

Literature and Society: The Transvaluation Of Society By Literature

COLI 214B Section 1

Meeting Times: Tues/Thurs 10:05-11:30

Meeting Place: Student Services Wing 307

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“A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now.” – Thomas Pynchon

Course Description:

The task at hand in this course is to determine literature's effect on society and society's effect on literature. While these two fields of study seem to almost necessarily go hand in hand, it will be the goal of this class to flesh out what the true role of literature is upon the formation and creation of our society. In shaping the course, I have taken what might seem to be a strange detour by deciding to frame the course around the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche, a philosopher, may seem to be an odd addition to a course on literature and society, but it is my belief that his writings may help shed some light on how literature can affect our world. Nietzsche's goal as a philosopher was to create a transvaluation or revaluation of all values, and the way he went about this was through writing. Though he is often categorized merely as a philosopher or philologist, his artistic style of prose in my mind makes him more “literary” than some of the best-selling authors we hear about today. After all, who is to determine what is or is not literature? This is a question that has boggled the greatest thinkers in the literary field for centuries and perhaps the solution to this question can be found in the bringing together of all fields related to art or humanity. All “humanities” departments seem to share a number of interests and goals, and coming closer may be the way to achieve these goals. This course and its addition of Nietzsche is another attempt at bridging these departments that are currently divided.

What are these goals though? What are the goals of all artists, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, etc.? Certainly change seems to be paramount when considering an answer to this question, but what other issues are at play? Is what is desired merely a revaluation of all values, as Nietzsche states, or is there more? During this course we will look at some classics of literature in order to address these questions and others that will arrive from your studies. We will start with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, which will offer a portrayal of an earlier society and allow us to enter into questions of history from a distant lens. We will then move on to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* before finally ending with Pynchon's classic, *Gravity's Rainbow*. Both *Bovary* and *Chatterley* will show us how these authors brought about change in our world, and when discussing *Gravity's Rainbow* we will be analyzing what sort of changes Pynchon might be aiming for or describing in his epic novel. Throughout the course we will be keeping Nietzsche's thoughts close at

hand and it will also be important to bring in our own views of this current society we share. There is no use trying to escape discussion of our current society and it is my hope as professor that we arrive at a number of relevant discussions that share our critiques of society and even arrive at some possible solutions that may one day be enacted by each one of you in order to create your own reevaluation of all values.

Course Requirements:

Longer Papers: There will be one *5 page paper to be revised* that will count for **20%** of your final grade and a *final 7 page paper* that will count for **25%** of your grade. The topics of these papers will be up to you to decide, but first must be approved by me.

Shorter Papers: There will be *six 1 page papers* to be due throughout the semester that will account for **20%** of your final grade. These will be graded on a score of 1-10 with the lowest score being dropped at the end of the term. These papers will be announced a week ahead of the due date.

Quizzes: There will be *six* short quizzes throughout the semester that will count for another **20%** of your final grade and will also be announced a week before they are to occur. The lowest of these scores will also be dropped.

Attendance and Participation: While it is important to attend class in order to know about paper due dates and quiz dates, your participation and attendance will also carry a weight of **15%** of your final grade. The course will be held in a discussion format and it will be important for each of you to speak up during class. You determine the amount you learn based on the attention and effort you put forth and your participation will be beneficial to all, especially yourself.

Extra Credit: There will be opportunities for extra credit throughout the semester. Currently I have plans to make five films available to you via library reserve that can each be viewed and responded to (1-2 page papers). The tentative films are: *American Beauty*, *The Big Lebowski*, *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, *Waking Life*, and *I <3 Huckabees*. Each viewing and response will be worth 1 point on your final grade. I also plan on having a creative writing extra credit due at the end of the semester that will likely go towards your final paper grade, or possibly your final grade.

Required Texts:

A Portable Nietzsche, Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann

A Merchant In Venice, William Shakespeare

Madame Bovary, Gustave Flaubert

Lady Chatterley's Lover, D.H. Lawrence

Gravity's Rainbow, Thomas Pynchon

***Disclaimer:**

Some of the texts in this course contain what may be scene as pornographic scenes, notably *Gravity's Rainbow* and depending on your taste *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. By continuing to enroll in this course you are agreeing that you will not be offended or complain about these issues later in the semester. I do not want to hear that any of you are "unable to read" these texts due to their graphic nature. Hence, the disclaimer.

Jan 29: intro to course – civilization, globalization, and transvaluation + Intro to Nietzsche: Letter to his sister - p.29, p.50 – last two notes, p.61 – (475), p.63 – (483), p.70 – (267), p. 71 – (282, 284), p.92 - (573), p.93 - (4) , p. 442 – draft of preface to *Will to Power*, p. 465 - Preface to *Twilight of the Idols*

Jan 31: Nietzsche's transvaluation of art discussion of art and reading literature and art – Nietzsche's division of the Dionysian and the Apollonian as presented in "The Birth of Tragedy". Readings: selections from "The Birth of Tragedy".

Jan 31st: p.496-514 from *Philosophies of Art & Beauty*, Edited by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (E-reserve)

Feb 5, 7: A reading of tragedy and an introduction to the relationship literature and society have within a classic work of literature from an earlier civilization. Readings: Shakespeare's *A Merchant In Venice*

Feb 5th: Acts 1-2

Feb 7th: Acts 3-5

Feb 12: Nietzsche's transvaluation of God. A destruction to the hierarchies and hegemonies. Readings – selections from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* + *Twilight of the Idols*, also p.95 - (125), selections from *Gay Science*, 447-450

Feb 14, 19, 21, 26: A literary overthrow – Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

Feb 14th: Part One, p.1-54

Feb 19th: Part Two, p. 55-124

Feb 21st: Part Two, p. 124-185

Feb 26th: Part Three, p. 187-286

Feb 28: Nietzsche's transvaluation of morals. Readings – selections from *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 443-446, selections from *Toward a Genealogy of Morals*, p. 450-454, also p. 73 – 1st note, p.79 - (76), p.81 - (97, 164), p.85-88 (202), p.441 – to his sister,

Mar 4, 6, 11, 13, 18: Unleashing passion and undermining cultural morality – Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

Mar 4th: p.1-56

Mar 6th: p. 56-114

Mar 11th: 113-174

Mar 13th: 174-244

Mar 18th: 244-322

Mar 20: Nietzsche's transvaluation of freedom – Readings – selections from *The Will to Power* (E-reserve) + *The Antichrist* (**First Paper due**)

Apr 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29, May 1: The tapestry of life. Examples of how the play of will to power and unlimited freedom creates society – discussions on Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and the films *Waking Life* and *What the Bleep do We Know?*

Apr 1st: p.1-92

Apr 3rd: p.92-177
Apr 8th: p.181-278
Apr 10th: p.281-336
Apr 15th: p.336-433 (**Revision of First Paper due**)
Apr 17th: p.433-505
Apr 22nd: 505-563
Apr 24th: 563-616
Apr 29th: 619-700
May 1st: 700-760

May 6: Nietzsche's transvaluation of the afterlife – Readings - selections from *Gay Science* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, also p.101 - (341), also p.684-687

May 8: A literary representation of this transvaluation and a conclusion of the class.
Borges – *The Garden of Forking Paths* (e-reserve) (**Final Paper due**)