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ENG 4300-4390-001-099: Political fiction, fictional politics

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AIMS OF THE COURSE

The Senior Seminar in English is designed as a "capstone experience" for English Majors who are approaching graduation. In this seminar, we will study a number of fictional texts from different cultures and periods, some of which may have been studied in earlier courses. Considering that literary texts embody views of history, politics, and society, we will subject a variety of novels to political and literary analysis, looking for connections between ideology and narrative technique. Assigned texts include narratives that feature a politician as protagonist, a dystopia, fictions of colonial encounter, and novels of social protest or revolution. Reading, discussing, and writing about novels that focus on characters, events, or ideas of clearly political significance, we will increase our understanding of narrative and of the interactions of literature and society. We will also train ourselves to be alert to the social and political assumptions underlying works that may seem apolitical.

English 4300/4390 is a writing-intensive course, and therefore a substantial percentage of the evaluation of student work is based on written assignments (papers, exams, in-class writing). Class participation is also important; regular attendance and conscientious preparation are required.

TEXTS

Chinua Achebe, A Man of the People; Isabel Allende, Of Love and Shadows;
Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale; Charles Dickens, Hard Times;
Lawrence Durrell, Mountolive; Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man;
Nawal el-Saadawi, Woman at Point Zero; Graham Greene, The Quiet American;
Sahar Khalifeh, Wild Thorns; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat;
Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men;

DR. Z's OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays, 0945-1045; Thursdays, 0945-1045 & 1315-1515; By Appointment
E-Office Hours: Normally, I will reply to email messages on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons. (To ensure a reply before the weekend, messages should arrive by 3:00 p.m. on Thursdays.)

CLASS PROCEDURES

Seminar participants are expected to complete the assigned reading punctually, to keep a class journal, to be prepared for in-class writing assignments and exams, to contribute actively and constructively to discussion, and to submit out-of-class writing assignments punctually and in correct form.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK I
Tuesday, 8 January: Introduction and Assignments
Thursday, 10 January: Warren, All the King's Men (Read Chapters I and II for today.)

WEEK II
Tuesday, 15 January: Warren, All the King's Men (Read at least Chapters I--VI for today.) (Consider carefully the significance of Chapter IV.)
Thursday, 17 January: All the King's Men (Read at least Chapters I--VII for today.)

WEEK III
Tuesday, 22 January: Complete All the King's Men.
Introduction to Achebe, A Man of the People
Thursday, 24 January: Achebe, A Man of the People (Read at least Chapters I-VIII for today.)

WEEK IV
Tuesday, 29 January: A Man of the People (Complete the novel for today.)
Thursday, 31 January: A Man of the People concluded
Ellison, Invisible Man (Read Prologue and Chapter I.)

WEEK V
Tuesday, 5 February: Ellison, Invisible Man (Read through Chapters 8 for today.)
Thursday, 7 February: Ellison, Invisible Man continued (read at least 11 chapters.)
Paper I due in class; Discussion of Seminar Paper Projects

WEEK VI
Tuesday, 12 February: Invisible Man (Complete the novel for today.)
Thursday, 14 February: Invisible Man concluded (Reread "Prologue" and "Epilogue.")
Discussion of Paper I

WEEK VII
Tuesday, 19 February: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat (Read at least three chapters.)
Thursday, 21 February: No class meeting—Dr. Z. attending professional conference: Keep reading A Grain of Wheat this week.

WEEK VIII
Tuesday, 26 February: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat. (Have novel read by today.)
Thursday, 28 February: A Grain of Wheat concluded

WEEK IX
Tuesday, 4 March: El-Saadawi, Woman at Point Zero (Read the book for today.)
Thursday, 6 March: Woman at Point Zero (concluded); Intro to Wild Thorns

WEEK X
SPRING RECESS: No class meetings this week.

WEEK XI
Tuesday, 18 March: Khalifeh, Wild Thorns (Read at least through p.121 for today.)
Thursday, 20 March: Wild Thorns (Finish the book for today.)
WEEK XII
Tuesday, 25 March:  
*Wild Thorns* concluded; Introduction to *The Quiet American*

Thursday, 27 March:  
Greene, *The Quiet American*; Read at least first two chapters for today.  
**Prospectus for Paper II due in class**; conferences scheduled

WEEK XIII
Tuesday, 1 April:  
Greene, *The Quiet American* (Finish the book for today.)

Thursday, 3 April:  
Greene, *The Quiet American* (concluded); Introduction to *The Handmaid's Tale.*

Research Presentations Scheduled

WEEK XIV
Tuesday, 8 April:  
Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Read at least 22 chapters.)

Thursday, 10 April:  
*The Handmaid's Tale* (Finish the book, if possible.)

WEEK XV
Tuesday, 15 April:  
*The Handmaid's Tale* (concluded). (Read the Epilogue!)

Thursday, 17 April:  
PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED

WEEK XVI
Tuesday, 22 April:  
**Paper II due on this date**

Thursday, 24 April:  
RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED

FINAL EXAM (CUMULATIVE)

(Bring test booklets to your final exam.)

GRADE CALCULATION:  
Class Participation (Oral and Written), Preparation: 35%

Paper I: 15%  
Paper II (including Prospectus and Report): 30%  
Cumulative Final Exam: 20%

ENGLISH 4300/4390: ASSIGNMENTS

I. JOURNAL: Keep a separate notebook or journal in which you write your initial and considered responses to reading assignments and class discussion and in which you keep notes of your "outside" reading in history, theory, and criticism. From time to time, you will be asked to write responses in class, and you should add them into your journal when they are returned. Journals are very useful in reviewing for exams and in planning your formal papers and oral presentations. I will not collect or grade journals.

