

**English 4109: Film as Literature**  
**MW, 11-12:15; TLC 1116**  
**Dr. Angela Insenga**

**Just Whistlin' Dixie?: The Celluloid South**

**CONTACT**

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**THE CLASS**

**Course Description:**

Beyond geographical position, what is it that makes the South southern? What makes it a region unto itself, one so ostensibly alien that Yankee John Kelso in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* insists to his editor that the "real" South is "like *Gone with the Wind* on mescaline!"? Is it the heat? A violent and troubled past? The hardscrabble life for rural inhabitants? Peaches and grits, sweet tea and fried pies? A fundamental belief in fostering states' rights? NASCAR? Paula Deen? Our course will investigate whether or not there is an identifiable and feasible southern iconography promulgated on films about the region. As a correlating idea, we will discuss how the South has actively ostracized certain groups and has been historically "othered" by the rest of the country; conversely, we will take into account a current socio-political notion that the "New South" heavily influences and shapes the whole of American culture. If such an argument holds water, then the iconic sign systems in these film-texts can help us to conceive and comprehend the cultural frame in which they exist. In essence, then, our chief practice will be to theorize how filmic images labor in an even larger system that constructs an ideology about where we live and work.

Along with viewing, re-viewing, and annotating class films produced between 1939 and 2011 in four course categories, students will read critical essays by historians, sociologists, politicians, literary critics, religious leaders, and even a few "good old boys" as they traverse the red clay of the South's celluloid terrain.

**Course Objectives:**

- Students will learn to view and analyze films as text.
- Students will gain an enhanced knowledge of the ways in which film employs the aesthetic and cultural techniques of other literary forms.
- Students will become familiar with the medium's distinctive qualities.
- Students will understand that social, political, economic, and historical influences affect the production and consumption of film texts.
- Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work a discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.

- Students will demonstrate their command of academic English and the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.
- Students will learn to use discipline-specific computer technologies related to the study of language such as listservs, word processing, and internet research.

## THE WORK

### Required Texts:

- Various critical articles found on Ingram Library's Docutek electronic reserves or linked on the class resource page (see detailed syllabus for specific titles, reading schedule, and directions to access Docutek)
- Films and unit titles (students will view and re-view films outside of class, though we will view representative scenes and examine specific elements of *mise en scene* in class)\*:

#### **The Mythic South:**

*Gone With the Wind*  
*To Kill A Mockingbird*  
*Deliverance*

#### **The Troubled South:**

*CSA: Confederate States of America*  
*4 Little Girls*  
*Hustle and Flow*  
*Red State*

#### **The Decadent South:**

*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*  
*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*  
*The Gift*

#### **The Female South: Hell's Belles**

*The Gift, continued*  
*Norma Rae*  
*Winter's Bone*

\*Students carry the responsibility for viewing and annotating films by specific class dates set down in the daily syllabus below. All films, save for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, can be bought at the university book store. All films can also be acquired through an online movie service like Netflix, and most are available from local rental establishments. I have also placed each film on six-hour reserve in the library. Whichever avenue you choose to acquire these movies, please remember that each film is a required text for this course.

### Major Assignments\*:

- Two, four to five page Reader Responses, 10 and 15% respectively
- Two in-class tests, one at mid-term and one as the final examination, 20 and 25% respectively
- One "Anatomy of a Scene" presentation and supporting materials, 20%

- Active participation in film annotation and general class discussion related to primary and secondary reading, 10%

**\*NOTE:** Graduate students will take both tests, turn in two seven-page Reader Responses, will present alone, and will create a third seven-page Reader Response on a class film of their choice, to be due at the beginning of the final examination period.

### **Descriptions of Major Assignments:**

#### *Reader Responses:*

Students will compose two, four to five page Reader Responses. For each, students will be free to choose a narrowed-down idea that interests them. However, the following parameters govern both Reader Responses: each must concern a **single class film**; each must possess **a clear argument**; each must **offer specific textual evidence and discussion of it that supports the argument**; and each will **not include summary or secondary sources beyond our class's assigned articles**. Further, MLA format and use of Standard English apply.

