

English 356: Lit, Politics, and Activism
Section 1: Class # 6539
Spring 2015, California State University—Chico
TR, 11 a.m. – 12.15 p.m., MLIB 442

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Literature, Politics, and Activism

Honestly, what’s the use of books and movies when the history happening outside our doors is so troubling and immediate and seems to demand action and activism, not fiction and film? This question, or a version of it, has occasioned much debate ever since Plato decided to banish poets from his ideal *Republic* as useless liars. Certain historical moments have made this debate even more important, though, and authors of literary works have often sought to alter the political landscape by intervening directly in the pressing issues of the day. From antebellum slavery in the USA to 20th-century apartheid in South Africa, from 19th-century industrial exploitation to the contemporary exploitation of immigrant labor, from the Holocaust to Hiroshima, writers have attempted to highlight injustices and affect society and social policy. In this class, we’ll ask how and why.

Students will read a number of “politically engaged” texts in order to

- understand the political, ethical, and social contexts to which these texts respond;
- suggest possible stances taken by or within the texts, or possible solutions to political problems posed by these texts;
- become familiar with some of the radically different strategies adopted by politically engaged writers, from avant-garde experimentalism to descriptive realism;
- and critically reflect on the role that these texts, and literature or literary intellectuals in general, can play as a force for political or ethical activism.

Grade Breakdown

Exam 1	midterm	200 points	20%
Exam 2	final	200 points	20%
Analytical research paper	annotated bibliography paper of at least 7 pages	125 points 250 points	12.5% 25%
Character Persona		100 points	10%
Introductory blog		25 points	2.5%
Concluding blog		100 points	10%

A = 93-100%
A- = 90-93%
B+ = 87-90%
etc.

Exams: There will be a **midterm exam** consisting of a few matching, fill-in-the-blank, and free-response questions (either a few paragraph-length answers or an essay), and a very similar and non-cumulative **final exam** which will cover everything discussed in class after the midterm. Portions of each exam are open-book, so be sure to bring with you also the books we have read and discussed in class. Exams will test your knowledge of the readings and of material covered during lectures and discussions.

Analytical papers help us to hone the most valuable and portable skills we learn in English courses: careful, critical reading; research; and clear, organized, analytical writing that uses primary and secondary texts in order to explain a literary work. This assignment will represent the culmination of a series of smaller steps.

For the **annotated bibliography** (125 points) assignment, you will read at least 4 secondary sources and write a ca. 250-word synopsis of each. These sources can be biographical, historical, theoretical, or critical, but they must be scholarly in nature—that is, they must come from a peer-reviewed academic journal or a peer-reviewed academic press. Full, accurate **citation of the works in MLA format** is worth 25 points, and each entry is worth 25 points. (If you are consulting only a limited section of a larger work—say, one chapter of a book—you can indicate this in your annotation.) These cannot be secondary works we read together in class, though you may use those in your paper, and each source must be at least 10 pages in length. Do not rely on casual blogs; these almost never conform to standards for scholarship. That is, they are almost never peer-reviewed by experts in the field. You are safest to procure your articles via JSTOR or the MLA Bibliography. The **bibliography** must be submitted by email, and I will comment on it and return it to you by email. An example is available at the end of the document “How to Write a Research Paper,” posted on Blackboard, and you will have to consult this to see what the assignment should do and resemble.

The **term paper** will be **submitted by email**, will be at least 7 pages in length (including the list of works cited), and must cite at least 3 outside sources. (Outside sources are things we did not read together as a class.) Papers should be nicely proofread and follow the standards for written work in the field of English: MLA style, including a list of works cited: 8.5" x 11" paper, 1" margins all around, 12-point Times New Roman, in black. The OWL site at Purdue University is an invaluable and quick resource for your questions about MLA style: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> Any questions not answered by that site can usually be resolved by consulting the print edition of the *MLA Guide*, available in the library.

There will not be time, obviously, for revisions after the due date, but I encourage you to make use of my office hours in order to get help on rough drafts before the due date.

N.B. The list of works cited is part of the paper. Please do not send it as a separate file.

