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3311 James Hall
Office Hours: Monday, 11-12:30 or by appointment

POLS 3440/ENGL 3293
Politics Through Literature
Fall 2024

This course takes up some of the most wrenching and destabilizing concerns of politics and art—war, power, sex, beauty, and the family—through great works of literature and political philosophy. Our canon ranges from the ancient Greeks to Black American literature. Along the way, we'll ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Why and how is art a political concern? Why do members of a polity care so much about what their artists think and create? Does art do anything politically?
2. What is a proper political concern? Do questions of family life, or sexual intercourse and romantic love, belong in the political sphere?
3. How do our everyday experiences and fantasies of beauty and love, and of the body, reflect political categories like race or wealth? And how are race and wealth framed by our experiences and fantasies of beauty, love, and the body?
4. How do we negotiate the fact that we are, simultaneously, selves and members of a collectivity (the family, a community, society, the state)?

The goal of the course is threefold. First, that we come away with a greater attunement to, and a heightened awareness of, what we do with art and what art does with us. Second, that we acquire a greater understanding of why it is that the people of a polity, both citizens and politicians, get so rattled by art, by what is read in the classroom and seen on the screen or in a museum. Last, that we see politics itself as a form of art, a stylized performance that, like art, draws from and speaks to, and reconfigures, our most intimate and personal dreams and desires and longings.

Course Requirements

1. 57 pages, on average, of reading per week
2. Class participation
3. Midterm and final exam

Grading Policy

1.	Reading and participation	25%
2.	In-class midterm	30%
3.	Final examination	45%

Reading and participation are important in this course. You will be expected to: a) buy the three books and course reader that are assigned for this class, in the printed (not electronic) editions specified on the syllabus; b) do all the assigned reading before class; c) come to class with the printed edition of the text we're discussing in that class; d) contribute to the

discussion.

Grades for participation will be assigned as follows: If you show up for every class with the assigned text, and say nothing, you will receive a participation grade in the D range. If you show up for every class with the assigned text, and occasionally make a contribution, you will receive a participation grade in the C range. If you show up for every class with the assigned text, and make regular contributions, which demonstrate knowledge of the reading, you will receive a participation grade in the B range. If you show up for every class with the assigned text, and make regular contributions, which demonstrate knowledge of the reading and critical thought, you will receive a participation grade in the A range. Frequent absences, frequent failures to bring the assigned text, and/or consistent silence in class, will earn you a failing grade for participation.

Attendance will be taken at each class. You will be allowed three absences throughout the course that will not count against your grade. Class will begin on time; any lateness will count as an absence.

No screens will be allowed in class unless they are required as an academic accommodation. If that is the case, you must be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services and I must receive an email from the CSDS documenting the accommodation. (For more information, call CSDS at 718-951-5538 or email Josephine.Patterson@brooklyn.cuny.edu or testingcsds@brooklyn.cuny.edu.)

Texts to buy

You must buy the following texts, in these editions and/or translations. You may buy used versions or from different sellers, but it must be these editions/translations.

1. Course reader. Available at Printworks, 0200 Boylan Hall. Bring cash.

2. Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1979)

https://www.amazon.com/Oresteia-Agamemnon-Libation-Bearers-Eumenides/dp/0140443339

https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?isbn=9780140443332&n=100121503&cm_sp=mbc-_-ISBN-_-used

3. Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1951)

https://www.amazon.com/Mother-Courage-Children-Bertolt-Brecht/dp/0802130828/

https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=31306679565&searchurl=ds%3D20%26kn%3Dbertolt%2Bbrecht%2Bmother%2Bcourage%26sortby%3D17&cm_sp=snippet-_-srp1-_-title1

4. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007)

https://www.amazon.com/Bluest-Eye-Vintage-International/dp/0307278441

https://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=31059087946&searchurl=kn%3Dtoni%2Bmorrison%2Bbluest%2Beye%26sortby%3D17&cm_sp=snippet-_-srp1-_-title2

Schedule of Readings

Part I: Sex and Sickness

Week 1

8.28

Intro to class. No reading.

Week 2 (39 pages)

9.2

Labor Day. No class.

9.4

Amia Srinivasan, "Talking to My Students About Porn," *The Right to Sex* (New York: Picador, 2021), pp. 33-71 [CR]

Week 3 (85 pages)

9.9

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Anchor, 1978), pp. 3-42 [CR]

9.11

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Anchor, 1978), pp. 43-87 [CR]

Part II: Politics and Literature

Week 4 (55 pages)

9.16

Hannah Arendt, "Freedom and Politics, a Lecture," *Thinking Without a Banister*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2018), pp. 220-244 [CR]

9.18

Thomas De Quincey, "The Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power, pp. 1-8 [CR]

Jean-Paul Sartre, "Why Write?" *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 48-69 [CR]

Part II: Ancients and Moderns

Week 5 (74 pages)

9.23

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 99-172

9.25

No additional reading

Week 6 (54 pages)

9.30

Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, in *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 173-226

10.2

Erev Rosh Hashanah. No class.

Week 7 (51 pages)

10.7

Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, in *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 227-277

10.9

No additional reading.

Week 8 (48 pages)

10.14

Columbus Day. No class. Monday classes will meet on Tuesday.

10.15

In-class midterm. No reading.

10.16

Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), pp. 3-24 [CR]

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *The Storyteller Essays*, trans. Tess Lewis (New York: New York Review of Books, 2019), pp. 48-73 [CR]

Week 9 (93 pages)

10.21

Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1951), pp. 19-111

10.23

No additional reading.

Week 10 (tk pages)

10.28

Isaac Babel, *Odessa Stories* (London: Pushkin Press, 2016), TBA [CR]

10.30

Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry* (London: Pushkin Press, 2014), TBA [CR]

Part IV: Beauty, Love, Desire

Week 11 (32 pages)

11.4

Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 9-12, 25-31 [CR]

11.6

Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 40-60 [CR]

Week 12 (47 pages)

11.11

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 25-43 [CR]

11.13

Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," in Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 111-148 [CR]

Week 13 (24 pages)

11.18

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Feminist Papers*, ed. Alice S. Rossi (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1973), pp. 40-51 [CR]

11.20

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Feminist Papers*, ed. Alice S. Rossi (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1973), pp. 64-71, 79-82 [CR]

Week 14 (50 pages)

11.25

Amia Srinivasan, "The Right to Sex" and "Coda: The Politics of Desire" in *The Right to Sex* (New York: Picador, 2021), pp. 73-122 [CR]

11.27

No class.

Week 15 (90 pages)

12.2

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), pp. 3-58

12.4

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), pp. 61-93

Week 16 (110 pages)

12.9

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), pp. 97-163

12.11

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), pp. 164-206