

## SYLLABUS

### Writing in Comparative Literature: Fiction and Cultural Identity

How do we perceive ourselves? How do we form our opinions of others? More often than not, the stories we tell are key to understanding, and even *creating*, personal and communal identity. In this class we will discover, through the discussion of texts from various cultural backgrounds, the diverse ways in which narrative allows us to explore, challenge and reformulate definitions of identity. While we discuss notions of identity as they appear in the modern novels, short stories and films on our syllabus, we will focus *primarily* on developing and improving your critical essay-writing skills. Therefore, we also spend a fair amount of class time doing basic writing activities. Through in-class debate, peer collaboration and individual conferences, we will work towards creating polished comparative essays in which you analyze our readings and films.

#### REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *Maus: A Survivor's Tale (Maus I)*. By Art Spiegelman. Random House, 1986.
- *Some Prefer Nettles*. By Jun'ichiro Tanizaki. Vintage, 1995.
- *The Powwow Highway*. By David Seals. Plume, 1990.

Any other texts we discuss will be available through electronic reserve (ER). I will provide photocopies of handouts for our various writing workshops; most of them will also be available on Blackboard under "Course Documents."

#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

You are required to have done your reading for each class meeting, in full. This ensures that, as a class, we can have a lively and informed discussion on the works assigned. The main focus of this class is developing critical writing skills, but we will also pay close attention to our readings. Our discussions about the assigned readings will serve not only to explore the nature of literary texts, but even more importantly will generate ideas for our paper-writing. I will take up some of class time with lecture, but 190 is primarily a discussion-based, workshop style class.

By the end of the quarter you will have written **4 formal papers** of varying length, as well as **5 mini-essays**, all of which should be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced and stapled (did I say STAPLED??). Class **participation** and attending **peer writing critiques** are musts! You will occasionally be asked to do some outside research on the texts; also expect the occasional pop quiz on the reading. Your performance on these will be factored into your participation grade. **Note:** You are required to visit the writing center at least once during the semester. We'll discuss details.

**Mini-essays:** we write one of these short, informal but well-thought-out papers (2 pages or so) for most texts (check the schedule!) The ideas do not need to be fully formed, but

should carefully consider **one** issue (not five) that may have struck you while you were reading. To do this, you will pose yourself a topic question at the beginning of each mini-essay (and type this in at the top of your paper). What about the text interests me? Puzzles me? Challenges me? These short papers will often be used to spark class discussion and also provide a good starting point for your formal papers, so take them seriously! Tip: these are meant to be more free-form than the formal essays, but it's not about what you liked/didn't like: take it up a level and maybe ask yourself *why* you liked (or didn't like) the film/novel/story. That's how you start to generate critical ideas! I don't give these a letter grade (you get either a check or an "ok," the former being better than the latter), but I do write comments on them. Simply doing all of them will earn you a C. More "oks" than checks? You'll get a B. The reverse? An A. **Note:** most of these response papers will be linked to the questions particular groups send out when it's their turn to lead class discussion (see below). In other words, you can choose as your mini-essay topic one of the questions your classmates have posed.

**Peer writing critiques:** These are not something you have to hand in, but events at which you must be both present and fully prepared. As you look at our schedule, you will see that four of these sessions are scheduled, one for each formal paper. At the class meeting before these sessions, you will bring in **stapled** copies of your paper DRAFT for myself and the other members in your group (check schedule for these due dates). The day of the peer critique you will come to class having read those papers, and will be prepared to offer *detailed*, constructive criticism to your peers (and they will do the same for you). Through the process of exchanging ideas and suggestions, you will become a better judge, both of your own work and that of others. I will also read your drafts, and am *always* happy to offer you written feedback on these before you write your formal papers. However, it is YOUR responsibility to ask me for it! I don't automatically hand them back with comments. **Note:** That 10% of your grade for "peer writing" listed in the table below will be decided by your teammates, so do your best....

**Participation:** Your class participation grade is based largely on your actual verbal participation in the classroom (i.e. what you say out loud, which should be both pertinent to the discussion and stated at the appropriate time). Speak up, and respect others' rights to do so as well! It not only affects your grade, but makes the class much more productive and enjoyable. I am confident that we, as a group, can create an environment where everyone will feel comfortable contributing. Here are a few pointers on how to participate successfully in class discussion. The student who *consistently* makes the effort to contribute according to these guidelines will receive a grade in the A to B range. A C grade, FYI, is fairly consistent participation that shows a basic understanding of the readings and other assignments.

- If you are usually comfortable with speaking in class, then choose the moments you wish to speak carefully; more is not necessarily better. On the flipside, if you tend to be a bit quiet, don't necessarily wait until the opportunity to speak is handed to you. Be proactive. Are you shy? Prepare some comments ahead of class and read them out loud instead. Come talk to me if you'd like some help.

