

HONORS 3rd YEAR SEMINAR
AESTHETICS, VALUES and AUTHORITY
Fall 2009

IDH 3005 (U07) / IDH 3007 (U07)
Wednesday, 2:00 – 4:45pm
Prof. M. Hoder-Salmon
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305-348-6390
Office Hours: Tu/Th 3:30 – 4:30pm &
by appointment

PROSE AND FILM: NARRATIVES OF DIFFERENCE

Storytelling is something that can awaken attentiveness, engagement and empathy to a life that isn't one's own. And to be attentive, to be engaged, empathetic. That is moral. (Rebecca Goldstein)

Seriousness is, for a certain kind of artist, an imperative uniting the aesthetic and the ethical. (John Coetzee)

Experiencing the variety of meanings available in a work of art helps make us tolerant and mentally lithe. Art is a realm of thought experiments that quicken, sharpen, and sweeten our being in the world. (Wendy Steiner)

This 3rd year course is organized around two genres: film and prose, with attention focused on the overall theme of "Aesthetics, Values and Authority." In order to vary the experience, the selection of films, fiction and non-fiction will be intermingled over both semesters. All the works we will study this year are diverse in terms of themes, critical reception, style, and other categories of artistic enrichment. For each selection there will be an emphasis on developing critical thinking skills, writing skills and graceful style through assignments built on traditional research papers, discussion and other programmatic academic exercises.

This semester we concentrate on a collection of novels and prose that are as diverse in subject as they are in narrative style. The class will come to know Hogwarts, a fantasy site of danger and opportunity for the youthful Harry, Ron and Hermione. Through an innovative graphic text the class will learn about Iran and Iranian family life under a complex and repressive culture. And then students will imaginatively visit life in the Dutch artist Vermeer's household in 17th century Delft. The films, as well, cover a wide range of visual style, era, theme and focus. We will study several adaptations connected to the novels and several additional films on ethnicity in the Southwest, World War II, and early twentieth century America.

For three of the novels, prose, and films there is a research and analytical essay assignment. In addition, students in small groups will plan and present interpretive projects of their own choosing connected to the course readings. Details follow the schedule of class meetings. We will also participate in unscheduled activities as opportunities occur.

REQUIRED BOOKS (Bookstore Editions):

A Short Guide to Writing About Film (6th Edition), Timothy Corrigan (for Fall and Spring semesters)

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, J. K. Rowling

Persepolis (Vol. 1 & 2), Marjane Satrapi

Girl With a Pearl Earring, Tracy Chevalier

Einstein's Dreams, Alan Lightman

SCHEDULE:

August 26	Overview of the semester Film scenes, "Harry Potter"
September 2	DUE: <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i>
September 9	DUE: Student Presentation on <i>Harry Potter</i>
September 16	In Class Film: "The Magnificent Ambersons" DUE: ESSAY
September 23	DUE: <i>Persepolis: The Complete Edition</i>
September 30	In Class Film: "Persepolis"
October 7	DUE: Student presentation on <i>Persepolis</i>
October 14	In Class Film: "The Milagro Beanfield War" DUE: ESSAY
October 21	DUE: <i>The Girl With a Pearl Earring</i>
October 28	Scenes from "Girl With a Pearl Earring"
November 4	DUE: Student presentation on <i>Pearl Earring</i>
November 11	In Class Film: "The Garden of the Finzi-Contini's" DUE: ESSAY
November 18	DUE: <i>Einstein's Dreams</i>

November 25	DUE: Student Presentation on <i>Einstein's Dreams</i>
December 2	Student film presentations (see assignment section) DUE: ESSAY
December 6-12	Final exam week

ASSIGNMENTS

STUDY QUESTIONS:

TEXTS: For each class meeting that has a prose reading assignment, compose a one-page length critical note that is based on your reading for that week. It is expected that this will be an interpretive response that is thoughtful and may encourage discussion. Research is appropriate.

FILMS: Before the class viewing students are expected to sample the literature on a film, such as reviews and analysis published by reputable sources. All the films we view in class will be on reserve in the library. After seeing and discussing the film in class, it is highly recommended that you view the film again in order to deepen your visual understanding, clarify your notes and focus on a particular interpretive aspect. For each film we study a one page interpretive response is required on a narrow focus, reinforced by research.

Please send these assignments to me via email according to the following schedule (and bring two print copies to class):

Books: By Tuesday of the week the reading is due.

