation, and revision. Therefore, in class, before the essays are due, we will spend some time imaging, researching, discussing, and experimenting with your thesis and argument. Most important is revision. For all the essays that you do in this class, except those done in class, there is a peer review workshop on the day they are due. On this day, you should bring two copies of your paper to class for your peers. You must also upload this rough draft onto Moodle before class begins. After the peer review workshop, you have until the following class to revise and improve your essay based on the feedback you get from your classmates, and you will hand in a paper copy of the final draft the next class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Essay on a North African Country (3-4 pages)

In this assignment, you must choose a North African country that has been in the news lately (e.g., Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia.) Before you begin writing, this assignment has three steps of research. The first step is to find several recent newspaper articles about these countries and come up with a general summary about what they all say. The second step is to research some of the history of these countries by looking at more scholarly sources and to observe differences between at least two scholarly sources. The third step is to discover what the newspaper stories neglect to mention or if they are even wrong about some of the history. This third step should help you figure out your thesis. After this third step, you can begin writing an essay that offers a critical perspective on the mainstream news coverage of other countries.

In-Class Essay on *Battle of Algiers*

In this assignment, you must come to class ready to write not only about the movie *Battle of Algiers* but also about the documentary films about the movie and the poems by Seamus Heaney. The prompt will be a surprise, but I expect you to make an argument, with a thesis, supported by reasoning and evidence from the assigned reading and viewing.

Essay on Crusoe and the Politics of Revision (4-5 pages)

This essay will compare and contrast the original *Robinson Crusoe* with the contemporary revisions of it. These revisions do not just change the story; they also comment and think critically about the original story. For this essay, I expect you to discuss the original novel, the 1997 film adaptation, the novel *Foe* by Coetzee, and the writings of Marx and Watt. Your essay must make an argument, with a thesis, supported by reasons and evidence from the movie and novels.

Essay Critically Imagining New Crusoes in the Age of Globalization (5-7 pages)

The essay is both critical and imaginative and requires some research. You will imagine a novel that has not been written in which the main character comes to country that is strange to him. This country will be the same country that you wrote about at the beginning of the semester. Your essay must explain the story you are imagining and reflect critically on the literary idea of Crusoe. Your reasoning must be supported by information about the country that you researched. Therefore, you must do a lot more research on that country, the many cultures within it, and the relationships between it and other countries. As you imagine this story, you must also compare and contrast your story with Dinaw Mengestu's *How to Read the Air* and the various versions of *Robinson Crusoe* that you wrote about earlier. Along with that comparing and contrasting, you will also reflect analytically and critically on those texts. In sum, your essay will weave together the summary of a new story that you are inventing, your research on the place, and some analysis of writing and revision in the context of a multicultural society. In addition, you will give a brief 5 minute oral presentation to the class about your idea.

Tests

Over the course of the semester, you will have three tests on the books *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe*, and *The New Minnesotans*. The test will include a few multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and one short essay question.

In-Class Discussions

An important component of the FYS class is discussion skills. I expect you to participate in class all of the time, and I always welcome your input, questions, and opinions, but that general sort of participation is graded in the “attendance, participation, and attitude” below. More specifically, several times throughout the semester there are times set aside for sustained discussion. These are always announced in the syllabus, and they will be graded.

We will come up with a way for how to grade the discussion at the beginning of the semester. In other words, you will create the rubric and the method for grading yourselves. After we brainstorm and formalize this rubric, I will post it on the class’s Moodle site.

Attendance, Miscellaneous Assignments, and Participation

You are expected to come to class everyday having done all the assigned reading and prepared to discuss it. I also expect you to be generous with your classmates, because participation does not just mean talking; it also means listening respectfully and engaging in genuine conversation. Occasionally I will also assign small in-class and take-home work. If you are absent for the in-class work, you receive a zero, and I do not allow make-ups.

If you miss more than three classes, your attendance and participation grade will be reduced by 20% for each day beyond the three that is missed.

