

Syllabus for Literature and Aging: INTD 360
Fall 2007

Wednesday, 6-9:30pm

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Course description:

This course examines the experiences of aging from the perspectives both of aging persons and of those who care for and about them. The readings include plays, short stories, poetry, and a novel, all of which help students experience vicariously what it's like to be aging or to be caring for someone who is. In addition to the readings, we will use several videos which will enhance understanding of the experience of aging.

Goals and objectives:

One objective is to increase students' sensitivity to and awareness of issues in aging, so that they may get beyond the usual negative labeling of the elderly and can, instead, come to see them as real and worthwhile individuals. Another goal is to help students imagine themselves as elderly, to "try on" different worlds of those who may have lived three or four times as long as the students have. While the course does not focus on ethics, the conflicts in the literature and film about aging necessarily raise ethical issues about how we treat the elderly.

This course satisfies both the biomedical humanities minor and major.

Course expectations:

Grades will be based on participation in class and e-mail responses to readings (10%), an "Aging in Music Project" (10%), two exams (20% each), and two papers (20% each).

During the course you will receive reading questions which you should respond to by e-mail the Tuesday before the class next meets. Some of your responses will be used as guides for class discussion. They will also count as part of your grade for participation in the class. You will be expected to attend class and participate in discussions. Cutting class is particularly damaging because the class meets only once per week (in other words, missing a class is the equivalent of missing a week of classes in the normal schedule).

Texts: *Literature and Aging*, eds. Kohn, Donley, Wear
 The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Bauby
 As We Are Now, Sartre
 Jar of Fools, Lutes
 In class handouts

- August 29 Introduction” “Ode to Clothes,” “Warning,” “Horizons” exercise.
- September 5 Immortality and Finitude: Read *Fortitude* and respond to questions. In class we will do a reader’s theater production of *Fortitude*. Read and be prepared to discuss “The Undertaking,” and “Who’s Afraid of Life Extension?” Pair up for “Aging in Music Project.”
- September 12 Immortality Redefined: Read and be prepared to discuss “Mortality and Morality...” and “The Machine Stops” (available on the internet), *100 Penny Box* and *Morrie* (videotapes). **Early start to class if possible.**
- September 19 In Search of New Horizons- Trapped in Mid-Life: *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* (videotape)
- September 26 In Search of New Horizons- Trapped in Later Life: *As We Are Now. The Gin Game* (videotape)
- October 3 In Search of New Horizons- What Sparks the Search: From *Literature and Aging* read “Next Day,” “A Woman Alone,” “Mr. Flood’s Party,” “Virginia Portrait,” “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” “A Clean Well-Lighted Place.”
1ST PAPER DUE
- October 10 In Search of New Horizons- What Sparks the Search: Continued
1ST EXAM (over all material INCLUDING those works discussed today)
- October 17 Love—Why not? From *Lit and Aging* read “In Retirement,” “We are Nighttime Travelers,” “The Linden Tree,” “Medicine,” “The Bean Eaters,” “Fallback,” “Now Before the End, I Think.” Respond to questions. *Harold and Maude* (Videotape)
- October 24 Families. From *Lit and Aging* read “Idiot’s First,” “Maggie of the Green Bottles,” “Stroke,” “Grandmother and Grandson,” *The Sand Box*. Respond to questions. *Marvin’s Room* (first half of videotape)
- October 31 Families discussion continued. *Jar of Fools*, Respond to questions. *Marvin’s Room* (second half of videotape)
- November 7 Families discussion continued. Read and respond to “The Last Leaf.”
2ND EXAM over material from weeks 7-11
- November 14 “Aging in Music Project” in-class presentations. Pot luck?
TAKE HOME FINAL paper topics distributed. Final paper due on or before Nov. 20.

Discussion questions for 9/5/07 for *Fortitude*, “The Undertaking,” and “Who’s Afraid of LifeExtension?”

1. For those who have read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, compare the outcomes of the scientist and monster in that novel to the fate of their counterparts in the play *Fortitude*.
2. Do you think that Dr. Little will stay and care for Sylvia and Dr. Frankenstein or return to his practice in Vermont? Why?
3. What do you think Gloria was trying to accomplish? Do you sympathize with her actions? Why or why not?
4. From Lynch’s “The Undertaking,” choose a line or thought that touched you deeply and also choose one that tickled you the most. Explain why for each case.
5. Do you think that aging is part of a ‘natural’ cycle that we shouldn’t unduly resist, or do you think that human intervention through the creation of life-extending technology should take us as far as we can go?

Discussion questions for 9/12/07 for “Mortality and Morality...,” and “The Machine Stops.”

1. Where would you place the “proper life span”—the number of years at which living beyond makes no sense?
2. Does having an end point (knowledge of your finitude) inspire you to make your life count for something?
3. What is the nature of our responsibility to the earth we live on as it, too, ages with us?

1st Paper Assignment (800-1200 words; Due October 3, 2007) -- From Now to Then: A Model for My Life Course

1. Choose a life course model from those discussed in class or design one of your own.
2. Provide an illustration of it and identify at least three distinct points along it.
3. Describe those points and analyze them in light of your model, explaining why you believe they will be of particular importance to you.

Aging in Music Project

Each team will be responsible for creating (or finding an existing song) about older persons or the aging process. The song will be presented by the team (live or recorded), or as it has been recorded by others. The team also will discuss how the song relates to themes raised in the course. The song and discussion should be no longer than 15 minutes. A progress report including identification of the song is due on October 24, 2007. Presentations will be at the final class session, November 14, 2007.

