

FYS: "Character"

K10.0058 - MW 3:30-4:45 - 194 Mercer, Room 207

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Office Hours: TR 2 - 5 and by appointment

This course will introduce you to college-level interdisciplinary study. We will develop methods for reading particular texts and for making reasonable generalizations that connect texts, images, and ideas across different time periods and cultures. We will consider two seemingly simple questions: What is "character"? What is a "character"? First, character is a fundamental element of the primal human activity of storytelling: Can we imagine a story without a character? A character without a story? Second, character can serve as a symbolic embodiment of the values and virtues of the culture that produced it: What can we learn from studying cultural heroes and archetypes? Why does modernity favor stories of highly individuated characters over stories of idealized "types"? Third, the word "character" also means "personality": Is character in that sense innate or "built," something genuine or a role we perform to meet social expectations external to our true and hidden self?

Required Books:

The following readings are available at the NYU Bookstore:

Greene and Lattimore, eds. *Greek Tragedies*, Volume I

Homer, *The Odyssey*

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

Other readings will be distributed as needed.

Discussions:

This is a seminar, a meeting of minds gathered to share views and insights about a common experience (in our case, a reading). Your attendance is vital, both to your own progress and to our existence as a group. Thus, if you can't make it to class, please phone or e-mail me in advance. For the same reasons, do come to class on time and avoid leaving early unless absolutely necessary. Class preparation and participation seriously affect your final grade.

Assignments:

Four short papers and one long final paper due at the end of the semester.

Class schedule:

Wednesday, September 3	Introductions
Monday, September 9 - Wednesday, September 10	Charles Chestnut, "The Passing of Grandison" Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener"
Monday, September 15	Readings: Aeschylus, <i>Agamemnon</i> (in Grene and Lattimore) Stanislavski, from <i>Building a Character</i> (to be distributed) One paragraph due: compare and contrast the characters of Bartleby and Grandison
Wednesday, September 17	Class visit to Martha Graham Co. rehearsal -- meet at Skirball promptly at 3:30
Monday, September 22	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books I - IV
Wednesday, September 24	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books V - XIV
Monday, September 29	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books XV - XXIV
Wednesday, October 1	<i>The Odyssey</i> Paper Due
Monday, October 6 - Wednesday, October 8	Sophocles, <i>Oedipus the King</i> (in Grene and Lattimore) From Aristotle's <i>Poetics</i> (to be distributed)
Monday, October 13	FALL HOLIDAY
Wednesday, October 15	Chaucer, Prologue to the <i>Canterbury Tales</i> (to be distributed) From George Simmel, <i>Individuality and Social Forms</i> (tbd)
Monday, October 20 - Wednesday, October 29	Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i> Irving Goffman, from <i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>
Monday, November 3	Daniel J. Boorstin, from <i>The Image</i> , "The Human Pseudo-Event" (to be distributed)
Wednesday, November 5	Richard Dyer on Marilyn Monroe (to be distributed) Paper Due
Monday, November 10 - Wednesday, November 24	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> E. M. Forster, from <i>Aspects of the Novel</i> ("People (Continued)") (to be distributed)
Monday, November 29 - December 10	Richard Wright, <i>Black Boy</i> November 29 - Paper Due
December 15	Final Papers Due