Character Personifications

You will sign up to personify a character from Zola’s *Germinal*, Zamyatin’s *We*, or Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. At least 5 times while we are discussing that work, you will tweet at least once as that character. Share thoughts, photos, knowledge of the historical period, etc. Respond to other characters’ tweets, in character. Demonstrate that you understand the character you’re playing and have tried to grasp his or her experience in the world, and share that familiarity with your classmates in order to help them grasp it all, too.

Introductory and Concluding Blogs

These will ask you to think about and express your opinion on the intersection of politics and literature (broadly defined: literary texts, films, TV shows...cultural products in general). The first will be due during the first week of class. The second will be due during finals week. While the introductory blog can be loose, hypothetical, and speculative, the concluding one

should be reflective. Think about what we've discussed in this class, and use your knowledge of how literature and politics interact in order to provide support for your opinions. Do you, at the end of the semester, think what you did at the beginning? Do you believe literature can be or should be or always is political? Do you believe it's just entertainment? Does it depend on the kind of literature?

Late work will not be accepted. The best way to insure that last-minute calamities will not derail your assignment is simply not to leave work until the last minute. If you leave work to the last minute and something goes wrong (a malfunctioning computer, "I just forgot about it," a flat tire, etc.), you will not have any time to fix it.

Laptops and tablets and other devices will not be permitted in class except on days specified in advance by me (on which we will use them for work in class).

Absences

Six absences will not affect your grade at all. All absences beyond the sixth one incur a 20-point deduction from your final grade for the course. I do not need any explanations, doctor's notes or e-mails regarding your absence, and I will not answer e-mails asking what was missed. You can get that information from a classmate's notes or come to my office hours to discuss it.

Attendance implies not just physical but also mental presence in the classroom. To really be there, you have to have done the reading carefully and have either a good grasp of it or, if you didn't understand it, good questions to ask about exactly what you didn't understand. If you come to class unprepared or do not pay attention in class, you are not fully present.

Ways to be marked absent in addition to actual physical absence from class:

- failure to bring the assigned reading material
- failure to demonstrate having read the assigned material on a pop quiz
- failure to complete and bring homework when assigned
- failure to participate meaningfully in class work or group work
- using your phone in class

Academic Integrity

Cheating, Misuse of Sources, and Plagiarism are not acceptable, whether on exams or on papers or presentations. Those guilty of misusing sources will likely be given a warning. Those guilty of cheating or plagiarism will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs, and consequences can be severe. We will go over this in class before the first assignment is due, but you are strongly urged to consult this web page for details on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it:

<http://www.csuchico.edu/sjd/assets/docs/integrity/Avoiding%20Plagiarism.pdf>

Students with Disabilities

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss his or her specific needs. Please also contact the

Disability Support Services office to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

My availability

I'm here to help in any way I can, but I often have very busy office hours. So, in order to keep you from having to wait in a long line to meet with me, I will ask students to sign up beforehand. You can always pop by during office hours without an appointment, but signing up in advance will help everything run more smoothly. The sign-up sheet is posted on my office door, Siskiyou 141, and you can sign up as far as two weeks in advance. Please know that, if you cannot find a convenient time during my posted hours, we can arrange a time that will suit both of our schedules, and meeting on the phone or via Skype or FaceTime is also an option. Please also know that I am often in my office simply working, and if the door is open you should feel free to pop in. **If the door is closed, and it's not office hours, please do not disturb.**

Contacting me: Email is the best way to get a hold of me, and I answer all emails promptly (within 24 business hours).

- I am accessible and eager to help, but I do ask that you respect my time by not emailing with questions you can easily find the answers to in class, on the syllabus, or through university websites or Google.com (questions like, for example, "I wasn't in class today; what did we talk about?"; "What's the reading for next week?"; or "How many points is this paper worth?").
- Please do not ask me whether you will earn credit for submitting an assignment late. If you want to submit it in order to learn from having done it, just do so.
- Please do not ask whether it is "okay" to miss class on a certain day. It is never "okay" to miss class. Sometimes it's unavoidable, and there's nothing we can do about that, which is why I allow a certain number of absences. If you can make it to class, I'm sure you will, and, if you can't make it, then my okay won't matter much either way. The attendance policy allows for instances just like this.

