

Experience of Literature 104Z – Fall 2009

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Experience of Literature: War in the 20th and 21st centuries

Let us count some of the many words for “war” in the English language: conflict, combat, altercation, confrontation, quarrel, row, dispute, clash, squabble, fight, hostility, antagonism, aggression. There is only one word for “peace”.

Why is war such a dominant part of our world and especially our literary works? We will discuss this question and look into the painful results of bloody millenniums as reflected in literary works. The course will concentrate on the 20th century and the unpromising beginning of the 21st century.

The Great War and Second World War left us with larger than life cemeteries and voluminous literature from all continents on our planet. None of those two major wars were meant to be “The War That Will End All Wars”. On the contrary, we have seen multiple regional wars and live in constant threat of escalation. Referring to nuclear weapons, Albert Einstein said: “I don’t know what will a Third World War involve but I am positive that the Forth World War will be fought with sticks and stones”.

The saying “When canons roar muses soar” has never rang truer than during the last hundred years. Every war has been, and still is documented in detail. We will read mainly first person testimonies of men and women who experienced war and its devastating outcomes. Among them are Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Erich Maria Remarque, Primo Levi, Virginia Woolf, Bertolt Brecht, Frederico Garcia Lorca, Albert Camus, Doris Lessing, Jonathan Safran Foer, and others.

The course will depend greatly on your direct involvement and impassioned curiosity. Your own interests will be reflected in the course’s agenda.

Some of the written assignments will be graded. There will be other un-graded assignments relating to reading, writing and researching on line and in the library.

The major assignments in this course will be as follows:

A. A research paper on a topic of your choosing; a subject you are passionate about. Here are examples of acceptable topics: The role of women in 20th century war, Wilfred Owen symbolic life and death, Can a war be justified and how, The role literature plays in religious wars. You will be asked to submit a first draft at mid-term and your final research paper at the end of the semester or you can choose 2 different topics.

B. Short creative writing assignments each week (1-2 pages long), reflecting your personal perspective on the literature we will be reading and discussing in class. You will receive feedback from fellow students and the instructor, improving your skills of reflecting and analyzing. By talking in class about your chosen subjects you will improve your expressive skills as well.

C. Informal journal of your reading as well as about the various presentations and interactions taking place in class.

Un-graded assignments will still be submitted to the course instructor and receive feedback. Late assignments are not accepted. Missing, incomplete, or late un-graded assignments will result in a lowering of the “written assignments” part of your grade.

Purposes

War is an important part of our lives. Understanding its literature will enhance your understanding of the society and civilization we belong to. Through this course you will increase your awareness of discrimination, persecution, violence and other forms of antagonism. You might become a better ambassador in the service of understanding and tolerating and hopefully help to create a more peaceful world.

Goals

1. Learn to identify the different narratives of war in the last and present centuries.
2. Become knowledgeable of the devastating toll war has on all humans involved.
3. Appreciate writers from different countries, cultures and continents.
4. Learn to contrast and compare diverse literary works.

Expectations

You are expected to show up to every class, and on time. Unjustified absence and tardiness will interfere with your learning and hence affect your grade. You are permitted one unexcused absence from class. For every unexcused absence beyond that, your attendance grade will be lowered by 5 pts.

Kindly avoid ringing cell-phones, text-messaging and eating during class.

All assignments will be presented in print, and in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty

You are expected to perform your academic work honestly and fairly. Since you can choose your subject and your writing is supposed to be personal, write it on your own. The consequences of failure to meet those expectations are outlined in the current *Student Handbook*.

Grading

1. Contribution in class discussion.....20%
2. Group work in class..... 10%
3. Journals.....10%
3. Presentations in class.....15%
4. Written assignments25%
5. Research papers on your chosen topics20%

Required Texts

The Norton Book of Modern War Paul Fussell editor

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

Survival in Auschwitz by Primo Levi

Recommended Texts

1. Adrian Barlow *The Great war in British Literature* (Cambridge Contexts in Literature)
2. John Newman *Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works about Americans fighting in Vietnam*
3. *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry in English*
4. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer
5. *Slaughter-House-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut

Schedule- *with possible modifications according to student topic researches*

Week I

Wednesday September 2 Introduction

Week II

Wednesday September 9 the wake of the 20th century

Week III

Wednesday September 16 Women's role in the Great War

Week IV

Wednesday September 23 All quiet on the Western front

Week V

Wednesday September 30 Armistice as seeds for a new war

Week VI

Wednesday October 7 Break of World War II - midterm due

Week VII

Wednesday October 14 Coping with testimonies

Week VIII

Wednesday October 21 Primo Levi's legacy

Week IX

Wednesday October 28 is evil banal?

Week X

Wednesday November 4 Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Week XI

Wednesday November 11 Veteran Day and its meaning

Week XII

Wednesday November 18 lost in translation

Week XIII

Wednesday November 25 Thanksgiving recess

Week XIV

Wednesday December 2 Nuclear weapons and terrorism - Finals due

Week XV

Wednesday December 9 Conclusions

Notes

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact the Services Offices as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
- 3) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 4) This syllabus is subject to change.