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Friday 12-13:30
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Boundary-Crossings in American Literature (2009)

This is a course exploring the ways boundaries are being crossed while identities (including gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic identity) are being produced in discourse. Literary pragmatics, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory will serve as the background for understanding this discursive constructedness. Reading various narratives of identity and passing, we will explore (i) how, for example, in scripts of womanhood, color, ethnicity, or sexuality, identities are being constructed along binary models and (ii) how social performances might transgress these binaries. In addition to reading literary texts, we will view and discuss several films and film adaptations, where identity constructions are more easily seen as social and cultural performances.

Grades will be based on

- (i) class participation,
- (ii) one presentation each student is required to give, and
- (iii) an in-class final test covering all the readings, films, and presentations.

Attendance. It is assumed that everyone will attend the classes. Missed classes will show in your grades.

Reading the assigned texts. Students are required to come prepared for class: you must read the assignments for each class. Actually, you are encouraged to read the assignments twice: once for “fun,” once “for class.” Not reading the assignments counts into your absences (missed classes) and will show in your grades.

Visibility, active participation. Be visible. Mere physical presence, even when you have read the assignments, is not enough: you have to prove your skills in reading, analysis, and argument in class discussions.

Oral presentation. All presentations should be extremely condensed, representing the final stage, the results only, of a long a complex thinking process. Presenters are expected to focus primarily on the dichotomies set up and/or transgressed in the texts in question. As a rule, presentations should give the main points of interest: what we should look for in the texts and films, what we should discuss, what directions we should take in our own thinking process. If more than one person is assigned the same text, students should prepare together as a team. Their presentations should dialogue with each other. (One word of advice: make sure you have your co-presenter’s phone number, email address, etc.) You are encouraged not to read your presentation but speak

without notes as much as possible.

In-class final test. This test will cover all the readings, discussions, and presentations.

Important: we must (and will) start the classes on time. No late-comers accepted.

Schedule of Topics and Presentations

September 8 **Orientation**

September 15 **Transgressing boundaries between reality and fiction**

READ: Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"

in-class viewing of film adaptation

Presentation:

September 22 **Alternative realities in film: performative creations**

in-class viewing of *eXistenZ*

Presentation:

September 29 **Performed realities**

READ: Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*

Presentation:

October 6 **Transgressing gender dichotomies**

Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*

in-class viewing of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*

Presentation/novel:

October 13 **Transgressing boundaries of gender and sexuality**

READ: David Hwang, *M. Butterfly*

in-class viewing of film adaptation

Presentation:

October 20 **Transgressing boundaries of race: passing as social performance**

in-class viewing of film *Suture*

Presentation:

October 27 **No class (fall break)**

November 3 **Transgressing boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality**

READ: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

Presentation:

November 10 **Transgressing boundaries of race**

READ: Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*

in-class viewing of *The Human Stain*

Presentation:

November 17 **Transgressing boundaries of race**

READ: Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Presentation:

November 24 **Transgressing boundaries of the real**

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Presentation:

December 1

in-class viewing of *The Handmaid's Tale*

December 8 **Some filmic transgressions**

The Fully Monty (1997) (Bordo, *The Male Body*, 174)

Saturday Night Fever (1977) (Bordo, *The Male Body*, 198-)

Presentation:

December 15

In-class final test