2014

124-14 Studies in Fiction

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Mailbox: First floor of Hinkle Hall (adjacent to Faculty Services)
Office: 212 Hinkle
Office hours: Tuesdays, 6-6:55 PM and by appointment

Course Description:
This is an introductory literature course and is intended to provide students with the history and thematics of select U.S. multicultural coming-of-age narratives. In an effort to understand the process of maturation from adolescence to adulthood for our characters, we will read course texts that are within the tradition of but also challenge conventions of the Bildungsroman. Particular focus will be paid to how social and psychological growth and identity formation are informed, shaped, and/or complicated by specific U.S. histories, regional differences, and differences of race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, class, and sexual orientation. This course will also require students to write their own coming-of-age narratives and to reflect on and situate these invented histories vis-à-vis those excavated through our course texts.

My methodology in this course assumes that formal analysis and close reading are essential to understanding course texts. It also assumes, however, that literary form has a material history that is inseparable from the wider social and political histories of these periods. As an introductory literature course, this course is committed to the goals of thinking critically, understanding contexts, engaging with other learners, and reflecting and acting. Thinking critically is central to close reading and to evaluating the social and political relevance of literary works. Understanding contexts is incorporated into the course to the extent that the course consistently relates literary works to both their socio-historical contexts and to “real time.” Engaging with other learners will be an important part of the day to day mechanics of the course and will be emphasized through classroom discussion. Finally, the goal of reflecting and acting is central to many of the themes in the course, for many of the readings are predicated on the idea that literary expression is a form of social engagement. I encourage all of you to “use” these texts as vehicles for personal, collective, and social change.

Required Texts:
James Baldwin, Go Tell it on the Mountain (Vintage International)
Mary Frosch, Ed. Coming of Age in America: A Multicultural Anthology (New Press)
Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar (Harper Perennial)
Anderson Prunty, Fuckness (Atlatl Press)
Course Goals:

- Increased understanding of the history and literature of the U.S.
- Familiarity with some critical debates surrounding literature and canon formation
- Awareness of the political and ideological functions of literary representations and an increased sense of how literature asks and answers important social questions
- Improved critical reading and writing skills: increased ability to recognize patterns in texts; increased ability to perform close reading
- Improved writing skills and increased ability to write for academic audiences
- Substantial practice of goals such as critical thinking, understanding contexts, engaging with other learners, and reflecting and acting

Course Requirements:

- Two essays of 5-6 pages double spaced (proofread, typed, stapled), each due on 10/14 and 11/25
- A final exam on Tuesday, December 16, 2014 in our regular classroom. The final will have three parts. The first part will consist of excerpts from texts we have read this semester. You will be expected to identify each excerpt and explain its significance. Part two will be a series of short answers. Part three will be a choice of essay questions on themes central to the course. You will be required to answer one essay question by referring to at least two course texts.
- One close reading essay of 2-3 pages double spaced. This essay will address a particular reading, or a portion thereof, before we address it in class.
- One 3-4 page coming-of-age narrative and 10 minute in-class presentation
- Approximately 6 quizzes or in-class writing assignments (I will drop lowest quiz grade)
- Approximately 50-100 pages of reading per week (depends on length and difficulty of text)
- Lively in-class participation, including facilitation of section of course text

Grading:

- First essay
- Second essay
- Final exam
- Close Reading Essay (able to revise)
- Coming-of-Age Essay & Presentation
- In-Class Participation
- Quizzes and In-Class Writing

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<td>First essay</td>
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<td>Second essay</td>
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<td>Final exam</td>
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<td>Close Reading Essay (able to revise)</td>
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<td>Coming-of-Age Essay &amp; Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Class Participation</td>
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<td>Quizzes and In-Class Writing</td>
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*In addition to the above course requirements, I also allow for ONE 10 point extra-credit essay. If you attend a university event (play, lecture, etc.) and provide a two page response on what you found interesting, problematic, or compelling about the event and its relation to our course theme or texts, I will add 10 points to your final total for the course.*

In-Class Policies:
Please turn off and put away all phones and I-devices. If I see you texting or checking your phone repeatedly in class, I will make a note of it – verbally and with a mark in my gradebook. Please be aware, as well, that lack of preparation for class (did not bring the book, does not participate during small group work, etc.) will negatively reflect your participation grade.

I prefer that you do not take notes on your laptop; if you must do so, then have open only Word or Word Mac. Please do not have the internet open. (This means staying logged into Facebook).

Attendance:
I expect all of you to come to this class regularly. Be advised that I do take attendance. You may miss two classes over the course of the semester for any reason without incurring a penalty. (Three tardies are equivalent to one absence.) After the second absence, your participation grade will be lowered at my discretion. Of course, you should use your allotted absences on days when you really cannot attend class due to illness, unexpected travel, or irresolvable scheduling conflicts. The only excused absences are religious observances and those required by an official Xavier University scheduled event (accompanied by a note from a Xavier University administrator). For these cases to be excused, you must receive my approval at least one week prior to the scheduled absence.

Preparation for Class and Class Participation:
Informed, lively discussion of course texts is an important aspect of this class. Therefore, each time you come to class you should prepare a question for class discussion – often derived from reading/marginal notes. You should be prepared to tell the class about a subject worth discussing, why the subject is worth talking about, or why the subject caught your attention (always provide page numbers when raising your question). I will often call on you to share these subjects as starting points for discussion. If you are not prepared, I will make a note of it. Lack of consistent preparation and failure to participate in class discussion will significantly lower your grade. On the other hand, lively and articulate discussion and good participation will affect your grade positively.