- Sometimes I will give you reading questions ahead of time. Sometimes I'll leave you to your own devices. In either case, as you read, TAKE NOTES. Don't just breeze through the text. You'll be surprised at how many ideas you'll have when you look back over what you wrote down. Use these notes to prepare some comments and/or questions for class.
- When you speak, state your point concisely and stay on the point under discussion. If tangential perspectives emerge, as they invariably will, write them down so you can return to the issue later. Of course, if the discussion seems ready to move in a different direction, then please proceed. I will do my best to keep us on track, but part of that responsibility is yours, too.
- Support your points on the basis of the readings. That means citing exact page numbers, reading aloud short passages, identifying key terms/issues, and/or accurately summarizing in addition to stating your idea/asking your question.

**Formal papers:** All the above activities will help you prepare for the work of writing these. The first two papers will deal with one text only. I will give you a choice of topic only for the first, and we will develop topics together for the others (being able to develop your own topic is an important part of the writing process). These topics should be well formulated and typed at the top of your formal papers, just as with your mini-essays. After we have our comparative writing workshop (see schedule), we will develop ways of writing about more than one text or theme. Your third and fourth papers are weighted more heavily, and will incorporate two texts we have discussed in class. Don't worry! We'll discuss details, such as my grading system, later. **Note: Late papers, formal or "mini," will not be accepted and will receive an F (= 0).** If you are having a problem, talk to me right away. Don't leave it to the due date.

*A note on attendance:* Needless to say, regular attendance is key to your success in this course. If you're not here, you can't participate; chronic absenteeism will not be tolerated. If you have a conflict of some sort, please talk to me about it in advance if possible. We can usually work something out. If you have any more than two unexcused absences, or are absent from a peer critique, your grade will be negatively affected.

### GRADING:

Mini-essays (5 total)	15%
Peer writing	10%
Participation	15%
Paper 1	10%
Paper 2	15%
Paper 3	15%
Paper 4	20%

**SCHEDULE** (subject to change):

<i>Week 1</i>	
January 21 M	Introduction to critical essay writing, form peer critique groups
January 23 W	Mock Peer Writing Critique, Writing Goals <b>Film screening: <i>Bhaji on the Beach</i></b> (7 p.m., SCCT G041)
<i>Week 2</i>	
January 28 M	<b>Mini-essay #1 due</b> , on <i>Bhaji on the Beach</i> Visit from Writing Center tutor
January 30 W	<i>Maus I</i>
<i>Week 3</i>	
February 4 M	<i>Maus I</i> (Topics for paper #1 handed out today)
February 6 W	<i>Maus I</i> Thesis workshop
<i>Week 4</i>	
February 11 M	<b>Paper #1 Draft due</b> (3-4 pp.) Sentence Streamlining Activity
February 13 W	<b>Peer Critique #1</b>
February 15 F	<b>Paper #1 Final due</b> (in my office by 5 p.m.)
<i>Week 5</i>	
February 18 M	<i>Some Prefer Nettles</i>
February 20 W	<i>Some Prefer Nettles</i> <b>Mini-essay #2 due</b>
<i>Week 6</i>	
February 25 M	<i>Some Prefer Nettles</i>
February 27 W	<b>Paper #2 Draft due</b> (4-5 pp.) Workshop on integrating quotes and evidence
<i>Week 7</i>	
March 3 M	<b>Peer Critique #2</b> , schedule conferences
March 5 W	<b>No class</b> - Individual conferences (required)
March 6 R	Individual conferences
March 9 Su	<b>Paper #2 Final due</b> (in my office by 5 p.m.)
<i>Week 8</i>	
March 10 M	<b>Workshop on writing comparative papers!</b>
March 12 W	Short stories by/about women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Meng Xiangying Stands Up” (ER)</li> <li>• “The Funeral Wailer” (ER)</li> </ul>

	SPRING BREAK
<i>Week 9</i>	
March 31 M	Short stories by/about women <b>Mini-essay #3 due</b> (make this one a draft of your intro paragraph, and bring 2 copies to class)
April 2 W	<b>Paper #3 Draft due</b> (5-6 pp.) Paragraph revision workshop (also bring a copy of a body paragraph you want to revise)
<i>Week 10</i>	
April 7 M	<b>Peer Critique #3</b>
April 9 W	<b>No class/ optional individual appointments</b>
April 11 F	<b>Film Screening: <i>Smoke Signals</i></b> (7 p.m., SCCT G041) <b>Paper #3 Final due</b> (bring to screening!)
<i>Week 11</i>	
April 14 M	<i>Smoke Signals</i> Session on writing about film
April 16 W	<i>Smoke Signals</i>
<i>Week 12</i>	
April 21 M	<i>Smoke Signals</i> <b>Mini-essay #4 due</b>
April 23 W	<i>The Powwow Highway</i>
<i>Week 13</i>	
April 28 M	<i>The Powwow Highway</i> <b>Mini-essay #5 due</b>
April 30 W	<i>The Powwow Highway/Smoke Signals</i>
<i>Week 14</i>	
May 5 M	<b>Paper #4 Draft due</b> (6-7 pp.) Workshop on writing conclusions
May 7 W	<b>Peer Critique #4</b> Evaluations, peer grading, schedule optional individual conferences
May 14 W	<b>Paper #4 Final due</b> by 5 p.m in my office. <i>Have a great summer!</i>