

English 481: Theories of Literature and Social Justice

Spring 2013
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Drown 201C
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Wednesday, 1-4

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"For if only one single spark from the fire of justice falls on the soul of the scholar, this is enough to set his life and aspirations ablaze and consume them in its purifying fire, so that he can no longer find any peace and is forever expelled from that tepid or icy mood in which ordinary scholars do their daily work"

-Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*

Course Description

This course introduces students to theories of literature and social justice. As we explore the very definitions of "literature" and "social justice" throughout the semester, we will address the following broad questions: Is literature a vehicle for social justice, and if so, what distinctive resources does it offer for thinking about just forms of life? How are conceptions of justice shaped by writing in particular historical moments, or in particular genres and narrative forms? How do theoretical paradigms including Marxism, feminism, virtue ethics, affect theory, and ordinary language philosophy contribute to the study of social justice? Finally, how might social justice inform our pedagogy as teachers of literature seeking to bridge intellectual concerns with "real world" issues?

Course Goals

- To interrogate the meaning of literature and social justice in cultures of the present and past.
- To question and to begin to theorize the relationship between literature and social justice.
- To explore the role of literary criticism and the work of teaching in the pursuit of justice.
- To investigate connections between literature and social justice in particular historical moments.
- To consider how the formal properties of writing have bearing on issues associated with justice.
- To gain knowledge of historical, theoretical, and philosophical paradigms for imagining justice.
- To sharpen skills of critical thinking, writing, and analysis.

Course Requirements

- Short idea paper (5 pages) on assigned reading: 20%
- Oral response to a fellow student's idea paper: 10%
- Six course-site posts (2 posts for each course unit, 300 words each): 20%
- Final Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 10%
- Final essay (15-20 pages): 30%
- Participation: 10%

Assignments

- **Participation**

Your active participation in the course is vital to everyone's learning experience. To participate effectively, complete the reading and come to course with at least one idea or one passage that you'd like to discuss. Clearly your attendance is crucial to earning a strong participation grade, but it's not just attendance that we are gauging here, but also your contributions to the learning experience.

- **Course Site Posts**

Your course site posts help us set the agenda for discussion, and give you a chance to do some preliminary thinking about a particular aspect of the texts we are reading. Your posts, then, should be substantive 300 words analyses of the details of an assigned text and the issues it raises. Please post by Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. to give everyone time to read your post and those who wish time to respond to your thoughts. You will post twice during each of the three "units" on the syllabus for a total of 6 posts. You are welcome to develop your posts into your final paper.

- **Short Idea Paper**

In your short idea paper, you will write about a particular work from the day you signed up for on the syllabus. In your 5-page idea paper, focus in on a particular passage, issue, question or some other details in the text to make a preliminary or exploratory argument. Do NOT do research beyond the primary texts on the syllabus for the week your paper is due. Your short paper may raise as many questions as it answers, and it may be used as a starting point for your final paper. Please upload a copy of your paper to Course Site by 1 p.m. the Tuesday before class (or 24 hours before we discuss it). One member of the class will serve as a respondent to your paper and the whole class will discuss it, in order to help you think through the idea, consider the structure of the argument, and even address smaller issues in the writing itself. Although we will discuss your paper, your paper is NOT meant to be a guide to discussion, but rather a focused argument about one aspect of the text at hand.

- **Response to Short Idea Paper**

As the respondent to the short idea paper for the day you will take about 10 minutes in class to do the following: summarize your classmate's argument; mention the strengths of the argument; point out areas in the paper that the writer might expand upon, or improve; and invite additional comments on the paper from the rest of the class.

- **Final Paper**

A one-page proposal for your final paper is due on April 10th, and an annotated bibliography with at least 10 sources is due April 26th. For the proposal, it's okay to be conversational, letting us know what you plan to write about and asking questions if you need feedback on particular issues. For the annotated bibliography, include at least ten primary and secondary sources that you intend to use. Works on the syllabus can "count" as sources, but you'll also need to do additional research. Your annotated bibliography will list the sources in correct MLA format for a Works Cited page. Each source will be followed by a sentence or two of summary and a sentence describing the usefulness of the source for your argument.

Your final paper of 15-20 pages (due May 3 by midnight via course site) will make an argument about some aspect of literature and social justice. In it you might engage with theoretical essays we've read about social justice, apply a theory of social justice to a work of literature on our syllabus, or describe and theorize a pedagogical issue related to literature and social justice. In

your final paper, use appropriate MLA format and bring relevant published scholarship (culled from the syllabus and from searching the MLA database) into your discussion.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, University Center 212 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.