Quizzes and In-Class Writing:
I will give a very brief quiz or in-class writing assignment approximately every other week, usually when you have completed a major reading. These days are marked in the syllabus schedule with an asterisk. In-class exercises have two goals: to keep you up with the reading and to provide a focus for class discussion. If you fail more than two quizzes, I will consider you a non-participating member of class and your total quiz grades will be reduced to a zero. This result will lower your final grade by a letter grade. Be advised that you cannot make up a quiz if you arrive after I have collected all quizzes.

Basic Advice for Writing Good Discussion Questions:
- Try to formulate questions that help others see our readings from a new perspective or ones that provide a helpful way of interrogating difficult matters central to either the text at hand or our course
- If you raise a question about the text, be sure to explain why it is a relevant question – connection with other passages in text, connection with other course texts, etc.
• Good comments frequently begin by describing a pattern or problem in the text and then generating a *productive* question about this pattern or problem

* We will spend sufficient in class time discussing how to write effective thought-provoking questions, as well as how to turn these questions into compelling essay topics.

**Writing and Academic Honesty:**
Unless written in class or posted electronically, all papers must be typed and double-spaced, with 1” margins, in Times New Roman, 12 point font (no exceptions). *I do NOT accept late papers.* 

**Failure to turn in an essay on time will result in a zero on that assignment.** Consulting secondary sources can be useful, but you *must* be careful to properly cite any ideas or phrases you have borrowed – this includes an idea, a paraphrase, or a direct quotation from the source. This rule also pertains to so-called “study guides” such as *Cliff’s Notes, Spark Notes, Monarch Notes,* and so on. In general, I do not recommend the use of such guides. Even though some of our readings are challenging (for everyone, including me), you should aspire to confront difficult readings on your own – even if it causes you to struggle. If you find yourself learning on study guides for comprehension, I suggest you see me. If you are substituting reading summaries for actual reading, then you are engaging in a form of academic dishonesty and will be penalized accordingly.

Once I have received your electronic or written work, I reserve the right to report any violations of plagiarism to the department and university authorities regardless of your intentions or possible ignorance. It is better to receive an “F” on an assignment than to be prosecuted for academic dishonesty. I make no exceptions to this policy.

**Disability and Support Services:**
Xavier University provides assistance to all eligible differently abled students. You may contact Student Disability Services in the Learning Assistance Center (513.745.3280)

**Grading Scale:**
In evaluating your written work, I use the following scale:

A range: Grades of “A” indicate true excellence in both thinking and writing. Essays in the “A” range have most or all of the following qualities: a clear, consistent, and compelling argument; evidence of independent thinking or originality; substantial supporting evidence for central claims; precise, efficient, and well-organized English prose. To receive an “A” a paper need not be flawless, but it should show signs of substantial, focused thinking, and a willingness to take on serious intellectual challenges.

B range: Papers in the “B” range are often good and reflect substantial achievement. They not only satisfy the assignment but do so in a compelling way. Typically, “B” papers contain some or even many of the qualities of an “A” paper. A “B” paper might, for example, have graceful and technically flawless prose but an argument that is not well supported or not highly complex. Alternatively, it might present a stunning and well-supported argument but the writer relies too heavily on the work of others. A paper can also be placed in the “B” range because most of its components are not up to the highest standard, or because it lacks the originality of thought required of an “A” paper.

C range: “C” papers competently complete the assignment. They are neither remarkable nor poor. “C” papers usually have some qualities of “B” papers and may have qualities of “A” papers that are offset by
problems in other areas. Oftentimes, “C” papers contain a weak argument: one that is disorganized or poorly supported, or obvious and unoriginal. Papers may also up in the “C” range when they contain confusing, garbled prose or serious mechanical difficulties; when they show little intellectual initiative, despite sound prose; or when their various components are all average.

D range: “D” papers barely meet the most basic assignment criteria and fail to do some of what the assignment asks. They may suggest careless work, a lack of effort, and little thought. Typically they lack an argument, show little or no engagement with the text, and contain seriously confused prose. DON’T GO HERE.

Need Revised: Papers in this range do not meet the requirements of the assignment. DON’T GO HERE.

I recognize English 124 is an introductory literature course; however, if you are interested in an easy “A,” please consider enrolling in another section.
Schedule of Assignments
(May be subject to change)

You should complete the text by the day marked with an asterisk (*) and you should expect a quiz or in-class writing exercise on this day.

Week One
T, 8/26: Course introduction including syllabus and schedule review; overview of Bildungsroman as genre; conventions and characteristics of coming-of-age narratives in film and literature; in-class exercise with short reading assignment

Week Two
T, 9/2: Review of genre conventions and characteristics of coming-of-age narratives; from Coming of Age: foreword, preface, “Fitting In” (all)

Week Three
T, 9/9: Coming of Age: “Affairs of the Heart” (all) *

Week Four
T, 9/16: Coming of Age: “Family Matters” (all)
Close reading essay due

Week Five
T, 9/23: Coming of Age: “Crisis” (all)

Week Six
T, 9/30: James Baldwin, Go Tell it on the Mountain: Part 1 only *

Week Seven
T, 10/7: Go Tell it on the Mountain: Parts 2 and 3

Week Eight
T, 10/14: Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar: Foreword-98 *
First Essay due

Week Nine
T, 10/21: The Bell Jar: 99-183

Week Ten
T, 10/28: The Bell Jar: 184-244 *

Week Eleven
T, 11/4: Anderson Prunty, Fuckness: 1-78 *

Week Twelve
T, 11/11: Fuckness: 79-153
Week Thirteen
T, 11/18: *Fuckness*: 154-200 *

Week Fourteen
T, 11/25: Student Presentations
Second essay due

Week Fifteen
T, 12/2: Student Presentations

Week Sixteen
T, 12/9: Preparation for Final Exam

Week Sixteen
FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED FOR:
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2014, 7-9:30 PM