Home, Away, and In-Between

Theo 4040
Prof. John C. Seitz, Ph.D.
Fordham in London: London Liberal Arts
W 2-5pm
Spring 2017

Course Overview

This course draws on theology and literature to explore diverse human engagements with displacement. Key examples include diaspora, quest, alienation, conversion, migration, and relocation. We will encounter characters and real-life actors whose experiences of these conditions—whether literal or metaphorical, whether cultivated or imposed—put them in the highly charged space between feeling “at home” and “away.” In addition to studying the responses of literary characters and religious actors, we will explore the ways the disciplines of literature and theology themselves invite practitioners into experiences of disorientation and reorientation. We will also consider the relationship between literature and theology as distinct ways of knowing about displacement and its meanings. Group excursions will take advantage of London’s rich history as a site of literary and religious creativity. Students will also have a chance to put their own experiences of home, away, and in-between in conversation with the classic and contemporary stories they will encounter in the classroom and in the streets of London. This course will fulfill Fordham’s Interdisciplinary Capstone Core Requirement.

Course Goals

• To build knowledge of diverse literary and religious engagements with the experience of displacement.

• To enhance understanding of literature as a vehicle of theological insight.

• To enhance understanding of theology as a tool for pondering human creativity and the inner life.

• To cultivate reflection on one’s own experiences of displacement and rootedness as a mode of understanding self and others.

• To develop appreciation of the literary, cultural, and religious history of London, Great Britain, and its former colonies.

• To sharpen skills in critical reading, thinking, writing, and speaking.
Course Requirements, Assignments, and Grade Distribution

➢ Work Overview
  • Ongoing Participation-10%
  • Two Discussion Leadership Presentations with Outlines- 10%
  • Three Reflections-15%
  • Two Interdisciplinary Papers-20%
  • One Final Exam-15%
  • One Final Paper-20%
  • One Presentation-10%

➢ Participation (10%)
Class participation includes evaluation of your informed and regular contribution to class discussion. It also includes attendance.

  o Readings and Discussion
    ▪ This is a combination lecture/seminar, with discussion sections scheduled for ½ of each classroom session. Complete the readings in advance of each classroom session and be prepared to discuss them and engage them. Informed discussion at the core of the course. Accordingly, you should arrive to class having read the assigned pages for that day.
    ▪ Lectures aim to augment understanding of approaches, themes, and events and provide a foundation for better discussion and writing.
    ▪ You must bring assigned readings to class.
    ▪ If you have a question, no matter how basic you think it is, ask. Others probably share your question and will benefit from your having asked it. I'll do my best to answer or find the answer.
    ▪ Be prepared. I will call on people to contribute or answer questions.
  
  o Attendance
    ▪ Attendance counts because it influences course dynamics and provides the context for your testing out of your scholarly mind and voice.
    ▪ Each student is allowed one unexcused absence. If you are going to be absent, do the reading, get notes from your classmates, and then make an appointment as needed to discuss questions about what you read. See below for steps to get an absence “excused.”
    ▪ Regular attendance is a required part of the course. Each unexcused absence beyond one will result in final grade deduction of 2%.

➢ Discussion Leadership with Type-Written Outlines (10% (2 at 5% each))
  o Students will sign up on the first day to serve as discussion leader during two different discussion sections. Each student must sign up to serve once as a “close reader” and once as an “analyst of theological implications.” Each session will have at least one person in each role. Submit a substantive typewritten outline of your presentation at the beginning of your discussion section (keep one for yourself).
Roles:

- Close Reader: Select a short passage from that day’s reading to which you will direct our class’s attention. Focusing particularly on questions of composition, style, and language, demonstrate the ways that a close reading of this passage opens up broader meanings of the text in relation to course themes. How does the way an author put something communicate central ideas, meanings, or feelings?

- Analyst of Theological Implications: Select a key term, character, or passage and plumb it for theological significance. How does this term (as used by the author), character, or passage offer commentary or insight about god or gods, or about religious categories such as the holy and the sacred in relation to human rootedness or displacement? What could these insights or comments mean in the world that exists beyond the text? How might they change one’s basic orientations to life?

