

ENGL 297 IDIS 297
Literature and the Way We Live
Spring 2006
Class time: MWF 5b

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Zinzendorf 301
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REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Peter Singer and Renata Singer. *The Moral of the Story: An Anthology of Ethics Through Literature*.
Malden, Ma.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.
Simon Blackburn. *Being good: an introduction to ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
Articles on reserve

COURSE OBJECTIVE: Because literature is a representation of reality and thus invites a variety of interpretations, it provides an ideal framework for reflection upon the moral life. In this course, through our reading and discussion of literary and ethical texts, as well as through related articles from a variety of disciplines, we will consider moral issues concerning: identity; duties to kin; love, marriage, and sex; abortion, euthanasia, and suicide; racism and sexism. Our goal will be to develop an awareness of the complexity of moral issues and of the need for interdisciplinary understanding in informed decision making. In grappling with our own values and moral position-taking, we will enhance our capacity for moral discernment, criticism, and argument.

COURSE METHOD: This course will consist primarily of reading, discussion, student presentations, and several writing assignments, including an ongoing journal.

EVALUATION: Journal (20%), student presentation (20%); essays (20%, 25%), attendance and participation (15%).

READING ASSIGNMENTS: All students will complete the daily reading assignments detailed in the syllabus. In addition, each student will sign up to read one of the excerpted literary works, in its entirety, in preparation for his/her oral presentation. Each student will also be responsible for choosing a secondary article from the discipline of his/her major, relating to the day's topic, to be put on reserve for the class to read at least one week in advance.

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS : Student presenters will begin each day's discussion with an overview of the day's text, as it relates to the moral topic under consideration (not mere plot summary). Since the rest of the class will have read only an excerpt, the presenter will be the authority on the text, prepared to help throughout the session with questions relating to background and context. The presenter will also explain how the article he/she has assigned (see above) sheds light on the moral issue at hand, and should conclude the presentation with two open-ended ethical questions designed to begin class discussion. The presentation should be 15-20 minutes in length, and a hard copy of the presentation should be handed in to the instructor.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: Apart from occasional in-class writing assignments, there will be three writing projects:

A. An ongoing journal, which I will collect daily, will be a crucial tool in preparing you for class and in generating discussion. Each journal entry will have three to four numbered components:

1. A general comment on the Singer reading, written in light of the ethical issue under consideration. Please read the "Issue" section at the back of the Singer text, responding to any questions posed there. If the day's assignment includes more than one excerpt, choose and address just one of the texts. (100 or more words)
2. A personal application, real or imagined, of the ethical issue at hand. (100 words or more)
3. A general comment upon the secondary, reserve article. How does it shed light for you on the current topic? (100 words or more)
4. When a section of the Blackburn text has been assigned, type out and then paraphrase one of the ideas presented, and pose a moral question arising from it.

**** At the right hand corner of the journal entry, record your name, the date the assignment is due, the author's name, the title of the work, and a total word count. (You should also include a word count at the end of each of the numbered sections.)

****Your journal entries will be due at the start of each class, and if you have fulfilled the above requirements you will receive full credit for the entry. Entries submitted apart from class (due to an absence) or at the end of class will receive no more than half credit.

B. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced.

C. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced.

NOTE: Due dates for essays are firm. If for some extraordinary reason you must be late, you need to talk to me. Late papers automatically receive a lower grade.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION: I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for you to attend each class, promptly, with your assignment read and your journal entry completed. The success of our class depends upon how well we can articulate our individual and collective responses to the readings and to the complex moral issues they pose. I will read off your name at the beginning of each class, both to learn who you are and to keep track of your attendance. It is your responsibility to consult me if you are late or absent. Your participation grade will reflect your regular, voluntary engagement in class discussion.

****Please turn off and put away all cell phones during class.**

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of someone else's work as your own. This includes such instances as quoting directly from a published work without giving the author credit (i.e. proper citation), inserting the author's words as your own, using or "borrowing" another student's work, buying a paper from a professional service, etc. It is your responsibility to be familiar with what constitutes plagiarism and, in the event of uncertainty, to ask in a constructive manner about a writing in question before it is due in a final version. You are also required to keep all note cards and rough drafts on papers and assignments until given a final grade for that course. Evidence of plagiarism and cheating will be dealt with in accordance with the college policy on academic honesty found in the Student Handbook. Please read this policy in its entirety. In the event of a suspected infraction – in fairness to your peers and the standards of the college – it is my job to send the materials in question to the Dean's Office at which time you are given the chance to provide your perspective on the matter.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:

Readings should be completed by the day on which they are listed. This schedule may be revised as the course progresses. I will announce changes in class.

