

CONF 757: CONFLICT AND LITERATURE

FALL 2016

PROF. RICHARD E. RUBENSTEIN

SYLLABUS AND SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Purposes

Welcome to CONF 757, the course in Conflict and Literature. This course has several purposes:

- To study how to read/interpret written and oral texts (and oral statements)
- To learn some of what imaginative literature (mainly novels, but also poetry, film, and drama) can teach us about the causes, motives, dynamics, and possibilities of resolving violent social conflicts
- In particular, to deepen our understanding of the human dimensions of conflicts involving mass movements for social transformation
- To practice interpreting a range of imaginative works, including novels, plays, poetry, and films
- To practice creating imaginative works of our own

Instructor and Office Hours

This course is taught by Richard Rubenstein, Metropolitan Bldg. 5070, on Tuesdays at 4:30-7:10 p.m. He can be reached at 703-400-7674 or at rubenstein.richard@gmail.com. The instructor is available to talk about the course or any other matters of interest by appointment.

Methods and Grading

The methods used to teach this course will be those of a graduate seminar, including lectures, guest lectures, discussions, and student presentations. Students are expected to attend each class thoroughly prepared to discuss the works assigned. Grades will be based on a midterm take-home exam (30%), an original story (20%), and a final take-home exam or term paper (50%). Please see the schedule below for relevant dates and deadlines. Students have the option to submit a term paper in lieu of sitting for the final examination, but the topic for the final paper must be

approved by the instructor by Week 11 (November 15) at the latest. So start planning early if you prefer to write a term paper.

In order to receive a passing grade, it is necessary to attend classes prepared to discuss the week's reading and to turn in all assignments on time. Please note that it is ICAR policy to refuse to grant grades of Incomplete for reasons other than documented medical or family emergencies.

University Requirements

These are listed immediately below in language suggested by the Provost's Office. We will take time in the first class to discuss any questions that you may have about this material, including questions about plagiarism.

Academic integrity

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

GMU email accounts

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

Office of Disability Services

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

Other Useful Campus Resources

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200;

<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES "Ask a Librarian"

<http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;

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<http://caps.gmu.edu>

The UNIVERSITY CATALOG, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

Course Materials

The required readings in this course are novels, plays, poetry, and films listed immediately below, and available at the Arlington Campus Bookstore, as well as in the Arlington Library, on Amazon, and through on-line sources. Additional materials will be delivered to students via email or placed on reserve in the John Burton Library or on the ICAR Community Forum (<http://icarcommunity.ning.com/>). All students should join the Conflict and Literature Group on the Community Forum, which will also be used for extra-curricular discussion.

Required Readings

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*
Anchor Books, 1998
ISBN-10: 038549081X

James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*
Beacon Books, 2012
ISBN-10: 0807006238

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3d Ed.
U. of Minnesota Press, 2008
ISBN-10: 0816654476

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor*
http://mseffie.com/assignments/billy_budd/Billy%20Budd%20Text.pdf
Simon & Schuster, 2006
ISBN-10: 1416523723

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts*
Penguin Books, 2003
ISBN-10: 0142437336

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
Grove Press, 2016
ISBN-10: 0802124941

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*
Random House, 2008
ISBN-10: 0812979656

Recommended: Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*

Shooken Books, 2009
ISBN-10: 0805210555

Course Structure

The course begins with A discussion of how to read/interpret texts, a topic that will recur throughout the course. We then read roughly one novel every two weeks, study some poetry, write an original story, and see a film during the remainder of the term. The novels and other works focus on the human dimensions of various types of struggle and transformation: viz., social revolutions; terrorism; race riots; gender conflicts; state repression; ethno-religious struggles; and imperial/anti-imperial conflicts.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Aug. 30 Introduction to the course: ways of interpreting literature. For this class read Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 1-46, 169-208, and Yeats, "Easter 1916"
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/43289>

Sep. 6 Discuss Herman Melville, "Billy Budd, Sailor"
http://mseffie.com/assignments/billy_budd/Billy%20Budd%20Text.pdf

Sep. 13 Discuss Franz Kafka, "Before the Law" and "In the Penal Colony."
http://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Franz_Kafka.pdf

Sep. 20 Discuss Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts*

Sep. 27 Discuss first half of Margaret Atwood, *A Handmaid's Tale*.

Oct. 4 Discuss second half of *A Handmaid's Tale*. *TOPICS FOR FIRST PAPER DISTRIBUTED*

Oct. 11 COLUMBUS DAY HOLIDAY

Oct. 18 *RETURN FIRST PAPER VIA EMAIL*. View film, "The Quiet American"

Nov. 1 Discuss James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, pp. 3-118. *TALK ABOUT ORIGINAL STORY ASSIGNMENT*

Nov. 8 Discuss first half of Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

Nov. 15 Complete *The God of Small Things*

Nov. 22 *RETURN ORIGINAL STORIES*. Readings from stories in class.

Nov. 29 Discuss first half of Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
CLEAR TOPICS FOR SELF-CHOSEN FINAL PAPERS BY THIS DATE

Dec. 6 Complete *The Sympathizer*. Wrap up discussion and celebration of end of term

Dec. 15 FINAL PAPERS DUE VIA EMAIL BY 5:00 P.M.