History 291H **“Putting Literature and History in Dialogue”** (Fall 2021)

Donald Reid ([dreid1@email.unc.edu](mailto:dreid1@email.unc.edu)) [This is how to contact me.]

**Office**: Hamilton 554

**Office hours:** Wednesday**,** 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

**The class** will be held on Mondays from 2:30 to 5:00 in Dey 202.

**Syllabi are works-in-progress. Throughout the semester, I will make changes and clarifications as necessary, i.e. in the essay and final exam prompts. The most up-to-date syllabus will always be posted on the Syllabus page of the Sakai site for History 291H.**

In this course, we will discuss six twentieth-century novels, written by Albert Camus, Doris Lessing, André Malraux, Claude McKay, Paul Nizan, and Richard Wright. There are no prerequisites for this course. None of the authors we’ll encounter set out to write books for history and English majors (what I was). They wanted readers from all walks of life open to being engaged, enthralled and willing to think about what had never occurred to them before. I would like these readers as well.

I will present to the class the particular historical context in which each novel is situated. Students will not read any “history books,” although we will read the novels as history books of a radically different sort. We approach these novels as historical documents, produced in particular historical situations, but our primary goal is to examine how the characters in the imagined worlds authors create in these novels pose and respond to important questions about lived experience in the past. How were these imagined worlds understood and given meaning and how, in turn, did these experiences and unrealized alternatives to them haunt historical actors? If we want to know how people may have thought and dreamed in the past, we need sources that enable us to explore what standard historical sources do not.

There are six required texts:

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962)

André Malraux, *Man’s Fate* (1933)

Claude McKay, *Romance in Marseille* ([1930-1933]/2020)

Paul Nizan, *The Conspiracy* (1938)

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

These texts are available at the UNC Student Stores and are on reserve. However, there is only one copy of each on reserve, so if you are going to read the books on reserve, you should plan well in advance to assure that the text is available.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Grading** : We will be using the Sakai site grade scale, an A= 95; A- =90, B+ =87, B= 83, B- =80, etc. (The Sakai scale has an A+ (100), but we will not use this because A+ is not a grade at UNC-CH.) There is no A+. For your total semester grade, computed from the weighted scale (i.e. 20% for discussion, etc.) a total of 92.5 or above will be an A; a grade below 60 will be an F. Otherwise, we will use the Sakai grade scale, i.e. to get a B, your semester percentage average must be 83 or above. If you do not submit an assignment, you will receive 0 points.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Discussion** (20% of the final grade). The key to doing well in discussion is to come to class prepared. Keep up with the reading. There are question to consider for each reading in a file in the Sakai Resources page, but do not limit your thinking about these texts to these! If you read the texts carefully, I feel confident saying that you will really enjoy and profit from this class. If you don’t do this, you (and I) will dread Monday afternoons.

**Report/Reflection on Discussion** (15% of the final grade). You will not need to take notes in discussion (except the week that you do). Each week an assigned student will take notes on the discussion. By 9 a.m. on the day of the next class, they will post a three-page report and reflection (the latter is important) on the discussion the previous week. Focus on issues, insights, and debates in the discussion; don’t give a general overview of the work itself. Don’t have us asking, like Ronald Reagan, “Where’s the beef?” Do not worry about identifying speakers or presenting everything that was said. It would be much better to take on an interpretive role and write something like, “Discussion focused on three central questions…,” even if at the time this was not apparent to the instructor or the students. Reviewing the discussion, you may come up with new ideas or interpretations of the work at hand that had not previously occurred to you. I encourage you to include these thoughts.

At the beginning of class the following week, we will read the report/reflection(s) on discussion the previous week (so bring your laptops) and will discuss them.

**Two Papers** (30% for your better essay; 15% for your other essay) The two six-page essays are due before class begins on Mon., Oct 11 and on Mon., Nov. 29. The prompts are in the schedule. You do not have other class preparation for these days, unless you are the reporter for discussion the preceding week. In class these weeks, students will discuss the arguments they presented in their papers. Papers too often feel like a missive sent to the instructor and the instructor alone. I would like to you share the insights you develop in your papers with one another.

**Final Exam** (20% of the final grade). The prompt is in the schedule.

**What Every Student Should Know**

The University’s [Policy on Prohibited Harassment, Discrimination and Related Misconduct](http://sexualassaultanddiscriminationpolicy.unc.edu/) prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of an individual’s race, color, national original, age, religion, creed, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, or veteran’s status. Related misconduct includes sexual violence, sexual exploitation, interpersonal (relationship) violence, and stalking.[[3]](#footnote-3)

You are bound by the Honor Code and should sign the pledge on each assignment you submit, as well as the final exam.[[4]](#footnote-4) Be particularly aware of plagiarism. You do not need to do research or visit any sites to ace this course. Your time will be much better spent reviewing and rethinking material in the books, lectures, films and discussions than googling for the heck of it. However, should you venture off the reserve, be very careful not to import text from elsewhere into your work unless you give a full citation of the site you consulted. [[5]](#footnote-5) In particular be aware of importing text from elsewhere and reworking it into “your own words,” without attribution. This too is plagiarism. Plagiarism will be detected—it’s not hard—and you will likely be brought before the Honor Court. From experience with the court, I can tell you that “I didn’t know that I didn’t write this” doesn’t work

**Follow the “UNC-CH Covid-19 Community Standards.”[[6]](#footnote-6)**

**Schedule**

Mon., Aug. 23 Introduction to the Class.

