2014

205-12/13 Literature and the Moral Imagination: Focus on Literature of the American West an Ethics/ Religion and Society

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ENGL 205 – 12 and 13: Literature and the Moral Imagination S2014
Focus on Literature of the American West
An Ethics/Religion and Society Course

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Office Hours: TR 1:30 – 2:20 and by appt. I am often around on Mondays from 12 – 1:30-ish.

Required Texts: in order of use
Jack Schaefer, Shane
Charles Portis, True Grit
David Anthony Durham, Gabriel’s Journey
Louise Erdrich, The Round House
Also short stories on e-reserves: password Russell

Course Description:

“The 19th-century ‘settling of the West’ implanted in the American psyche a tradition of heroic myth complete with figures equal to the gods and heroes of ancient Greece. A century later, that mythology still pervades American attitudes and popular culture, from firearms to cowboy clothing, from folklore to literature, from pop art to fine art, music, literature, and film. In a sense, it defines America.” --Thomas W. Knowles, “Dreams West”

“Acknowledging the moral complexity of Western history does not require us to surrender the mythic power traditionally associated with the region’s story. On the contrary, moral complexity provides the base for parables and tales of greater and deeper meaning. Myths resting on tragedy and on unforeseen consequences, the ancient Greeks certainly knew, have far more power than stories of simple triumphs and victories.” --Patricia Nelson Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest

As the passages above indicate, the West looms large in American culture, not only as a contributor to our sense of national identity but also as a consistent reservoir of images, themes, and issues in our literature. The texts we will examine are mostly contemporary, but we will also read some earlier material for historical context. Because much of our mythology of the West comes from film (think John Wayne), we will also view movies that correspond to the course focus. This course is part of the Ethics/Religion and Society (E/RS) focus in the university core curriculum, so much of our class materials and discussions will provide substantive opportunities to analyze the moral and ethical dimensions of socially significant issues as well as religious/spiritual aspects of the reading or film. We will explore, for example, how this material treats problems of alcoholism, greed, family dysfunction, racism, and violence, and we will examine how individuals’ choices affect the people and society around them. Another goal of the course is to gain understanding of how contemporary American writers revise and complicate our frequently romanticized perspective of our Western past.
It's important for you to understand, going into the course, that you will encounter potentially offensive language and graphically brutal scenes. Eastwood's film *Unforgiven* is very dark, for example, and some of the literature is also violent in portraying the wild American West. Serious literature and film reflect the best and worst of humankind, so we will need to read, view, and discuss it with an open mind and with respect for the authors'/screenwriter's intentions. Finally, the course will also offer a chance for you to study some of our most interesting contemporary writers whose work transcends the Western themes and issues that link them on this syllabus.

**Course Pre-requisites:** ENGL 101 – Composition or ENGL 115 – Rhetoric, and THEO 111 – Theological Foundations and PHIL 100 – Ethics as Introduction to Philosophy, though these last two may be taken at the same time as ENGL 205. The English department strongly recommends that students complete their core literature requirement before taking this course.

**Class Format:** This course will be an ongoing conversation with few instances of lecturing. For this conversation to be worthwhile, you must bring your curiosity, insight, and voice to every class meeting. (I love it when students participate and show some enthusiasm.) You will often be asked to explore your response to the works through brief writing assignments and collaborative small group discussions; these are learning tools, not busy work, and must be treated as the serious academic tasks that they are. I really enjoy the material in this particular course, and I think most students do as well. Feel free to bring drinks or snacks to class as long as you aren’t disruptive as you consume them.

**Assignments and Grades:**

I use plus/minus grading based on a scale of 100, as follows: 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 63-66, D- 60-62, F 59 and under.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Points</th>
<th>Assignment Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Brief essay (2-3 pages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>Midterm</td>
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<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>Longer Paper (4 – 5 pages)</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>Group Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Reading quizzes, brief writing assign., and class participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Possible points</td>
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</tbody>
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**Policies: otherwise known as “the mean stuff”**

You must complete and submit all assigned work to pass this course.

I take attendance at the beginning of each class meeting, so if you are late you need to see me after class to make sure I recorded your presence. This is your responsibility—not mine. You are allowed three absences, so use them wisely; I don’t distinguish between excused and unexcused. After the third absence you will face a 1/3 letter grade deduction (35 points) for each additional absence. If you have a serious illness or participate in a university-sponsored event or sports, provide me with documentation and I will work with you as best as I am able. Likewise, if you have any documentation for other legal accommodations, please let me know in the next week or two.

