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ENG 4300-002: Political Fictions, Fictional Politics

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POLITICAL FICTIONS, FICTIONAL POLITICS

The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude."

--George Orwell ("Why I Write")

...all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community.

--Frederic Jameson (The Political Unconscious)

TEXTS


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 of 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.

CLASS PROCEDURES

Seminar participants are expected to complete the assigned reading punctually, to keep up a class journal, to be prepared for in-class writing assignments, and to contribute actively and constructively to discussion.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK I

Tuesday, 22 August: Introduction and Assignments
Thursday, 24 August: Warren, *All the King's Men* (Read Chapters I and II for today.)
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WEEK II
Tuesday, 29 August: Warren, *All the King's Men* (Read at least Chapters I--VI for today.)
(Consider carefully the significance of Chapter IV.)
Thursday, 31 August: *All the King's Men* (Read at least Chapters I--VII for today.)

WEEK III
Tuesday, 5 September: Complete *All the King's Men*.
Discussion of Seminar Paper Research Projects.
Introduction to Achebe, *A Man of the People*

Thursday, 7 September: Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Have Chapters I-VIII completed).

WEEK IV
Tuesday, 12 September: *A Man of the People* concluded (Complete the novel for today.)

Thursday, 14 September: Dickens, *Hard Times* (Read Book One, Chapters 1-16 by this date.)

WEEK V
Tuesday, 19 September: *Hard Times* (Read Book One and Book Two for today.)

Thursday, 21 September: *Hard Times* concluded

WEEK VI
Tuesday, 26 September: PAPER I DUE IN CLASS ON THIS DATE.
(Be prepared to share your paper with the class; Peer Evaluations)

Thursday, 28 September: El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Complete the book for today.)

WEEK VII
Tuesday, 3 October: *Woman at Point Zero* concluded; Revisions due

Thursday, 5 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Read Prologue and Chapters 1-8 for today.)
Conference Sign-Up

WEEK VIII
Tuesday, 10 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Read Chapters 1-11 for today.)

Thursday, 12 October: *Invisible Man* continued (Complete the novel for today.)

WEEK IX
Tuesday, 17 October: Discussion of *Invisible Man* concluded
Be sure to reread the "Prologue" and reread the "Epilogue."
Introduction to Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Thursday, 19 October: Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Read at least half the book for today.)
Conference Sign-Up

WEEK X
Tuesday, 24 October: *The Handmaid's Tale* concluded

Thursday, 26 October: No Class Meeting--Dr. Z. participating in professional conference.
(Conferences scheduled these two weeks.)

WEEK XI
Tuesday, 31 October: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (Read at least seven chapters.)

Thursday, 2 November: *A Grain of Wheat* concluded; (Have novel completed for today.)

WEEK XII
Tuesday, 7 November: Scott, *The Jewel in the Crown* (Read Parts I and II for today.)
Prospectus for Paper II due today; Sign up for conferences.
WEEK XII (continued)
Thursday, 9 November: No Class Meeting--Dr. Z. participating in professional conference.
Read Scott, *The Jewel in the Crown*.
(Conferences scheduled for next week.)

WEEK XIII
Tuesday, 14 November: *The Jewel in the Crown* (Have novel completed for today.)
Thursday, 16 November: *The Jewel in the Crown* concluded;
Introduction to *The Quiet American*

WEEK XIV
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY--NO CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK XV
Tuesday, 28 November: Greene, *The Quiet American* (Have the novel read for today.)
Research Presentations Scheduled
Thursday, 30 December: *The Quiet American* concluded
PAPER II DUE ON THIS DATE

WEEK XVI
Tuesday, 5 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED
Thursday, 7 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS CONCLUDED
FINAL EXAM REVIEW SHEETS.

FINAL EXAM (CUMULATIVE) _____________________________________________

(Bring test booklets to your final exam.)

GRADE CALCULATION: Class Participation (Oral and Written), Preparation: 30%
Paper I: 15%; Paper II (including Prospectus and Report): 30%
Final Exam: 25%
ENGLISH 4300--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.

During the last two 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 to last 10 minutes. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions and respond to the comments of the seminar.

III. PAPER I (800-1400 words/3 to 5 typed double-spaced pages) is due on 26 September. Paper I is an essay analyzing some specific aspect of historical, political, or ideological content in any one or two works assigned for the seminar. As appropriate, you may use other works by the author you are discussing, historical background works, or works of literary theory or criticism. Be sure to quote accurately, indicate all quotes and paraphrases, and document accurately just as you would for a "research paper" (use the MLA system).

IV. PAPER II, due Thursday, 30 November 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 ASSIGNED FOR THE COURSE. 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.
IV. PAPER II ASSIGNMENT (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 7 November. 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.)

POLITICAL FICTIONS, FICTIONAL POLITICS
EXAMPLES OF WORKS THAT MIGHT LEND THEMSELVES TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

STANDARDS & POLICIES: Class 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. 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. Unannounced quizzes on assigned material or other in-class writing assignments may be given at any time. There will be no opportunities to "make up" missed quizzes.

EXAMS: 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).

Major Tests and 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. Work turned in late with clearance will be penalized, usually at the rate of 5 points per day.
3. Any lateness may delay the grading and return of the paper, perhaps until the end of term.

BE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERY PAPER YOU HAND IN. It is advisable to keep a diskette as well as a hard copy of every paper you submit. 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 typed (double-spaced) or computer-printed 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. Papers must be stapled or clipped and pages arranged in the correct order. Computer print must be clear and dark laser or ink-jet. If you use continuous-form paper, be sure that pages are separated and edges removed.

ONLY PAPERS THAT ARE NEAT AND IN CORRECT FORM CAN BE ACCEPTED.

DOCUMENTATION: Use the "new" MLA system to cite both primary and secondary sources used in your papers. The new 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 and 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. Avoid resorting to prefabricated papers and research materials found on the net. 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.