

## **ILS 253: Literature and Society Power, Writing, Resistance**

In this course, we will study a series of literary texts in order to question the relations between political power and resistance in modern writing. Instead of assuming that literature lies beyond the pale of political life, we will explore the hypothesis that literary works are marked by the very relations of power that structure subjects and societies at large. The goal of this course is thus to discover ways of reading and thinking politically, while attending to the staging of political problems in literary texts. Special attention will be paid to new relational modes that literature imagines.

Beginning with modern lyric poetry (from Baudelaire to Auden), we will try to understand the Platonic injunction that exiles the poets from the Republic, and what kind of critical potential resides in poetic speech. How can the poet disrupt order? Turning to the novel, we will study themes of displacement, empire, and colonialism in works by Conrad and Foster, asking whether and how complex large-scale political events can be rendered comprehensible through narrative. Can the novel raise political consciousness? Finally, the last portion of the course will study forms of resistance in catastrophic situations (Hurston, Kafka, Levi), attending especially to the fate of the human (Levi, Orwell). Are there atrocities capable of eradicating humanity as such? Throughout the course, literary texts will be paired with theoretical readings (from Plato to Rancière), some of which are optional, and all of which are thought provoking.

Requirements include weekly online postings, one short essay (4-5 pages), a longer final paper (8-10 pages) and one in-class presentation.

### Required Texts:

- 1) Charles Baudelaire; Arthur Rimbaud, *Selected Poems* (PDF online)
- 2) W.B. Yeats; R.M. Rilke; W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (PDF online)
- 3) Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaas*
- 3) Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*; “Amy Foster”
- 4) Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- 5) Franz Kafka, *Selected Stories*
- 6) Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes were Watching God*
- 7) Primo Levi, *If This is A Man?*
- 8) George Orwell, *1984*

### Electronic Reserves:

Plato, *The Republic* (excerpts).  
W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (excerpt)  
Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing”.  
Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’, ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’.  
Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (Excerpts).  
Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa”.  
Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (excerpts).  
Jacques Rancière, ‘Ten theses on Politics’.

## **Learning Outcomes:**

As a Humanities course, this class focuses on the comprehension and communication of human experience, the meaning of historical and cultural phenomena through creative expression, reflection, and interpretation. We will study and discuss prose fiction, poetry and literary critical works. Upon successful completion of this course, students will ideally be able to:

- comprehend and deploy various approaches to interpreting and creating works of art, literature, music, architecture, philosophy, film, etc.
- demonstrate knowledge of major movements, trends, or events in the development of global culture.
- demonstrate an appreciation of the complexities of the interpretative process within a historical context.
- apply critical approaches to the “texts”/works and alternative ways of considering them.
- think critically about their own culture and the larger global community.

## **Reading Schedule:**

The UW-Madison Academic Calendar is available here:

[https://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/geninfo\\_calendar.htm](https://pubs.wisc.edu/ug/geninfo_calendar.htm)

Secondary readings are marked [\*] below.

## **Course Requirements and Guidelines:**

*Assignments:* Required assignments include one short paper (4-5 pages), a final paper (7-8 pages), weekly online postings, and an in-class presentation.

*Papers:* Provisional due dates are indicated below. Late papers will be penalized by a third of a letter grade per day. No extensions are granted. All your work must follow the principles of academic integrity:

<https://www.students.wisc.edu/doso/academic-integrity/>

*Writing Center:* <http://writing.wisc.edu> helps undergraduates in all disciplines become more effective writers. Workshops and individual help with writing are available onsite and online. You are strongly encouraged to work with the Writing Center before submitting your papers.

*Participation:* Presence in class is essential. Regular attendance and informed participation is a basic requirement of the course. Bring your texts and reading notes to class. If you must miss a session, send an email well in advance explaining why you cannot attend (sickness, religious holiday, exceptional circumstances are acceptable reasons).

*TA:* William Broadway ([wbroadway@wisc.edu](mailto:wbroadway@wisc.edu)).

*Office hours:* 9-10:30 Tuesdays, and by Appointment. All email inquiries will be responded to within 24 hours, excluding weekends.

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### Week 1

|        |    |  |
|--------|----|--|
| Jan 19 | Tu | Introduction                                 |
| Jan 21 | Th | Plato, <i>The Republic</i> (Book II, III, X) |

### Week 2

|        |    |   |
|--------|----|---|
| Jan 26 | Tu | Baudelaire, <i>Flowers of Evil</i> ; Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"     |
| Jan 28 | Th | Rimbaud, W.B. Yeats and W.H. Auden, Selected Poems<br><u>First Paper Assigned</u> |

### Week 3

|       |    |                                  |
|-------|----|----------------------------------|
| Feb 2 | Tu | Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas"       |
| Feb 4 | Th | Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> |

### Week 4

|        |    |  |
|--------|----|--|
| Feb 9  | Tu | Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , Benjamin "The Storyteller"                |
| Feb 11 | Th | Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Horror of the West" |

### Week 5

|        |    |  |
|--------|----|--|
| Feb 16 | Tu | Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i>   |
| Feb 18 | Th | Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> , "The Image of Africa"<br><b>First Paper Due</b> |

### Week 6

|        |    |   |
|--------|----|---|
| Feb 23 | Tu | Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i>                                |
| Feb 26 | Th | Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i><br><u>Final Paper Assigned</u> |

### Week 7

|       |    |                                |
|-------|----|--------------------------------|
| Mar 1 | Tu | Kafka, <i>Selected Stories</i> |
| Mar 3 | Th | Kafka, <i>Selected Stories</i> |

### Week 8

|        |    |                                |
|--------|----|--------------------------------|
| Mar 8  | Tu | Kafka, <i>Selected Stories</i> |
| Mar 10 | Th | Kafka, <i>Selected Stories</i> |

### Week 9

|        |    |  |
|--------|----|--|
| Mar 15 | Tu | Hurston, <i>Their Eyes were Watching God</i> |
| Mar 17 | Th | Hurston, <i>Their Eyes were Watching God</i> |

SPRING RECESS: March 18-26

### Week 11

|        |    |   |
|--------|----|---|
| Mar 29 | Tu | Hurston, <i>Their Eyes were Watching God</i> , Dubois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> |
|--------|----|---|

(excerpts)\*  
Mar 31

Th Sartre, *What is Literature?* (excerpts).

Week 12

Apr 5

Tu Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”

Apr 7

Th Paper Workshop

Week 13

Apr 12

Tu Levi, *If this is a Man*

Apr 14

Th Levi, *If this is a Man*

Week 14

Apr 19

Tu Levi, *If this is a Man*

Apr 21

Th Levi, *If this is a Man*, Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (excerpts)\*

Week 15

Apr 26

Tu Orwell, *1984*

Apr 28

Th Orwell, *1984*

Week 15

May 3

Tu Orwell, *1984*

May 5

Th Concluding Discussion; **Final Paper Due**