

English 223
In Troubled Times: American Literature & Historic Crises
Spring 2009
Section 00; MW 1-2:15PM; ALH 214
Format: Lecture/Discussion

Professor: Henry Marchand

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Office Hours: Mon., Wed. & Thurs. 10-11AM (and by appointment)

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(All email between students and instructor must utilize cedarcrest.edu addresses)

Books:

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself

A Farewell to Arms, by Ernest Hemingway

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck

Slaughterhouse-Five, by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

If I Die in a Combat Zone, by Tim O'Brien

Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, by Tony Kushner

Course Description: The purpose of this 3-credit course is to explore the ways in which literature written in anticipation of, during or after a national or global crisis reflects and helps us to understand historic events and the conditions surrounding their occurrence. Works of prose, poetry and drama will be read, discussed, and analyzed in terms of their individual themes and literary qualities as well as their literary, historical, and cultural contexts.

Why we'll do this: Literature is language shaped and enlivened by people with significant things to say, people whose work reflects not only their own personalities and interests but something vital about the times, places, and cultures in which they live. Through reading, discussing, and writing about American crisis literature, we'll open ourselves to new voices, experience, and insights. We'll learn a great deal about the development of our national culture through the writing that mirrors and helps to shape it. In the company of intelligent, passionate, imaginative people, we may even learn something about ourselves.

That's not a bad investment of our time, as I see it.

How we'll do it: We're going to read a lot. Every class member is expected to participate regularly in discussion of materials read. I'll do some lecturing, of course, providing the historical and cultural contexts of various works. As for the writing requirements: each student will write a short paper (3-5 pages) closely examining a work or works assigned, to demonstrate understanding of literary analysis and competency in college-level writing. There will be three exams, all taken in class. Each exam will include a short answer section and an essay.

How your work will be evaluated: In assigning a final grade to your performance in this class, I will consider your level of contribution to class discussion, the quality of your analytical paper, and your performance on the exams.

Final Course Grades will be calculated using these percentages:

First Exam: 20%

Second Exam: 20%

Third Exam: 20%

Paper: 25%

Participation in Discussion: 15% (see participation grade scale at the end of this syllabus)

Attendance: In order to derive the full benefit from this class, and to do your part in enhancing your classmates' experience through meaningful contributions to our discussions, you must attend on a regular basis. Two absences from class are permitted without penalty, but each subsequent absence will lower your final course grade by one increment (A to A-, for example). If you know in advance that you will miss a class, arrange to get class notes and assignment details from a classmate.

Handing In Work/Lateness: Your analytical paper must be submitted to me via the Drop Box on the course website as scheduled (see Course Schedule, below, for the due date). Papers posted late will lose one whole letter grade (for example, A to B) for each day beyond the due date. Exceptional circumstances (serious illness, etc.) will be considered in the event that you request a deadline extension; computer or printer problems are not sufficient. If you are absent on the day of an exam, the make-up exam must be taken as soon as possible; the grade will be reduced by one full letter grade for each day after the scheduled exam date. It is your responsibility to arrange a time to take the make-up exam. If you will be absent on the day of the third exam, you must arrange to take it before the scheduled date, but no earlier than six days prior to that date.

Modern Language Association (MLA) format, using in-text citations instead of end notes or footnotes, is required for the analytical paper. Papers must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. Please use 12 point, Times New Roman font. Do not include a cover page; instead, place your name, the course/section numbers, and the due date in the upper left corner of page one. An appropriate title is required for each paper, and should be centered on page one. Subsequent pages must include your name and the page number at upper right.

Please familiarize yourself with the MLA format as soon as possible. Any good college writing manual will contain what you need.

Honor Philosophy: The Honor Philosophy of Cedar Crest College obliges all students to uphold community standards for academic and social behavior to preserve a learning environment dedicated to personal and academic excellence.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism, whether inadvertent or intentional, must be avoided. Everything that appears in your written work must be yours, unless otherwise noted. *All phrases, sentences, paragraphs, ideas, insights, interpretations, arguments -- even, at times, individual words -- taken from a source outside yourself must be attributed to their source according to the MLA format.* If you fail to provide such attribution, the result is plagiarism. The penalty for this

transgression and other violations of academic honesty is an F for the work at hand or for the final course grade, as the instructor deems appropriate. Be aware that correct citation of online sources is every bit as important as the correct citation of material gleaned from books, scholarly journals, and other printed sources.

Classroom Environment: I want and expect you to talk a great deal in this class, but conversation should be limited to meaningful and informed engagement in class discussions. Private conversations conducted at any volume – with someone seated beside you, or across the room, or outside the room via cell phone – create a disruption of the academic environment. Likewise, coming late to class and/or leaving early are not acceptable. Eating in class is also prohibited. Drinking (that is, drinking coffee, tea, water, juice, or soft drinks) is fine. Laptops are to be used in class only with prior approval of the instructor. Cell phone ringers must be set to “Vibrate” rather than to ring, and if you receive a call during class time you must either turn off your phone or leave the room to answer it, understanding that you are not to return until the next class meeting. Do not bring guests to class. Dependent children may be brought to class only with the prior approval of the instructor.

E-mail Policy: All e-mail correspondence between students and the instructor must utilize Cedar Crest College e-mail accounts. I will only respond to emails sent from your cedarcrest.edu address to hmarchan@cedarcrest.edu.

Special Accommodations: Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Advising Center.