- The assignment asks you to lead discussion: that means thinking about what kinds of close reading/theological analysis will lead to good back-and-forth among the wider group. Be creative and thoughtful about engaging your audience. Plan to speak for about five minutes total, not including time for discussion or engagement with your presentation.

- In all cases, discussion leaders should strive for depth and specificity more than straining to capture “the whole thing.” In all cases remember to select (and point us to) specific passages or key terms that you consider crucial and which open out to wider discussion.

- The assignment does not presume that you fully understand the texts in question; it does demand that you do your best to try to understand the texts and to develop—at the least—good questions that will help elicit deeper understanding.

- Texts applicable to this assignment: The Tempest, Revelations of Divine Love, Middle Passage, White Teeth, Silence, and Hind Swaraj.

Reflections (15% [Three at 5% each])

- Submit, in three installments, a set of reflections assessing your own experiences of displacement. See below for details.

- Hand in previous reflections each time, so that by the end, all three will be bound together and submitted.

- Each reflection should include two parts. First, write (hand-written or typed) a free-association planning section (outlines, charts, key words, loosely organized memories, rough diagrams, experimental notions, etc.). Second, write a more complete official reflection (typed), drawing on the planning section. Hand in both parts.
Reflection #2 and #3 must explicitly draw on and actively engage course materials, Reflection #1 need not.

Honor system: spend a minimum of thirty minutes uninterrupted time (no devices, screens, or other distractions) on the planning section and a minimum uninterrupted sixty minutes on the official reflection. There is no page maximum or minimum.

- **Reflection 1:** Reflect on your decision to study abroad this semester. Consider the particular courses, books, conversations, and relationships that brought you toward this decision to venture away from Fordham. What expectations and hopes influenced your decision to leave your home campus? Frame those expectations and hopes in light of broader reflections on your sense of life’s basic meanings.

- **Reflection 2:** What have been the most surprising, challenging, revealing, or troubling aspects of your time abroad to this point? Situate one or more of these aspects of your experience in one or more of our texts. Consider themes of separation, longing, loneliness, freedom, exhilaration, disorientation, release, etc. Have your basic assumptions about the good, the true, and the holy changed in any ways? Be as specific as possible as you cite texts from the syllabus and your own formative experiences.

- **Reflection 3:** As you look at a life after Fordham in London (and after college more generally), what do you expect or hope will result from your time abroad? Draw on your encounter with one or two figures from our texts to flesh out your aspirations and expectations about the future, post-displacement you.

Reflection Grading Criteria:
- Completion (70%): Did the student hand in the assignment in complete form, on time, and following instructions? Is the reflection grammatical and free of typos?
- Care (30%): Do the reflections witness to a purposeful and deliberative effort? Do they reflect a testing of assumptions, a dedicated searching, a self-reflexive stance, an analytical sensibility? Are the reflections grounded in specifics? Do they attend to and offer analysis of specific circumstances, people, moments, and/or texts? Do Reflections #2 and #3 explicitly draw upon and engage course materials? Do they build from specifics toward broader observations? Do they witness to a lively and engaged mind?

- **Interdisciplinary Essays (20% [Two at 10% each])**
  - For each of these two papers you are asked to choose one of our major texts (*The Tempest, Revelations of Divine Love, Middle Passage, White Teeth, Silence, Hind Swaraj*) and read it through two lenses, one literary and one theological. We will discuss different examples of literary and theological analysis in class.
Your goal in the essay is to 1) demonstrate the unique insights (new ways of seeing/thinking) available through a specific application of each disciplinary approach, and 2) synthesize these insights to develop a project (argument) of your own about the moral, political, existential, aesthetic, and/or theological meanings of displacement.

This is not a research paper: our secondary texts serve as examples of literary and theological analysis. Each essay should draw on two of these secondary texts. You are not bound to use the secondary texts which are associated on the syllabus with a given major text: you may apply interpretive lenses borrowed from any secondary text to any major text.

Final Exam (15%)
- Short, medium, and longer essay questions covering the whole semester and including major and secondary readings as well as lectures.

