HONORS SEMINAR: AESTHETICS, AUTHORITY, AND VALUES

IDH 3005 9030
Spring Semester 2004
Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:15pm
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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 1:100-1:45pm,
            Thurs 3:30-4:30pm & by app’t

Art requires philosophy, just as philosophy requires art. Otherwise what would become of beauty?
Paul Gauguin

Reading is a means of thinking with another person’s mind; it forces you to stretch your own.
Charles Scribner Jr.

Art is the signature of civilizations.
Beverly Sills

The semester’s focus is on the Nobel Laureates in literature. This special project is intended to develop more sophisticated academic skills by concentrating on a comprehensive research and writing exercise, with each student choosing her or his own author to study. The assignment page of the syllabus provides details.

The books the class will read together is a collection of diverse texts, beginning with the South African author, John Coetzee, who won the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature. We are reading his fictional essay on the question of justice for animals, an unusual book based on Coetzee’s lecture given for Princeton’s prestigious Tanner Series. Then, we follow another Nobel Laureate, this time an American, Toni Morrison, into the astonishing world she created for her portrayal of slavery, the theme of the distinguished novel Beloved. The last three books, by renowned, but not Nobel awardees, include British author Virginia Woolf. Her novel, Mrs. Dalloway, relates one day in the life of a socialite planning a party, but is about many things, particularly the loss of certainty in the aftermath of the first world war. Unlike Virginia Woolf, the author John Dos Passos is comparatively little recalled today. Yet in mid-twentieth century his fiction earned universal acclaim. Currently, Dos Passos’ fiction is on the edge of rediscovery and in celebration of this rightful acknowledgment we will read The Big Money, the final novel of his famous trilogy U.S.A., said to be the quintessential American story. Finally, we move into strange realms with a scientist’s foray into fiction, Einstein’s Dreams, about the “...time-tangled, tragic and sublime nature of human life.”
REQUIRED BOOKS (Bookstore Editions):

Lives of the Animals, John Coetzee
Beloved, Toni Morrison
Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf
The Big Money, John Dos Passos
Einstein’s Dreams, Alan Lightman

SCHEDULE

January 6:     Poetry
The course

How we treat animals is of no importance except insofar as being cruel to animals may accustom
us to being cruel to Humans. (. . .Animals)

January 8:   Lives of the Animals, Introduction and Chapter 1 (to pg. 45)

SPECIAL EVENT:  Carlos Eire, Waiting for Snow in Havana, 2003 National Book
Award winner, January 9, 7:30pm, GC Ballroom

January 13/15:   Lives of the Animals, Chapter 11 and the four reflections
Film:  Scenes from “Babe”

January 20:      Group presentation on . . . Animals
22:        Library visit (details TBA) (Nobel author selection)
1st essay due, on . . . Animals

Beloved, scratching the back of her hand, would say she remembered a woman who was hers,
and she remembered being snatched away from her. (Beloved)

January 27/29:   Beloved, pages 3-129

February 3/5:   Beloved, pages 130-end
Film:  Scenes from “Beloved”

February 10:      Group presentation for Beloved
12:       2nd essay due, on Beloved
Library hour: Nobel project research

As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time
flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the
human frame. (Mrs. Dalloway)
February 17/19:  Mrs. Dalloway

February 24:
24:  Film:  Scenes from “Mrs. Dalloway” source films
26:  Group presentation on Mrs. Dalloway
     3rd essay due, on Mrs. Dalloway

SPECIAL EVENT:  Sally Boysen (named in “Top 50 Women Scientists), Keynote Speaker for Honors College mini-conference on student research, February 25, 2:00pm, GC 140.  Further details forthcoming.

he thought of the great continent stretching a thousand miles east and south and north, three thousand miles west, and everywhere at mineheads, on the shore of newlydredged harbors, along watercourses, at the intersections of railroads sprouting  (The Big Money)

March 2/4:  The Big Money, pages 1-219
March 9/11:  The Big Money, pages 220-end
March 16:  Group presentation on The Big Money
     18:  Library hour
     4th essay due, on The Big Money
March 22-26  SPRING BREAK WEEK

