



Prison Literature
English 345 -- Online
Spring Session A — 2015
SLN: 19465
Prof. Lockard

SYLLABUS

Prison literature constitutes an immense and too-little read body of US and world literature. This is the literature that emerges from, records, or imaginatively engages the experience of incarceration irrespective of reason.

In the western tradition, prison literature originated as a small body of writing by elites and bore a heavy religious imprint. It has expanded enormously into a democratic and mass-produced global literature that incorporates narratives, novels, poetry, and political documents adopting radically differing social perspectives. A lengthy list of major prison writers from world literature would include Feodor Dostoevsky, Liu Xiobo, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Andrei Sakharov, Wole Soyinka, and many more.

This course employs a selection of US and world literature to trace prison literature as an integral feature of literary and rhetorical history; as a vehicle for civil disobedience; as exposition of socially concealed worlds; as a site of gender and sexual consciousness; as resistant political autobiography and demand for expressive autonomy; and as a feature of everyday life in the US Southwest. The central goal of this course is to make visible an invisible literature.

Course requirements include four 4-page papers and one 6-page paper.

English majors (Literature): fulfills post-1900 requirement.

Dates

January 12-March 3, 2015

Texts [in reading order]

USA: Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849) [available online]

USA: Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963) [available online]

Russia: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* (1962)

USA: Leonard Peltier, *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance* (1999)

UK: Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* and 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' (1897-98)

UK: Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* (1914)

USA: John Cheever, *Falconer* (1975)

Arizona: Ken Lambertson, *Wilderness and Razor Wire: A Naturalist's Observations from Prison* (1999)

Arizona/New Mexico: Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand* (2001)

Additional critical readings will be posted.

Coursework

Paper-writing (100 percent). **Six 4-page** (double-spaced) papers, a total of 24 pages. Each paper is worth 16.6 percent of the course grade. Paper assignments will be announced. Papers will be due by 11:59pm on the specified date.

Advice: Do not let the reading and paper-writing remain for Sundays, when it will require much catch-up time and writing to submit the coursework timely. In this course, consistent daily work is more likely to be successful than irregular bursts of work.

Reading Load

Due to its 7.5 week term, this course cannot reasonably assign the same amount of reading as a full-semester course would cover. Students have work and family lives that must be respected. Nonetheless, this course carries a stiff reading load in order to cover a respectable amount of literature. Substantive, in-depth reading is an inherent element of a literature course.

The syllabus design begins with short readings in order to give students opportunity to progress into a much heavier load. After two-book loads during Units 2 and 3 to provide comparative knowledge, the reading drops to one book a week or less for the remainder of the course. The final section of the course, Unit 6, provides a two-week period to read and write on *Baca's* prison memoir.

The instructor requests with great concern that you read the syllabus before the course begins, assess its reading requirements versus your anticipated capacities, and continue enrollment in the course only if you believe you can bear the reading load. This will help prevent mid-course drop-outs and safeguard your time, tuition, and often GPA. Should there be questions about the reading load or coursework generally, please contact the instructor.

Grades

Grades will be posted each Monday-Tuesday for work done the previous week. In order to provide clarity on the grading standards for this course, note the following information.

Grading standards for papers: A successful paper should begin with a well-framed argument based on an abstract concept. It will elaborate that initial conceptual argument through the length of the paper, without meandering, and employ sufficient evidence from the text under discussion. Further instructions will be provided together with the first paper assignment, and anonymized examples of more successful papers will be made available with student consent. Paper grades will include plus/minus grades. *This is not a writing course, so paper comments will be summary. If you wish to have more detailed comment on your paper, contact the instructor.*

Writing quality is a crucial issue and this course requires consistently high-quality writing that includes well-expressed, concise argumentation. Your writing will be evaluated on the presence of these qualities. Papers should be written with full benefit of correct spelling, grammar, and a complete assembly of writing skills. Coursework will be evaluated on quantity as well as quality. Inadequate papers lacking a clear argument and filled with descriptive prose indicate lack of engagement with the readings.

The instructor is a liberal grader and those who complete the coursework can usually expect at least a B-range grade. If coursework remains incomplete (i.e. missing papers), the course grade will be E. *Important: all work must be completed and accomplished timely for a passing grade.* No extensions or incompletes will be given. Grades may be queried and appealed for reconsideration. Every student has the right to do so without concern for adverse instructor reaction. If you wish to appeal a grade, send the instructor an e-mail stating the reason succinctly.

Technologies

If there are technical issues that create obstacles, please contact the instructor for advice. Responsibility for resolution of technical difficulties, however, resides with the student.

All course announcements will be made both via announcements on the course website and via e-mail to your ASU e-mail account. E-mail will not be sent to non-ASU addresses; if you wish to receive e-mail at a non-ASU account, please set forwarding at your ASU e-mail account.

Paper Due Dates

For scheduling purposes, the six course papers are due on January 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15, and March 3.

Instructor

I am available via e-mail at Joe.Lockard@asu.edu and generally respond quickly, Monday thru Friday. Skype arrangements can be made per request. I will not be available on weekends.

Work Schedule

Unit 1: Disobedient Subjects (January 12 – 18)

- Read Thoreau, 'Resistance to Civil Government'
- Read King, 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'
- Watch video talks
- Write Paper 1 (4 pages) due January 18

Unit 2: Political Dissidents (January 19 – 25)

- Read Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*
- Read Leonard Peltier, *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance*
- Watch video talks
- Paper 2 (4 pages) due January 25

Unit 3: Prisons, Gender, and Sexuality (January 26 – February 1)

- Read Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* and 'Ballad of Reading Gaol'
- Read Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences*
- Watch video talks
- Paper 3 (4 pages) due February 1

Unit 4: Post-60s Prison Novels (February 2 – 8)

- Read John Cheever, *Falconer*
- Watch video talk
- Paper 4 (4 pages) due February 8

Unit 5: Southwestern Prison Literature [1] (February 9 – 15)

- Read Ken Lamberton, *Wilderness and Razor Wire: A Naturalist's Observations from Prison* (1999)
- Watch video talk
- Paper 5 (4 pages) due February 15

Unit 6: Southwestern Prison Literature [2] (February 16 – March 3)

- Read Jimmy Santiago Baca, *A Place to Stand*
- Watch video talk
- Paper 6 (4 pages) due March 3