

Course Descriptions, Spring Term 2021

Fascism: My personal interest in Fascism is triggered by my family history, including my father's service in the World War I German cavalry and my grandfather's service in World War I as an Austrian army medical officer. My immediate family immigrated to the United States in 1936. This class will explore Fascism and the resistance to it from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to the present.

Week One: Prologue: Post–World War I

- Treaty of Versailles
- Wilson's 14 points
- German reparations

Week Two: Postwar Economy

- Inflation
- Abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II
- Weimar world
- Mussolini, Franco, Stalin

Week Three: Hitler

- Hitler
- 1936 Olympics
- World War II

Week Four: Post–World War II

- European and Asian reconstruction
- Marshall Plan
- United Nations

Week Five: The Cold War

- Soviet Union
- East and West Berlin

Week Six: The Present

- Populism

Recommended reading:

Albright, Madeleine. *Fascism: A Warning*. New York: HarperCollins Books, 2018.

Instructor: Thomas Gruenewald: Mondays, 1:00 – 2:30 PM on Zoom, April 26 – May 31 (6 sessions)

The Canterbury Tales: In this course, we will read selections from Geoffrey Chaucer's last (and unfinished) work, *The Canterbury Tales*. We will consider these stories in the context of the historical, political, economic, religious, and literary milieu in which they were produced and from which their tellers are drawn. Why, for instance, does Chaucer bring together people from such diverse classes and how do they interact with one another? What do *the Tales'* various literary genres and forms suggest about the themes, the pilgrim-storytellers, and the experimental qualities of Chaucer's work? What does it mean to go on a pilgrimage in late fourteenth-century England, and what are the various discourses around Christianity, Judaism, and Islam? And what ideas about gender, sexuality, and race does Chaucer explore in the prologues and tales? As we consider corporeal bodies in Chaucer's *Tales*, we will look at how physical bodies are seen as readable texts, and at how Chaucer produced his written work—from the sources he drew upon, to the manuscript culture within which he wrote, to the mosaic of narratives, which yield information about late medieval social hierarchies, gender and race, marriage, the Church, war and chivalric codes, business and trade, and Chaucer's own place in the rising middle class. Together, we likewise will try to make connections between the older worlds of Chaucer's *Tales* and the world in which we live today. Some of the modern adaptations of Chaucer's work we'll examine include Jean "Binta" Breeze's poem, "The Wife of Bath Speaks in Brixton Market" (2009), Patience Agbabi's spoken word adaptation of the Wife of Bath's *Prologue*, "The Wife of Bafa" (2013), and the *Refugee Tales* project (2015-ongoing), which is based structurally on Chaucer's *Tales*, and combines text and social action in an effort to communicate the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

While we will be reading Chaucer's work in Modern English, we likewise shall spend time learning to read and speak a bit of Middle English. No prior knowledge of Middle English is necessary. An excellent resource for getting started is Harvard's Chaucer page, which you can visit by copying and pasting this link: <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu>. You may use an edition of *The Canterbury Tales* you already have. I will provide PDFs of the readings (Middle and Modern English), so there is no requirement to purchase books for this course. Harvard's Chaucer page includes *Tales* in Middle English with interlinear Modern English translations: <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/tr-index.htm>. The editions I am using are: *The Canterbury Tales Complete* (in Middle English; Houghton Mifflin, 2000; ISBN: 0-395-97823-8) and *The Canterbury Tales* (in Modern English; Oxford UP, 2011; ISBN: 978-0-19-959902-8). I will email a course syllabus a week prior to the start of class.

Instructor: Linda Neiberg: Tuesdays, 10:00 – Noon on Zoom, April 20 – June 8 (8 sessions)

Play Reading - Eugene O'Neill: We'll read aloud and discuss *Long Day's Journey into Night*, "this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood," the finest play by arguably America's finest playwright. The ultimate family drama, the play echoes much of O'Neill's own family history and his relationships, torturous but inescapable, with its members. Yet his conception of tragedy lends them an importance greater than their limited roles on the stage of life:

"To me, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life – and the hope. The noblest is eternally the most tragic. The people who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle-classes. Their stopping at success is the proof of their compromising insignificance. How petty their dreams must have been!"