Required Texts

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Norton)
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (Norton)

Course Schedule

I. The Moral of the Story: Is Literature a Vehicle for Social Justice?

A Definition and a Debate

January 16:

- Brian Barry, from *Why Social Justice Matters* (2005), 3-34.
- Ben Jackson, "The Conceptual History of Social Justice," *Political Studies Review* 3 (2005): 356-73.
- Richard A. Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism," in *Ethics, Literature, Theory* (63-78)
- Martha Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism," in *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (59-82)

Affect Theory and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

January 23:

- Heather Love, from *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), 1-30.
- Suzanne Keen, from *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), vii-xxv, 65-99.
- Sianne Ngai, from *ugly feelings* (2005), 1-88, 126-73.

Paper: ____Sarita_____ Response: ____Dasheille_____

January 30:

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Norton), 1-199.
- James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (Norton edition of *UTC*), 532-39.

- Lauren Berlant, "Poor Eliza," *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke 2008), 33-67.

Paper: _____ Cynthia _____ Response: _____ Evan _____

February 6:

- Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 200-408.
- Mark Bracher, "How to Teach for Social Justice: Lessons from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Cognitive Science," *College English* 71.4 (2009): 363-88.
- Jane Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" (Norton edition of *UTC*), 539-61.

Paper: _____ Emily _____ Response: _____ Robert _____

II. Theoretical and Historical Paradigms for Approaching Literature and Social Justice

Marxist Theory and Late Medieval Literature

February 13:

- Readings in Marxism: Overview of Marxism; Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, chapter one; Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, chapter one; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 151-157
- Thomas Wimbleton, *Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue*
- *The Rule of St. Francis*
- From Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381: The Black Death* (Knighton's Chronicle); The 1351 Statute of Laborers; The 1376 Commons' Petition Against Vagrants

Paper: _____ Evan _____ Response: _____ Ashley _____

February 20:

- *Piers Plowman: The C-Version*, Passus VIII, Passus IX, and Passus XXII
- Miri Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge*
- Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty*, 1-11; 21-25; 30-40

Paper: _____ Alicia _____ Response: _____ Renee _____

Feminist Theory and Jacobin Literature

February 27:

- Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 1-80.
- Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 126-54, 215-49.
- Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*

Paper: _____ Taara _____ Response: _____ Cynthia _____

March 6:

- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria; or the Wrongs of Woman*
- Elizabeth A. Dolan, "Unsentimental Seeing: Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* and Didactic Children's Literature," *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era*, 195-213.

Paper: _____ Robert _____ Response: _____ Taara _____

Paper: _____ Dashielle _____ Response: _____ Sarita _____

March 13: Spring Break

Virtue Ethics and Ordinary Language Philosophy

March 20:

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* on Justice: IIa, IIae, Q. 57, article 1; IIa, IIae, Q. 58; IIa, IIae, Q 59, article 1;
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* on Anger: Ia, IIae, Q.46; IIa, IIae, Q. 158
- Augustine, *Confessions*, 24-34; 106-110; 133-154; 201-208
- William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus VI-Passus VII through line 119

Paper: _____ Ashley _____ Response: _____ Laura _____

March 27:

- Henry Medwall, *Nature*
- Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1-51
- Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 168-180
- Charles Pinches, *Theology and Action*, 1-5

Paper: _____ Renee _____ Response: _____ George _____

III. Literature, Social Justice, and Pedagogy: Service Learning
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Why (or Why Not) and How to Teach for Social Justice

April 3:

- Matthew C. Hansen, "O Brave New World: Service-Learning and Shakespeare," *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 11. 1 (2010): 177-97.
- Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
- Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*

- Film: *Shakespeare Behind Bars*

Paper: _____ Laura _____ Response: _____ Alicia _____

Two Service Learning Courses

April 10:

- Kate Crassons, Poverty course syllabus
- Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, chapter 9 and epilogue
- Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, introduction
- Kate Crassons, "Poverty, Representation, and the Expanded English Classroom"
 - Final Paper Proposal Due

Paper: _____ George _____ Response: _____ Katie _____

April 17:

- Elizabeth Dolan, Alzheimers class syllabus.
- Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*, 1-25, 53-73.
- Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative*, 1-17.
- Cary Smith Henderson, *Partial View* (Parts 1 and 2).
- Rabold Residents, *TimeSlips Stories* (2009).
- Attitude Toward Alzheimers Survey

Paper: _____ Katie _____ Response: _____ Emily _____

April 24: Conclusions

April 26: Annotated Bibliography Due

May 3: Final Paper Due (by midnight, submit via course site)