Late assignments will be accepted, but, out of fairness to the students who turned the work in on time, I will penalize your grade by half a letter grade for each calendar day late. Please see me if
you are having difficulty with an assignment, preferably well before it’s due so that I can help. Always turn late work into the Faculty Services desk in the Hinkle Hall atrium; it might get overlooked if you put it under my office door. **Do not e-mail papers to me** unless we have made prior arrangements for you to do so. Also, if you e-mail me and do not get a response within 48 hours, assume that I have not received your e-mail. When I (or any other professor) do respond to your e-mail, please acknowledge that response, even with just an “okay” or “thanks.” We appreciate such gestures and will think well of you.

**Plagiarism** in any form is unacceptable and will be punished severely. You must document your use of other people’s ideas or words (this includes summary and paraphrase, as well as direct quotations) or you will be guilty of stealing intellectual property. The penalty for plagiarism includes a zero grade for the assignment and possible failure for the course. Refer to Xavier’s catalogue for the university policy on plagiarism and other forms of cheating. I will require you to submit written work to Turnitin.com (information provided in class) as well as submitting a paper copy in class on the due date.

**Paper Format:** Papers must be word-processed and double-spaced. Type your name, the course title, my name and the date in the upper-left margin, and then space down once to center your paper title (no cover page is necessary). Number pages and staple or paper-clip them together. Use standard fonts and print size, please, and MLA style if you are citing secondary sources.

**You may not use any electronic devices during class time,** and this includes laptops, Kindles, I-pads, phones, etc. If you bought electronic versions of the books, you are still not allowed to use the devices in class. I want to be absolutely clear about this in advance. It should go without saying that texting and other electronic gadget activities shouldn’t occur during class time—when I expect to have your complete attention—so stow away your phone out of sight. Unfortunately, other students who are less polite than you forced me to come up with this policy: if I see you using your phone (or other device) during class time (and this includes surreptitious glances to see if you have messages), I will give you one warning. If I see you do this beyond the first instance, **I’ll deduct 50 points** from your course grade for each time I have to ask you to stop the activity. Those points will add up fast, so please don’t make me enforce my policy.
**Reading and Assignment Schedule:**

The schedule reflects my best sense of what we will do for each class meeting, but I reserve the right to make changes as needed. These will be announced beforehand in class or emailed to the class in advance. **= E-reserves  Password: Russell**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>1/14</td>
<td>Introduction to the course. Historical context. The Wild West.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>1/16</td>
<td>Introductions to one another. The literary west vs. the formula Western. E-reserves, Brand, “Wine on the Desert”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>1/21</td>
<td>E-reserves, Crane, “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky” and London, “All Gold Canyon”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>1/28</td>
<td><em>Shane</em>, Chapters 1 – 7 (about 79 pages—but it’s quick and easy reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>1/30</td>
<td><em>Shane</em>, Chapters 8 – 16 (about 71 pages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td><em>High Noon</em> (film)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/6</td>
<td><em>High Noon</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2/11</td>
<td><em>True Grit</em>, pp. 1 – 125 (this novel has no chapter breaks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td><em>True Grit</em>, pp. 126 – 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2/18</td>
<td><em>True Grit</em>, pp. 200 – 264 or end. <strong>Paper #1 Due.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>E-reserves: Bausch, “Old West”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2/25</td>
<td><strong>Midterm Exam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/27</td>
<td>TV Westerns (no reading)</td>
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T and R, 3/4 and 3/6  **Spring Break—Go Nuts!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>3/11</td>
<td><em>Gabriel’s Journey</em>, part one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>3/13</td>
<td><em>Gabriel’s Journey</em>, part two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>3/18</td>
<td><em>Gabriel’s Journey</em>, part three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td><em>Gabriel’s Journey</em>, part four, and group project time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>3/25</td>
<td><em>Unforgiven</em> (film)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>3/27</td>
<td><em>Unforgiven</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
T 4/1    E-reserves, Johnson, “Lost Sister” and group project time.
R 4/3    Paper #2 due. Other work tba
T 4/8    Group presentations. 1 and 2
R 4/10   Group Presentations. 3 and 4
R 4/17   Easter Holiday – no class
T 4/22   Round House, Chapters 1-4
R 4/24   Round House, Chapters 5 - 7
R 5/1    Round House, Chapters 10 – end. Review for Final Exam.

Final Exam: 10:00 section meets 8:30 – 10:20 on TH, May 8
            11:30 section meets 10:30 – 12:20 on T, May 6