Final Paper (20%)
- Take one of your interdisciplinary papers and the sum of your reflection papers, and then incorporate materials from two additional course texts to craft a final essay in which you propose an argument about theological and aesthetic resources for good living. Speak in particular to the merits (and/or liabilities) of literal or figurative positions of being “at-home,” “away,” and/or “in-between.”

Final Presentation (10%)
- Retool your final paper as a 5-7-minute presentation, to be delivered with a maximum of one 5x7 card worth of notes. Details in class.
**Readings, Class Sessions, Outings, and Assignments Schedule**

**Week 1: Introduction to Course Themes**  

**Week 2: Outing—Shakespeare’s *The Tempest***  
Michael Tomko and Emma Mason, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien* (2016) [Introduction and Ch. 2]  
[Begin *The Tempest*]

**Reflection #1 Due**

**Week 3: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**Week 4: Outing—Norwich**  
Caroline Walker Bynum, "Introduction: On The Complexity of Symbols,” *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*  

**Week 5: Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* [selections]**

**Week 6: Outing—Victoria & Albert Museum [Buddhism Collection]**  
Rupert Gethin, *Foundations of Buddhism* [selections]  

**Interdisciplinary Paper #1**

**Week 7: Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage***

**Spring Recess**  
[Begin *White Teeth*]

**Week 8: Outing—Black Cultural Archives**  

**Reflection #2 Due (include #1 stapled to it)**
Week 9: Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Week 10: Outing—London Catholic Martyr Sites


Interdisciplinary Paper #2

Week 11: Shusaku Endo, *Silence*

Week 12: Outing—Tate Britain: Colonial Art [TBD]
Edward Said, “Introduction,” from *Orientalism*

Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* [selections]

Reflection #3 Due (include #1 and #2 stapled to it)

Week 13: Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*
Final Exam

Week 14: Presentations
Final Paper Due

Week 15: Presentations
Other Important Matters

➢ Communications
  o Many common problems can be avoided with advance notice and open lines of communication.
  o I will rely on email to communicate important course-related information to you. Please read your emails and respond to them as needed. I often send emails through blackboard, which employs your default address for Fordham. This is usually your @fordham.edu address. Be sure to arrange to check this account frequently or have it forwarded to your favored account.
  o Feel free to send emails to me with your questions or concerns.

➢ Excursions
  o In some instances, London and its surroundings will become part of the classroom for this course.
  o Please comport yourselves accordingly during group excursions. This means being on-time, respectful, and otherwise responsible in your interactions with others and their spaces.

➢ Laptops and Other Devices
  o Use of laptops, phones, tablets, and other electronic devices during class is prohibited.
  o You may have to print out some of the readings from Blackboard. Please budget for this in your evaluation of the cost of materials for the course.

➢ Academic Integrity
  o From Fordham’s Academic Integrity webpage: “Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an honest, truthful, and responsible manner. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating on exams, falsification, unapproved collaboration, and destruction of library materials.” For further information about the Arts and Sciences Policy on Academic Integrity, and the procedures related to violations of it, please click: http://www.fordham.edu/academics/colleges_graduate_s/undergraduate_colleg/for dhham_college_at_1/studying_at_lincoln_/academic_integrity_23682.asp
  o Beware in particular of non-scholarly webpages.

➢ Late Work, Emailed Work, Absences
  o Students are required to turn in all work on its assigned due date. Exceptions will be made only in the case of documented illness or other documented emergency.
  o Adhering to this policy will create a stable environment for learning and class discussion.
  o Unless otherwise specified, I do not accept emailed work.
  o Here are the steps to take if you are absent outside of documented illnesses or emergencies:
    1. Do the assigned reading
    2. Get notes from someone in class
    3. Review notes in light of your reading
4. If desired, make an appointment with me to discuss your questions about the reading and the class notes

- Disabilities
  - "Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, course work, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule an appointment to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Rose Hill – O’Hare Hall, Lower Level, x0655 or at Lincoln Center – Room 207, x6282)."

Grades: 93-100% = A; 90-92% = A-; 88-89% = B+; 83-87% = B; 80-82% = B-; 78-79% = C+; 73-77% = C; 70-72% = C-; 60-69% = D; 0-59% = F