

Political Science H596

Political Theory & Political Narratives

Professor Michael Neblo

Class: T/R 1:30 to 3:18

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This course is an advanced introduction to contemporary democratic theory. However, we will be approaching this topic through an unusual medium: post-WWII fiction. The philosopher Richard Rorty has argued that political philosophy should move away from trying to argue people into submission to its precepts, and toward a model of providing convincing and attractive narratives of the way we want to be as individuals and as a community. The most important new political theories will be the work of “the strong poet” – artists who create the standards by which they will be judged. We will try to take Rorty’s idea seriously by reading four important pieces of recent fiction as attempts to articulate narratives of the relationship between individual and collective identity relevant to the political situation of the countries in which they are set.

Students with disabilities should make their needs known to the instructor and seek available assistance in the first week of the quarter. For course materials in alternative formats please see Mr. Wayne DeYoung, 2140 Derby Hall, 292-2880, also in the first week of the quarter.

Course Requirements

There are four main course requirements:

1. Seminar participation: I have high expectations for attendance and class preparation. In addition to you being expected to volunteer your views during discussion, you may be called upon at random. Some of these readings are dense and difficult, so I strongly encourage you to take notes as you read, and whenever possible, to read them twice and/or discuss them with classmates before the class session. *I do not expect you to come to class with all the "right" answers. However, I do expect you to come to class having thought seriously about our texts and the questions they raise.* "A" level participation involves demonstrating

consistently high levels of engagement with the readings, as well as insightfully connecting them to each other, the course themes, other students' contributions, real politics, etc... General seminar participation will count for 30% of the final course grade.

In addition to general participation, each member of the class will be assigned the role of "point person" for two class sessions. This role involves turning in a formally written set of comments on the readings (about three pages), and making a short (about 5 minute) class presentation designed to spark discussion. Your discussion, presentation, and written responses for this session will count for 10% of your final grade.

2. Quizzes: I will give an indeterminate number of unannounced quizzes to check for preparation and understanding. The quizzes will not be difficult if you have done the readings for that class session. The combined quizzes will count for 10% of your final grade.
3. Final paper. One ten page paper on a subject of the seminar member's choice, *clearly relevant to the course themes, and contingent on my prior approval*. This paper will count for 40% of the final course grade and is due on June 5th by noon in electronic format (MS-Word is preferred). When you email me the paper, you should not consider it received until you get a confirmation response from me. I do accept late papers, though you lose one third of a letter grade per day until 24 hours before grades are due. The standards for the paper follow the criteria outlined in Booth et. al. which we will discuss in depth when we cover that book.

We will workshop a draft of your papers on the last day of class. Therefore, a draft of your paper will be due in class on May 30th. Though this draft will not be graded, it is very much in your interests for it to be a serious attempt at laying out your argument.

4. Colleague comments: Each person in class will be paired with two others for purposes of workshoping each other's papers. You will be expected to provide your partners (and me) with a written set of comments on their draft paper, using the criteria set out in Booth et. al. Your colleague comments will count for 10% of your final grade.
- (5.) Extra Credit: Throughout the quarter, I will be arranging screenings of several films that touch on the topics of the course. The screenings are completely optional. I will award extra credit for attendance at the screenings accompanied by short reaction papers. Also, given the end of quarter crunch, I will award extra credit for papers that significantly address our final novel, *The Heart of Redness*.

A note on academic integrity: I require electronic copies of your paper because they will be run through a software program designed to detect plagiarism from the web, study aides, as well as a database of papers turned in at OSU and elsewhere. I do this *not* because I do not trust you. I believe that the vast majority of students are honest. I even believe that most students who plagiarize do so, not because they are generally dishonest, but because they panic in the end of term crush. I check for plagiarism to reassure students who do their own work that they are not chumps, and to help students who are tempted to plagiarize under pressure to avoid making a decision that they will come to regret.

Course Materials: The following required books are available at SBX:

Richard Rorty	Contingency, Irony, Solidarity (CIS)
Toni Morrison	Beloved (BLV)
Salman Rushdie	Midnight's Children (MC)
Gunter Grass	The Tin Drum (TD)
Zakes Mda	The Heart of Redness (HR)
Booth et. al.	The Craft of Research (CR)

Schedule of Readings

March 28 th	Course Introduction
March 30 th	Rorty: Introduction and Chapters 1-3 (CIS)
April 4 th	Rorty: Chapters 4, 8, & 9 (CIS); Rorty (Handout)
April 6 th	Morrison Chapters 1-8 (BLV)
April 11 th	Morrison Chapters 9-18 (BLV)
April 13 th	Morrison Chapters 19-28 (BLV)
April 18 th	Grass Chapters 1-16 (TD)
April 20 th	No Class [Make Progress on Booth et. al.]
April 25 th	Grass Chapters 17-29 (TD)
April 27 th	Grass Chapters 30-38 (TD)
May 2 nd	Grass Chapters 39-46 (TD)
May 4 th	Rushdie Book I (MC)
May 9 th	Rushdie Book II (MC)
May 11 th	Rushdie Book III (MC)
May 16 th	Booth et. al. ALL (CR) [Esp. Chaps. 3, 4, 7-11]
May 18 th	Mda Chapters 1-4 (HR)
May 23 rd	No Class [Make Progress on Papers]
May 25 th	Mda Chapters 5-8 (HR)
May 30 th	Mda Chapters 9-12 (HR)
June 1 st	Paper Workshop