Films: By Tuesday of the week following the in-class viewing.

ESSAYS: There is a writing assignment for two of the four books we are reading this semester and one of the films; select your three and note the due dates in the schedule. Each paper should be a solid four to six pages. Standard research and essay style is expected. For each essay I will expect two research citations, one library book or journal article (required), and an Internet source of standard reliability may be included. As an alternative, with permission, students may substitute for one of the papers a non-narrative creative project, such as a website, short film, or other concept. I have developed assignment suggestions for each novel which are strictly intended to be helpful, but are certainly not required. More detailed explanations will be given in class.

NOTE: If you decide to use an Internet source understand that care is required as web documents may or may not be reliable; only reviewed (vetted) content may be assumed to measure up to academic standards.

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“The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared hungrily back at them . . . he had a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness.”

1. *Harry Potter*: J. K. Rowling utilizes fantasy, myth, history, geography, and familial relations to create a compelling story about the interweaving of choice and destiny through the lens of moral complexity. Construct an intellectual narrative, using values and authority to interpret a narrow aspect of the book’s many possibilities for literary and historical interpretation. You may use character, theme, setting, religion, family, society or another category. You will find that there are numerous books and articles in various disciplines, including philosophy, history, and literature (and of course, children’s literature) for example, on the sources and meaning of the “Potter” phenomenon that you can rely on for background research.

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“As for us, we stayed. Not just out of fatalism. If there was to be a future in my parent’s eyes, that future was linked to my French education, and Tehran was the only place I could get it.”

2. *Persepolis*: Graphic novels have become a postmodern genre, as more such novels appear using the cartoon format to present serious literature. In Marjane Satrapi’s illustrated story on repression in her homeland Iran, we find an ironic tale of political history and memoir. Certainly Iran is much in the news as the United States and other nations weigh any threat that Iran may present to our own—and our allies—safety. You may take a purely literary focus to discuss how Satrapi’s melding of illustration and narrative serve her story. Or, you may relate the text to a political theme on terrorism and repression in our time. Certainly the themes of authority and value pertain to this text.

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“He was right—the painting might satisfy Van Ruyjven, but something was missing from it. I knew before he did. When I saw what was needed—that point of brightness he had used to catch the eye in other paintings—I shivered. This will be the end I thought.”

3. *Girl With a Pearl Earring*: Chevalier’s novel is so rich in details that one may come away believing that this historical rendition of a time and place long past is based on observation rather than imagination combined with known particulars. In this study of a great artist and two families of different social class there is ample opportunity to explore ideas about the moralities of art, the evolving traditions of gender and familial roles, as well as how the author evokes a painterly gloss through her narrative style. Or you may focus on Vermeer, and his art, the city of Delft in history, or on other topics—as long as your essay is related to the novel.

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“Why such a fixation on speed? Because in this world time passes more slowly for people in motion. Thus everyone travels at high velocity, to gain time.”

4. *Einstein's Dreams*: In thinking about organizing time as an artificial construct, our world of hours, minutes, days, weeks, months and years, Alan Lightman has constructed a web of other ways that time might be reconfigured. Within this imaginative world human life proceeds very differently, but still the dichotomy between tragedy and happiness, exists as it does for us. For this essay, take Lightman's thesis and use it to model the way time intersects with your life, not as a journal of events, but as an opportunity or hindrance to becoming the person you most wish to become.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS: This assignment will be organized in class. For each novel a committee of three to four students will plan a program connected to the novel. All formats are welcome, for example, debate, media, historical, theatrical or other idea. While no grade is given for this assignment - planning, preparation, participation and effectiveness will be considered against a measure for a negative grade.

FILM NOTES: Each student should have a designated notebook for film viewing. Taking notes while simultaneously viewing a film is a skill that requires practice. Guidance will be given in class. Students should purchase an inexpensive book-light for class. Computer use will not be allowed during a film.

SPECIAL CAUTION: Because of the status of film in popular culture the Internet is a valid resource, but can be a snare for the unwary. Film research connected to Plagiarism is cited as the highest category of student failure. Be careful, use only clearly marked academic sources, such as vetted film journals, and be scrupulous in managing citations.

STUDENT FILM PPRESENTATION: At the end of the fall semester half of the class, each student, will present individual film scenes of a favorite film to your classmates, augmented by a brief discussion. This presentation should last about ten minutes. The assignment will continue for the second-half of the class spring semester.

