

July/August 2019

ENGL 4115A/ENGL 5900S

Culture and the Text:

History, Oppression, and the Literary Imagination

Prerequisite: fourth-year standing or permission of the department.

A background in English is highly recommended.

Classes: Monday/ Wednesday 10:05 – 12:55

Loc: 1816 Dunton Tower

Instructor: Dr. Patricia Whiting

Office: 1810 Dunton Tower

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email: Patricia.Whiting@carleton.ca

Office Hours: Monday 1:00-2:00, or by appointment

This is the final course outline. Please read it carefully.

DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will read novels written between 1900 and 1950, each dealing with historical situations of oppression, specifically, worker exploitation, revolution, imperialism, racism, and political imprisonment. Because all were authored by someone personally involved in these events and situations, the novels present an insider perspective that is ideologically inflected. Nevertheless (and this is the interesting part), they set out a view of history that is in some ways extraordinarily balanced, rejecting the reductive tendency to situate people and events on either one side or the other of an assumed binary situation. Though the settings and contexts differ widely in time and place, the novels all conclude that oppression is bad for everyone. They are unanimous in teasing out the implications of terms such as “dehumanization,” and they are consistent in relentlessly interrogating the implications of being human, for better and worse. The governing questions of the course focus broadly on the contribution literature makes to the study of history. More specifically, what advantages does the novel offer those who want to chronicle historical events based on personal experience? What happens when the literary imagination meets historical truths? Why, when each of these authors is known to have a distinct political agenda, are they so uniform in highlighting contradiction and complicity in ways that deny readers the easy answers we desire from troubling books and situations? Finally, can we postulate a unique and important role for the novel in current discourses of human rights, one not limited to bearing witness, truth-telling, or confessing guilt? In keeping with the aims of each author, we will undertake to understand as fully as is possible in a seminar the historical and political contexts of each novel, the author’s relationship to events, and the author’s aims in writing the novel, and to examine the books within these contexts. Research will involve arguments primarily

based on grounds other than theory and literary criticism, using evidence from not only history, but law, biography, letters, newspapers, and other contemporary sources.

EVALUATION:

Individual seminar 25%
Background group seminar 15%
Roundtable discussion questions (x2) 20%
Attendance/participation 15%
Written work (choice of two options; see below) 25%

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Azuela, Mariano. *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution* (Penguin Classics)
Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan* (Penguin Canada)
Gellhorn, Martha. *A Stricken Field* (University of Chicago Press)
Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle* (Penguin Classics)
Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Signet Classics)

These books are available at Octopus Books, 116 Third Ave.

1. Attendance and participation: Class attendance is mandatory. Excused absences must be medically documented. Absences for work reasons will not be excused. Students who attend only part of a class will be counted as absent for that class. **Students with more than one unexcused absence will lose ten attendance points for each missed class.**

All students are expected to contribute productively to every class and on every novel. **Students will receive a penalty of two points from their attendance/participation mark for each class in which they do not substantively participate.** The participation mark will be based on demonstration of knowledge of the texts being discussed and the relevance and contribution value of comments.

PLEASE NOTE: Unless a student has a documented accommodation, the use of laptops or other electronic devices is not permitted in this seminar.

2. Seminars: Each student will present two seminars: A) as a participant in an 60-minute group-led seminar on a major historical aspect of the novel, and B) in a 40-minute individual seminar that makes a focused argument regarding an aspect of the novel being discussed.

A) Background group seminar: Each group will prepare a 60-minute seminar that consists of a presentation made up of equal contributions by group members (contributions may be arranged however you wish) and prepared questions that will lead to productive discussion of the presentation relative to the novel. (Suggested time allocation: 45 minutes for the presentation, 15 minutes for the

discussion.) **The purpose of the background seminar is to contribute to intelligent reading and understanding of the novel; your group is providing important context for the other members of the class. The presentation should focus only on in-depth background with minimal or no reference to the novel, and the questions should focus on the novel in relation to the background material presented.** The background group seminar should include basic background material, but should focus primarily on a specific area and should be neither too detailed nor too general. Suggestions for specific areas appear at the end of the course outline.

Students may not give their background seminar and individual seminar on the same novel.

Five percent of the background seminar will be peer-determined.

B) Individual seminar: Each student will present a 40-minute seminar (25-30 minute individual presentation, plus discussion questions) that makes a focused argument regarding an aspect of the novel being discussed. Presenters are strongly encouraged to discuss topics with me at least a week before the presentation takes place. **It is essential that all the presenters on the same novel speak with each other very early on so as not to duplicate material and also that they not duplicate the material presented in the background seminar, so you will have to check with that group as well.**

On the night before the presentation, the presenter will e-mail an abstract of the presentation to each member of the class and to me.

At the end of each seminar, the presenter will also lead a 10-15-minute discussion. Some questions may be generated by the class, but the presenter should also be prepared to ask questions relevant to his/her seminar argument.

On the day of the presentation, the presenter will hand in a legible hard copy of seminar notes (may be informal) and a proper Works Cited page. The Works Cited must contain a minimum of three secondary sources.

A note about seminar presentations:

1. Don't take on too much. Your argument should be informed, straightforward, and intelligible.
2. Practice aloud for clarity, coherence, and timing.
3. Keep it straight and simple. Complex theoretical ideas that work well in an essay are difficult to follow in an oral presentation.
4. Make eye contact and speak clearly and audibly.
5. Use up but do not exceed your allotted time. Presentations that are either over or under 25-30 minutes will be penalized.