Some topics from the first few films that students chose to write about in the past include but are not limited to: the challenge to social hierarchy that the "mammy" image in *Gone With the Wind* presents; homophobia and/or homosexuality as "monstrous" evidence of a "monstrous" South in *Deliverance*; the myth of the "happy darkie" in the field presented and then deconstructed in *Gone With the Wind*; The "confederate woman" in *Gone With the Wind*; "White Saviors" as carpetbaggers in *Mississippi Burning*; and the adolescent as truth-teller and ultimate critic of social order in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Students are more than welcome to discuss their ideas with me at any stage of the writing process, though I am most helpful when I can examine a draft and discuss a work in progress during a face-to-face conference.

#### *Examinations:*

Students will take two examinations, one at mid-term and another during the final examination period. Each test will be comprised of two parts. The first portion requires knowledge of film grammar terms and technique. The second portion, an essay, requires successful synthesis of course theme discussion, primary films, and secondary source material.

#### *Anatomy of a Scene Presentation:*

The basics: undergraduate students will work in pairs for this presentation; graduate students will present by themselves. Each presentation should be no more than 20 minutes long, including the time it takes us to view the scene(s) chosen. Each presenter's subject is the film scheduled for discussion during that class period. Students may sign up for presentations at the end of the first two class periods.

The specifics: for each presentation, the presenter(s) should aim to orient us **briefly** to the 5-7 minute scene or consecutive series of short scenes they have chosen; point to ways in which the scene(s) work to add meaning to the film in some salient way(s); and offer up two or three discussion-generating questions arising from an

analysis of the scene(s) presented. Each presenter should offer each classmate and the professor a well-designed handout that outlines the major points, lists discussion questions, and provides other pieces of information germane to the chosen scene(s). Presentations need not use secondary sources beyond the ones read for class.

In essence, then, each presentation ought to outline for us ways in which scene(s) work to make meaning in the film. Specific brainstorming questions to ask while approaching this presentation include but are not limited to the following: how do lighting and scene composition work to imbue a film with an ethereal quality present in some decadent southern films, and why is that quality important/problematic?; how do camera angles in the scene(s) work to craft a vast expanse/small space/canted angle and why are they used to do so?; how does the score function to create a particular tone or mood and why?; how do particular qualities of the scene(s) date the film, and is such a “stamp” important for some reason beyond plot?; how do the visual elements work to make specific points related to character development?; and/or do specific aspects of the film that made it a major art object in its time hold up to scrutiny now? Why or why not/how or how not?

#### *Participation:*

Attention to primary and secondary readings and active discussion are requirements of this course. Preparedness is also related to participation; therefore, having all assigned articles printed out and annotated and all of your film notes related to our particular film(s) during each class period are a must. From time to time, I will collect film annotations to make sure you are on track with filmic analysis.

## **THE POLICIES**

### **Grading Scale:**

All English courses 2000-level and above make use of a departmental grading scale. Please familiarize yourself with it, as I will use this instrument to grade all Major Assignments, verbal or written. To view this rubric, please click on the link on the main page of the English Department's Website or the one found on your class's resource page. Feel free to ask questions regarding the rubric either in class or during office hours.

### **Website/Paperless Policy:**

Many of your past professors may have used Course Den for getting information to you. However, I primarily use my website ([www.westga.edu/~ainsenga](http://www.westga.edu/~ainsenga)) and often e-mail the class with my thoughts, suggestions, or announcements. Most information for this course—this document, exams, short required texts, announcements, or resources—is hyperlinked on the website. Please check the site regularly for updates. *Students are entirely responsible for printing out and bringing to class all assigned documents from the class resource page or those located on Docutek.*

### **“My UWG” Policy:**

As of fall 2006, all e-mail correspondence between professors and students must occur via university e-mail. Please send all communication to me via your “My UWG” account. Students should check university e-mail daily to avoid missing important class messages. Checking university e-mail regularly also prevents mailboxes from filling up. If

university mailboxes fill up, messages do not get queued; rather, they do not get delivered at all. Therefore, students risk not receiving important information if they do not check e-mail in a timely fashion.

### **Attendance and Disruptive Student Policies:**

Our class meets twice per week. Students who miss more than four class periods—two weeks of class—*cannot* pass the course. Please also be aware that no distinction exists between excused and unexcused absences. Finally, avoid repeated tardiness, as it disrupts professor's and peers' work.

