

Literature and Society
COLI 214B Section 5
SW 315 TR 4:25 PM - 5:50 PM
Binghamton University - SUNY
Spring 2008

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OF THINKING AND BEING

Course Description

“Force is that which makes a thing of whoever submits to it”.

The Iliad or the Poem of Force
Simone Weil

What is this force that makes a thing of a human being? What is this force that for Weil makes a living being into a non-living thing? Staying a moment more on Weil’s statement, we can perhaps gather that there lies behind it her thoughts on the human being as such, and that which turns the human being into her opposite condition: a being deprived of life. Starting with Weil’s reflections on force and its effects on the human being, we will explore, through the different texts we will be reading, the various ways force takes shape in the individual human being and in a collective; the various ways the individual human being and collectives attempt to deal with force; and finally, the effects that force might have on the human being as such.

But first we perhaps might ask: what lies behind force? What enables force? Or what produces force? For force does seem to need to be produced. For if, as Weil conjectures, it does turn a living thing into a non-living thing, it is against nature itself. Force is against being. Here we turn to Rancière, and his thoughts on writing and society. We are used perhaps to thinking that writing can never be discussed without discussing society. But what if the case is such that we cannot discuss society without discussing writing or literature as we call it today? That writing is enmeshed in the very production and reproduction of society and the membership and non-membership of the individual human beings into these communities? And that writing is in the thick of the very production of this force that makes a thing of the human being, or that which enables the human being not to submit to this force and thus remain human, that is, a living being?

This brings us to our primary goal in our course: to attempt to think thinking in relation to being. What enables and disables thinking? And thus enables and disables our being?

Course Texts (All books available at the University Bookstore)

Rosario Castellanos trans. Esther Allen. *The Book of Lamentations*. Penguin Books, 1998.

Athol Fugard “Sizwe Bansi is Dead” in *Statements: Three Plays* London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Jean Rhys. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. New York: Norton 1992 reprint of 1966

Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* New York: Little, Brown and Company: Time Warner Book Group, 2004.

Simone Weil *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* New York: P. Lang, 2006
ISBN: 9780820463612

Simone Weil *On Colonialism: An Ethic of the Other* Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

Shorter texts (available electronically at the library or to be posted on blackboard):

Rancière, Jacques. *Politics of Literature* SubStance # 103, Vol. 33, no. 1, 2004

Rancière, Jacques. “An Intellectual Adventure” from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*

Wallerstein, Emmanuel. *The Construction of Peoplehood*

Films:

Cuckoo
The Thin Red Line
Fast Food Nation

Course Requirements

The course relies on your involvement. The course needs you to read the texts, attend class, participate in the discussion, write papers and make presentations. Your grade will of course reflect your level of involvement in each of the categories below.

Participation	10%
Presentation	10%
In Class writing and exercises	15%
Response Papers	15%

Four Page Paper	20%
Final Six Page Paper	30%

The basic requirement is reading. All the other requirements depend on your level of engagement with the texts. Your level of engagement with the text will determine all your other work in class.

Participation means your active involvement in class discussions which necessarily means that you are present in class. Participation does not only mean providing information on the text but raising questions which would invite the class to specific directions in the discussion. Everyone must bring a copy of the text when they come to class. Class discussion is text based. A question or a comment is accompanied by a specific textual citation. You are allowed to make three unexcused absences before you are penalized with one letter grade for each absence (for example from A to A-). Two tardiness will be counted as one absence.

This course meets the “C” or composition requirement. Thus, 65% of your grade comes from your papers. Papers will be revised after consultation with the instructor.

Responses are one to two page papers on the texts currently being discussed. The response papers will help us organize our thoughts as we prepare for the class discussion.

There will be unannounced writing exercises to be done in class on texts currently being discussed.

Presentation is a ten minute pair presentation on the text currently being discussed in class. Outside materials will be used to provide additional information on the text currently being discussed. Presentors may use whatever media they may deem helpful in their presentation.

Papers should be computerized, double spaced using size 12 Times New Roman with standard Microsoft Word document margins on all sides. We will use the MLA style in our documentation. There will be no writing prompts. Ask your own questions. However, you are strongly encouraged to discuss with the instructor your questions and the possible ways of thinking your question. We will organize our schedule to make time for everyone. The first four page paper will be rewritten. The grade will be divided equally between the draft and the rewritten paper. The final paper will be more slowly thought out starting from the argument you propose to pursue in your paper. The final paper will synthesize your thoughts on the texts we have read. Choose one major question to think for your final paper.

We are all on a schedule so please be mindful of the deadlines. No extensions will be given unless an extremely unavoidable situation prevented you from turning in your paper in class. Only hard copies will be accepted in class.

The university does not allow plagiarism, so don't plagiarize. Refer to the university student manual for the university's technical definition, examples and consequences of plagiarism.

Tentative Course Schedule:

Week 1

January 29 and 31: Course Introduction

Week 2

February 5 Simone Weil *Iliad or The Poem of Force*

February 7 Simone Weil *Iliad or The Poem of Force*
Film Screening: *The Thin Red Line*

Week 3

February 12 Emmanuel Wallerstein *The Construction of Peoplehood*

February 14 Athol Fugard *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*

Week 4

February 19 Charlotte Bronte *Jean Eyre*

February 21 Jacques Rancière *The Politics of Literature*

Week 5

February 26 Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea* pp 15 to 56

February 28 **First Paper Due**
Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea* pp 59 to 124

Week 6

March 4 Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea* pp 124 to 171

March 6 Film screening: *Cuckoo*
Simone Weil *The Iliad or The Poem of Force*

Week 7

March 11 **Rewrite of First Paper Due**

Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 1 to 54

Simone Weil Extracts from *The Need for Roots*

pp 121-125 of *Simone Weil on Colonialism: An Ethic of the Other*

March 13 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 55 to 105

Week 8

March 18 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 106 to 158

March 20 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 159 to 190

Week 9

- April 1 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 191 to 241
Simone Weil *Letter to Jean Giraudoux* pp. 77-79
April 3 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 242 to 289

Week 10

- April 8 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 290 to 331
April 10 Rosario Castellanos *The Book of Lamentations* pp 332 to 367

Week 11

- April 15 Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* pp 3 to 40
April 17 Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* pp 43 to 97
Film screening: *Fast Food Nation*

Week 12

- April 22 Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* pp 98 to 129
Film Screening: *Fast Food Nation*
April 24 Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* pp 133 to 176
Film Screening: *Fast Food Nation*

Week 13

- April 29 Luis Alberto Urrea *The Devil's Highway* pp 179 to 220
May 1 Jacques Rancière. "An Intellectual Adventure"
From the *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons
In Intellectual Emancipation*

Week 14

- May 6 **Final Paper Due**
May 8 Final Discussion