**English 358:363:001**

**Twentieth Century Literature: Existentialism in Global Literature and Film**

Fall 2015

T/R 4:30-5.40

Professor Avram Alpert

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Office: Murray 020

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 3:00-4:30 and by appointment

Existentialism is a kind of thinking that asks how we can best live in a world beset by tragedy, absurdity, and injustice. It refuses any kind of otherworldly thinking, and insists that we have no expectations about life besides what we can bring about. At the same time, it accepts the limits of what any individual can do given the confines of an indifferent and chaotic universe. In this class, rather than treat existentialism as a philosophical or literary doctrine, we will treat it as a challenging way of thinking that demands authenticity, responsibility, and a sense of the tragic. We will look at existential expressions across philosophy, personal essay, literature, and film. Although you may write an academic paper for your course assignment, you are strongly encouraged to create a final work in one of these four genres.

**Books to purchase:**

All books and films are also available on reserve

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed* (Pantheon)

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (Grove)

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (Vintage)

Kamel Daoud, *The Meursault Investigation* (Other Press)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau)

All other readings will be made available to you on SAKAI

**Requirements:**

1) Attendance and participation. **20% of grade.**

This class will be run as a lecture with discussion. I will provide context and go over the texts/films in some detail, but you are expected to be an active participant when we have discussions. This means you must do the reading or watch the film for each class. You are furthermore expected to attend every class except in cases of illness or emergency. After your third unexcused absence, you will be docked 5% of your grade. All students are expected to speak in class, and we will do a variety of small discussion groups and activities to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to do so. If you are uncomfortable about speaking in class, please do not hesitate to come speak to me privately about it.

2) Responses. **30% of grade**

Each week I will give a question for the reading or film. At least an hour before Thursday's class, post your response to this question on the SAKAI site. Aim to write about a paragraph (You may also respond to some other part of the material that interests you if you prefer.)

3) Mini-Writing Assignment (1-2 pages): **10% of grade**

Extend one of your responses into a longer argument, due October 22.

4) Final project. **40% of grade**

One aim of this course if for you to engage with existentialism by creating your own work (even if in your work you choose to disagree with the positions we discuss). This project is up to you to create. You can write a critical paper on one of the works we engage (10-12 pages), but you are strongly encouraged to write an essay, story, treatise, or visual work that engages the themes we have discussed in light of your own experience. We will discuss the form this project will take throughout the semester. Please remember that all projects will be graded according to the rigorous internal standards of the genre you are working in.

**IMPORTANT: ON COMPUTERS, TABLET AND SMART PHONES**

There are many wonderful things about computers and smart phones, and we all use them all the time to very good effect. But electronics are also distracting to ourselves and to others around us, and they fragment the attention in a classroom. Our aim here is to be a community of readers working together to think through a number of difficult books, films, and ideas, and we will need to focus as closely on those texts as possible. If necessary, please advise friends or family ahead of time that, except for emergencies, you will not be reachable during this class period. You may use a computer in this class to access the readings, but your internet must be turned off before class starts.

**Schedule of Course Readings:**

Sept 1st: Introductions.

Sept 3rd: Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*

Friedrich Nietzsche, "How the 'Real World' at Last Became Myth"

Sept 8th: *Vertigo,* continued

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, "The Existential Constitution of the There"

Sept 10th: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience"

Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, selections

Sept 15th: Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"

Sept 17th: Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, selections; *Being and Nothingness* 96-116

Sept 22nd: Frantz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man"

Sept. 24th: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, "Introduction"

Simone de Beauvoir, "The Woman Destroyed," first half

Sept. 29th: Simone de Beauvoir, "The Woman Destroyed," second half

Oct. 1st: Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, first half

Oct. 6th: Albert Camus, *The Stranger,* second half

Optional: Camus, "Reflections on the Guillotine"

Oct. 8th: Kamel Daoud, *The Meurseault Investigation*, first half

Oct. 13th: Kamel Daoud, *The Meurseault Investigation*, second half

Oct. 15th: Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* "Concerning Violence" and "Conclusion"

Oct. 20th: Che Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba"

Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, chapter 1

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (brief excerpt)

Oct. 22nd: Sarah Gómez, *One Way or Another (*better translated: *In a Certain Way)*

Glauber Rocha, "An Aesthetics of Hunger"

**Mini-Writing Assignment due at beginning of class (Oct 22)**

Oct. 27th: Akira Kurosawa, *Ikiru*

Oct. 29th: *Ikiru* continued

Saul Alinsky, "Prologue" to *Rules for Radicals*

Nov. 3rd: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

Paul Chan, "Waiting for Godot in New Orleans"

Nov. 5th: Forugh Farrokhzad, *The House is Black*

Farrokhzad, "Another Birth" and "The Wind Will Take Us" (short poems)

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (pages on leprosy)

Nov. 10th: Béla Tarr, *Turin Horse*

Nov. 12th: Stephanie Black, *Life and Debt*

Nov. 17th: *Life and Debt* continued

David Graeber, *Debt* (excerpts)

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

Nov. 19th: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, first half

Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (brief excerpts)

Nov. 24th: Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, second half

Black Lives Matter, Mission Statement

Reviews of Coates by Michelle Alexander and David Brooks

Dec. 1st: Franz Kafka, "Before the Law" (version in *The Trial*, with commentary)

Dec. 3rd: Guest lecture by Shadi Harouni

Watch: Harouni, *The Lightest of Stones*

Dec. 8th: Wrap-up

**Final project due last day of exam period**