GE21 SEM2:
Backgrounds of Modern Literature

Instructor: Bethany Johnsen

Meeting Time and Place: Th 3-5:50, Humanities A60
Office Hours: Th 12:30-2:30, & by appointment; Humanities A94
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Course Description: This course will revisit central thinkers from the first two quarters of History of Modern Thought by reading literary works that were in conversation with their ideas. Our examination of how literature absorbs and reflects emergent concepts in fields such as philosophy, psychology, political theory, and the sciences will engage with questions about the forms and functions of art. What does literature do? Can a literary work be said to “make an argument,” and what is unique about its staging of arguments? How can we tell when a fictional piece endorses or critiques a certain stance? What distinguishes literary writing from other types of writing? How do preoccupations from contemporary thought come to infiltrate a work of literature, and vice versa? What can literature teach us about ourselves and the world, and how should we weigh its possibilities and its dangers?

Course Objectives:

1) to identify and analyze interplay between the history of ideas and the history of literature;
2) to investigate and articulate how a literary text works to stage, and perhaps ultimately endorse or critique, specific ideas;
3) to develop and write persuasive interpretations of literary work;
4) to interrogate our own beliefs about what constitutes “good art” and how it is achieved.

Required Texts:

Devil on the Cross, Ngugi wa Thiong’wo, ISBN: 978-0143107361

All other readings are available on the course CCLE site.
WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1: From Medieval Romance to the Modern Novel (4/5)

Thomas Malory, from Le Morte D’Arthur (1485)
Miguel de Cervantes, from Don Quixote (1605/1615)

GUEST LECTURE: Kersti Francis, “Harry Potter and the Historical Politics of Fantasy”

WEEK 2: Strange Fits of Passion (4/12)

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), pp. 1-221

EXERCISES: Close Reading

WEEK 3: Gothic, Uncanny, Sublime (4/19)

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), pp. 222-441

EXERCISES: Critical Questions ➔ Thesis Statements

WEEK 4: Enlightenment and Revolution (4/26)

Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), pp. 442-end

EXERCISES: Evidence and Argumentation, Pt. 1

WEEK 5: Romantic Poetics (5/3)

John Keats, “Lamia” (1820)
César Víllegas, from Los Heraldos Negros (1919)
Anne Boyer, from Garments Against Women (2015)

EXERCISES: Analyzing Poetry

**SHORT PAPER DUE (Sunday, 5/6 at 7 PM via TurnItIn)**

WEEK 6: Liberties of Self-Fashioning (5/10)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, from Confessions (1782)
Olaudah Equiano, from The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)
Frederick Douglass, from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845)

EXERCISES: Evidence and Argumentation, Pt. 2
WEEK 7: Cultural Infertility (5/17)

T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915); “The Waste Land” (1922) in *The Waste Land and Other Writings* (pp. 3-7, 38-51)

Mary Karr, “How to Read 'The Waste Land' So It Alters Your Soul Rather Than Just Addling Your Head” in *The Waste Land and Other Writings* (pp. ix-xxvi)

EXERCISES: Research Bootcamp

WEEK 8: The Theater of Modernity (5/24)

Bertolt Brecht, *A Man’s a Man* (1926)

EXERCISES: Grammar and Style

**CREATIVE PROJECT DUE (Saturday, 5/26)**

WEEK 9: Islands in the Sun (5/31)


EXERCISES: Reverse Outlining

WEEK 10: GET OUT (6/7)

Ngugi wa Thiong’wo, *Devil on the Cross* (1980)

Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (film) 2017

WRITING WORKSHOP

FINALS WEEK

**RESEARCH PAPER DUE (Saturday, 6/15)**

GRADE BREAKDOWN:

**Participation (25%):** In this seminar you will be expected to participate in every discussion; I will be grading you on both the quantity and the quality of your input. I expect everyone to bring a hard copy of the week’s text(s). Showing up and talking regularly will not guarantee you a high grade. Rather, you need to consistently demonstrate that you have completed the week’s reading carefully and thoughtfully. Know the material and be prepared to be called upon in class. If you feel
uncomfortable speaking in class, set up an appointment with me so we can figure out participation strategies. I understand shyness, but I can only help if you communicate with me.

**CCLE Posts (15%)**: Brief responses to the next day’s reading are due at **11 PM every Wednesday**. The point is to help you complete the reading on time, start unpacking a text, and prepare yourself for our class discussion. Each post will ask you to respond to a prompt. These posts will be graded on thoughtfulness and demonstrated completion of the reading, as well as consistently meeting the deadline. You are allowed to skip **TWO** posts without penalty.

**Short Paper**: 3-5 pages + 1-page reflection (20%): This short exercise will require you to respond to a critical question of your own making. In addition, you will also write a 1-page reflection evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your work and how you hope to improve for Paper 2. **DUE: 5/6 at 7 PM**

**Creative Project (15%)**: This assignment will require you to engage artistically with one of the course texts in the medium of your choice (e.g. creative writing, photography, short film, etc.). Detailed guidelines will be provided. **DUE: 5/26 at 7 PM**

**Research Paper**: 12-15 pages + 1-page reflection (25%): This paper will expand on the close reading skills developed in your first paper to incorporate research into your argument. Papers should use at least one primary source and at least one secondary source, and be formatted in MLA style. In addition, you will also write a 1-page reflection evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your own work and how you hope to improve your future writing. **DUE: 6/15 at 11 PM**

**CLASSROOM RULES:**

1. **Treat One Another With Respect.** In the course of analyzing literary texts, disagreements are bound to occur. It is critical, however, that we voice our disagreements respectfully and remember that this is an academic setting. No one should feel intimidated or belittled in class, and rudeness to others WILL hurt your participation grade. On the other hand, if someone disagrees with your interpretation of a particular text, remember that it’s not personal.

2. **Come to Class.** You cannot participate if you’re not here, so it is in your best interest to attend section weekly. If you must miss class for any reason, please let me know ahead of time. If you are absent, it is **your responsibility** to get notes or a debriefing from a classmate. All unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

3. **Put Away Your Damn Phones.** Electronic devices of any kind will not be allowed in class without special permission. Pretend you’ve been transported to the historical period we’re studying. If I see you using an unauthorized device during class, I will stop class and ask you to put it away. I will be irrationally irritated. The violation will hurt your participation grade.

4. **Communicate With Me.** My office hours (Thursdays 12:30-2:30) are the best way for me to address any questions you may have outside of class, but you can also email me with brief questions. I will typically respond within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. If you have questions about grades, come see me during office hours.

5. **Don’t Plagiarize.** As always, the UCLA plagiarism policy is in effect. You can find guidelines here: [https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf](https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf).