

English 349

English 349, Katy Ryan, Spring 2007

ENG 349W: Contemporary U.S. American Literature:

"Barbarous Acts Which Have Outraged the Conscience"

Spring 2007

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Office Hours: Thurs. 10:00-12:00 and by appointment

It is necessary to discuss the agonistic moral universe embodied in a drama or novel and see in that aesthetic experience a searing incarnation of conflict and choice. But it is, I think, an abrogation of that reading to blind oneself to the similar drama in the battle all around us for justice, emancipation, and the diminishment of human suffering.

--Edward Said, Humanism and Democratic Criticism

In the wake of the Holocaust and World War II, the newly conceived United Nations published its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This document calls upon nations to ensure the political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights of all people. We will begin our class by reading this document and a selection from Micheline Ishay's study, *The History of Human Rights*. We will also read an essay by a German writer, Theodor Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," which argues that the primary goal of education is to prevent genocide: "Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to this single idea: never again Auschwitz." We will consider what education should mean in our historical moment and how acts of reading and writing might contribute to vital discussions about human rights, democracy, and justice.

We will read a diverse set of contemporary US American literary texts: a graphic novel, a documentary play, short stories, a historical novel, a collection of poems, and a postmodern play. As we turn to literary texts, we will keep in mind the vision, language, and hope of international human rights movements. We will discuss how and why fictional texts reimagine and recontextualize historical realities, such as, the Middle Passage, slavery, mining disasters, Matthew Shepard's murder, the rule of the Taliban, 9/11, atomic weaponry, and the US-led war in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will explore how literature might help us gain a conceptual hold of the past and construct a living relationship to it. In addition to ongoing discussions and short

writing assignments, you will compose three analytical essays that both engage with our literary texts and incorporate independent research.

Books:

Lucille Clifton, The Terrible Stories Toni Morrison, Beloved Möises Kaufman, The Laramie Project Tony Kushner, Homebody /Kabul Art Spiegelman, In the Shadow of No Towers

Course Goals

- To become astute critical readers of contemporary US American literature and culture
- To explore how knowledge is produced and transformed
- To compose strong analytical essays that engage with literary texts and literary scholarship
- To learn to ask original and compelling questions
- To express your ideas with confidence in class discussion, and to respond thoughtfully and productively to the ideas of others

Requirements Three Essays 60% (6 pages, double-spaced) Four Short Responses 20% (1-2 pages, single-spaced) Participation and Attendance 20%

Grading Scale A+ (98-100) A (97-94) A- (93-91) B+ (90-88) B (87-84) B- (83-81) C+ (80-78) C (77-74) C- (73-71) D (61-70) F (60 or below) WRITTEN REQUIRMENTS Essays (60 points)
Length: double-spaced, 5-6 pages

You will complete three essay assignments. My criteria for evaluating analytical essays will be the following:

- A timely and complete draft that engages with a difficult, original, or complex question
- A revision that clearly demonstrates a reworking of the draft, in terms of argument, content, and organization.
- A suitably complex and clear thesis that provides a blueprint for the essay
- Smooth and grammatical integration of quotations from literary texts and information from secondary sources
- Strong transitions that move the essay forward logically and thoughtfully
- A polished, clean final essay free of grammatical and surface errors
- Consistent use of MLA style for documentation

Research Options Scholarly Article Research There are three basic ways to find scholarly articles on your subject:

- 1) The Mountainlynx catalogue will locate books on your author or literary work that are available in our library.

- 2) The MLA (Modern Language Association) database will locate articles on your author or text that may be available in our library or online. Steps to using the online MLA International Bibliography: 1) WVU Libraries Homepage 2) Right side of page, under FIND ARTICLES, click on DATABASES 3) Click on "M" and scroll down to MLA International Bibliography 4) Enter your

search terms into FIND ["Kaufman Moises—you must reverse author's name. In the box below, you can add another term to narrow the results. For instance, "Laramie Project"] 5) Click on Linked Full Text and PDF File to access the article online 6) In order to print, click on the printer icon within the PDF File 7) If the article is unavailable online, look for its source (the journal or book) on Mountainlynx

3) Project Muse is a full-text, online collection of humanities, arts, and social science journals. You will find Project Muse on the library's main page under Popular Databases. After clicking on it, you will be taken to its front page. Choose "Search" and type in your literary subject.

Play or Book Review Search The easiest way to search for a review is on LexisNexis. This can be found on the library's home page under Popular Databases. After clicking on it, you will be brought to its main search page. To do a quick search, simply type in your subject (for instance, "The Terrible Stories") and choose the range of years. (Here you can only choose up to 2 years back.) If you want to find an earlier review—and this can be important if you want to see how first critics responded to a play—choose "Guided News Search" on the front page of LexisNexis. In the first category box, choose Arts and Sports; in the second source box, choose "Book, Movie, Music, Play Review"; then choose a range of time. This one allows you to search into 10-year archives. To find even earlier reviews, on the library's home page, choose "Databases" under "Find Articles." Then, scroll down to Proquest Historical Newspapers. This is also a full-text database that will link you to an enormous archive of articles from major newspapers. Writing Workshops Together we will work to improve your writing. On workshop days, you will bring to class a thesis statement, an outline of your essay, or the complete draft. We will use our time to model effective development of ideas, the construction of an insightful thesis, and the incorporation of research into your writing. Your participation grade depends on full participation in these in-class writing conferences. At least once during the semester, you must give me a rough draft of your essay so I can offer you feedback.

Revision Option You will have the opportunity to revise one graded paper, which must be turned in within ten days of when you receive your graded essay. In order to receive credit for a revision, the essay must be substantially changed. You must make an appointment with me if you want to undertake a revision.

Reader Responses (20 points) You will write four 500-word, single-spaced responses to our readings on the days marked on the syllabus. This mini-essay should begin with a specific, non-plot question that you have about the material. Given the brevity of these responses, you should

choose one scene, one character, or one idea to analyze closely, rather than attempting to explicate an entire literary work. Be sure to include quotations from the literary work.

PARTICIPATION and ATTENDANCE This class will strengthen your ability to think—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. There will be a variety of ways to participate:

- Come to class with one or more questions about our readings—real questions about something that you have not figured out
- Ask questions of one another during discussion
- Make observations about our readings
- Read one of your written responses
- Offer an idea that came to you as a result of a previous class
- Submit a draft for our group workshop

***If you miss more than three classes for any reason, you must make an appointment to meet with me.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS Plagiarism/Cheating. The following definitions are from the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog. Please see the section on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of procedures. Plagiarism: material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others . . . including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition. Cheating: doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as his / her own. Scholastic dishonesty: involves misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; interfering with another's work. Clear cases of plagiarism or cheating may result in an unforgivable F for the course. If you have any question about how to document sources, please talk to me. Cell Phone and Pager Courtesy. Before class, please turn off cell phones and pagers. Social Justice. I share the university's commitment to social justice and try to foster a learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Please let me know if I can better meet these goals. Accommodating Disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation, please let me know. You should also make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700). Emergencies or Health Crises. If you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, you or your family should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me concerning your problem and authorize me to make arrangements for you. Schedule *Take note of a Special Event on February 1

Jan 9: Introductions Adrienne Rich, "Power" Letter to Jane Alexander, National Endowment for the Arts

Jan 11: UN Declaration of Human Rights Micheline Ishay, from The History of Human Rights Introduction; 211-243

Optional Reading Jan 11: Allison Hedge Coke, "Working Class Indigenous" Reading 6PM Rhododendron Room

Jan 16: The Terrible Stories: "Telling Our Stories," Sections 1 and 2

Jan 18: The Terrible Stories, Sections 3 and 4 First Response Due

Jan 23: The Terrible Stories, Section 5 Bring to class one scholarly article or review of The Terrible Stories

Jan 25: The Terrible Stories (entire book)

Jan 30: Theodor Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz"

Special Event Feb 1: Talk by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein Graff, "Demystifying the Academic Game." Rhododendron Room in the Lair, 12:00-1:00

Feb 6: Writing Workshop Due, Typed: 1) First 2 or 3 paragraphs of your essay, including thesis statement. 2) Summary/Paraphrase of your scholarly article with a copy of the article

Feb 8: Harold Bloom, "Ranting Against Cant" Howard Zinn, "Knowledge as a Form of Power"

Feb 13: Beloved, pp. 1-86 (approx ½ of Part One) Final Essay Due in Class

Optional Reading Feb 13: John McKernan Reading. Gold Ballroom 7:30PM

Feb 15: Beloved pp. 87-195 (end of Part One)

Feb 20: Beloved, pp. 199-277 (Part Two)

Feb 22: Beloved (entire novel) Second Response Due

Feb 27: Cynthia Griffin Woolf, " 'Margaret Garner': A Cincinnati Story" Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken"

Mar 1: The Laramie Project

Mar 6: The Laramie Project

Mar 8: The Laramie Project

Optional Lecture Mar 8: Gordan Hutner, E. Moore Hall 12:00-1:00

Mar 13: The Laramie Project—video in class Second Essay Drafts Due in Class (1 copy)

Mar 15: Writing Workshop Arrive with handwritten or typed comments as well as comments in the margins of the essay. Provide at least the following:

- A brief paraphrase of the essay's main argument and response to it
- At least one specific question about the writer's thesis
- At least two specific suggestions that will encourage the writer to expand on ideas
- Explanation of how effectively the writer has incorporated critical and/or historical sources
- Clear articulation of what is working well in the draft
- If necessary, suggestions for cutting repetitive or unnecessary information
- A specific evaluation of the essay's organization with your thoughts for making the flow stronger (consider transitions between paragraphs and between major components of the argument carefully)
- Grammatical or typographical corrections, including commentary on MLA documentation
- Suggestions for improving the title

Optional Reading Mar 15: Lee Abbott, Robinson Reading Room, Wise, 7:30

Mar 20: Donald Barthelme, "The School" and "Porcupines at the University" Second Essay Due

Mar 22: Poetry—Your Selections

Spring Break

Apr 3: Homebody / Kabul Act 1 Third Response Due

Apr 5: Homebody / Kabul Act 2

Apr 10: Homebody / Kabul Act 3

Apr 12: Homebody / Kabul

Apr 17: Art Spiegelman, In the Shadow of No Towers pp. 1-9

Apr 19: In the Shadow of No Towers (entire book)

Apr 24: In the Shadow of No Towers Fourth Response Due

Apr 26: Writing Workshop Due, Typed Theses and Outlines

Final Essay due May 1 by 2PM