Then, in a small town in Italy, the first mechanical clock was built.  People were spellbound.  Later they were horrified.  Here was a human invention that quantified the passage of time, that laid ruler and compass to the span on desire, that measured out exactly the moments of a life.  It was magical, it was unbearable. . . (Einstein’s Dreams)

March 30/April 1:  Einstein’s Dreams

SPECIAL EVENT:  Lynne Duke, New York Bureau Chief for the “Washington Post,” Spring Excellence Lecture, March 30, 2:00pm, Biscayne Bay Campus.  Further details TBA.

April 6:  Group presentation on Einstein’s Dreams
     5th essay due, on Einstein’s Dreams

April 8, 13 and 15:  Oral reports on Nobel Laureate projects
     13:  Nobel Laureate paper due
ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

NOBEL LAUREATE PROJECT:

Since 1901 the Nobel Committee has named annual (minus several exceptions) Nobel Laureates in literature. The list of honorees includes, as expected, many of the renowned authors of the twentieth century, but also features writers who once so acclaimed are little known today, either for reasons of neglect or shifting trends. Early in the semester students will peruse the list and select an author, famous or forgotten, to study for a focused, serious undertaking in research and writing. Caution is fore-advised, particularly for obscure writers, as securing, for example, out-of-print books from interlibrary loan or other sources will take time. To facilitate research skills students will have guided instruction with library staff and several class meetings in the library.

Planning steps:

1. **Peruse** the Nobel list, the Internet and library holdings to select an author. Any facet of interest may be utilized; era, nationality or theme, for example. The Nobel site is: [www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/index.html](http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/index.html).

2. **Scan** primary works, criticism, biography and related data as background to formulate a plan. Begin thinking about a focus of exploration and securing primary and critical books and articles.

3. **Read** and as you read, remember to think critically and take careful research notes. Index cards are still useful for this purpose, or use a computer, as you prefer. Hopefully, this exercise will lead to a precise, and interesting topic, and even, if creativity and good fortune meet — original. As you develop your topic, keep in mind: “aesthetics, values and authority.” At this stage, a thoughtful, descriptive paragraph and tentative title is expected.

4. **Write** the outline and begin the first draft. As rewriting is a major key to a first-class essay, considerable effort is expected at this stage. The goal is to develop a polished essay.

5. **Bask** — assuming you have worked earnestly and diligently you will have taken your academic skills to a new level of achievement. You should feel good about it.

Option: If you have a special colleague in the class and can agree on a topic as well as a research/writing plan, you may work as a collaborative team, with permission.
MINI-PAPERS:

Choose three of the five course books to write a brief (three pages should suffice) essay, which may be on any topic that reflects the course theme of aesthetics, values or authority. Each essay is expected to include a minimum of one secondary source. You may, with permission, choose another interpretive mode than critical writing. See schedule for due dates.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS:

The assignments for group presentations will be organized in class. As before, students may plan a debate, media event, theatrical experience or other original presentation. Planning, preparation, participation and effectiveness will all be considered a part of the assignment.

CLASS PARTICIPATION:

Students are expected to engage in class discussion, which is facilitated by advance preparation in such ways as noting interesting passages, articulating questions, extra-curricular research and offering connections within the text and/or to other art. As an optional exercise I will ask students to email me “questions” and/or “ideas” before class in which a particular text is to be discussed.

NOTE:

We will continue the “coffee hours” as schedules permit; and take advantage, when feasible, of on-campus visiting lecturers, theatre performances and related events. The film, “Girl With A Pearl Earring,” will be the first group event.

UNIVERSITY AND COURSE POLICIES:

Strict adherence to the university’s code of Academic Integrity is mandatory. Students should be particularly familiar with the section on plagiarism, as well as of the Honors College code.

Two absences accompanied by a legitimate excuse and two late arrivals are permitted; more than this is subject to grade penalty.

GRADING:

- Nobel Laureate project: 55%
- Each of three mini-papers: 12%
- Collegiality & Participation: 9%