Students will be dismissed from any class meeting in which they exhibit behavior that disrupts the learning environment of others. Such behavior includes—but is not limited to—repeatedly arriving late for class, allowing cell phones to ring, speaking disrespectfully to the instructor and/or to other students, checking email or surfing the web, and using personal audio or video devices. Each dismissal of this kind will count as an absence and will be applied toward the attendance policy above.

### **Plagiarism, Collusion, and Academic Dishonesty Policy:**

From the English Department's website: "The Department of English and Philosophy defines plagiarism as taking personal credit for the words and ideas of others as they are presented in electronic, print, and verbal sources." The Department expects that students will accurately credit sources in all assignments. An equally dishonest practice is fabricating sources or facts; it is another form of misrepresenting the truth. Plagiarism is grounds for failing the assignment and/or course. You can also be subject to a university disciplinary review, and the university requires professors to report plagiarism in writing to the appropriate university office. Other university policies for handling cheaters are found here: [\*The Faculty Handbook\*](#) and [\*UWG Connection and Student Handbook\*](#).

Please note: "excessive collaboration" includes having family members, friends, or significant others edit your work. This means that no one should "fix" your grammar for you or "write in" sentences/ sources/ documentation for you. This sort of behavior is cheating and will be treated as such. We will collaborate in class, and you have the University Writing Center as well as my input should you need extra advice about your writing. All assignments are included here in the syllabus, and you have ample time to complete work and/or get feedback. Should you hire a personal tutor or use an athletic tutor, realize that excessive collaboration with that person can also result in plagiarism charges. In short: do your own work. Should you cheat in this class, and should I have evidence of that cheating, you will be assigned an "F" for the course, and I will recommend that you be sent before a disciplinary committee. My policy is a zero tolerance one.

### **Required Format:**

Each major assignment must be word-processed. When formatting and citing, use MLA documentation. If you need a refresher on MLA format, see the MLA Documentation link on the class resource page. All major assignments must be delivered in hard copy.

**Students with Special Needs/Disability Pledge:**

I pledge to do my best to work with the University to provide all students with equal access to my classes and materials, regardless of special needs, temporary or permanent disability, special needs related to pregnancy, etc. If students have any special learning needs, particularly (but not limited to) needs defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and require specific accommodations, they should not hesitate to make these known to me, either themselves or through Disability Services in 272 Parker Hall at (770) 839-6428.

Students with documented special needs may expect accommodation in relation to classroom accessibility, modification of testing, special test administration, etc. This is not only my personal commitment: it is a right, and it is the law. For more information, please contact Disability Services at the State University of West Georgia.

Any student who has a special need should inform me during the first week of class. We will then set up a conference to discuss the specifics of the official paperwork from Disability Services.

**Late Work/Make Up Work\*\*:**

I do not accept late work except under the direst of circumstances, and those who miss class cannot make up work missed or turn in any work due on the day of their absence. However, if you feel you have an extenuating circumstance, you should see me in conference during office hours or during a scheduled conference to discuss your problem. At that time, I will determine whether or not an assignment can be turned in late and what deduction, if any, will apply.

**\*\*NOTE:** I realize that, occasionally, "life happens" and that some problems beyond your control crop up. Never hesitate to discuss problems with assignments or attendance with me if you feel that your circumstance is dire. With honest and swift communication, many issues can be resolved to your advantage!

**THE DAILY SYLLABUS**

Note: all assigned articles are located on Docutek, which is the library's online reserves system. Find below the directions to access articles on Docutek:

- Go to the library's main page: <http://www.westga.edu/library/>
- Click on "Course Reserves" in the blue box in the center of the page
- Enter either my last name, Insenga, or the course number, ENGL 4109
- Click on our Spring 2012 ENGL 4109 class link
- Enter the password for our class: "read"

- Choose the appropriate article from the alphabetized list, print it out, read, and annotate it

### **January 9**

Course Introduction

Sign up for presentations

To Begin: "An American Trilogy"

*For next class:*

-Read "The Growth of a Mythology: The South on Film"

-Read the link under the subheadings entitled "Suggestions for Successful Film Annotation" and "Various Resources for Analyzing Film"

### **January 11**

Reading Film: A Critical Viewing Primer and Practice

Finish signing up for presentations

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *Gone With the Wind*

-Read "The Southern Imaginary," "Hollywood Themes and Southern Myth: An Analysis of *Gone With the Wind*," and "Scarlett O'Hara as Confederate Woman" (remember, all of the assigned essays are located on Docutek!)