FALL 2011 CALENDAR

Aug. 31 (Wed)	Introductions and Ground Rules
Sept. 2 (Fri)	In-class discussion: What do we know about the conflicts in North Africa? How can we distinguish between a real democratic movement and a false one? When talking about such movements, does history matter?
Sept. 6 (Tue)	Class meets in SJU Quad Training Center IT Services presentation by Cathy Robak
Sept. 8 (Thu)	Preliminary 2-minute oral reports on North African countries In-class discussion: The anniversary of 9/11
Sept. 12 (Mon)	Class meets in SJU Alcuin Library, AV-2 Library presentation by Molly Ewing
Sept. 14 (Wed)	Workshop on paper, bring all your sources In-class discussion: study habits and time
Sept. 16 (Fri)	Due: Essay on North African country Peer Review session with Writing Center Tutors

- Sept. 20 (Tue) Seamus Heaney’s poems “Making Strange” and “From the Republic of Conscience”
In-class watch documentary “Gillo Pontecorvo: the Dictatorship of Truth” about the director of *Battle of Algiers*
- Sept. 20 (Tue) at 4 pm and at 7:15 pm, two separate screenings of *Battle of Algiers* in Alcuin Library room AV2.
- Sept. 22 (Thu) Seamus Heaney, “Funeral Rights”
discuss *Battle of Algiers*
- Sept. 26 (Mon) Seamus Heaney, “The Nobel Lecture: Crediting Poetry” (on-line)
In-class watch documentary “*Battle of Algiers*: a Case Study”
- Sept. 28 (Wed) **In-class Essay on Battle of Algiers**
- Sept. 30 (Fri) *Robinson Crusoe*, p. vii-44
Seamus Heaney, “From the Frontier of Writing”
In-class discussion: coming to new places (e.g., like college)
- Oct. 2—Seamus Heaney, Escher Auditorium, 2:00 pm
- Oct. 4 (Tue) **Walk through the Arboretum with John O’Reilly**
Meet by the pendulum in the New Science building and dress for hiking
Robinson Crusoe, p. 44-95
Before class, look up the concept “environmentally sustainable” on-line
- Oct. 6 (Thu) *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 95-154
Before class, look up the concept “multiculturalism” on-line
- Oct. 10 (Mon) *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 154-220 (finish novel)
Test on *Robinson Crusoe*
- Oct. 12 (Wed) Karl Marx and Ian Watt on *Robinson Crusoe*, p. 274-277 and 288-306
- Oct. 13—16 Long Weekend
Watch 1997 movie version of *Robinson Crusoe* (starring Pierce Brosnan) on your own.
Also recommended are the 2000 movie *Cast Away* (starring Tom Hanks) and the 1988 movie *Crusoe* (starring Aidan Quinn).
- Oct. 18 (Tue) In-class discussion: movie versions (revisions) of *Robinson Crusoe*
- Oct. 20 (Thu) *Foe*, p. 5-45
- Oct. 24 (Mon) Academic and Career Advising, guest Erica Rademacher

- Oct. 26 (Wed) Individual meetings in my office, to be scheduled
- Oct. 28 (Fri) Individual meetings in my office, to be scheduled
- Nov. 1 (Tue) *Foe*, p. 47-157 (finish)
Test on *Foe*
- Nov. 3 (Thu) In-Class Discussion of *Foe* and the movie
- Nov. 7 (Mon) **Due: Essay on Crusoe and the Politics of Revision**
- Nov. 9 (Wed) *New Minnesotans*, p. ix-39
- Nov. 11 (Fri) *New Minnesotans*, p. 41-84
K'Naan (his music on YouTube and his website)
NPR *Morning Edition* story on Somalia (Aug 26, 2011) with K'Naan
- Nov. 15 (Tue) *New Minnesotans*, p. 87-140
Ogina: Oromo Arts in Diaspora on-line issue 2:1 (Summer 2009)
- Nov. 17 (Thu) **Test on *New Minnesotans***
Explanation of last two assignments and rest of semester
- Nov. 21 (Mon) Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa" (on-line)
How to Read the Air, p. 1-37
In-class Discussion: How to write about a foreign place
- Nov. 23—27 Thanksgiving Recess
- Nov. 28 (Mon) *How to Read the Air*, p. 38-111
- Nov. 30 (Wed) library day
- Dec. 2 (Fri) *How to Read the Air*, p. 113-162
Oral presentations on New Crusoes
- Dec. 6 (Tue) *How to Read the Air*, p. 163-215
Oral Presentations on New Crusoes
- Dec. 8 (Thu) *How to Read the Air*, p. 216-305
Oral Presentations on New Crusoes
- Dec. 12 (Mon) **Due: Essay on New Crusoes**
- Dec. 14 (Wed) Final Day of Class