

STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Dr. Steven Thomas

office phone: x3193

office: Quad 352-B

office hours:

odd days: 4:30—5:00 at the Local Blend

even days 2:15—3:00 in Quad 352-B

and also by appointment

English 367, spring 2008

time: odd days, 2:40—3:50

place: Henrita Academic

Bldg. room 118

flag: gender

GOALS FOR THE COURSE

- Enjoy literature published after 1985
- Develop several frameworks for analyzing literature by focusing on one theme
- Learn some of the conceptual tools for thinking critically about gender

TEXTS IN BOOKSTORE

- Condé, Maryse. I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter and Other Writings, ed. Leland Person
- Juffer, Jane. Single Mother
- Mukherjee, Bharati. The Holder of the World
- Parks, Suzan-Lori. The Red Letter Plays
- Updike, John. Roger's Version

CLASS WEBSITE

<http://www.employees.csbsju.edu/swthomas/engl367.htm>

ASSIGNMENTS

Group Presentation on Hawthorne Criticism	5%
Response Essay to the question(s) of <i>Scarlet Letter's</i> feminism	10%
Analysis Essay: the Politics of Revision	15%
Oral Presentation on Text of Choice	10%
Speculative Essay: new novel	15%
Final Research Paper	25%
Group leadership of class discussion	10%
Attendance, Participation, Quiz	10%

Group Presentation on Hawthorne Criticism (10 minutes)

Each group (to be formed in class) will choose one of the critical essays in Norton Critical edition of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. The group will present a concise summary of the essays argument, methodology, and evidence. Compare and contrast to the arguments made by Baym and Levine. And finally, explain why you agree or disagree.

Response Essay (3 pages)

Based on your reading of both Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and the criticism, make up your own mind as to not only **whether**, but also **how**, the novel is feminist (or not). You must engage with two of the critical arguments made by others and support your own claims with evidence from the novel. Cite properly according to MLA style.

Analysis Essay: the Politics of Revision (5 pages)

Compare and contrast how the three texts – the movie, *I, Tituba*, and *Roger's Version* – all revise the plot of *The Scarlet Letter* supposedly to appeal to a contemporary audience. Using Jane Juffer's theory as a critical tool, analyze the political implications of these revisions.

Oral Presentation on a Text of Choice (10 minutes)

There are so many poems, pop songs, novels, movies, and television shows that revise or allude to *The Scarlet Letter* that we could not possibly cover them all in this class. In consultation with the instructor, select a text or group of texts and give a ten minute oral presentation to the class about it. Try to relate your presentation to the other texts we've read in class and to the conversations the class has been having. This syllabus has a short list of texts for you to choose from, and the course website has a longer list that will grow.

Speculative Essay: new novel (5+ pages)

Your task here is to imagine writing a new novel that revises or alludes in some way to *The Scarlet Letter*. Explain the setting, situation, characters, plot, and theme. Justify your decisions by referencing the theory, criticism, and other literature that we've read so far with special attention to the questions raised by Jane Juffer and Suzan-Lori Parks.

Final Research Project (7-10 pages)

The topic for your research paper is completely your choice, though obviously I expect the topic to relate in some way to what we are reading and discussing in the class. You will conduct your own primary and secondary research, and to help you achieve that, some days of class will be devoted to your own project.

Your first step is to raise a clear question. I strongly recommend that you talk with me about your research question during my office hours sometime *before* spring break. Then, as you explore that question both in your own research and in the reading assigned for the class, your next step is to come up with a clear, arguable thesis. I will grade you on the quality of your research and how well you support your thesis with evidence – evidence from your own research as well as evidence from the reading assigned to the class.

Group Leadership of Class Discussion

In the same groups as in the earlier group presentation, your group will choose a day – any day – in which you will be in charge of leading class discussion about the assigned reading.

As for which days are available to you, the first day is February 11. After that, any day when some reading is assigned is okay, except for the last day of class, May 2.

