

Spring 2020

GET3930/LIT3400/JST3930

The Poetics of Justice: Law, Literature and Film

Instructor: Eric Kligerman Office: 307 Pugh Hall

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Time: Monday, Periods 5-7 (11:45 AM - 2:45 PM), Location: [RNK 0106](#)

Office Hrs: Mon 4th Period, Wed 7th period or by appointment

In his brief yet complex parable “Before the Law” Kafka describes how a man from the country searches for the law but is stopped outside the gates by a menacing guard, never to gain entrance to the law. What is the significance of this failure to grasp the law? How does Kafka’s perplexing tale shed light on questions pertaining to the interplay between justice, law and violence, and how do we as individuals encounter these conflicts within the social and political spaces in which we live?

This interdisciplinary course sets out to explore these very questions and collisions by juxtaposing shifting modes of representations. By turning to the works of history (Thucydides), Religion (Book of Job), philosophy (Nietzsche and Arendt), literature (Sophocles, Dostoyevsky and Kafka) and film (Tarantino and the Coen brothers), our objective is to trace the narrative of justice through ancient Greece, the Enlightenment, the modern and postmodern periods. In particular, we will examine the realm of trials (both real and imaginary) to probe the relation between justice and ethics along with the various questions pertaining to law, guilt, responsibility, violence and punishment. How do writers critique the institutions of law and justice through works of literature and art? Our goal is to rethink these dynamic relationships by turning to the spaces of history, philosophy, political thought, literature and film.

Grading will be based on in-class participation (25%), take-home midterm (25%), takehome final (25%) and an 8-10 page final paper (topic of your choice, 25%).

Grading:

Final Research Paper (8-10 pages) 25%

Participation 20%/attendance 5% 25% Midterm Exam (take home) 25% Final Exam (take home) 25%

- 1) Since this seminar meets only once a week, students are allowed 3 absences. If you miss more than 3 classes in the semester, you will automatically fail the course. Participation will play a major part of the final grade and students are expected to partake and contribute daily to class discussions.
- 2) **If you do not bring to class the text we are discussing for that day, you will be marked as absent. You are not permitted to read the text on your phone in class.**
- 3) Do not text message in class.
- 4) Laptop usage in the class will not be permitted. If you have a good reason to use your computer in class, please come to office hours and explain them to me.

5) There will be a take home midterm and take home final exam comprised of identification and short answer essay questions.

6) There will be a final research paper on a topic of choice selected by the student in consultation with me. Late papers will not be accepted.

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students who enroll at the University commit to holding themselves and their peers to the high standard of honor required by the Honor Code. Any individual who becomes aware of a violation of the Honor Code is bound by honor to take corrective action. Violations of the honor code include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, bribery, misrepresentation, fabrication, and conspiracy. Such violations may result in the following: lowering of grades, mandatory 0 on assignments, redoing assignments, a final failing grade in the course, expulsion from the course, referral to the student-run Honor Court. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment. For more information, refer to: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/>

Students with Special Needs:

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

Syllabus subject to change:

Week 1: Introduction: Kafka's "Before the Law"

1/6

We begin with a close reading of Kafka's *Before the Law* to examine how the text discloses an allegory of reading: the quest for law is analogous to our attempt to grasp the meaning of the story. In what ways does our approach to understanding a literary work reflect our desire to uncover either the meaning of law or an abstract concept like justice?

Weeks 2-3: Sophocles, *Antigone*

1/13 and 1/20

How do we as rational and free subjects engage with laws that might conflict with our own systems of belief or values? How do we make judgments about laws that we might not agree with?

Week 4: Thucydides, "Pericles Funeral Oration" and "The Melian Dialogue" from *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

1/27

In addition to probing how the politics of war are configured as a debate between concepts of justice and self-interest of the state, how is this model reflected in an individual's own actions within a community?

Week 5: Bible, *Book of Job*

2/3

We frame our exploration of biblical justice through the themes of evil, suffering, punishment, and divine justice.

Weeks 7-8: Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

2/10 and 2/17

The psychology of the criminal will be examined in relation to the overstepping of morality: how nihilism encounters our system of ethics.

Take home midterm will be due on 2/24

Weeks 9-11: Kafka's *The Trial*
2/24 and 3/9:

We will return to Kafka and try to rethink the notions of law, enlightenment and power in relation to the problems associated with the individual's experience within the modern state.

3/1 (spring break)

Weeks 12-13: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
3/16 and 3/23:

We situate the German Enlightenment's upholding of the tenets of reason alongside Arendt's study of the Eichmann trial, where the courtroom attempts to frame the limits of legal understanding: the Holocaust.

Weeks 14-15: Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds*
3/30 and 4/6:

Our analysis of Tarantino will explore how Hollywood cinema engages with the legacy of the Holocaust and the question of justice in the 21st century.

4/13 and 4/20

Screening: Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men*

Final exam due 4/21 Final paper due 4/30