Contacting you: I use email very frequently to update you on class business, so please make sure that I have an email address that you check regularly (once daily, if possible). If you are not receiving any emails I send (you will know, because I will refer to these emails in class), it is your responsibility to apprise me.

Course readings

All of the course books are available at the campus bookstore, but feel free to buy them used on Amazon if you can save a few bucks. Please have the edition listed, so that you can fully participate in and follow class lectures and discussion.

Required texts:

Émile Zola, *Germinal* (Oxford)

Samuel Becket, *Waiting for Godot* (Grove)

Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (Penguin)

Alan Moore et al, *V for Vendetta* (DC Comics)

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford)

ISBN: 9780199536894

ISBN: 9780802144423

ISBN: 9780140185852

ISBN: 9781401208417

ISBN: 9780199535569

English 356 Calendar

Wk 1	Week of Jan 19		reading
	T	Introduction What do we mean when we say art can be “political”?	
	Th	<u>Critical Realism and Naturalism</u> Émile Zola, from <i>The Experimental Novel</i> (1880)	online
		Sign-up for Character Persona assignment	
Wk 2	Week of Jan 26		
	T	Émile Zola, <i>Germinal</i> (1885)	Parts I-II, 1-132
	Th	Zola, cont.	Part III, 135-195
Wk 3	Week of Feb 2		
	T	Zola, cont.	Part IV, 199-291
	Th	Zola, cont.	Part V, 295-354
Wk 4	Week of Feb 9		
	T	Zola, cont.	Parts V-VII, 354-476
	Th	Zola, cont.	Part VII, 476-end
Wk 5	Week of Feb 16		
	T	<u>Experimental Anti-Realism</u> Samuel Beckett, <i>Waiting for Godot</i> (1957)	whole play
	Th	Beckett, cont.	
Wk 6	Week of Feb 23		
	T	Beckett, cont. Martin Esslin, from <i>Theatre of the Absurd</i> (1961) Theodor Adorno, from “Engagement”	online online
	Th	Midterm	
Wk 7	Week of Mar 2		
		<u>Theme 1: Bad Worlds</u>	
	T	Yevgeny Zamyatin, <i>We</i> (1921)	1-74
	Th	Zamyatin, cont.	75-120
Wk 8	Week of Mar 9		
	T	Zamyatin, cont.	120-179
	Th	Zamyatin, cont.	180-225 (end)

Spring Break

- Wk 9 Week of Mar 23
- T Meet in normal classroom, and **bring a laptop or tablet** for a research methods workshop led by Ms. Rachel Arteaga, from the Merriam Library. This will be most useful to you if you bring ideas—even vague ones—for a project topic.
- Th No class :: Baker at conference :: Read *V for Vendetta*
- Wk 10 Week of Mar 30
- T No class :: César Chávez Day
- Th Alan Moore and David Lloyd, *V for Vendetta* (1982-89) entirety
- Wk 11 Week of Apr 5
- T *V for Vendetta*, cont.
- Th *V for Vendetta*, cont.
T.S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men” online
Anonymous, “We are Anonymous. We do not forgive. We do not forget.” online
- F Annotated bibliography due**
- Wk 12 Week of Apr 12
- Theme 2: Inequality
- T Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Volume 1, 1-101
Thomas Piketty, from *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*
- Th Austen, cont. V 2 chs 1-13, 103-160
Virginia Woolf, from *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) online
- Wk 13 Week of Apr 20
- T Austen, cont. V 2 ch 14-19, 161-184
- Th Austen, cont.
- F Drafts of Final Paper to peer-review partner, by midnight latest**
- Wk 14 Week of Apr 27
- T Austen, cont. Volume III, 185-end
The Declaration of Independence (1776) online
The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) online
- W Textshop of Final Paper draft, by midnight, by email**
- Th Ralph Ellison, “Battle Royal” online
- Wk 15 Week of May 4
- T Ellison, cont.
- W Final Papers due by midnight, by email**
- Th Review for final exam
- Wk 16: Finals Week
- Concluding Blog** due Monday, May 11, by midnight
- Final Exam:** Thursday, May 14, 10:00-11:50 a.m.