A note about PowerPoint presentations:

1. Use keywords and images rather than a lot of text on slides.

2. Do not read from your slides unless you are explicating a quotation.
3. Show quotations only if you are going to discuss or explicate them.
4. Don't substituted visual cleverness for intellectual substance.

Remember that PowerPoint can add to or detract from the effectiveness of a seminar presentation.

3. Roundtable discussions: At the conclusion of each novel, a roundtable discussion of 90-100 minutes will be led by groups of students (excluding those who presented a seminar on that novel). Each student will participate in two roundtable discussion groups. **Students may not lead roundtable discussions on the novels on which they presented their individual seminar, but they may lead one roundtable discussion on the novel on which they presented their background seminar.** The roundtable discussions should deal in part with the themes and aims of the course set out in the title and description.

Each discussion group will have heard the background seminar and first individual seminars on the novel being discussed. Please find out the subject of the third seminar, which may occur on the same day as the roundtable discussion, so as to prevent duplication and repetition of material in roundtable discussion questions.

Five percent of each roundtable discussion mark will be peer-determined.

Students will sign up for a background presentation, an individual seminar, and two roundtable discussions on the first day of class. Students not present on July 3 will be assigned topics and discussions for which they are responsible.

4. Written work: On July 10, students will commit to one of the following options. This choice is definite and may not be changed. Please include the word count on your written work.

Option 1. Five double-spaced insight reports of 750 words for graduate students and 600 words for undergraduates to be submitted *before* the beginning of class on the day each novel will be discussed. Deviations of more than 25 words will be penalized. The insight reports are intended to stimulate sustained and thoughtful reflection on the novels themselves. Each report is worth 5% of the final grade. Rather than being formal, academic papers, these reports should reflect graduate-level engagement with the texts and will be marked on thoughtfulness, originality, quality of analysis, and quality of written expression. You must hand in all five reports on time. Failure to do so will result in the loss of 25% of the final mark.

Option 2. A formal research essay of 16 pages for graduate students and 13 pages for undergraduate students to be submitted by 1:00 p.m. on August 14. Deviations of more than 50 words will be penalized. These papers should give evidence of substantial research, should present a compelling and convincing argument, and should be beautifully written. The essay will focus on complication,

contradiction, **OR** complicity in one or more novels from the course. I will be glad to work with you on your thesis statements by e-mail before August 10.

If you write on the novel on which you presented your seminar, you must write on more than one novel, and you may build on but not duplicate your seminar. The essay must cite a minimum of three secondary sources.

Late assignments for either the insight reports or the essay will not be accepted without a valid doctor's certificate.

5. **Collaboration:** Although you are encouraged to talk with each other about assignments and to review each other's work, all assignments written for evaluation are to be the original work of individual students.

6. Plagiarism: The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- ☐ reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- ☐ submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- ☐ using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- ☐ using another's data or research findings;
- ☐ failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- ☐ handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course.

The policy can be found at: <https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

Plagiarism is a serious matter and can be grounds for expulsion from the University. Plagiarism often occurs because a student is not sure where to draw the line between

common knowledge, paraphrase, and direct quotation -- and indeed, the distinctions are sometimes hard to make. The rule of thumb is this: All direct quotations have to be contained by quotation marks and their sources cited in proper MLA documentation style; all paraphrases have to be clearly indicated as such, and their sources also cited. When in doubt about whether a point that you are making is common, shared knowledge in the public domain or the "intellectual property" of another author, either contact me for clarification or err in the direction of documentation.

Please note that I hand over ALL cases of suspected plagiarism to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for investigation.

7. REQUEST FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Religious obligation

Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. carleton.ca/pmc

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

<https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

SYLLABUS

July 3 – Introduction and sign-up

July 8 – Complication, contradiction, complicity – case studies

*July 10 – *The Jungle*

July 15 – *The Jungle*

*July 17 – *The Underdogs*

July 22 – *The Underdogs*

*July 24 – *A Stricken Field*

July 29 – *A Stricken Field*

*July 31 – *Obasan*

August 5 – Civic Holiday, no class

August 7 – *Obasan*

*August 12 – *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

August 14 – *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; Final essay due

***Insight reports are due on days marked by an asterisk.**

Suggested topics for background seminars (feel free to discuss another major aspect of the novels, but discuss with me to avoid duplication):

Sinclair

The political and economic landscape of Chicago in 1900

American socialism in 1900

*The relevant life and political/philosophical ideas of Upton Sinclair (do not spend time on irrelevant biographical details)

Azuela

The politics and major events of the Mexican Revolution

*The relevant life and political/philosophical ideas of Mariano Azuela (do not spend time on irrelevant biographical details)

Gellhorn

The relevant history and political landscape of Czechoslovakia, particularly in the 1930s.

*The relevant life and political/philosophical ideas of Martha Gellhorn (do not spend time on irrelevant biographical details)

Kogawa

The politics and economics of Japanese immigration and settlement in Canada before Pearl Harbor

*The relevant life and political/philosophical ideas of Joy Kogawa (do not spend time on irrelevant biographical details)

Solzhenitsyn

The politics and economics of Stalin's labour camps.

*The relevant life and political/philosophical ideas of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (do not spend time on irrelevant biographical details)

***The lives of authors are fascinating and can easily take up the greater part of a seminar without contributing to it. If you choose to focus on the relationship of an author's life and thought to her/his novel, be sure that your points are substantive and productive of a good discussion.**