

Experience of Literature 104A – spring 2013

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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 these 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 ringed 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, watching films, 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 films and literature plays in 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 as well your expressive skills.

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

D. A presentation on a topic that is close to your heart, it should be visual (power-point) and raise a question that the class would discuss.

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.

Throughout the semester you will have to do some community service, mainly tutoring a young kid in reading and writing. This should enhance your reading and writing and help you reach out to the community and giveback to society. There would be class discussions about the reading and writing you will do with the child you tutor.

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 and film makers from different countries, cultures and continents.
4. Learn to contrast and compare diverse literary works.
5. Enhance your understanding and compassion.

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. For every unexcused absence 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*.

Blackboard

You are expected to use Blackboard for course information and assignments throughout the course. You will be enrolled in Blackboard and you have to make sure you check Blackboard before each class.

Grading

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|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Active contribution to class | 20% |
| 2. Group work | 10% |
| 4. Journals..... | 10% |
| 5. Presentations in class..... | 15% |
| 6. Written assignments | 20% |
| 7. Midterm | 10% |
| 8. Final essay..... | 15% |

Required Texts

The Norton Book of Modern War Paul Fussell editor

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

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's topic researches

Week I

Tuesday January 15 Introduction

Thursday January 17 the wake of the 20th century

Week II

Tuesday January 22 Dulce et Decorum Est

Thursday January 24 Owen and Sassoon

Week III

Tuesday January 29 Women's role in the Great War

Thursday January 31 German perspective

Week IV

Tuesday February 5 All quiet on the Western front

Thursday February 7 Muddy trenches on both sides

Week V

Tuesday February 12 Armistice as seeds for a new war

Thursday February 14 War and Love

Week VI

Tuesday February 19	Break of World War II
Thursday February 21	Mid-term paper due
Week VII	
Tuesday February 26	can one win?
Thursday February 28	Man's Search for Meaning
Week VIII	
Tuesday March 5	spring recess
Thursday March 7	spring recess
Week IX	
Tuesday March 12	coping with testimonies
Thursday March 14	is evil banal?
Week X	
Tuesday March 19	Homecoming and first impressions
Thursday March 21	War and moral
Week XI	
Tuesday March 26	forgetting and forgiving?
Thursday March 28	Lost in translation
Week XII	
Tuesday April 2	Wars of religions
Thursday April 4	engaged literature
Week XIII	
Tuesday April 9	Hiroshima's poems
Thursday April 11	Avoiding WWII
Week XIV	
Tuesday April 16	Final essay due
Thursday April 18	Affirmations
Week XIV	
Tuesday April 23	Affirmations
Thursday April 24	Affirmations and Conclusions

Notes

- 1) You can expect to dedicate 5-7 hours per week outside of class, reading and preparing assignments.
- 2) Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, assistant director of Learning Services for academic and disability support at 1507 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.
- 3) The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.
- 4) Do not hesitate to address me with any kind of problem you have during class or after.
- 5) This syllabus is subject to change.