CLASS PARTICIPATION: Engagement in class discussion is expected. In addition, at intermittent class meetings students may be asked, with advance notice, to lead discussion by noting interesting passages, summarizing themes, or fostering dialogue through other means.

COLLEGIALITY: Includes class participation, attendance and promptness, and routine adherence to collegiate standards. One absence, with standard reason, is equal to two classes, which is the allowed course absence. Infractions may incur grade deflation.

PLAGIARISM: Refer to the University and the Honors College policies on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity. Any infraction will be strictly enforced.

GRADING:

Each of the three essays: 30%

Collegiality and Participation standards: 10%

HONORS COLLEGE NOTES:

SRAI FOURTH YEAR OPTION: Students who choose the SRAI 4th year option will be enrolled in IDH 4905 (for 6 credits total) during the Fall and Spring semesters in which the project is being completed. SRAI projects must be presented at the annual Honors College Research Conference and students must complete other requirements as stated by the Director of the SRAI Program. Students who wish to conduct a SRAI project for the 4th year option must submit an application signed by the SRAI Research Affiliate with a 350-word abstract describing the project no later than May 2010. **No extensions will be made to this deadline.** Incomplete proposals will not be approved. Only projects that comply with these procedures will be applied toward the fourth year requirements for graduation.

HONORS COLLEGE SPECIAL EVENTS:

Colloquium	October 1, 3:30pm
Convocation	October 15, 1:00pm
Excellence Lecture	October 29, 3:30pm
Colloquium	November 19, 3:30pm

(Draft)
SPRING SEMESTER 2010

IDH 3006/IDH3008

REQUIRED BOOKS: (Bookstore Editions)

The Corrigan film book continues
Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress by Dai Sijie
Bel Canto by Ann Patchett
Lives of Animals or Angels and Apes (?)

January 6	Course Introduction
January 13	DUE: <i>Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress</i>
January 20	DUE: Student Presentation on “Balzac”
January 27	In Class Film: “The Station Agent” DUE: Essay
February 3	In Class Film: “Daughters of the Dust”
February 10	DUE: <i>Bel Canto</i>
February 17	DUE: Student Presentation on <i>Bel Canto</i>
February 24	In Class Film: “The Namesake”
March 3	In Class Film: “The French Lieutenant’s Woman”
March 10	In Class Film: “Fahrenheit 451”
March 15-19	SPRING BREAK WEEK
March 24	In Class Film: “Orlando”
March 31	DUE: Coetzee or Gopnik

April 7	Student Presentations on Coetzee or Gopnick
April 14	Student Film Presentations
April 21	Last Class, TBA

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“Just about everyone in the village had come to the house on stilts to witness the arrival of the city’s youths . . . ‘Comrade, it’s a musical instrument,’ Luo said as casually as he could, ‘and my friend here’s a fine musician. Truly.’ ”

1. *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*: Throughout the novel, the repression of Western literature, and by extension Western culture and values is presented as severe deprivation. Part historical, part fable, part autobiography, this unusual novel appears to make a claim for the power of storytelling regardless of circumstance. Why does the author believe so strongly in the compelling power of literature? This question may be addressed using any of the novel’s topics, including youth, politics, education, or community, for example.

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“There was one other person there who understood the music, but she was not a guest. Standing in the hallway, looking around the corner to the living room, was Carmen, and Carmen, though she did not have the words for it, understood everything perfectly.”

2. *Bel Canto*: This novel encompasses a relationship between aesthetics, in this case, of music, and the intersections of values and authority. The novel’s ideas on the human capacity to both love and to hate, to do good and to cause harm, are depicted through the contemporary meeting of terrorist and victim. Within this context locate a theme by which you will elaborate on aesthetics, values and authority in the novel.

[[[[(Tentative)

“. . .how we treat animals is of no importance except insofar as being cruel to animals may accustom us to being cruel to men.”

3. *The Lives of Animals*: Coetzee presents a point-of-view in his fictional argument and four scholars in different disciplines react to his perspective. Follow, in their example, select a discipline and react to Coetzee’s thesis, with the stipulation to rely on an aspect of the course theme. In regard to the subject of “justice for animals” there are many contexts to explore, and just to mention several, animals in captivity, farm practices, research, apparel, as food, intelligent capacities and

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**HONORS COLLEGE SPECIAL EVENT: SRAI RESEARCH CONFERENCE,
MARCH 30 (ALL DAY)**