Course Outcomes, Objectives, and Assessment:

English 223: In Troubled Times: American Literature & Historic Crises is designed to facilitate the following educational outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of American literary works
- Students will demonstrate understanding of how individual works fit into larger literary, cultural, and historical contexts
- Students will demonstrate reading and analytical/critical thinking skills through oral presentations of ideas and responses and through writing activities
- Students will demonstrate competency in basic writing skills
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic literary terms

To attain these outcomes, English 223 pursues the following course objectives:

- At the completion of this course, students will have an overview of important works in American crisis literature
- Students will have knowledge of works of American literature and their historical and cultural contexts
- Students will be able to analyze a work of literature, considering both its formal qualities and its various contexts
- Students will be able to write focused literary essays

- Students will have gained an appreciation of literature and of the connections to be made among literary works

English 223 achieves its intended educational outcomes through the following forms of assessment:

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of course content through the writing of an analytical paper, completion of exams, and regular and informed contributions to whole class discussion
- Students will demonstrate analytical/critical thinking ability through class discussions and writing
- Students will demonstrate the ability to write clearly and effectively through completion of an analytical paper and short answer/essay exams

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the course syllabus and schedule as the semester progresses. Students will be informed of any such changes as they are made.

Course Schedule
English 223, Section 00
Spring Semester 2009

Date **Readings for the Day (or Other Class Activity)**

Week 1: Is History Just a Series of Crappy Things Happening?

M 1/19 Course Introduction. *Defining “Crisis” in life and literature.*

W 1/21 Our Founding Writers: Tom Paine and *The Crisis*; Ben Franklin’s almanac and *Autobiography*.

Week 2: Writers Make War on Slavery

M 1/26 The Truth Will Set [Them] Free: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself.*

W 1/28 Excerpt from “Slavery in Massachusetts,” by Henry David Thoreau, at left. The book that started the war? *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Or Life Among the Lowly*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. **Chapters 1 and 5**, at left. [Free ebook download available at www.gutenberg.org (Project Gutenberg)]. Also, “Mrs. Child’s Reply,” at left.

Week 3: How to Write The Civil War

M 2/2 The Naturalist: *The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane. **Chapters 1, 5 & 6** at left under The Civil War/Romance Ends. [Free ebook at www.gutenberg.org].
The Anti-Romantic: Three Stories by Ambrose Bierce, at left.

W 2/4 The South Shall Rise Again: *Gone with the Wind* and the persistence of Romanticism.

Week 4: World War 1: The Lost Generation and the Birth of Modernism

M 2/9 The Lost Generation: Wandering the Waste Land, Landing in Paris.

W 2/11 Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*: Distance or Immersion?

Week 5: The Roaring Twenties

M 2/16 Exam 1

W 2/18 "Gatsby" and More: F. Scott Fitzgerald Dissects America's Class System. (Excerpt at left.); America Laughs: Jazz Age Humor (Stories by James Thurber and Dorothy Parker, at left.)

Week 6: The Great Depression

M 2/23 -ists and -isms: Looking for a Future, in Literature and Life.

W 2/25 American Epic: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Week 7: World War Two: Romance vs. Realism, and Something New

M 3/2 *The World War Two Story*: Its Characters, Plot and Outcome.

W 3/4 Mr. Vonnegut's War: *Slaughterhouse-Five* Obliterates the Paradigm.

Week 8: Spring Break

M 3/9 No class meeting

W 3/11 No class meeting

Week 9: Separate and Unequal: Writers and the Racial Divide

M 3/16 The Literature of Outrage: Richard Wright's *Native Son*.

W 3/18 Exam 2

Week 10: A World Gone MAD: The Cold War, the Sixties, and Vietnam

- M 3/23 Witch Hunts and Mushroom Clouds: The Literature of Fear.
- W 3/25 Writing the Sixties: The New Journalism Dethrones the Novel. (Excerpts from books by Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson, at left.)

Week 11: The War in Vietnam

- M 3/30 Technicolor Nightmare: This is Not Your Father's War Story.
- W 4/1 Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone*.

Weeks 12-14: The AIDS Epidemic

- M 4/6 Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes; Part One: Millennium Approaches, Act I*.
- W 4/8 *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes; Part One: Millennium Approaches, Acts II and III*.
- M 4/13 No Class Meeting
- W 4/15 *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes; Part Two: Perestroika, Acts I-III*.
- M 4/20 Angels in America, film adaptation
- W 4/22 Angels in America, film adaptation

Week 15: September 11, 2001

- M 4/27 Poetry and Prose: Writers Respond to the events of the day.
- W 4/29 Exam Review.

Week 16: Exam 3

- M 5/4 Exam 3. Last class meeting.

Class Participation Grading

Grade

Criteria

- A** Regularly demonstrates excellent preparation: has clearly read the assigned material and thoughtfully considered any suggested questions,

etc. Brings original thought and perspective to discussion, making significant contributions that expand and extend our collective understanding and appreciation of the literary work. Listens attentively to class members and instructor and responds constructively. Maintains active involvement throughout the semester.

- B** Regularly contributes to class discussions and has clearly read the assigned material, considering any suggested questions, etc. Brings original thought and perspective to discussion. Listens attentively to class members and instructor. Maintains consistent ongoing involvement throughout the semester.
- C** Contributions to discussion show that the assigned materials have been read. Listens attentively to class members and instructor. Level of involvement variable, but can contribute when called upon.
- D** Doesn't often contribute without being called upon. Completion of assigned reading sometimes in doubt. Level of involvement consistently unsatisfactory.
- F** Does not contribute to discussion unless called upon. Contributions when called upon indicate that assigned materials have not been read.