

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Literature and Politics/Literature and Society

Fall 2006

Instructor: R. Avramenko
Office: 201c North Hall
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Office Hours: T 1:00 – 3:00

Course: ILS 253/PS570
Location: 130 Psychology
Time: TR 5:00–7:30

There are two general objectives for this course. The first is to learn how selected works of literature articulate visions of order and disorder, both political and spiritual. Our analysis of these texts will reveal not only the close connection between literature and political philosophy, but will also demonstrate that, with the proper approach to the texts, literature is a rich source of information (i.e., data) for political analysis.

The second objective is to explore themes central to political and social life. Specifically, in the works we read, issues of leadership, tyranny, and manliness will be highlighted. This, of course, does not exhaust the political and philosophical problems raised by these thinkers, but these general themes will guide us as we search for understandings that cross cultural, moral, and aesthetic boundaries. Students are encouraged to keep these two objectives in mind in the seminar discussions and in their written work.

Required Texts:

Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage* (Dover, 1990).
Durrenmatt, Friedrich. *The Visit* (Grove/Atlantic, 1972).
Koestler, Aurthur. *Darkness at Noon* (Bantam, 1984).
Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Mandragola* (Waveland Press, 1981).
O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (Broadway, 1999).
Orwell, George. *1984* (Addison-Wesley, 1976).
Pressfield, Steven, *Gates of Fire* (Bantam, 1999).
Richler, Mordecai. *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Simon and Schuster, 1999)
Shaw, George Bernard. *Saint Joan* (Penguin, 1989).
Sozhenitsyn, Alexander. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Signet, 1998).

Electronic Reserves

Aristophanes. *The Assemblywomen*.
Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*.
Strauss, Leo. "Persecution and the Art of Writing."
Taylor, Charles. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man."
Voegelin, Eric. "On Readiness to Rational Discussion."
Robert Penn Warren, "Why Do We Read Fiction?"

Students are **strongly** encouraged to purchase these particular translations and editions. This is a text-based course and full participation requires that we navigate and explore these texts together—that we be on the same page, so to speak.

Requirements:

Grading Schema:

Participation:	10%	94 % +	A	77-80	C+
Presentations:	20%	91-93	A-	74-76	C
First Paper (5pp):	15%	87-90	B+	71-73	C-
Second Paper (5pp):	15%	84-86	B	67-70	D+
Term Paper (15pp):	40%	81-83	B-	64-66	D

Participation:

The course will proceed as a seminar. This means its effectiveness depends on two things: reading and participation. The grading schema is therefore designed to encourage both. The participation is based on attendance, preparedness, and participation in class discussion. Carefully reading the assigned material before each class will go far in ensuring a good participation grade. This grade will be self-assigned.

Presentations:

Students will be responsible for two presentations. On the student’s assigned day for presentation he or she will serve as our resident hermeneut. That is, on the day of the presentation, the student will become our expert on the text. The task is therefore not so much to talk for the whole class, but rather to facilitate the discussion, to present what he or she perceives to be the major themes and statements in the text, and to be the expert who can guide us in our interpretation and discussion of the text.

Papers:

The first two papers (4-6pp) will each be due in class the week after the student’s presentation. The topic is open, but the paper will focus on the themes discussed in the presentations. The term paper (15pp) will be due on December 22; topics will emerge during the semester as students discover issues of particular interest. All term paper topics should be approved in consultation with me. Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day.

Itinerary

Theme 1: Politics and Literature

September 5 – Introduction

September 12 – Voegelin, “On Readiness to Rational Discussion;” Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man;” Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing;” Robert Penn Warren, “Why do We Read Fiction?”

Theme 2: Leadership

September 19 – Pressfield, *Gates of Fire*

September 26 – Aristophanes, *The Assemblywomen*

October 3 – Shaw, *Saint Joan*

October 10 – Niccolo Machiavelli, *Mandragola*

Theme 3: Tyranny

October 17 – George Orwell, *1984*

October 24 – Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*

October 31 – Solzhenitsyn, *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

November 7 – Durrenmatt, *The Visit*

Theme 4: Manliness

November 14 – O’Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*

November 21 – Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

November 28 – Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*

December 5 – Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*

December 22: Final Paper Due

Honor Code. This course demands adherence to a certain code of honor. As such, I will construe all cheating in this class as a personal insult. Since it is no longer acceptable to get satisfaction in a duel, I will have to recur to a less-than-honorable recourse: I’ll tell on you and fail you. In short, plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize or cheat, you will receive an F for the course and the case will be referred to the Dean’s Office.