

ENGL/IDIS 262
Literature and the Way We Live
Spring 2009
MWF 5b 12:50-2:00

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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.

Kim Stanley Robinson. *Forty Signs of Rain*. Spectra, 2005.

Articles on reserve

2 theatre tickets (~\$3 each) to MCTC's *Growing Up Naked* and *Oedipus*.

COURSE OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES: 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: the environment; identity; duties to kin; love, marriage, and sex; 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%). It is within the instructor's purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for any assignments and for the final course grade.

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 recently published secondary article from a scholarly journal in the discipline of his/her major, relating to the day's topic (not necessarily to the day's literary text), to be approved and put on reserve (2 copies) for the class to read at least one week in advance. (See presentation evaluation sheet, attached.)

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: Student presenters will begin each day's discussion with an explanation of how the day's text relates to the moral topic under consideration (not mere plot summary). Since the rest of the class may have read only an excerpt (with which the presenter should be especially familiar), 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 (one on the literary text, one on the reserve article) designed to begin class discussion. The presentation should be 10-15 minutes in length, and a hard copy of the presentation should be handed in to the instructor. (See presentation evaluation sheet, attached.)

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 or other main 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 hypothetical situation, real or imagined, that presents a dilemma related to the ethical issue at hand. (150 words or more)
3. A general comment upon the secondary, reserve article. How does it shed light for you on the current ethical topic (not necessarily on the literary text itself)? (150 words or more)
4. When a section of the Blackburn text has been assigned, comment on the reading, summing it up to the best of your ability (100 words or more)

**** 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. *** Since the journal is designed to enhance class discussion, entries submitted apart from class (due to an absence, even if the entry is submitted in advance) or at the end of class (unless typed) will receive no more than half credit.

B. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced. **See "Rubric" (attached).

C. A 4-5 page essay on a topic to be announced. **See "Rubric" (attached).

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. Full attendance without such engagement will earn no more than a grade of C for participation.

****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.

Wed. Feb. 25 Tom Wolfe, from *The Bonfire of the Vanities*
Blackburn, pp. 65-73

Spring Recess

Week 7 Mon. March 9 George Eliot, from *Middlemarch*
Blackburn, pp. 74-81

Wed. March 11 William Shakespeare, from *Macbeth*
Blackburn, pp. 81-86

Week 8 Mon. March 16 **RACISM AND SEXISM**
Introduction
Harriet Beecher Stowe, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
Lerone Bennett, Jr., "The Convert"
Blackburn, pp. 86-93

Tues., March 17: Required attendance at "Leadership in a World of Divided Feminism"

Wed. March 18 William Shakespeare, from *The Taming of the Shrew*
Henrik Ibsen, from *A Doll's House*
Blackburn, 93-97

Week 9 Mon. March 23 **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. 97-102

Wed. March 25 ii. *The Duties of Sisters and Brothers*
Sophocles, from *Antigone*
William Shakespeare, from *Measure for Measure*

Fri. March 27 Film: *The Good Mother*

Week 10 Mon. March 30 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. 103-107

Wed. April 1 Miller, *The Good Mother*
Blackburn, pp. 108-112

Thurs., April 2- Sun., April 5: Required attendance at MCTC's *Oedipus*

- Week 11** Mon. April 6 Discuss MCTC's *Oedipus*
Blackburn, pp. 112-116
- Wed. April 8 **LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SEX**
Introduction
Jane Austen, from *Pride and Prejudice*
William Shakespeare, from *Romeo and Juliet*

Easter Recess

- Week 12** Wed. April 15 Vikram Seth, from *A Suitable Boy*
Blackburn, pp. 116-124
Essay Due
- Week 13** Mon. April 20 Leo Tolstoy, from *Anna Karenina*
Blackburn, pp. 125-133
- Wed. April 22 Guest speaker
- Week 14** Mon. April 27 George Bernard Shaw, from *Mrs. Warren's Profession*
John Cleland, from *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*
Daniel Defoe, from *Moll Flanders*
- Wed. April 29 Review; Conclusions
Blackburn, pp. 133-135