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Fall 2014
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English 410: Senior Seminar

Readings: **Emile Zola, *Therese Raquin*, translated by Robin Buss (Penguin)**
 Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills* (Feminist Press)
 Stephen Crane, *The Open Boat and Other Stories* (Dover)
 Frank Norris, *McTeague* (Penguin)
 Willa Cather, *Paul's Case and Other Stories* (Dover)

In this seminar, we will read and analyze works of authors writing from the middle to the end of the 19th Century and into the earliest days of the 20th Century. This is a very important slice of American literary history because of the many changes taking place in American culture during this period. We will discuss these changes throughout the semester, and consider ways in which these works are affected by the time in which they were written – and conversely, how they may have had an effect on their era.

The point of the seminar structure is to encourage open discussion about any topic that seems relevant to the evening's reading – participants in a seminar have considerably more independence and autonomy than students in (for example) a lecture class. Feel free to take notes if you wish – if you feel that they will help you in the writing of your essays – but there are no tests or quizzes. You are graded on the quality of your participation, both in verbal and written form.

Seminar Essays

For this class, you will write two 15-20 page research essays. ***Essays with fewer than 15 pages will not be accepted.*** For each essay, I expect **no more than five** fully-read and fully understood scholarly sources. One essay will concentrate on the work of the first half of the semester and one will concentrate on the work of the rest of the semester. Both essays must adhere to MLA documentation guidelines. There will be regularly assigned progress reports all semester when students will share the research they are looking into, and even bring in copies of drafts.

It is extremely important to remember that an essay of this length cannot be written in the few days before it is due; even though the first one is not due until October, you should begin thinking about it as you do the reading for next week.

Weekly Responses

Each week, you will write a 1-2 page response essay about that week's reading assignment. In these brief writings, you might make one specific point (or several) about a reading or perform a detailed close reading of a favorite passage, or do anything else you want. Consider using these as places to begin to think through your longer essay

topic options, or try out ideas that could lead to a longer essay. You must write ten of these over the course of the semester; they are to be sent to me each week via email no later than Wednesday at 5:00 pm. They will not count if I receive them after that. The weeks in which you hand them in are up to you – as long as I have ten by the end of the semester.

Discussion Leaders

On the following dates, members of this class will be responsible for a part of the evening's discussion. Plan on meeting with me in advance of class about ways to engage the class, help us understand the texts, and generate our collective responses to it. Each student will choose two dates, one from the first half of the class and one from the second half.

Dates: First half: 9/11, 9/18, 9/25, 10/2, 10/9

Second half: 10/23, 10/30, 11/6, 11/13, 11/20

Grading

Seminar Essay 1	30%
Seminar Essay 2	30%
Weekly essays	20%
Discussion Leadership	10%
Discussion Participation	10%

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this class about?

This is considered a capstone class; the point of the course is to demonstrate all you have accumulated as an English major here – all the highly polished analytical, writing, and interpretive skills that you have accrued in your time with us. The readings are different every semester, but the goal is the same: to give you all a chance to put into practice all those elements that define you as someone about to receive a BA in English.

Why are there no writing assignments?

At this point, I feel that you should all be able to read a piece of literature and create your own cogent response to it, one over which you have complete control from start to finish. Therefore, I require two major pieces of writing and ten shorter weekly assignments that all come from your own creative reaction to a text; are all assembled in ways that show your capacity to organize your ideas into a coherent argument; and show your ability to provide evidence to support that argument using carefully and appropriately chosen textual passages that are interpreted with the imagination and skilled analysis expected from someone trained in close reading.

What do we do in class?

We talk about the reading. Sometimes our discussions are framed by brief presentations I will give about literary history or theory, but just as often, you will create the framework for our discussions. This means that, more than ever, you need to do the reading very

carefully and come to the table with a lot to say about it. General comments are ok, specific comments are better, but the class works best when your individual reading comes together as a communal reaction to parts of a text, to ideas in it, to problems with it, or just to really cool passages you want to point out.

What is my role in the class?

In a sense, you are each in charge of the class. This means your chief responsibility to the class and to each other is to read carefully, actively, and attentively. If you don't do the reading, you may as well not be here. You can react to things people say, but it does not really carry any force – like commenting about a movie you have not seen, you will only be able to offer the vaguest and most general statements that are, to be honest, not all that meaningful.

Are you a demanding professor and a tough grader?

I, of course, think of myself as a fair grader who is no more demanding than is reasonable. While I like to hear as much laughter in my classes as possible, I expect seriousness of purpose from each student. I do my best to match the grade to the level of commitment to the class – and student commitment to the class is surprisingly easy to measure. In short, I believe you should be proud of your work and work so that your pride in it is easy to see.

Why are you so obsessed with us doing the reading?

My reason is obvious: if you do not do the reading you will be unable to make useful contributions to the class and you will be unable to write passing essays.