### **January 16: no class or office hours—Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday**

### **January 18**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation One

Discuss *Gone With the Wind* and the South

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *To Kill a Mockingbird*

-Use as a reference for viewing the following resource: "Film Study Guide for *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Seeing the Film through the Lens of Media Literacy"

### **January 23**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Two

Discuss *Gone With the Wind* and articles

*For next class:*

-Read "The Gift Refused: The Southern Lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Client*, and *Cape Fear*"

### **January 25**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Three

Reader Response One assigned, discussed

Discuss *To Kill a Mockingbird* and article

For next class:

-Work on Reader Response One

### **January 30**

Discuss *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Reader Response One discussed

For next class:

-View and annotate *Deliverance*

-Work on Reader Response One

### **February 1**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Four

Discuss *Deliverance*

For next class:

-Read "The Bugging Hillbilly and the Buddy Movie: Male Sexuality in *Deliverance*"

-Work on Reader Response One

### **February 6**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Five

Discuss *Deliverance* and article

For next class:

-Reader Response One due

-View and annotate *4 Little Girls*

### **February 8**

Turn in Reader Response One

Discuss *4 Little Girls*

For next class:

-Read "Remembering Birmingham Sunday: Spike Lee's *4 Little Girls*"

### **February 13**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Six

Discuss *4 Little Girls* and article

For next class:

-View and annotate *CSA: Confederate States of America*

-Read "The Sincerest Form of Flattery: A Brief History of Mockumentary"

### **February 15**

Discuss *CSA: Confederate States of America*

For next class:

-Read "Twenty-First-Century Slavery Or, How to Extend the Confederacy for Two Centuries Beyond Its Planned Demise: C.S.A.: *The Confederate States of America*"

### **February 20**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Seven

Discuss *CSA: Confederate States of America* and article

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *Hustle and Flow*

### **February 22**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Eight

Discuss *Hustle and Flow*

*For next class:*

Read "The Southernization of America"

### **February 27**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Nine

Discuss *Hustle and Flow* and article

*For next class:*

-Begin reviewing for mid-term examination

-Bring all class notes for mid-term review

### **February 29**

Introduction to Kevin Smith's *Red State*

Brief review for mid-term examination

*For next class:*

-Study for mid-term examination

### **March 2: mid-term—last day to drop with a "W"**

### **March 5**

Mid-term examination

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *Red State*

### **March 7**

Discuss *Red State*

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

### **March 12**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Ten

Discuss *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

For next class:

-Read "Simulacrum Savannah: *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*"

### **March 14**

Discuss *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* and article

For March 26:

-View and annotate *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

### **March 19 and March 21: no class or office hours—Spring Break**

### **March 26**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Eleven

Discuss *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

Reader Response Two assigned, discussed

For next class:

-Read "The Image of New Orleans on Film"

### **March 28**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Twelve

Discuss *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and article

For next class:

-View and annotate *The Gift*

### **April 2**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Thirteen

Discuss *The Gift*

For next class:

-View and annotate *Norma Rae*

### **April 4**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Fourteen (on *The Gift*)

Discuss *The Gift* and *Norma Rae*

For next class:

-Read "Norma Rae Character, Culture and Class"

-Finish Reader Response Two

### **April 9**

Turn in Reader Response Two

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Fifteen

Discuss *Norma Rae* and article

*For next class:*

-View and annotate *Winter's Bone*

**April 11**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Sixteen

Discuss *Winter's Bone*

*For next class:*

-Read "Meth and the Maiden"

**April 16**

Anatomy of a Scene Presentation Seventeen

Discuss *Winter's Bone* and article

*For next class:*

-Bring all class notes for final examination review

**April 18—last day of MW classes**

Course Evaluations and wrap-up

Review for final examination

*For April 23:*

-Final exam from 11:30-1:30