

**HISTORY 202: Literature of Political Disillusionment
Spring, 2015
Prof. Alan Charles Kors**

The Spirit of Our Seminar:

The excitement of seminars, and I have been teaching them for many (many) years, is that they are a chance for you to learn from each other, to try out your own analyses and comparisons of authors, and to hear your own voices in intellectual conversation with each other. Penn students are wonderfully bright and interesting, and seminars are an opportunity for you all to be colleagues in an historical inquiry.

Our seminar meetings will be organized around discussion. Your grade will be determined by discussion (50%) and by your research term-paper (50%), rounded in favor of discussion. Your individual comments will not be graded (that would be awful), but, rather, you'll be graded on the basis of informed, ongoing, responsive participation in discussion. By "informed," I mean informed by a close reading of our texts. By "ongoing," I mean both sustained throughout each meeting and sustained throughout the semester. By "responsive," I mean responsive to each other, taking each other seriously enough to respond to each other's observations and analyses.

I understand fully that for some of you, talking in class is as easy as breathing, but that, for others, it is a hurdle to overcome. If talking in class is difficult for you, but the course interests you, please take it and come identify yourself in an early office hour. In all my years of teaching, I have learned all the ways of making it easy to participate. It's never failed.

We are a history seminar, doing intellectual history, not a seminar on

philosophy or on political or moral theory. That is to say, our goal will not be to judge or to argue the merits and demerits of our authors (you always can choose to do that voluntarily on your own, apart from our seminar), but to understand how the world has looked to different minds. The focus of our discussion will be analytic and comparative. We'll be interested in what views an author holds of political possibilities; of society; of the psychology and institutionalization of power; of human nature, motivation, ethics, and history, and so on. We get to ask questions about an author's beliefs that an author may not even ask himself or herself (for example, implicit views of human nature or of ethics). It may be that two of you who agree about what an author believes might hold two different views of the author's rightness or wrongness. Our subject will be the former (analyzing an author), not the latter (judging an author). We're a class in history.

Imagine, for the sake of argument, that we were studying Tibetan Buddhism or Medieval political theory. To summon those thinkers to judgment by our own contemporary or personal views of the world would be to study ourselves, not other minds or schools of thought. Our task is to understand other minds and other ways of thinking.

In the twentieth century, two movements that wished to alter fundamentally the nature of human life, Communism and Fascism, attracted a significant number of authors. Many participants in these efforts to produce a new form of individual and society became, for diverse reasons, disillusioned, and, being thinkers, they wrote about their disillusionment for the rest of us in the culture. (Fascists generally were either ashamed of or quite secretive about their involvement, so

there is far less of a literature of Fascist disillusionment.) We shall seek to understand how they present (where they do) their enthusiasms, their experiences, their disillusionment, and the lessons that they would have us draw. In the process, we shall encounter a remarkably influential body of literature and a diversely revealing set of twentieth-century experiences. Many of our works helped to frame the very terms of political debate.

What judgment you make privately of our authors is neither my goal nor my business. My classroom is never a pulpit. My sole interest here is your analytic and comparative reading and discussion (from which I always learn new things). I give you my word on that.

Each week, I'll send out questions for discussion, which will be our starting point. I'll ask you each to choose ONE of our questions and, in a go-around at the start of class, to sketch out a brief answer (three minutes or so.... you can read it from a written-out statement, or an outline, or extemporize). After that go-around, we'll take a twenty-minute break, and then reconvene for discussion, beginning with disagreements you might have with each other, and then proceeding wherever the discussion takes us. To encourage both fairness and spontaneity, I'll create a queue (the British term sounds fancier than a line or list) in the order of hands raised, with the understanding that if you truly need to make a brief interjection about someone's comment or to ask a brief question of someone, you can cut in by signaling for such a comment. Trust me... it will work.

Assignments: In the assignments that follow, you should read only the authors' texts, not the editors' introductions, with the exception of Crossman's introduction to the first reading.

1/20: Introductory meeting

1/27: R. H. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed: Crossman's introduction and the essays by Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, and Richard Wright*)

2/03: Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine* (entire)

2/10: Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (entire)

2/17: George Orwell, *1984* (entire)

2/24: Curzio Malaparte, *Kaputt* (Parts I-III)

3/03: Curzio Malaparte, *Kaputt* (Parts IV-VI)

3/10: Spring Vacation

3/17: Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered* (entire) AVAILABLE ON KINDLE

3/24: Vasily Grossman, *Forever Flowing* (entire)

3/31: Milan Kundera, *The Joke* (entire)

4/07: Herman Padilla, *Heroes Are Grazing in My Garden* (entire)

4/14: Liang Heng, *Son of the Revolution* (entire)

4/21: Herta Müller, *The Land of Green Plums: A Novel* (entire)

4/28: Slavenka Drakulic, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (entire)

Books: All books except Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered*—which is available on Kindle—are available in paperback at the Penn Book Center (not the Penn Book Store), at 34th and Sansom.

Grades: Your grade will be determined as followed: 50% on the basis of your informed, ongoing, and responsive participation in seminar discussion; 50% on the basis of your research papers.

Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30 pm and Thursday, 2:30-4:30pm, in 307 College Hall.

Email: akors@sas.upenn.edu (my students' emails come first).

Research Paper Assignment:

4000 to 6000 words, due by or before Tuesday, Monday, May 4, 5 PM

(Please leave hard copy only, in my History Department mailbox.)

Choose a work of political disillusionment not on our syllabus (I'll give you a list of possible works, from the Western to Eastern Hemispheres). Compare and contrast its expression of political disillusionment to that of any two works on our syllabus. Don't retell the "story" of any of the works, but actively compare and contrast them in terms of deep themes such as values, views of human nature, views of politics, degree and scope of disillusionment, and so on.

Avoid direct quotation; a paraphrase is much better. You may provide footnotes, or endnotes, or parenthetical references, but let me know on what parts of the texts you are relying. All citations **and paraphrases** must be documented. Provide author, work, and page numbers for the first reference of a text, and then short title and page numbers after that.

FORM: Provide a cover (title) page and number your pages. **You must write with proper American-English syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.** **When in doubt, consult reference works** (such as Strunk and White, *Elements of Style*; Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers...*; Bryan Garner, *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*; or, the sacred text of editors, *Words into Type*). Please give yourself time to proofread, revise, and rewrite. **Back up your work, and keep an extra hard copy for yourself.**

Note well: I am available throughout the semester if you want help with framing your papers or improving your prose, and I am eager to help. If you send me three pages or so of what you consider your best writing, I'll be very glad to read it and go over the writing with you. **Rough drafts will receive an F.** I do not give Incompletes except for medical or personal emergencies, so plan your schedules accordingly. You should choose not to take the class if these conditions are unacceptable to you