

Political Science 87

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Fall Quarter 2016

Tuesday 12:00 - 1:50
September 27 – October 25
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POWER IN FICTION

Objectives

Power is a critical aspect of politics. Indeed, many political scientists define their discipline as the study of power. Many individuals and groups seek power, and power can be pursued, used, and abused in many ways. This course will explore four prominent works of fiction, set in different societies and times, that describe these pursuits and their consequences. Our objective is to better understand the pursuit, uses, and abuses of power by reading and discussing these books.

Approach

This is a freshman seminar, with no prerequisites. There will be five weekly seminar meetings. Class attendance is required, and except for the first day you should come to class prepared to discuss the literature assigned for that day. During our initial meeting we shall explore the nature of power and its uses and abuses. The remaining seminar meetings will explore four works of fiction. **In order to get credit for this seminar, you will have to attend all five seminar meetings and write a brief discussion paper (800 words or more) on one of these readings.** (If you miss one class meeting due to illness or late registration, you can instead submit a longer paper.) The generic paper topic is: "How this book/play helps me understand the pursuit, use, and abuse of power." A hard copy of your paper is due no later than noon the day before we discuss the book in class (i.e., Monday), or preferably earlier. It can be left in an envelope outside my office (SSB 384). You may wish to revise your paper after the seminar discussion, and **final papers are due by noon on Monday, November 1.** All dates and class schedules are subject to change.

Books and Materials

The following books have been ordered by the bookstore:

Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People*.

Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*.

C. P. Snow, *The Masters*.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Paperback editions will be available through the bookstore, but you should feel free to use any edition you can find. All readings will also be placed on library reserve. The seminar will be supported by a TritonEd (Blackboard) account.

Calendar

September 27: INTRODUCTION: POWER, POLITICS, AND FICTION

Readings:

Robert A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*. Prentice-Hall 1963, ch. 5 ("Power and Influence").

John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*. Univ. of Illinois Press 1982, ch.1 ("Power and Participation").

These are classical readings on what power is and how we should study it.

October 4: SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Reading: Ibsen

This is a play in which the protagonist is a medical doctor who is trying to alert his community to a serious health hazard that is facing them. Though well intended, his attempt to speak truth to power lands him in all sorts of trouble with the authorities and even with political forces he had counted on as his supporters. Though written more than a century ago, this is a remarkably timeless drama, written by one of the world's most renowned playwrights.

October 11: CHALLENGING POWER

Reading: Achebe

This novel, published in 1966, is set in an unnamed African country shortly after decolonization. An ambitious young man gets reacquainted with a former teacher who has since become a powerful and charismatic politician. The young man is taken in by his new opportunities, but quickly becomes jealous and disillusioned and decides to go into political life for himself. He soon discovers that politics can be a dangerous game. The author, Chinua Achebe, was until his recent death one of Africa's most widely read and respected novelist and social commentators.

October 18: ABUSE AND POWERLESSNESS

Reading: Solzhenitsyn

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's brief but powerful novel about life in the Soviet concentration camps had an explosive impact when it was published in the early 1960s. It won the author a Nobel Prize in Literature, but also caused him to be exiled from the Soviet Union. And the little book helped cause a shake-up in the government of his country.

October 25: POWER THROUGH BARGAINING AND PERSUASION

Reading: Snow

C.P. Snow's novel *The Masters* is set in a small college in England in the 1930s. The college master (principal) is dying, and two candidates are lining up for the contest to be his successor. The book is a tale, with lots of twists and turns, about how these candidates and their respective supporters try to build a winning coalition by persuading, cajoling, or occasionally "bribing" the faculty members that elect the master. C.P. Snow was a prominent scholar, author, and politician in mid-century Britain. He wrote a series of novels about the characters we encounter in this book, but *The Masters* is the most famous of these books.