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Fall 2015

## Human Rights and Literature (Fall 2015)

Robert D. Tobin

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# CLARK UNIVERSITY

## **Human Rights and Literature Fall 2015**

Comparative Literature 109  
Classtime: Monday/Wednesday 12:00—1:15

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In this class, we will be reading literary and cultural documents to contemplate the concept of “human rights.” What rights do all humans have, simply by virtue of being human? Who counts as human? Do current understandings of human rights exclude some people? Do humans have more rights than other species? How do questions of gender and sexuality fit into the discussion of human rights?

As we seek to answer these questions, we will trace the development of human rights discourses from the Enlightenment to the present, looking at literature from a variety of cultures and human rights documents from a variety of sources. We will supplement our readings with outreach to local human rights organizations.

In this class, we will have some of the following objectives:

- Students will learn some of the key conceptual vocabulary around human rights.
- Students will follow current and historically important human rights debates.
- Students will learn to read subtle and substantial literary texts.
- They will learn to think critically about issues regarding human rights, a term that is often thrown about in ways that make it hard to be a critical thinker.
- Students will work on their writing skills, with frequent expository essays and a written final examination.
- Students will also develop their oral skills, both in participating in class discussions and in leading the discussion.

In the spirit of Clark University's LEEP initiative (Liberal Education and Effective Practice), Human Rights and Literature is a course that bridges the gap between the study of the humanities and 'real world' situations. This course will demonstrate that literature and social sciences, artistic expression and societal problems, and creativity and social change all are linked together.

More specifically, the lecture series associated with the course will serve to introduce students to the effective practice of scholarly work.

This class lives up to Clark's core aspiration: "challenge convention, change our world." We challenge convention, both in terms of upholding human rights and refusing to accept sloppy reasoning about human rights. We hope that this will result, at least in some small way, in changing our world.

Clark's signatures guide our educational process:

- **Make a Difference:** by becoming more literate about human rights, we can become better advocates for the rights of all.
- **Learning through Inquiry:** by struggling with the concepts of human rights in a variety of literary texts, we will become active participants in the world's on-going discussion about rights. We will also be able to reach out to human rights advocates here in Worcester and test our concepts in the practical world of human rights organizations.
- **Experience Diverse Cultures:** by reading literature from a variety of different cultures, we will be able to begin to understand in what ways human rights are universal and in what ways they have culturally specific manifestations.

Finally, the course aspires to introduce the principles of Clark's Difficult Dialogues program into the seminar.

## Assignments

Participation	25
Class assignments	25
Preparation for speakers	10
3 five-page essays	30
Final Exam	10

Participation: this is a seminar, so come to class prepared and jump into the conversation!

Class Assignments: There will be periodic assignments in class. There will, for instance, be short presentations on the following types of human rights organizations: the United Nations, the regional human rights courts, non-governmental agencies, state and local agencies. In addition, there will be an art project associated with Satrapi and Kafka.

Preparation for Speakers: We will have three speakers (Professor George Haggerty, Professor Samuel Moyn, and Professor Elisabeth Anker). One third of you will be assigned to each speaker. You will do some additional research on the speaker's scholarship, write-up an introduction for the speaker, and prepare some questions in advance for the speaker.

Five-Page Essays: you will write short essays about *Frankenstein*, *The Reader*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. You will upload them to our moodle.

Final Exam: this will be a chance to reflect on the concept of human rights, and how literature can help analyze or depict them. It will take place on the date announced by the Registrar's Office.

### **Engaged Academic Time:**

We estimate that you will be engaged in academic work for about 186.5 hours this semester. This is based on the idea that you will be spending on average 2 hours outside of class reading and preparing for each hour in class, although we are aware that people read at varying speeds and with varying levels of care. Nonetheless, our estimate of the engaged academic time in this course is as follows:

Class time: 27 meetings at 1.5 hours per meeting	40.5
Prep for class 2 hours per hour of class	81
Lectures: 3 mandatory lectures at 2 hours per lecture	6
Prep for lectures:	10
Papers: 3 x 10 hours	30
Prep for assignments	10
Prep for final	10
<b>Total Engaged Academic Time</b>	<b>186.5</b>

## Grading

### Grade Structure for Papers:

**A:** An "A" paper will have a clear and original thesis. It will be well written, with a lively sophisticated style. Arguments will be comprehensive and buttressed by strong evidence. They will take into account obvious objections. There will be virtually no errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling.

**B:** A "B" paper will have a clear thesis and be solidly written.

**C:** A "C" paper will lack a clear thesis. Many arguments will not follow from the evidence given, or will be asserted, rather than proven. There will be errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**D:** A "D" paper will have a topic, but no thesis. Many arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. Others will not follow from the evidence given or will be asserted, rather than proven. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

**F:** An "F" paper will scarcely have a topic. Arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

### Grade Structure for Participation:

**A:** advances the discussion; contributes complex insights; will be articulate and engaging; and enhances and encourages the participation of others.

