2014

205-21A Literature and the Moral Imagination: Focus on Mental Illness

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Course: ENGL 205-21A  
Instructor: Don Prues  
Time: Saturday 8:30-12:00  
Room: 346 Smith Hall  
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday: 1:15-2:15; Saturday: after class (and by appointment, whether in person or over the phone)  
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Objectives:
Our goals are not necessarily to make an in-depth study of the elements of fiction (plot, theme, setting, style, etc.) but to evaluate and learn about how some aspects of mental illness manifest themselves in literature. The texts in this course are very character-driven, which is intentional. We are reading texts that are less about “normal” people doing “normal” things and more about unconventional characters engaged in the extraordinary. Sometimes what we study might seem unbelievable and disturbing, as our characters might act (and react) in conventionally strange ways -- some probably aren’t like us (or are they?) while others are a lot like us (or are they not?). Ultimately, this course will challenge, clarify, and de-stigmatize our individual and societal presumptions and conclusions about some aspects of mental illness.

I am not a psychiatrist, psychologist, or counselor; I am an English teacher who is fairly well-acquainted with and extremely curious about mental illness. I come to you in this course less as an authority on mental illness but more as a fellow explorer and guide.

Required Course Materials:
Therese Borchard, “Black and Depressed: Two African-American Women Break the Silence”  
William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*  
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*  
Notes on a Scandal*  
Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*  
Ordinary People*  
Girl, Interrupted*  
William Kennedy, *Ironweed*  
The Shape of Things*  
Distributed parts of Marya Hornbacher, *Sane: Mental Illness, Addiction, and the 12 Steps*

*The four books you must purchase are in bold.*  
*An asterisk (*) indicates you will watch the video and thus do not have to purchase the text.*
Class Policy:
You must attend every class. If you miss two classes, your final grade will be dropped one full letter grade. If you miss three classes, you will fail the course. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. The only exceptions will be documented hospitalization or documented death in the family. You also must read each assignment and view each movie carefully, and then be prepared to ask questions and share your thoughts with the class. This course is highly participatory, which means your attendance and participation are essential both for your personal success and for the success of the class as a whole.

Grades/Assignments:
Quizzes = 20%
Essays = 20%
Two Exams = 50%
Participation = 10%
(By “participation” I don’t mean just showing up – that’s merely attending! You get zero points for attendance, as you’re expected to be here. You get points for participating, which you must earn, by contributing regularly and substantively to class discussions.)

Grade Distribution:
A: 93%-100%
A-: 90%-92%
B+: 87%-89%
B: 83%-86%
B-: 80%-82%
C+: 77%-79%
C: 73%-76%
C-: 70%-72%
D+: 67%-69%
D: 60%-66%
F: 59% and below

Quizzes:
You will be given weekly quizzes and possible short in-class writing assignments. All quizzes and writing assignments are worth 10 points and will be given at the beginning of class. You may NOT make up a missed quiz or writing assignment. And I do not allow any extra credit work to boost your grade. So be punctual and prepared for each class.

Exams:
Each exam is worth 25% of your grade. Your exams will be a combination of brief written responses, excerpt identification or explication, possibly a True/False section, and one or two long essays. You must take both exams in class at the assigned date and time; no early or make-up exams permitted.

Essays:
You have the option to write two 3 ½-4 page essays (due on the specified dates) or one 7-8 page essay (due at the end of the term). Your essays must be typed or word-processed, double-spaced in 11 or 12 pt. font, with 1-inch margins. I expect clear, organized, thoughtful, and well-developed papers, written in sharp, college-level prose. They also must adhere to MLA guidelines. Each day (not class period) a paper is late, a full letter grade is dropped for that paper. Only excuses with written verification will be accepted.
You aren’t English majors, so if your writing skills are rusty you may want to make an appointment at the Writing Center (745-2875).

**Plagiarism:**
Any case of intentional or unintentional academic dishonesty will result in zero for the assignment, a letter to your Dean, most likely an F for the course, possible expulsion from the university and potential prosecution. All work must be your own – turn in another’s work (however small) under your name and you’ll pay the consequences. The following are examples of plagiarism:

1. Quoting verbatim (word-for-word) from *any source* -- a book, a blog, a journal article, a magazine, a website, a movie, a podcast, a song, a tweet, a television show, a YouTube video, an encyclopedia, Wikipedia, another’s paper, etc. -- without putting the quote in quotation marks and giving that source credit/attribution.

2. Paraphrasing another person’s/source’s unique ideas, theses, themes, research, etc. (published or unpublished) without giving that person/source credit/attribution.

3. Using another person’s/source’s tables, graphs, photographs, artwork, or illustrations without giving that person/source credit/attribution.

4. Using all or a small part (even a phrase) of another student’s paper or presentation, even if that student approves. Both emailing parts of a paper to another student and receiving parts of a paper from another student constitute academic dishonesty; as such both students will be held accountable.

5. Using/purchasing a paper or any material from a website or any other source.

The above list is not complete, so please consult plagiarism.com If you are uncertain about whether you are plagiarizing and/or need to know Xavier’s policy on plagiarism, please ask me or visit Xavier’s Preventing Plagiarism tutorial: [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism).

Note: I may require you to submit essays to turnitin.com.

**Readings and Assignment Schedule:**
I don’t anticipate any changes during the course, but this schedule is subject to revision at my discretion. Changes will be announced in class or via email and/or Canvas.

*Please turn off your electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) before class. They are distractions, and I will not permit you to use them. The only exception is if you are using a tablet just for the readings, NOT for the web, email, etc.*

Note:
A little caveat: This course contains adult content and our classroom is an open forum for discussion about anything regarding mental illness. Given the theme and content of this course, many of our texts and films inevitably contain various unpleasant and explicit aspects of mental illness, including adultery, pedophilia, suicide, self-harm, torture, racism, child abuse, rape, sexual transgression, etc. If you are easily offended by or find yourself particularly sensitive to such material, you may want to you drop this course and find another 205 section, as our class time will contain involved discussions – even using profanity when necessary -- in reference to such material. For us to euphemize or avoid
taboo words and phrases and the horrible aspects of mental illness would both defeat the purpose of the course and be intellectually disingenuous.
Weekly Schedule

**Week One**
Sun. 8/17  Course Introduction  Discussion on mental illness

**Week Two**
Sat. 8/23  Styron, *Darkness Visible*
Borchard, “Black and Depressed: Two African-American Women Break the Silence”
*Ordinary People*

**Week Three**
Sat. 8/30  Nabokov, *Lolita*
*Notes on a Scandal*

**Week Four**
Sat. 9/6  Nabokov, *Lolita*
*Notes on a Scandal*

**Week Five**
Sat. 9/13  Exam #1  Essay #1 Due

**Week Six**
Sat. 9/20  Plath, *The Bell Jar*
*Girl, Interrupted*

**Week Seven**
Sat. 9/27  Kennedy, *Ironweed*

**Week Eight**
Sat. 10/4  *Sane: Mental Illness, Addiction, and the 12 Steps*
*The Shape of Things*

**Week Nine**
Sat. 10/11  Final Exam  Final Essay Due
Please note the following information as it pertains to your prerequisites and Xavier University’s Core Curriculum.

You must have completed and passed ENGL 101 or 115 and ENGL 124 to be in this course. ENGL 205 is your third English Department required course in the university’s Core Curriculum. As such, this course fulfills one or more requirements of the Core Curriculum, especially the following:

- Students will be effective communicators in writing and orally
- Students will formulate clear and arguable theses, supported by evidence drawn from appropriate sources
- Students will be critical thinkers
- Students will analyze and interpret texts, images, objects, artifacts, and quantitative and qualitative data
- Students will evaluate the strength of an argument or claim and its evidence
- Students will 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
- Students will utilize their imagination and creativity, individually and collectively, to innovate and generate new perspectives to problems
- Students will be able to understand and appreciate the arts, humanities and science disciplines, and reflect on connections among these studies
- Students will recognize and interpret artistic and literary expression
- Students will consider perspectives of diverse groups when making decisions
- Students will interact with sensitivity as members of society and as professionals with people who have ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are different from their own
- Students will critically read, write about, and reflect on ethical and/or religious issues of social significance through interpretation of literary texts
- Students will 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