I will meet with each student in the class individually this week.

Mon. Aug. 30 Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 1)

Mon., Sep. 13 Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 2)

Mon., Sep. 20 Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Book 3)

Mon. Sep. 27 Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (the five books of that constitute *The Free Women*. These are on pages 1-53, 245-269, 355-392, 485-501, 617-635 of the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition of *The Golden Notebook*)

Mon. Oct. 4 Richard Wright, “How Bigger Was Born,” pages 431-462 of the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition of *Native Son*) and Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (selections from the Notebooks kept by Anna, author of The Free Women on pages 146-159, 283-286, 426-429, 459-461, 503-508, and 511-512 635 of the Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition of *The Golden Notebook*)

Mon., Oct. 11 First essay due at the beginning of class

**Prompt**: What historians have trouble doing (or do not see it as their job to do) is to present the complex, contradictory world of individuals who are not leaders or putatively representative of people in a particular group (i.e., the typical worker thought….). But, what if we start with the individual as the producer and product of the environment they inhabit? Novels allow us to do this, whether it is Bigger in Chicago or Anna and Molly in London. Pick up the challenge presented historians and explain how understanding Bigger and Anna or Molly enables historians to understand elements of race, class, politics, and gender in a particular context—how they are lived and confronted—in revealing ways. (Pick two of these four for each novel.)

Mon., Oct. 18 Paul Nizan, *The Conspiracy* part 1

Mon., Oct. 25 Paul Nizan, *The Conspiracy* parts 2-3

Mon., Nov. 1 Claude McKay, *Romance in Marseille*

Mon., Nov. 8 André Malraux, *Man’s Fate,* parts 1-3

Mon. Nov. 15 Albert Camus, *The Plague*, parts 1-2

Mon., Nov. 22 Albert Camus, *The Plague*, parts 3-5

Mon., Nov. 29 Second essay due at the beginning of class

**Prompt**: Select three major characters (i.e. Cottard, Joseph Grand, Father Paneloux, Raymond Rambert, Bernard Rieux, Jean Tarrou ) from *The Plague* and have each read a different one of these books: *The Conspiracy*, *Romance in Marseille*, and *Man’s Fate*. What would be each individual character’s response to the book they read? What in particular would the reader identify with? What would disquiet him? What new insights do we gain about each character and about these three texts? Because the characters and the texts are situated in particular historical situations, discuss how this can give us new understandings of the limits and possibilities of these situations (and of the Oran of *The Plague*).

**Final Exam**

The final exam is in the form of a take-home exam. You need to turn in your final exam **by 7 p.m. on Fri., Dec. 3**. The expected length is 6 pages. You have the prompt below. My advice is to think about it over the course of the semester and take notes. Write a draft at your own convenience and go over it a couple of times before you submit it.

**Final Exam Prompt**:

Each of you is a quite different individual, but you share the experience of life in the United States in the early 21st century. Reflect on the six novels we read, all written and set in the mid-twentieth century. Viewers often say of films set in the past that if made them feel like they were there. Think about the particular aspects of these novels that gave you this sensation and then compare what was important to individuals in these novels and how they reacted to it to what you, living in the 21st century U.S., find important and how individuals living in the 21st century react to it. The point is not to compare particular historical events (i.e. some characters in these novels were inspired by the Soviet revolution in 1917 and you have never known a time when the Soviet Union existed), but to think about what is meaningful and important to individuals we meet in these novels (which could, in this case, explain why the Soviet Revolution inspired them). This essay has a subjective dimension—what you think is important and motivates fears and dreams now—may be different than what your classmates think. That’s fine. What is important is that you articulate and analyze clearly your position so that you can compare it with the clearly subjective positions of the novelists and the characters they create. What makes life in one historical period similar and different from that in another, beyond categorization in terms of political regimes and measures of material life, can be difficult for historians to assess. Imagination has a history. Compare expressions of imagination then and now and what this tells us about the historical then and the historical now.

1. I recommend the Harper Perennial Modern Classics editions of Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* and of Wright, *Native Son*. The Penguin edition of Camus’ *The Plague* is the most recent translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Late papers will be marked off a full grade per day late (i.e., A to B), beginning the day and hour that the papers are due. The exception is for documented illness. If you are travelling for varsity sports or have a job interview, you know about this assignment in advance and can prepare your paper in advance.**

   **Grades are assigned using the criteria given instructors by the Office of the University Registrar:** [**http://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/**](http://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/grades/explanation-of-grading-system/)**. Visit this site and click on “Undergraduate Grade Definitions” to see what an A, B, or C means at UNC-CH.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the Director of Title IX Compliance (Adrienne Allison – [**Adrienne.allison@unc.edu**](mailto:Adrienne.allison@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([**reportandresponse@unc.edu**](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)) (a resource for all types of reports): Ew Quimbaya-Winship – [**eqw@unc.edu**](mailto:eqw@unc.edu) or (919) 843-3878; Rebecca Gibson – [**rmgibson@unc.edu**](mailto:rmgibson@unc.edu) or (919) 445-1578; and Kathryn Winn – [**kmwinn@unc.edu**](mailto:kmwinn@unc.edu) or (919) 843-2993. Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See <http://studentconduct.unc.edu/students/honor-system-module> for an explanation of the code. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an online source, provide the name of the website, the title or if not the title, a descriptive phrase identifying the piece cited, and the author, if given. Then provide the complete address and the day you consulted it. For other materials, see “Citing Sources” on the Resources page of the course Sakai site. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/community-standards/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)