

Dalhousie University
Department of Political Science

Political Science 3431: Politics Through Film and Literature (2012/13)

Instructor: Florian Bail

Office Hours: M/W 12:00 – 1:00 or by appointment.

HH 354 Tel: 494.6608 e-mail: fbail@dal.ca

Description

Political Science 3431 is a workshop in political analysis. Its purpose is to explore the potential of films and literature for achieving a deeper understanding of aspects of politics not ordinarily covered by routine political analysis. The method of analysis in this course is informed by critical theory and phenomenology.

This year's course is the eighth in a series of seminars on the pathology of power I have conducted over the past seven years. They covered dissimulation and the construction of a second reality; distorted speech; exile, displacement, and dispossession; ontological transgression; the futility of power; parataxis and serialization; and melancholy and ambiguity. This year's seminar revisits some of these sites but focuses on conflict of conscience.

Conflicts of conscience are similar to yet different from conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest arise over what one actually wants. Conflicts of conscience arise over what one ought to do. In both cases loyalty, integrity, and agency are at stake. Ultimately, power rests on one's ability to avoid conflicts of interest and to resolve conflicts of conscience.

Conflicts of conscience should also not be equated with bad conscience or, if recognized and resolved, with good conscience. Conflicts of conscience are the root of moral and political dissent. They also form the core of corruption – individually and collectively. Corruption is now regarded a major problem of governance in all states whether they are authoritarian, transitional and democratic. Institutional reform by itself will not succeed unless one can identify denial of conflict of conscience as the essence of the culture of corruption.

Conventional political analysis can clarify conflicts of interest. Conflicts of conscience tend to be more complex and traditionally called for theological solutions. Art, including film, photography, literature and music show nuances and focus on the moment of being caught in an existential dilemma of having to choose who one should be. This, in any case, is what we will try to discern in this course.

Required Texts

The following books can be purchased from the **Bookmark**, 5686 Spring Garden Rd.

Antonio Lobo Antunes	The Land at the End of the World
Roberto Bolano	By Night in Chile
Albert Camus	The Fall
Ivan Klima	Waiting for the Dark / Waiting for the Light

You can obtain from the net or other sources

Vaclav Havel	The Power of the Powerless
Niccolo Machiavelli	The Prince
Thomas More	Utopia
Plato	The Apology
St. Paul	Letter to the Romans
Shakespeare	Hamlet
Sophocles	Antigone

Required Viewings

The following films on DVD can be rented from the **Video Difference**, 6086 Quinpool Rd.

Bernardo Bertolucci	The Conformist
Florian Henckel von Donnersmark	The Lives of Others
Larry Weinstein	Shostakovich Against Stalin
Fred Zinnemann	A Man for All Seasons

Assignments and Grading

The course load will consist of two short essays (1000 words), a longer essay (2500 words), and a final exam.

The two short essays will be worth 20% each, the long essay will be worth 40%, and the exam will be worth 20%. Due dates and specifics regarding plagiarism, format, documentation, method of interpretation, and the expression of a personal yet political view will be discussed in class.

The topic for the first essay is: **Conscience vs. Interest**

The topic for the second essay is: **Power, Agency and Moral Clarity**

The topic for the third essay is to be formulated by you in consultation with the instructor. It must deal with the depiction of conflicts of conscience in one or several of the readings and/or viewings. Short outlines of the paper must be presented and discussed in class prior to submitting the final draft.

Since this class will also draw on recent visual art and music, it is also possible to write the long essay on how either visual art or music reflect on political parataxis.

The in-class exam at the end of the term will test your understanding of the principal theme of the course as reflected in the texts and films analyzed in class.

Policy on Accommodation

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the **Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation (OSAA)** prior to or at the outset of each academic term (with the exception of X/Y courses). Please see www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca

for more information and to obtain **Form A: Request for Accommodation**.

A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honorarium of \$ 75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at **494-2836** for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

Outline

- 1 Introduction: Terminology and Methodological Concerns**
- 2 Politics and Conscience: Sophocles, Plato, Shakespeare and Machiavelli**
- 3 Power and Moral Courage: More and Havel**
- 4 Conformism and Lack of Integrity: Bertolucci**
- 5 Anguish and Artistic Truth: Weinstein**
- 6 Conscience and Empathy: Donnersmark**
- 7 Conscience and Being: Camus**
- 8 The Muddiness of Conscience: Bolano**
- 9 Unexpected Freedom: Klima**
- 10 Witness and Despair: Antunes**
- 11 To Act or not to Act: St. Paul**
- 12 Conclusion: Power and Clarity**