ENG 4390-001: Senior Seminar (Honors): 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

Chinua Achebe, _A Man of the People_; Margaret Atwood, _The Handmaid's Tale_; Charles Dickens, _Hard Times_; Lawrence Durrell, _Mountolive_; Ralph Ellison, _Invisible Man_; Graham Greene, _The Quiet American_; Nawal el-Saadawi, _Woman at Point Zero_; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, _A Grain of Wheat_; Anthony Trollope, _Phineas Finn_; Robert Penn Warren, _All the King's Men_


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, a fiction of espionage, 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

The class will be conducted as a seminar. Participants are expected to contribute to discussions as well as to be prepared for assigned reports and presentations.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK I

Wednesday, 26 August: Introduction and Assignments
Introduction to _All the King's Men_
Oral Report Sign-Up
WEEK II
Wednesday, 2 September: Warren, *All the King's Men* (Complete the novel for today.)
Oral Report Sign-Up (completed)
Report __________________________

WEEK III
Wednesday, 9 September: Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Complete the novel for today.)
Report __________________________
Discussion of Seminar Paper Research Projects.

WEEK IV
Wednesday, 16 September: Trollope, *Phineas Finn*
(Read [at least] Volume I of the novel for today.)
(Study the political ideas embedded in the narrative, as for instance Mr. Turnbull's creed [in "Mr. Turnbull"] and "Mr Monk Upon Reform").
Report __________________________
Report __________________________

WEEK V
Wednesday, 23 September: Review Volume II of *Phineas Finn*
Read assigned passages from Volume II.
Report (on issues from Vol. II) __________________________
Dickens, *Hard Times* (Read the novel for today.)
Report __________________________

WEEK VI
Wednesday, 30 September: *Hard Times* concluded
MAJOR TEST I (Bring test booklets to class.)

WEEK VII
Wednesday, 7 October: El-Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Read the novel for today.)
Report __________________________
PAPER I DUE IN CLASS ON THIS DATE.

WEEK VIII
Wednesday, 14 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Have novel completed for today.)
Report __________________________
Report __________________________

WEEK IX
Wednesday, 21 October: Ngugi, *A Grain of Wheat* (Have novel read for today.)
Report __________________________
Report __________________________
PROSPECTUS FOR PAPER II DUE ON THIS DATE

WEEK X
Wednesday, 28 October: Durrell, *Mountolive* (Read novel for today.)
Discussion of Prospectuses and progress on Paper II.
Report __________________________
WEEK XI
Wednesday, 4 November: Conclude Mountolive; Introduction to The Quiet American
MAJOR TEST II

WEEK XII
Wednesday, 11 November: Greene, The Quiet American (Have the novel read for today.)
Research Presentations Scheduled
Report_________________________
Report_________________________

WEEK XIII
Wednesday, 18 November: Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (Read the book for today.)
PAPER II (POLISHED, TYPED & DOCUMENTED) DUE FOR COMMENTS ON THIS DATE (OPTIONAL)

WEEK XIV
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY--NO CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK XV
Wednesday, 2 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED

WEEK XVI
Wednesday, 9 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS CONCLUDED
FINAL EXAM REVIEW SHEETS
PAPER II DUE ON THIS DATE.
NOTE: PAPER II WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT PENALTY UP TO 4:00 P.M. ON 10 DECEMBER.

FINAL EXAM (CUMULATIVE)__________________________________________________________
(Bring test booklets to your final exam.)

GRADE CALCULATION: Oral Reports, Participation, Preparation: 30%
Paper I: 15%; Paper II: 25%
Mid-Term Exam: 10%; Final Exam: 20%
ENGLISH 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 REPORTS: During the semester, each seminar participant will present one oral report (approximately 10 to 15 minutes) on one of the assigned texts, and a second report on the research project undertaken for the final seminar paper.

In preparing the first report, the student should select some specific aspect of historical or political thought or background to discuss with the seminar. Consult histories, letters, biographies, memoirs, or whatever background material you find helpful. (Sources should be mentioned by name in the report; be sure to communicate clearly to the class the source of information and opinion.) Try to connect background information with theme and/or narrative technique. Bring your critical intelligence to bear on the work; give us the benefit of your own insights.

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 your insights in as clear and interesting a fashion as you can. The presentation should be timed to last 20 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 7 October. Paper I is an essay analyzing some specific aspect of historical, political, or ideological content in any of the works assigned for the seminar. You may, if you wish, write on the work that you choose for your oral report. 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 Wednesday, 9 December or Thursday, 10 December, 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 previously 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. You may wish to "compare/contrast" treatments of the political issues in the non-political work with more overtly political work(s) read for this course.
IV. Paper II Assignment/continued

OR

B. Read 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. You may wish to compare the "outside" work chosen with one or more works assigned for the course.

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 preliminary prospectus (approximately one page typed and double-spaced) is due on 3 November. The prospectus should indicate the primary work(s) to be discussed, and specify the approach and critical method. The most important secondary sources to be used should also be named. All papers must be typed or computer-printed (double-spaced); all print must be dark and letter-quality or near letter-quality (no pale dot matrix) and pages must be separated and stapled. See course policy statement for details on presentation of papers.)

ENGLISH 4390: 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; a participation/preparation score will be assigned each student for each one of the fourteen (14) 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. Unannounced quizzes on assigned material 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. 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 typed (double-spaced) or computer-printed 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.

In the case of computer printed papers, be sure to hand in LETTER-QUALITY (OR "NEAR LETTER-QUALITY") COPIES PRINTED ON A RIBBON THAT IS IN GOOD CONDITION--NO PALE or DOT-MATRIX COPIES WILL BE ACCEPTED.

ALSO, MAKE SURE THAT PAGES ARE SEPARATED, NUMBERED, AND CLIPPED TOGETHER IN CORRECT ORDER.

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. 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.