II. ORAL PARTICIPATION AND REPORTS: Students are expected to come prepared to class and to contribute informed comments. Throughout the semester, students may be asked to prepare comments or bring in information relevant to assigned texts and their background.
II. Oral Assignments continued:
During the last several class sessions, each participant will present the material of his/her final seminar paper. Do not read your paper; rather present highlights of your insights in as clear and interesting a fashion as you can. The presentation should be carefully timed. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions and respond to the comments of the seminar. (No make-ups possible for missed presentations.)

III. PAPER I (800-1400 words/3 to 5 typed double-spaced pages) is due on 7 February. Choose among the following topics for Paper I:

Option A: Characterize and analyze the figure of the politician as depicted in Warren’s All the King’s Men and Achebe’s A Man of the People.

OR

Option B: Characterize the depictions (and implied definitions) of "the people" in the novels read so far for the course. What attitudes towards "the people" are conveyed by the texts, and what is the political significance of each book’s portrayal? Feel free to include your own definition of "the people," and your understanding of the people’s capacity and responsibility to govern themselves.

OR

Option C: Discuss the interaction of personal and social relations with politics as depicted or suggested in the novels read so far for the course. What impression do you get from these texts of the interaction of public and private life and concerns? Feel free to add your own observations or opinions on the subject.

IV. PAPER II, due on 22 April is a researched critical study of 2000--3000 words analyzing some specific aspect or feature of political, historical, or ideological content in a work of fiction NOT READ FOR THE COURSE. (You may write on one of the texts assigned for the course but not discussed in class, if you wish.) The ideal seminar paper will set the chosen work in a comparative context and will link political content, overt or otherwise, to some aspect of narrative technique.

Choose one of the following approaches:
A. Reread a novel that you have read for another class during your college career and analyze it from a political perspective. Read a text that you have previously not considered "political," and examine social and political assumptions that underlie the world created in the work. In your paper, compare treatments of the political issues in the "non-political" work with those in one or more of the overtly political work(s) read for this course.

OR

B. Read (or reread) a novel (not assigned for the course) that is or can be considered overtly political and analyze some very specifically focused aspect of its historical, political, or ideological content in relation to narrative technique. Compare the "outside" work chosen with one or more works assigned for the course.
ASSIGNMENTS (continued)

The specific focus of the paper and the outside sources (primary and secondary) read in preparing it will be determined by each seminar participant in consultation with me. A working prospectus (one fully developed paragraph, typed and double-spaced) is due on 1 April. The prospectus should indicate the primary works to be discussed, and specify the approach and critical method. The most important secondary sources to be used should also be named. (See course policy statement for details on presentation of papers.)

A prospectus of one fully developed paragraph (typed or printed) outlining your plans for your final paper is due on 27 March.

EXAMPLES OF WORKS THAT MIGHT LEND THEMSELVES TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

ATTENDANCE, punctuality, preparation, and participation are expected and required. Students are responsible for all material covered in class and all announcements or assignments made in class as well as for all assignments on the syllabus. It is essential that all students attend every session of the seminar and participate in the discussion; it is impossible to "make up" a missed seminar session. Assignments are to have been completed by class time on the date for which they appear on the syllabus. The books in which the day's assignments are contained should be brought to class.

Remember that "class participation" counts towards the course grade; a participation/preparation score will be assigned each student for each of the scheduled class meetings other than the first, and absence will result in a "0" for the day's participation as well as on any graded work due or done in class. There will be no opportunities to make up a missed exam or oral report other than in cases of documented medical emergency; (signing in at Health Service does not constitute documentation of a medical emergency). Unannounced quizzes on assigned material or in-class writing assignments may be given at any time. There will be no opportunities to "make up" missed quizzes.

FINAL EXAM: The final exam should be written on test booklets, available at the Union Book Store. Please write tests in ink and on the appropriate booklets.

ALL PAPERS AND OTHER WRITTEN WORK must be handed in on the date due.

1. Work turned in late without advance clearance will not be accepted.
2. Clearance does not constitute an "excuse." Work turned in late with clearance will be penalized, usually at the rate of 5 points per day of lateness.
3. Any lateness may delay the grading and return of the paper, perhaps until the end of the semester.

BE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERY PAPER YOU HAND IN. IN THE CASE OF A MISSING PAPER, THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPPLYING A COPY.

A NOTE ON THE PRESENTATION OF PAPERS: Papers must be computer-printed (or typed) (12-point type; double spaced) on heavy or medium-weight white 9 x 11 paper. Leave adequate margins. Each paper must have a separate title sheet which includes the title of the paper, course title, instructor's name, student's name, and date of submission. Repeat the title at the top of the first page of text. Pages must be numbered, and papers stapled or clipped.

Be sure that your papers are letter quality copies printed by laser or ink jet (or a ribbon that is in good condition). No pale or blurred print copies will be accepted. Also be sure that pages are separated, numbered, and clipped together in correct order. Only papers that are in correct form can be accepted.
Course Policies continued:

DOCUMENTATION: Use the MLA system (latest version) to cite both primary and secondary sources used in your papers. The system is fully explained and illustrated in the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Each student should have access to a copy.

Inform yourself about documentation conventions for electronic media information and materials. All such materials must be documented; citation forms are illustrated in recent handbooks; go to the Writing Center for assistance. Electronic-media materials must be evaluated for quality at least as scrupulously as print materials. Please remember that you must absorb and process all materials: downloading is not research.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written work (papers, exams, tests, quizzes) must be original and independent. Please make sure that you understand the meaning of plagiarism and the policy of the English Department:

> *Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work"* (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)--*has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of the grade of F for the course.*

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: "If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible."