Political Science 570: Literature and Politics

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Spring 2013
MWF, 8:50-9:40AM, Education L185

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Office Hours: Tues. 10am-12, or by appt.

Description

In most political science courses, students learn about the political world by reading textbooks, academic books and articles, or other scholarly writings. Without dispensing with scholarship, this course endeavors to deepen students’ understanding of politics by turning to a less traditional source of insight: literature. The prevalence of political themes in great works of literature alone justifies such a turn. Yet this course goes beyond thematic examination, engaging also in meta-level analysis of the relationship between literature and politics. In other words, the objective of this course is not simply to discover what various authors have to say about politics, but to consider in what ways politics is a resource for literature and vice versa. Why do some authors not trained in political science write about the political, and why do some political philosophers express themselves through literature? How does literature as a medium of communication enable or limit the expression of ideas about political phenomena? How do stylistic choices such as genre shape the visions of political life a work of literature presents?

This course is divided into three sections: tragedy, comedy, and philosophy. The famous ancient Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides set the stage for contemplating the tragic nature of political life, as a realm of conflict, violence, and tyranny. Duke scholar Peter Euben’s book on tragedy and political theory and Ian McEwan’s novel Atonement then provide opportunities for reflection on how tragic poetry might serve as a resource for navigating the tensions of communal life. We then turn, in the second section of the course, to comedy, beginning with the famous ancient Greek comic poet Aristophanes, whose works will help us contemplate the more joyful nature of political life, as a realm of possibility, progress, and community. With the help of scholars David Konstan, Stephen Halliwell, and John Zumbrunnen, we will think about how comedy navigates the darker side of political life, in contrast to or in harmony with the tragic approach. John Kennedy Toole’s A Confederacy of Dunces caps the comedy section of the course, allowing for further insight into the resources comedy provides for politics. The course ends with philosophy, exploring the reasons why political philosophers might turn to literature as a vehicle for expressing their theories. Here we commence with Plato’s Phaedrus, a philosophic dialogue exploring the art of writing and truth seeking. We next turn to scholars Andrea Nightingale, Arlene Saxonhouse, and Leo Strauss for help in contemplating Plato’s use of the dialogue form. Finally, we end the course with Robert Pirsig’s novel Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, a work of philosophy that brings together our inquiries throughout the course into the relationship between literature and politics.

Objectives

1) Become familiar with the texts read in the course and the political insights they offer
2) Explore and examine the relationship between literature and politics
3) Improve students’ abilities to analyze, evaluate, and discuss works of literature and political theory both verbally and in writing
Materials
The following books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore. You are required to purchase the editions listed.


***You will also be required to purchase a coursepack, which will be available for purchase after classes begin. Further details to be announced in class.***

Course Requirements
Below is a projected breakdown of the grades for this course, though I reserve the right to change assignments and weightings as I deem necessary:

- **Participation**: 20%
- **Quizzes**: 20%
- **Paper**: 60% (proposal: 5%, 1st draft: 20%, 2nd draft: 30%, peer edit: 5%)

Participation
Active attendance and participation are crucial to your success in this course, and to the success of the course as a whole. I will thus take attendance each time we meet and deduct points for anything beyond one absence. Physical presence at class meetings is necessary, but not sufficient for earning a good participation grade. The strength of your participation grade will also depend on your performance as a contributor to class discussions. If you rarely speak, I will have nothing to judge you by. Shy students should thus schedule a meeting with me during the first week of class so we may discuss strategies for increasing or supplementing classroom participation. On the other hand, speaking frequently, but thoughtlessly (or, worse, with ill intent) will result in deductions of your participation grade. Aim for some middle point between these two extremes.

Quizzes
Randomly throughout the semester I will administer unannounced quizzes at the beginning of class. These quizzes will test (a) whether you have completed the expected reading assignment and (b) how closely you read the assigned text. Please note: *if you do not do the readings, you will not pass the quiz*. As you will discover, the quizzes will ask about details not found on Sparknotes, Wikipedia, etc. It is therefore essential to do the readings in full. Just so there are no surprises, let
me state here that these quizzes will test your knowledge of often easily overlooked facets of the text. Accordingly, I will drop your lowest 3 quiz scores.

Given the detailed nature of these quizzes, I will allow you to use your notes. By this I mean that you will be allowed to use any handwritten notes that you personally have taken. You may not use typed notes, printouts from online sources, notes copied from a friend, notes written in the margins of your book, or the like—only your personal, handwritten notes will suffice. I suggest you create a reading journal for this class in which you take careful notes both as you read and after you’ve completed that day’s reading. I’m happy to discuss note-taking strategies during office hours.

Paper
The major requirement for this course will be a paper on which you will work the better part of the semester. The assignment will require you, first, to write a one-page paper proposal, i.e. the introductory paragraph of your paper. Using the comments received on your paper proposal, you will then craft a 5-7 page paper that explores the relationship between tragedy and politics using texts from that section of the course. The next step will consist of taking the comments you have received on this paper and re-writing it, this time adding in an exploration of the relationship between comedy and politics using selections from that section of the course. This second paper—of 10-12 pages—will, in other words, offer a comparison of the political dimensions and uses of tragedy and comedy. Before turning in this paper, you will exchange papers with a peer and conduct a peer editing exercise. Your final paper submission will thus include not only the paper, but also a short worksheet from this peer editing exercise. More details on the paper assignment will be handed out during the semester. This is a paper you will never forget.

Grading Policies
• Papers must be turned in by the start of class on the due date. Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for every 24-hour period late (e.g. A to AB, AB to B, etc.). If you are 1 minute late, or 24 hours late, it costs you one letter grade.
• Papers turned in via email will not be accepted. You must submit printed copies.
• I will not discuss grades on any assignments for 24 hours after they have been returned. If, after 24 hours reflection, you believe you deserve a higher grade, contact me and I will re-evaluate your assignment and make the final decision regarding the grade.
• Any instances of plagiarism or cheating will be dealt with in full accordance of University policy and will result in a grade of “F” for the course.
• Mcburney students are required to submit visas to me by the end of the second week of class.
Course Schedule

WED, JAN 23  Introduction to Course

ACT I: TRAGEDY

FRI, JAN 25  Aeschylus, Oresteia
MON, JAN 28  Aeschylus, Oresteia
WED, JAN 30  Aeschylus, Oresteia
FRI, FEB 1  Sophocles, Oedipus Rex
MON, FEB 4  Euripides, Bacchae
WED, FEB 6  Euben, The Tragedy of Political Theory
FRI, FEB 8  Euben, The Tragedy of Political Theory
MON, FEB 11  Euben, The Tragedy of Political Theory
WED, FEB 13  McEwan, Atonement
FRI, FEB 15  McEwan, Atonement

MON, FEB 18  McEwan, Atonement  PAPER PROPOSAL DUE
WED, FEB 20  McEwan, Atonement
FRI, FEB 22  McEwan, Atonement
MON, FEB 25  McEwan, Atonement
WED, FEB 27  McEwan, Atonement

ACT II: COMEDY

FRI, MAR 1  Aristophanes, Acharnians
MON, MAR 4  Aristophanes, Knights
WED, MAR 6  Aristophanes, Birds
FRI, MAR 8  Konstan, “Introduction” and “Birds” in Greek Comedy and Ideology
MON, MAR 11  Halliwell, “Aristophanic Satire”
WED, MAR 13  Zumbrunnen, “Elite Domination”
FRI, MAR 15  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces

MON, MAR 18  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces  PAPER 1 DUE
WED, MAR 20  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces
FRI, MAR 22  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces

SPRING BREAK (MAR 23-31)

MON, APR 1  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces
WED, APR 3  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces
FRI, APR 5  Toole, A Confederacy of Dunces

ACT III: PHILOSOPHY

MON, APR 8  Plato, Phaedrus
WED, APR 10  Plato, Phaedrus
FRI, APR 12  Plato, Phaedrus
MON, APR 15  Nightingale, “Alien and Authentic Discourse” in Genres in Dialogue
WED, APR 17  Saxonhouse, “Comedy in Callipolis”
FRI, APR 19  Strauss, “Introduction” and “Persecution and the Art of Writing” in Persecution and the Art of Writing
MON, APR 22  Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance
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<td>WED, APR 24</td>
<td>Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance</td>
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<td>FRI, APR 26</td>
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<td>MON, APR 29</td>
<td><strong>PEER DRAFT DUE</strong></td>
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<td>WED, MAY 1</td>
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<td>MON, MAY 6</td>
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<td>WED, MAY 8</td>
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<td><strong>PAPER #2 &amp; PEER EDIT WORKSHEET DUE</strong></td>
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