Attendance, Participation, Quiz

I expect you to come to class every day, having done the reading and ready to ask questions about it and discuss it. More than three absences will lower your overall attendance, participation, and quiz grade.

Sometimes, I will give pop quizzes on the reading. There are no make-ups for quizzes if you are absent.

OTHER NOVELS OF INTEREST

- Lindsay, Alan. A.
- Updike, John. S.
- Updike, John. A Month of Sundays
- Acker, Kathy. Blood and Guts in High School
- Bigsby, Christopher. Hester
- Bigsby, Christopher. Pearl
- Larson, Charles. Arthur Dimmesdale
- Noyes, Deborah. Angel and Apostle

CALENDAR

- Jan. 14 (M) introduction, syllabus
- Jan. 16 (W) poems from *Little Girls in Church* by Kathleen Norris (handout)
allusions in pop songs and art (click on links from “Texts” on class website)
class discussion: what do allusions do?
- Jan. 18 (F) Hawthorne, “The Custom House” in *Scarlet Letter*
- Jan. 22 (T) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 1-8
Juno, movie, in theaters now
- Jan. 24 (Th) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 9-13
- Jan. 28 (M) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 14-22
- Jan. 30 (W) *Scarlet Letter*, ch. 23-24
Nina Baym, “Revisiting Hawthorne’s Feminism” in *Scarlet Letter*, pp. 541-58
Robert Levine, “Antebellum Feminists on Hawthorne” pp. 274-90
- Feb. 1 (F) **due: group presentation on Hawthorne criticism**
- Feb. 5 (T) **due: response essay**
- Feb. 7 (Th) *Scarlet Letter*, the movie
reviews of movie (see class website)
discussion: why revise an old story? what are the politics of revision?
- Feb. 11 (M) *I, Tituba*, pp. ix-54

recommended: the “historical note” and glossary” for *I, Tituba*, pp. 183-6
The Crucible, movie or play
- Feb. 13 (W) *I, Tituba*, pp. 55-86
- Feb. 15 (F) *I, Tituba*, pp. 89-131
- Feb. 19 (T) *Single Mother*, pp. 1-34
I, Tituba, pp. 132-172
- Feb. 21 – 24 Long Weekend
- Feb. 25 (M) *I, Tituba*, pp. 175-225
- Feb. 27 (W) *Roger’s Version*, pp. 3-74

- Feb. 29 (F) *Roger's Version*, pp. 74-148
- Mar. 4 (T) *Roger's Version*, pp. 149-226
- Mar. 6 (Th) *Single Mother*, pp. 35-75
- Mar. 10 (M) *Roger's Version*, pp. 227-284
Single Mother, pp. 77-84
- Mar. 12 (W) *Roger's Version*, pp. 284-329
Single Mother, pp. 85-112
- Mar. 14 (F) **due: analysis essay – the politics of revision**
- Mar. 15-24 Easter Recess
- Mar. 26 (W) discussion of future assignments: oral presentation on other text, speculative essay, and final research paper
- Mar. 28 (F) library day
- Apr. 1 (T) **due: oral presentations**
- Apr. 3 (Th) **due: oral presentations**
- Apr. 7 (M) *Single Mother*, pp. 112-43
“In the Blood” from *The Red Letter Plays*
- Apr. 9 (W) *Single Mother*, pp. 144-66
- Apr. 11 (F) *Single Mother*, pp. 167-205
- Apr. 15 (T) “Fucking A” from *The Red Letter Plays*
- Apr. 17 (Th) *Single Mother*, pp. 206-241
due: speculative essay
- Apr. 21 (M) draft workshop for final paper
- Apr. 24 (Th) *Holder of the World*, pp. 1-61
- Apr. 28 (M) *Holder of the World*, pp. 61-138
- Apr. 30 (W) *Holder of the World*, pp. 139-208

May 2 (F) *Holder of the World*, pp. 209-286

final paper due by Thursday, May 8.