2014

205-03/05 Literature and the Moral Imagination

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Focus: These sections of Literature and the Moral Imagination focus on the complex relationships among memory, desire and narration (understood as storytelling in the broadest senses; that is, as the creation of identities—self/gender, generation/coterie, geographical/economic or political community and nation—in congruency with, or in opposition, to blood (sex, ethnicity and race). The last three novels we will read—Percival Everett by Virgil Russell, The Sense of An Ending and Was—concern the role of storytelling and narration in relation to remembering and imagining while the first three—Ceremony, Life Goes On and Half Man Dreaming—pose ethnicity and race in relation to community and national identities. The seventh novel, the fourth one we will read, is about what is sometimes, disparagingly and unfairly, called Generation X. This novel, Taipei, poses the problem of existential angst, a refusal of the categories of psychology and biology (in short, all those named above) even as the characters find themselves implicated in a “global” world whose neoliberal premises are undercut by the “return” of ethnicity, race, gender and class antagonisms.

Texts: Ceremony (Leslie Marmon Silko); Life Goes On (Hans Kilson); Half Man Dreaming (David Matlin); Taipei (Tao Lin); Percival Everett by Virgil Russell (Percival Everett); The Sense of An Ending (Julian Barnes); Was (Geoff Ryman)

Requirements: Two Oral Reports (These will be recorded by ISS on days when I will not be in class. However, all students are expected to attend class and participate in the oral reports as presenters or respondents/listeners).

Two Papers. The first paper, due Friday February 28, 2014, must compare and contrast themes, characters or forms in two of the first three novels. The second, due Friday, May 2, 2014, must concern two of the last four novels.

One midterm examination, Friday, February 28.

Final examination May 7 (10:00 a.m.-11:50 a.m.; 12:00 p.m.-1:50 p.m.).

Regular and consistent participation in class discussions.

Impromptu (“pop”) quizzes on the readings assigned for particular days.
Grading: Oral Reports: 20 points (10 points each)
Papers: 20 points (10 points each)
Midterm Exam: 20 points
Final Exam: 25 points
Quizzes: 10 points
Participation: 5 points

Schedule: Week

1. Ceremony
2. Ceremony
3. Life Goes On
4. Life Goes On
5. Half Man Dreaming
8. Spring Break
9. Taipei
12. Percival Everett by Virgil Russell
13. The Sense of an Ending
14. Was
15. Was
16. Final Examinations May 7 and May 9 2014

Student Learning Outcomes:

GOAL 1: Students will be effective communicators in writing and orally
1. Students will be able to organize and express their ideas in writing and orally
2. Students will be able to formulate clear and arguable theses, supported by evidence drawn from appropriate sources
3. Students will be able to utilize an effective writing process guided by audience, purpose, cultural context, and disciplinary standards

GOAL 2: Students will be critical thinkers
1. Students will be able to analyze and interpret texts, images, objects, artifacts, and quantitative and qualitative data
2. Students will be able to describe the historical, cultural, mythological, and social contexts of texts, works of art, and theories
3. Students will be able to evaluate the strength of an argument or claim and its evidence
4. Students will be able to discuss fundamental questions that arise from the human condition, such as questions about the grounds of morality, the essence of justice, the nature of reality, the possibility of certainty, the nature of beauty, or the reasonableness of religious faith
GOAL 4: Students will understand and appreciate the arts, humanities and science disciplines, and reflect on connections among these studies.

1. Students will be able to think historically in order to understand the past on its own terms and to understand how societies have changed over time
2. Students will be able to recognize and interpret artistic and literary expression

GOAL 5: Students will be integrated individuals who articulate a coherent, ethical perspective on the world and their place in it

1. Students will be able to recognize the societal, ethical and moral dimensions of discourse, art, information, science and technology
2. Students will be able to relate their knowledge and skills in a reflective and constructive way to their life experiences and the challenges confronting today’s world
3. Students will be able to use information and resources responsibly in their communication and research
4. Students will be able to utilize intellectual, moral, and spiritual tools and sensibilities to engage faithfully and responsively in the world for the promotion of peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability

GOAL 7 (E/RS): Students will be intellectually, morally and spiritually educated individuals capable of critical reflection on ethical and/or religious questions of social significance from the perspective of multiple disciplines with unique methods

1. Students will be able to analyze rationally competing claims about individual and political justice within foundational philosophical texts
2. Students will be able to engage in critical, theological reflection on ethical and/or religious questions of social significance, using human experience and religious traditions as resources to address these questions
3. Students will be able to reflect critically on ethical and/or religious questions of social significance through the method of another discipline or through a second course in philosophy, theology or literature

*You will notice that there are four scheduled days for oral reports. Half of the class will give reports on one day in February, the other half on the second day in February. Repeat in March. Each report should be between 5 and 7 minutes long. Students cannot give both reports on the same day. There should be time for 6-7 reports per class; we will draw lots to determine what day each student is expected to give his or her report. In the event we need another day for oral reports, April 11 and 18 will be our back up days.*
Miscellaneous: The use of laptops*, cell phones, I-phones or any texting devices during class is strictly forbidden. Any student caught using such devices will be marked absent for the day and will not be allowed to participate in class in any form whatsoever. Students who attend class without the book being discussed that day will also be considered absent and will likewise be forbidden to participate in class discussions or take quizzes. Students who walk into class more than five minutes after class begins will also be considered absent for the day and will not be permitted to participate in class discussions and/or take quizzes. Late papers will be penalized a half a grade per day (not class) late. Plagiarism, intentional or not, will result in automatic failure of the course.