

MALEDICTA:

"BAD" LANGUAGE, RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER
IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

REE 325, CL 323, MAS 363R, WGS 340

COURSE SYLLABUS

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RUDE

DIRTY

Required texts: [both available at the UT Co-op]

- *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better than Others?* [BL], E. Battistella. Oxford UP, 2007.
- *Expletive Deleted: A Good Look at Bad Language* [ED], Ruth Wajnryb. Free Press, 2005.
- Course packet of readings [CP], available on Canvas

Supplementary text: [available at the UT Co-op]

- *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Keith Allan, Kate Burridge. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

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Ma•le•díc•ta: (Latin. n., pl. *maledictum*, sg.), curse words, insults; profane and obscene language of all kinds.

When is a word “bad?” Why does it seem that one person can use a particular “bad” word with impunity, and another cannot? Why are certain words used specifically to hurt, insult, or demean another person? How do race, socio-economic class, and gender play into the use of “bad” language in the US? This course undertakes the examination of modern usage of language that has been designated as “bad” through social convention. Usage of various forms of obscenities and invective in common usage will be examined in an attempt to come to an understanding of how the products of popular culture portray *maledicta* in situational contexts. Through an examination of various popular texts culled from print, film, and music, participants will study the context and use of “bad” language and attempt to determine the underlying principles that dictate its social effect and determine its impact on the intended audience. Though the majority of texts and usage will be taken from English-language sources, several non-English examples of *maledicta* from Mexican Spanish and Russian will also be considered for contrast and comparison.

TRIGGER WARNING: The materials, discussions, and assignments in this course will, necessarily, expose the student to language that may be considered offensive, abusive, and/or denigrating.

I. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation: You are expected to attend class meetings regularly, so attendance alone does *not* equal “active participation.” Students must participate **vigorously** in discussions, do all assigned readings and film viewings, and prepare written and revision assignments. Critical analysis, synthesis, and cogent argumentation are essential to the success of the course; precise articulation – orally and in writing -- of your understanding of the various “texts” we consider this term is essential to your own success. REES or MALS participants in this course will be required to work with a significant number of the texts in the original Russian or Spanish.

Special Accommodations: Any student with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259. Any necessary accommodations should be presented to the instructor in written form from the SSD **at the beginning of the course**, unless the need for special accommodations becomes necessary during the semester.

Response Paper: Each participant will submit a very brief (no shorter than 2, no longer than 3 pages) response paper to one of a series of statements from the course material presented in class. The paper must be uploaded to Canvas by the beginning of class on **Wednesday, October 2**.

Reflection Paper: A short (no shorter than 3, no longer than 4 pages) essay on a pre-assigned topic, or one pre-approved by the instructor, involving at least *two* of the “texts” covered in the course. This essay must be uploaded to Canvas by the beginning of class on **Monday, November 11**.

Revision Project: Course participants, working in groups of three or four, are required to upload to Canvas **by the end of our final class**, a group revision project and write-up of 3-4 pages, treating any of the films, music, or literary texts covered during the semester, **or** a “text(s)” chosen by the participants with the prior approval of the instructor. Sample treatments, which may include video, audio, or digital media, will be discussed well in advance of the due date. Groups are required to communicate with the instructor about the treatments well in advance of the due date, as well as to turn in a brief, one paragraph prospectus (via email or Canvas) justifying the choice of text(s) before beginning the revision project.

II. GRADING

While your Teaching Assistant will do a great job of advising, assessing, and commenting on your various assignments, remember that **only** your professor is the instructor of record for this course. As such, he determines the final grades in the course. **Any questions you might have at any time in the semester about your grades or grading need to be brought to him before the last day of class.**

There are four components of the final course grade. These components and their relative weight in the final course grade are:

Response Paper (2-3 pp.)	20%
Reflection Paper (3-4 pp.)	25%
Revision Project (project, plus 3-4 pp.)	40%
Active enthusiastic participation	15%

The result of these calculations will be on a number on a scale of 0-100. This numerical grade will be converted to a letter grade as follows:

94 – 100	=	A	74 – 76	=	C
90 – 93	=	A-	70 – 73	=	C-
87 – 89	=	B+	67 – 69	=	D+
84 – 86	=	B	64 – 66	=	D
80 – 83	=	B-	60 – 63	=	D-
77 – 79	=	C+	59 and below	=	F

III. HONOR CODE

The University of Texas Honor Codes reads:

“The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness and respect toward peers and community.”

Every class participant is expected to adhere to these principles throughout the course, in dealing with the instructors, fellow students, and in completing all assignments for the course.

IV. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when an alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside. Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building. Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class. In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office. For other important Emergency Information, go to:

<http://www.utexas.edu/safety/preparedness/>

COURSE OUTLINE

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

When Language Strikes Back

- The History of “Bad” Language
- Defining Bad Language: “I Know It When I Hear It”
- The F-Word: What is “Bad” Language Linguistically?
- “Banned in Boston”: Books, Language, and Censorship
- You Can’t Say That! The Case of The US v. Lenny Bruce



OCTOBER

Language, COMEDY, and Music

- George Carlin: Seven Words You Can’t Say on TV
- Tipper Gore v. MTV
- The Rise of Hip-Hop, Rap, and Spoken *Maledicta*
- The N-Word Reemerges
- Cable TV Pushes the Envelope

NOVEMBER

Bad Language, Race, and Gender in Film

- MPAA Rating System
- *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966)
- *M*A*S*H* (1970) and the F-Word
- Quentin Tarantino v. Spike Lee
- Post-Porn: Women and Language



DECEMBER

Take Back What You Said!