Following *Long Day*, for contrast, we'll read the best-known of O'Neill's few comedies, *Ah, Wilderness*, another family drama, but, superficially at least, missing the later play's guilt-ridden context in favor of happiness all around.

The title is adapted from Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*:

“A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness— Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!”

But was it enough for O'Neill? Could a primarily tragic dramatist, perhaps in spite of himself, have slipped at least a suggestion of irony into his comedy? See the above quote from the master.

I'll post the complete texts of the plays on my screen and share them with you via Zoom.

Instructor: Robert Rumsey: Wednesdays, 1:00 – 3:00 PM on Zoom, April 21 – May 26 (6 sessions)

Marginalized Americans: Labor: This course will examine the situation faced by labor in the United States and in other countries in a world of increasing inequality. Because TLC does not have the upload speed to show on Zoom the documentary films which form the basis of this course, the only way we can do this is if class members look at the films on their computers prior to each class. Each class will be a discussion of the movie. Hopefully, this is a one-time only situation. Here are the films we will discuss (in the order listed, one film for each of the seven class meetings. These links should take you directly to the movies, but if you have any difficulty please contact me at lrland44@gmail.com:

1. *The Fight in the Fields* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b81Xm93Bk7k> for Part One, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_Z5prtctxyw) for Part Two
2. *Wage Crisis* (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/wage-crisis/>)
3. *Plutocracy*
 - a. Part One (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/plutocracy-political-repression-usa/>)
 - b. Part Two (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/plutocracy-solidarity-forever/>)
 - c. Part Three (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/plutocracy-class-war/>)
 - d. Part Four (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/plutocracy-gangsters-capitalism/>)
 - e. Part Five (<https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/plutocracy-subterranean-fire/>)

Instructor: Larry Rand: Thursdays, 10 AM – 11 AM on Zoom, April 22 – June 3 (7 sessions)

Play Reading – Shakespeare: We'll read aloud and discuss, in the following order, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, two plays at least partly designed as propaganda for Shakespeare's contemporary monarchs, Elizabeth and James I. And incidentally, although certainly not intentionally, to act as advertisements for republicanism. The melodramatic *Richard III* is the run-up to *Macbeth*. An archetypal figure in a context of civil war, Richard loves plotting and killing consistently throughout the play, although we can detect a slight weakening of purpose and conviction before his final battle. Richard is the ultimate lone wolf, a villain of

villains. Unlike the earlier Scottish usurper, Richard does not depend on his wife to soothe his conscience but is delighted to cause mayhem alone and take all the credit for it. The end of the play baptizes, so to speak, the Tudor line and thus sanctions Elizabeth's right to rule. Macbeth similarly is sited in the midst of civic mayhem. Scotland the Brave is a nightmare, literally, in which the malign influence symbolized by the Three Witches blackens the affairs of state and loosens the world from its pivot. Macbeth and his Lady, a power couple from hell, successfully usurp the throne but are brought low, inevitably, by their "vaulting ambition." The dynamic of this couple follows its own peculiar trajectory. Macbeth needs Lady Macbeth to steel him to do what he wants to do. Yet following their successful usurpation, she loses her drive while he, in an opposite but parallel evolution, anneals his. As a riff on Richard III, the final scene of Macbeth similarly re-establishes the natural order, this time one that ultimately will lead to, and provide the benediction for, the reign of James I. I'll post the complete texts of the plays on my screen and share them with you via Zoom.

Instructor: Robert Rumsey: Fridays, 1:00 – 3:00 PM on Zoom, April 23 – June 4 (7 sessions)