Note – here are four ways I can tell when you have not done the reading:

- a) You will not make eye contact with me.
- b) You will make vague, universalized statements instead of comments specific to the character's situation in the novel, followed by a deflecting joke. (“Laurent is curious because it's human nature. I'm really nosy myself! Like one time at work they hired a new girl and I was like ‘I need to find out all I can about this one!’”)
- c) You will piggyback in a really obvious way on someone else's comment, simply repeating what she says rather than adding to it, elaborating on it, or illuminating it with a reference to the text.
Student A: “I think McTeague is actually trying to assert his will but he can't because of the restrictions in his environment.”
Prof: “Good point!”
Student B: “Yeah, it's like he really wants to assert himself and stuff but he can't because of where he is.”
Prof: “You mean at home?”
Student B: “Yeah at home.”
- d) In rare instances, you will make embarrassing errors about the details in the novel. (“At least at the end of the novel Laurent is happy and has a great marriage!”)

There may be other ways I have not listed here – and believe me there are even more obvious examples when it comes to writing essays about a novel you have not really read.

Academic Integrity Statement

Academic integrity, a commitment to honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility, is the foundation of the learning process. All members of the St. Thomas Aquinas College community are held to the highest standards of academic honesty. While we recognize the participatory nature of education, we take academic integrity very seriously, and the College policy on academic dishonesty details consequences that can include dismissal from the College. That policy can be found in both the Student Handbook and the College Catalog.

As a student in this class, you must demonstrate your commitment to academic integrity by submitting work which originates in your own imagination, analytical faculties, or your own knowledge, which you have done yourself, and which represents your very best efforts. Your work should be supplemented and supported by appropriate outside sources; however, you must always ensure that these sources are properly cited using the recommended documentation system.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the submission, for grade or for review, of work that is not your own. This includes ideas you get from elsewhere *as well as* language — specific words and sentences — taken from other sources. These other sources can include essays, books, websites, and other people. You should know that plagiarism, or academic theft as it is also known, is a serious offense, punishable by sanctions ranging from failure to dismissal from the college. For the record: I assume that the writing you show me in draft form or hand in to me for a grade is your own work; if it is not your own work, you will fail the essay with a grade of zero, that is, no credit. And you cannot rewrite it.

Electronic Use Policy

Faculty members at St. Thomas Aquinas College have the discretion to regulate the use of electronic devices in their classes, and students should not use such devices without the expressed consent of the professor. This policy covers cell phones, laptop computers, or any other device the use of which might constitute a distraction to the professor or to the other students in the class, as determined by the professor. Students with documented disabilities should discuss the issue of laptop use with their professor at the beginning of the semester.

When a professor designates a time during which laptop computers may be used, they are only to be used at the discretion of the faculty member and in accordance with the mission of the college. Professors can develop specific and reasonable penalties to deal with violations of these general policies. For more extreme cases of classroom disruption, refer to the College's Disruptive Student Policy.

Academic Disability Statement

Students requiring accommodations for a documented disability should notify the instructor before the end of the first week of class.

Other policies

Attendance

Because of the nature of this class – that so much is based on our discussions – attendance is imperative. Missing two or more classes will result in failure. Excessive lateness also matters: up to thirty minutes late to class counts as half an absence; more than thirty minutes counts as a full absence.

Class participation

Part of your overall grade is based on your participation. This grade is computed by my observing some obvious signs of participation – saying useful and appropriate things to advance our discussion, for example – as well as by my noticing some things that demonstrate an active rejection of this invitation to participate, such as texting, daydreaming, talking about non-class related things, taking unofficial breaks from class.

Late papers

I will deduct one full letter grade from the earned grade for each 24-hour period (including weekends) that the paper is late. This means that a C paper handed in the day after it is due becomes a D paper.

Classroom Decorum

Turn off cell phones. No virtual conversations of any kind, *especially text messaging*, at any time. These rude activities disrupt the class and distract you, your classmates, and me – and they will have a negative effect on your participation grade for this class. Texting, in particular, is forbidden. If I see you texting – even if I do not acknowledge that I see you – I will take points off your participation grade.

Tentative Schedule

9/4 Introduction

9/11 Emile Zola, *Therese Raquin*

9/18 *Therese Raquin*

9/25 Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills*

10/2 *Life in the Iron Mills*

10/9 Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*

10/16 Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat"

10/23 Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"
Seminar Essay 1 due

10/30 Frank Norris, *McTeague*

11/6 *McTeague*

11/13 *McTeague*

11/20 Willa Cather, "Paul's Case" and "A Wagner Matinee"

11/27 **Thanksgiving**

12/4 Willa Cather, "Lou, the Prophet," "Eric Hermannson's Soul," and "The Enchanted Bluff"

12/11 **Seminar Essay 2 due**