- What is the Impact of “Bad” Language?
- “Bad” Rewritten



SYLLABUS OF ASSIGNMENTS

Wednesday, August 28

Introduction to “Maledicta”

Overview of syllabus, texts and course requirements

👂 Cee Lo Green’s “F*** You” vs. “Forget You”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 “Falling Foul” and Ch. 2 “Precisely Foul” in *ED*

Wednesday, September 4

Definitions of Terms: Obscenity v. Profanity

- What are “*maledicta*” anyway?
- Why do “we” swear the way “we” do?

👁 View scenes from *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *South Park* (1999)

For next meeting, read “Swearing: A Cursory Introduction” by Hughes, and “On Profanity” by Doroghazi in *CP*.

Monday, September 9

Setting the Stage I: A History of “Bad” Language in Western Civilization

- The Historical Evolution of Bad Language
- 👁 View “Why Are Bad Words So Bad?”

For next meeting, read Ch. 1 and 4: “Bad Language: Realism versus Relativism” and “Bad Words” in *BL*, and “Swearing” by Anderson and Trudgill in *CP*.



Wednesday, September 11 **Setting the Stage II: What Exactly IS “Bad” Language?**

- Markers of *maledicta*
- Role of the listener/recipient
- 👂 Listen to excerpts from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

For next meeting, read Ch. 4 and 5 “Where the F***” and “The Wild Thing” in *ED*, and Sheidlower’s “Introduction: About the F-Word” in *CP*.



Monday, September 16

The F-Word

- Linguistic considerations
- Social considerations and the dilution of the word
- 👁 View scenes from *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994)

For next meeting, read “Regulation of Indecent Speech” in the *CP*.

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Wednesday, September 18

Regulating Language and The Slippery Slope

- Problems in regulating language
- Coming to consensus on how and what to regulate

For next meeting, read “Banned Books: From *Harriet the Spy* to *The Catcher in the Rye*” by Brunner in *CP*.



Monday, September 23 **Banned In Boston! Literature under Siege**

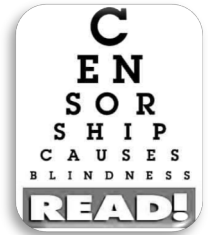
- What were criteria for the bans?
- What does national culture say about profanity?
- Excerpts from Mexican and Russian literature

For next meeting, read the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and “Book Censorship” in *CP*.

Wednesday, September 25 **What Does the 1st Amendment Protect?**

- Free Speech v Freedom of Speech
- 👁 View scenes from *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* (1996)
- Examples of “protected speech” in the US

For next meeting, read “The Trials of Lenny Bruce” by Doug Linder.



Lenny Bruce Mug Shot

Monday, September 30 **The Case of Lenny Bruce**

- 👁 Lenny Bruce performances on obscenity
- Review case history and verdict
- Was Lenny Bruce a scapegoat?

For next meeting, read “Richard Pryor,” and “Shock Jock” in *CP*.

👉 Don't forget: Response Paper due Wednesday!

Wednesday, October 2 **Lenny Bruce's Inheritors: From Richard Pryor to Howard Stern**

- Breaking Barriers: Pryor's Standup
- “Shock Jocks” and Profanity
- **Response Papers are due today!**

For next meeting, read “N*****” [from Wikipedia (Yes, Wikipedia!)] in *CP*.



Chris Rock on Stage

Monday, October 7 **The N-Word: Does Comedy Excuse Language?**

- Humor v. Language
- Current models: Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock v. Louis C.K.
- The Case of Michael Richards (2006)

For next meeting, bring in examples of “controversial” language in current television media.

Wednesday, October 9 **Language and the Media**

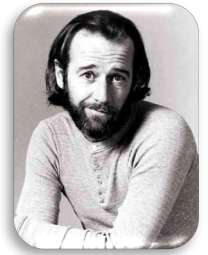
- Does it matter *where* bad language occurs?
- 👁 Watch segment from “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour”

For next meeting, read transcript of George Carlin's “Filthy Words” and “A Tribute to George Carlin” in *CP*.

Monday, October 14 **Words You Can't Say on TV**

- Carlin's "Seven Words" and Why *Those* Words
- 👁 View stand-up "7 Words You Can't Say on TV"

For next meeting, read Lombardi's "Music and Censorship" in *CP*.



George Carlin

Wednesday, October 16 **Music, Lyrics, Performance, and Bad Language**

- Relationship between music lyrics, obscenity, and censorship
- 👂 Listen to selected early rock songs from various "banned lists"

For next meeting, read intro to *Raising Kids in an X-Rated Society* by Tipper Gore in *CP*.