**B:** expresses text-based, substantial ideas; stays with the topic and continues the discussion; actively volunteers; asks good questions; shows genuine effort; but might fluctuate between "A" and "C" behavior.

**C:** shows acquaintance with the text if called on; tends to offer personal opinions without textual references; does not advance discussion; actively listens, but does not participate.

**D:** continued refusal to participate in discussion; exhibits signs of disengagement, such as sleeping, zoning out, or non-attendance; and reveals no evidence of having done the reading.

**F:** "D" behavior carried to the extreme.

**Three Final Notes:**

**Attendance:** Attendance is vital for a seminar class. More than three absences may result in the lowering of your final grade by a whole letter.

**Lateness:** Late papers complicate the grading process. Therefore, I will take off a half grade for each day of lateness. I leave the calculation up to you whether the extra work you put into a paper will be worth the grade erosion caused by lateness.

**Disabilities:** Clark University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you have or think you have a disability and require academic accommodations, you must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), which is located in room 430 on the fourth floor of the Goddard Library. If you have questions about the process, please contact The Director of Accessibility Services, Emily Tarconish, at [etarconish@clarku.edu](mailto:etarconish@clarku.edu) or (508)798-4368. If you are registered with SAS, and qualify for accommodations that you would like to utilize in this course, please request those accommodations through SAS in a timely manner.

## Day by Day

- Aug 24 Introductions. What are human rights?  
 Aug 26 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
 Available online: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>  
*Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley's "Introduction," "Preface," and the four Letters

*The Enlightenment and Human Rights: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*

- Aug. 31 *Frankenstein*, Vol. 1  
 Sept. 2 *Frankenstein*, Vol. 2
- Sept. 7 Labor Day, Holiday  
 Sept. 8 4 pm, Fuller Room, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of Library  
 Mandatory Lecture: George E. Haggerty, "What is Queer about Frankenstein?"  
 Have *Frankenstein*, Vol. 3, finished by lecture  
 Sept. 9 Discuss lecture and novel with Professor Haggerty
- Sept. 14 The French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution.  
*Vindication of the Rights of Man* and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
- Sept. 16 *Frankenstein* and Human Rights  
 Sept. 18 Paper due in Moodle Drop Box by Midnight

*Depicting Human Rights Violations: Kafka and Satrapi*

- Sept. 21 Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, pp. 3-110  
 Sept. 23 Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, pp. 111-222
- Sept. 28 Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, pp. 223-341  
 Sept. 30 Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" (available on Moodle);  
 Bring in your own drawing inspired by "In the Penal Colony" for discussion purposes

*The Holocaust and International Human Rights Law: Bernhard Schlink's The Reader*

- Oct. 5 Review the Universal Declaration, United Nations Human Rights Commission  
 Oct. 7 Regional Human Rights Courts: European Court of Human Rights / Inter-American Court of Human Rights / African Court on Human and People's Rights

- Oct. 12 Fall Break
- Oct. 14 *The Reader*, Part 1, Chapters 1-10 (3-50)  
*The Reader*, Part 1, Chapter 11-Part 2, Chapter 4 (51-104)
- Oct. 19 *The Reader*, Part 2, Chapter 5-Chapter 15 (105-157)
- Oct. 21 *The Reader*, Part 2, Chapter 15-Part 3, Chapter 12 (158-218)
- Oct. 26 Read Moyn  
 Required Afternoon Lecture, 4 pm, Higgins Lounge  
 Samuel Moyn, "The Holocaust and Human Rights: A Belated Entanglement"
- Oct. 28 Discuss lecture, *The Reader*, papers.
- Oct. 30 Paper due in Drop box
- Dictatorship and Repression in the Spanish-Speaking World*
- Nov. 2 *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, pp. 3-71
- Nov. 4 *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, pp. 72-132
- Nov. 9 *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, pp. 133-196
- Nov. 11 *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, pp. 196-281
- Nov. 16 Anker visits class for a discussion of South Africa  
 Mandatory Afternoon Lecture, 4 pm  
 Elizabeth Anker, "For Love of Paradox: Human Rights and the Ends of Critical Theory"
- Nov. 18 Reports on NGOs that focus on human rights issues: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ACLU, etc.
- Nov. 20 Paper Due in Drop Box
- Nov. 23 Make-Up Day if necessary
- Nov. 25 Thanksgiving holiday
- Dec. 2 Report by Asya Darbinyan on her research
- Dec. 4 Reports on state and local human rights agencies
- Dec. 9 Review of human rights
- Final Examination