

COLI 214B sec. 5 Literature and Society – Fall 2009

MWF 8:30-9:30am LN 1402

Instructor: Jana Nehring

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Office hours: TBA

### Class Syllabus\*

Literature? Society? Literature AND Society???

The average American high school student (and presumably many students from other nations as well) may feel that he or she has a good grasp of the terms “literature” and “society” by graduation. The pupil probably doesn’t shy away from using the terms in daily conversation and can comprehend the terms in a variety of contexts. It’s only when a Socratic figure comes along and probes the pupil for concise definitions of these respective terms that the pupil may hesitate. After all, literature must be something more than books or even the types of books that one reads in school – but what is it exactly? And society is a lot more than the subject of ill-repute in one’s favorite punk song. The native English speaker knows what “society” and “literature” mean, but kind of doesn’t know what they are at the same time. Hmm...

When the two terms come together with an “and” between them one may feel compelled to think of this “and” as the point of overlap between the two terms, like a Venn diagram. If this were the case, this course would simply cover the contents of this overlap. One could throw the two concepts into a blender and voila – literature and society. Yet the objective of this course is to explore the complexities of this “and” that has the harrowing task of connecting two very convoluted terms. Thus this course will jump around a lot as different relationships and aspects of literature and society are explored at various degrees. Questions at stake in this course include: how literature represents society, how society influences literature, how literature influences society, and so forth. The goal of the course is not a thorough understanding of the relationship of literature and society, but a deeper *appreciation* of this relationship.

### Written Assignments

This course is listed as a “c” course and thus students should expect not only to do a lot of writing in this course, but to become more effective writer. Interestingly, one of the best ways to become a more effective writer is to do a lot of it. Students are expected to turn in 10 one-two page double-spaced response paper to the reading assigned of that week (thus only one paper can be turned in a week). I believe strongly that writing is a form of thinking and thus the purpose of these papers is to encourage students to “think” about what they have read. These papers will receive a completion grade as long as they show evidence of thought related to the assigned reading and incorporate college-level writing (i.e. proper spelling, grammar, citation, etc.). These papers can range from critiques, summaries, analysis, close readings, compare/contrast, application, etc. These will make up 20% of students’ grades.

In addition to weekly papers, students must write 3 papers. The first two papers should be 3-5 pages and each make up 10% of the final grade. The final paper should be 7-10 pages and will make up 30% of the final grade. Papers should be written in MLA format. Students are encouraged to refer to

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> for MLA usage tips. These papers will be discussed more throughout the semester.

**Note: Plagiarism, in any form, will not be tolerated in this or any course at Binghamton University. The consequences of plagiarism range from failure of an assignment to expulsion from the university. If you have any questions, please consult me or the university's official policies on plagiarism and academic honesty.**

### **Class Preparation and Participation**

Students are required to do 2 presentations during the semester. One of these presentations will be over a poem and the other will be to start a class discussion. These should be about 5 minutes and could, but not necessarily, consist of a short discussion of a reading passage and/or discussion questions. The two presentations will make up 10% of the final grade.

The remaining 20% of students' final grades will be based on general preparation and participation. This portion of the grade will be evaluated through unannounced quizzes, attendance, preparation, and participation. If students come to class regularly (on-time), alert, and ready to discuss assigned materials, full credit will easily be attained. Behaviors that will hurt this grade include (but aren't limited to): sleeping in class, more than 3 unexcused absences and tardies, disrespecting instructor and/or fellow students (i.e. using electrical devices, chattering, offensive language, etc.), failing more than 3 quizzes (this includes failing due to unexcused absences or tardiness), and so forth.

Due to the H1N1 virus, the University requests that I post the following information:

***If you have a fever, body aches, cough, and/or sore throat please do not come to class. Please remain at home or in your room and follow instructions from the University's Health Services that will be available on the web.***

If you are unable to attend class due to illness or a family emergency please contact me as soon as possible via email so that the two of us can figure out the best way to deal with the situation.

### **Reading assignments**

The following texts, which can be purchased at the Bookstore, are required:

- Astley, Neil. *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times*.
- Confucius. *The Analects*.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from Underground*.
- Plato. *The Republic*.
- Sophocles. *Antigone*.
- West, Nathanael. *Miss Lonelyhearts & The Day of the Locust*.

In addition to these texts, shorter required texts will be provided via email, blackboard, or handouts.

### **Tentative reading/class schedule:**

#### **Week 1**

August 31 introduction

September:

2 “Is there such a thing as misreading?” – Crosman (blackboard)

4 Plato’s *Republic* I

## **Week 2**

Labor Day

9 *Republic* II

11 *Republic* III

## **Week 3**

14 *Republic* V

16 *Republic* VI

18 *Republic* VII

## **Week 4**

21 *Republic* X and (optional: “Mimesis” essay on blackboard)

23 poetry from *Staying Alive* – “The art of poetry” and “The Sound of Poetry;” and Hofstadter essay (blackboard)

25 poetry from *Staying Alive* – “In and out of love”

## **Week 5**

No class

30 poetry from *Staying Alive* – “My people”

October:

2 poetry from *Staying Alive* – “War and peace”

## **Week 6**

5 poetry from *Staying Alive* – “Me, the Earth, the Universe”

7 peer review

9 “Lordship and Bondage” from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind (or Phenomenology of Spirit)* (<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/phindex.htm>) -- **1st paper due**

## **Week 7**

12 *Notes from Underground*

14 *Notes from Underground*

16 *Notes from Underground* (1<sup>st</sup> paper revision due)

**Week 8**

16 "The Art of Fiction" – James (blackboard)

21 *Miss Lonelyhearts*

23 *Miss Lonelyhearts*

**Week 9**

26 *Day of the Locust*

28 *Day of the Locust*

30 *Day of the Locust*

**Week 10**

November:

2 peer review

4 "Literature into Culture: Cultural Studies after Leavis" (blackboard) – 2<sup>nd</sup> paper due

6 "Race, nation, and ethnicity" -- Kerr

**Week 11**

9 "Everything that Rises Must Converge" – O'Connor (blackboard)

11 "Feminisms" -- Tolan

13 3 short stories by Chekhov

**Week 12**

16 excerpts from *The Bible*

18 *The Analects*

20 *The Analects*

**Week 13**

23 *Antigone*

25 *Antigone*

Thanksgiving

**Week 14**

30 *Erewhon* excerpt – chapters X – XII (blackboard)

December:

2 *In the Penal Colony*

4 *In the Penal Colony*

**Week 15**

7 “Value” essay – Waugh (blackboard)

9 open day – in class to help with final paper questions

**11 final paper due**

\*This document is only a tentative guideline for the course and thus can be changed at any time. Changes will be announced either in class or via email.