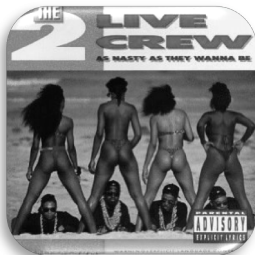
Monday, October 21 **Tipper Gore and the PMRC**

- Rock music lyrics, profanity, and Capitol Hill Moms
- 👂 Listen to songs on PMRC "hit list"

For next meeting, read Ch. 6 "Bad Accents" in *BL*, and "Rap, Rock, and Censorship" by Deflem in *CP*.



Tipper Gore and PMRC



2 Live Crew LP cover 1986

Wednesday, October 23 **The Rise of Hip Hop**

- The creation of a new musical genre, and new language of criticism
- 👂 Listen to "Me So Horny" by 2 Live Crew

For next meeting, read "Congress Examines Hip Hop" and "The Language of Political Correctness" by Allan and Burridge in *CP*.

Monday, October 28 **Hip Hop Music and the Written Word (Graffiti)**

- The Language of Rap: Poetry, Lyric, Message
- 👁 Watch segment from *Style Wars* (1983)

For next meeting, read "The Blue Tube: Foul Language on Prime Time Network TV" and "PTC Study Shows Almost 70% Jump in Bad Language on Broadcast TV" in *CP*.



Wednesday, October 30 **Language, Cable, and TV Culture**

- Ratings v. Language
- 👁 View scenes from *The Sopranos* and *Dexter*

For next class, read "FCC Regulation of Broadcast Obscenity, Indecency, and Profanity" and "High Court Weighs Policy against Curse Words on TV" in *CP*.

Monday, November 4 **Cable Rewrites Bad Language**

- Why does “pay TV” change all the rules?
- 👁 View scenes from *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Wire*, and *Entourage*.

For next meeting, read Beck’s “Hollywood Censored: The Production Code Administration and the Hollywood Film Industry, 1930-1940” in *CP*.



Wednesday, November 6 **Censorship and Cinema**

- Can language in film be controlled?
- 👁 View edited scenes from censored movies.
- 👉 **Reflection Essay is due on Monday!**



Monday, November 11 **Early Cinematic Occurrences**

- “Frankly My Dear...”
- 👁 View scene from *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
- **Hand in Reflection Essay today!**
- For next meeting, read “Useful Notes: The Fifties” in *CP*.

Wednesday, November 13 **The 1950s and How Language is Managed**

- The New Age of Television and Language

For next meeting, read “One Eternal Round - Movie Ratings and Content Judging Profanity in Film” by Kevin B. and “Motion Picture Association of America Rating System” in *CP*.

Monday, November 18 **Film Gets “Rated”**

- Ratings: Utility v. Censorship
- 👁 View scenes from *Clockwork Orange*

For next meeting, read Legman’s “A Word for It” and Stewart’s “Male and Female Differences in Swearing and Taboo Language” in *CP*.



MPAA Rating System

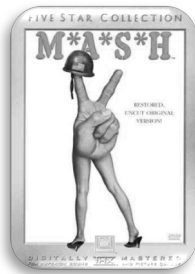


Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)

Wednesday, November 20 **Women and Language in Film**

- Women playing women – or men?
- 👁 View scenes from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *The Color Purple* (1985)

For next meeting, read Weiner’s “A Concise History of ‘Fuck’” in *CP*.



M*A*S*H (1970)

Monday, November 25 **The F-Bomb Explodes on Film**

- The F-bomb is dropped!

👁 View scenes from *M*A*S*H* (1970) and *Summer of Sam* (1999)

For next meeting, read “Swearing in the Cinema” by Cressman, et al. in *CP* and watch *Reservoir Dogs*.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Monday, December 2

Postmodern Cinema and a Leap in Language Use

- Why the shift in language use?

👁 View scenes from *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

For next meeting, read Ch. 9 “Son of a Bitch” in *ED* and “Dialogue Graffiti” in *CP*.



Pulp Fiction (1995)

Wednesday, December 4

Post-Porn: Women, Language, and the B-Word

- The rise of the b-word and its appropriation / dilution
- 👁 View scene from *Aliens* (1986)
- 🎧 Listen to songs by Madonna, Britney Spears, Tech N9ne, Trisha Paytas

For next meeting, read Ch. 11 “Bootleggers and Asterisks” in *ED*, and wikiHow “How to Stop Swearing” (in *CP*).

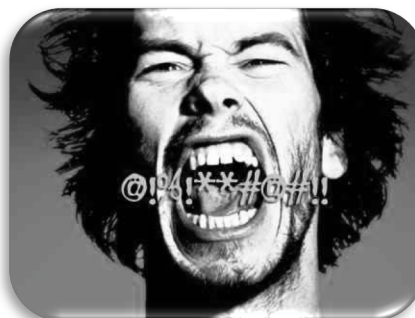
Monday, December 9

Can Bad Language Be Rewritten?

- 👁 View “How to Stop Swearing” videos and scenes from *Ted* (2012) and *Bad Words* (2014)
- Closing Comments
- **Final Projects due**



Spike Lee



Have a f*ing great holiday!**