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ENG 2601-002: Backgrounds of Western Literature

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2601-002

English 2601-002: BACKGROUNDS of WESTERN LITERATURE

Spring 2007 / TTh 9:30-10:45 / Coleman 3609

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Course Description

Here is a description for "Backgrounds of Western Literature," according to the university website:

A reading of major world masterpieces through the Renaissance, works that have influenced literature in English, by such writers as Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, Ovid, Marie de France, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes. Required of English majors, open to others.

This class will introduce you to a few European works that for one reason or another became important to something called "the Western tradition." During the semester, I hope to familiarize you with some of the ideas of this "tradition," as well as question some of its assumptions. We cannot hope to survey the vast histories and literatures of many cultures that preceded the Renaissance (or, as it is often referred to today, the "Early Modern Period"). We can try, however, to gather a sense as to the enormity of philosophical, literary, and cultural achievement preexisting the modern world. In doing so, we must be prepared to encounter worlds and cultures that are very foreign to our own, while at the same time recognize that, despite this vast gulf of time, we may encounter surprisingly familiar ways of seeing the world. The documents we will read in this class are both literally and figuratively translations. That is to say, these texts translate a very foreign world into a language accessible to us—not only into English, but also into a modern idiom that didn't exist when it was written.

You will be expected to participate in our class discussions on a daily basis, so you must come to class having read the course material. Much of the reading will be extensive and difficult: you should count on **at least** five hours of reading per week.

We will begin with Longinus' treatise "On the Sublime," and move to two of the three Theban plays of Sophocles, since they were written before everything else on our syllabus (fifth century B.C.E.). We will proceed more or less chronologically from there. A few of these texts will be in the Course Reader, bridging the large historical gap between Sophocles and Petrarch.

Texts

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. (1351 CE)

Cervantes, Miguel de. Don Quijote. (1605 CE)

Ovid. Metamorphoses. (8 CE)

Petrarch. Sonnets. (1340s)

Sophocles. The Theban Plays. *Oedipus Rex* (429-425 B.C.E), *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 B.C.E.),
Antigone (c.442 B.C.E.)

Hacker, Diane. A Pocket Style Manual.

Course Reader, available **after Week 2** at the Copy Shop in the Student Union.

****ALL ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THE COURSE****

Academic honesty: Students are responsible for knowing Eastern Illinois University regulations and policies regarding academic honesty. Plagiarism will likely result in your failing the course and in further action by the university. Here is the English Department's statement on plagiarism:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – “The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work” (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) – has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments, of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Paper Policies

Papers—and all other assignments—are due at the beginning of class. **Late papers will not be commented upon, and be marked a half grade lower for every class period late.** Essays turned in a week past the deadline will be given a “zero,” but must nevertheless be submitted in order to pass the course.

Your paper should be stapled and include page numbers. Format: 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

Absence Policy:

When you are absent—especially when you are frequently absent—two things happen. First, your participation grade drops substantially. Second, you naturally fall behind in understanding course material and neither the class nor the Professor can catch you up on everything missed in a day's class. YOU need to decide when it is absolutely necessary to miss class. Be wise. It bears repeating: you cannot make up missed work and late assignments will be penalized. Whether these are excused or unexcused absences does not matter for this course. Being late for class will be counted as an absence.

If you are late for or miss more than five (5) class meetings, you cannot pass this course. If you think you will be late for or miss more than five classes, you should strongly reconsider registering for this class. Once you have missed six classes, you are welcome to continue visiting the class, but you will receive a failure on your transcript.

Emailing Policy:

I want to get to know you and your work this semester. Thus I ask that you call me or stop by my office during office hours (or scheduled times) so that we can talk. **DO NOT EMAIL ME TO ASK FOR AN “UPDATE” ON MISSED ASSIGNMENTS, OR TO EXPLAIN AN ABSENCE.** Working groups will be assigned so that you can contact group members for notes and missed work.

Requirements

All assignments and exams must be turned in to pass the course.

Longinus Paper: due Friday, January 19, 1:00 pm (15%)

Exams: Midterm, March 8 and 20 (25%)

Final Exam, during finals week April 30 – May 4 (25%)

Cervantes Paper: ~ week 12 (10%)

Presentation of Critical Work: ~ weeks 15-16 (5%)--see below

Class Participation: see below (20%)

Longinus Paper (15%)

Our first reading and assignment in this course will be on Longinus' treatise “On the Sublime,” a theoretical essay written either in the first or the third century of the Common Era. Your task will be to find a text to apply Longinus' ideas on the sublime, and show how an analysis of the sublime helps a reader to produce a more thorough understanding of the text.

Midterm Exam, March 8 and 20 (25%)

The midterm exam will consist of two parts: an in-class section, which must be written on March 8 during our class period (no exceptions) and a take-home section, which must be handed in during our first class after the spring break (March 20). The take-home section will require you to analyze two passages from our early-semester readings.

Cervantes Assignment (10%)

Tba

Presentation of a Critical Work (5%)

By Week 12, you will have found a critical work (i.e., secondary sources) on any of the texts we will read in this course. This article should be at least fifteen pages in length. You will inform me of the work you have chosen in proper bibliographic citation (please refer to your reference handbook). In the classes leading up to the end of the semester, I will ask you to give a brief (five-minute), formal presentation to the class on the work.

Final Exam (25%)

The exams will verify your engagement with the class material through identification, short-answer, and essay questions. Like the midterm, the final exam will contain both take-home and in-class sections.

Class Participation (20%)

There will be a number of required, yet ungraded assignments throughout the quarter, constituting a substantial portion your class-participation grade. I will expect you to come to class having read the material, and with questions or comments on the readings. Some of the course material may be quite tough slogging: you should pinpoint specific moments of reading difficulty, and query me ("test" me, if you will) about them. If you attend class without reading the texts carefully and completely, you will almost certainly fail the two exams, and your class-participation grade will suffer immensely. If necessary, we will have unannounced quizzes at the beginning of class. You cannot "make up" missed quizzes; however, if you perform inadequately on a quiz, you will be asked to write a paper demonstrating that you have read the tested material.

Important disclaimers...

Conduct

Instructors are responsible for maintaining order and a positive learning environment in the classroom. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students may be required to discontinue course activities and to cancel the course registration (or be disenrolled). In addition, students may be subject to disciplinary action.

Grades

Your instructor sets the requirements and grading criteria for specific assignments. Here are general standards for grades:

- A = Achievement that is outstanding and unique
- B = Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet the requirements
- C = Assignment meets the basic requirements in every respect
- D = Assignment meets only some of the requirements and is worthy of credit
- F = Assignment does not substantially meet the basic requirements

For in-class or other brief writing assignments, you will be graded on a scale of $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, or $\sqrt{-}$. Work that is strongly engaged and on-topic will receive a $\sqrt{+}$. Satisfactory work that is on-topic will receive a $\sqrt{}$. Work that shows little engagement or is off-topic will get a $\sqrt{-}$.

Incompletes

Incompletes are not given except in the most extraordinary circumstances (e.g., medical emergency), which a student must be able to document, and only if just a small part of the course remains to be finished. The student and teacher must make a written agreement concerning the condition of the incomplete.

Cell Phones

All those caught not having turned off their cells and/or other electronic devices will be subject to relentless mockery, public shaming, and, if necessary, unimaginably medieval tortures.