- Week 1**
- Mon. Jan. 16 Introduction
- Wed. Jan. 18 Singer, Preface
Blackburn, Intro.
- Week 2**
- Mon. Jan. 23 **WHO AM I?**
Introduction
Ralph Ellison, from *Invisible Man*
Blackburn, pp. 9-19
- Wed. Jan 25 Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey, from *Puberty Blues*
Blackburn, pp. 19-29
- Week 3**
- Mon. Jan. 30 James Baldwin, from *Giovanni's Room*
Blackburn, pp. 29-37
- Wed. Feb. 1 Movie: *Educating Rita*
- Fri. Feb. 3** *Educating Rita* and discussion
- Week 4**
- Mon. Feb. 6 Tom Wolfe, from *The Bonfire of the Vanities*
Blackburn, pp. 37-43
- Wed. Feb. 8 George Eliot, from *Middlemarch*
Blackburn, pp. 43-46
- Week 5**
- Mon. Feb. 13 Arthur Miller, from *The Crucible*
Blackburn, pp. 47-50
- Wed. Feb. 15 William Shakespeare, from *Macbeth*
Blackburn, pp. 50-55
First Essay Due
- Week 6**
- Mon. Feb. 20 **DUTIES TO KIN**
Introduction
i. *The Duties of Parents to Their Children*
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Unnatural Mother"
Charles Dickens, from *Bleak House*
Joseph Kanon, from *The Good German*
Blackburn, pp. 56-65
- Wed. Feb. 22 ii. *The Duties of Sisters and Brothers*
Sophocles, from *Antigone*
William Shakespeare, from *Measure for Measure*
Blackburn, pp. 65-73

Week 7 Mon. Feb. 27 iii. *The Duties of Children to Their Parents*
Zitkala-Sa, "The Soft-Hearted Sioux"
Ambrose Bierce, "A Horseman in the Sky"
Alice Munro, from "The Peace of Utrecht"
Blackburn, pp. 74-81

Wed. March 1 Movie: *The Good Mother*

Fri. March 3 *The Good Mother* and discussion

Spring Recess

Week 8 Mon. March 13 **LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SEX**
Introduction
Jane Austen, from *Pride and Prejudice*
William Shakespeare, from *Romeo and Juliet*
Blackburn, pp. 81-86

Wed. March 15 Vikram Seth, from *A Suitable Boy*
Blackburn, pp. 86-93

Week 9 Mon. March 20 Guy de Maupassant, "The Model"
George Eliot, from *Middlemarch*
Blackburn, pp. 93-97

Wed. March 22 Leo Tolstoy, from *Anna Karenina*
Blackburn, pp. 97-102

Week 10 Mon. March 27 George Bernard Shaw, from *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
John Cleland, from *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*
Daniel Defoe, from *Moll Flanders*
Blackburn, pp. 103-107

Wed. March 29 Movie: *Pride and Prejudice*
Second Essay Due

Fri. March 31 *Pride and Prejudice* and discussion

Week 11 Mon. April 3 **ABORTION, EUTHANASIA, AND SUICIDE**
Introduction
Maeve Binchy, from "Shepherd's Bush"
Kate Jennings, from *Moral Hazard*
Blackburn, pp. 108-112

Wed. April 5 Brian Clark, from *Whose Life is it Anyway?*
Blackburn, pp. 112-116

Fri. April 7 Movie: *Whose Life is it Anyway?*

Week 12 Mon. April 10 William Shakespeare, from *Hamlet*
Anna Bontemps, "A Summer Tragedy"
Blackburn, pp. 116-124

Wed. April 12 *Whose Life is it Anyway?* and discussion

Easter Recess

Week 13 Wed. April 19 **RACISM AND SEXISM**
Introduction
Harriet Beecher Stowe, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Lerone Bennett, Jr., "The Convert"
Blackburn, pp. 125-128

Fri. April 21 William Shakespeare, from *The Taming of the Shrew*
Henrik Ibsen, from *A Doll's House*
Blackburn, pp. 129-135

Week 14 Mon. April 24 Movie: *A Doll's House*

Wed. April 26 *A Doll's House* and discussion

Fri. April 28 Review; Conclusions