

Fall 8-15-2010

# ENG 2601-003: Backgrounds of Western Literature

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2601-003

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Office hours: MWF 10:00–12:00,  
MW 3–3:30, and other times by  
appointment

581–6983 (during office hours)  
581–2428 (English Department)

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This course will take us back to a world we still live in. War is still the means by which conflicts between states and peoples are too often settled. The trauma of war still brings about the undoing of human character. We still remember the dead by memorializing their names. We still experience the complicated feelings of returning home and becoming reconnected to people and a place. We still live in a world of imperial ambitions. In our pursuit of desire we still make ourselves and others ridiculous.

We'll travel Backwards in Western Lit to read Homer, Virgil, and Ovid (epic and anti-epic poetry); Sophocles and Aristophanes (tragedy and comedy); and Sappho (lyric poetry). The point of reading these writers is not grimly practical; the point of reading, say, Homer or Ovid is not to be able recognize references and borrowings in later works of literature. The point, rather, is to begin to understand these writers in all their imaginative and emotional power and to think about why they have had such an enduring hold on the western literary imagination.

Our reading will allow us to talk about many topics: myth, storytelling, epic poetry, tragedy and comedy, love poetry, literary and cultural values, gender, patriarchy, the sorrows of war, suicide, empire, orality and writing, authorship, translation, parody, literary influence.

#### TEXTS

Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Fitzgerald

## ENGLISH 2601 BACKGROUNDS of WESTERN LITERATURE PROFESSOR M. LEDDY FALL 2010



Sarah Lawall, ed., *Norton Anthology of Western Literature*, Volume One  
Sappho, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Lombardo  
Sophocles, *Four Tragedies* (trans. Meineck and Woodruff)  
George Steiner, ed., *Homer in English*

Also: Michael Harvey's *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*, a great book for student-writers.

You should have access to a hardcover collegiate (college-level) dictionary when reading.

The works we're reading contain material that some readers may find offensive or disturbing (language, sex, violence). In such cases, please consider taking another course.

#### REQUIREMENTS

The course will require dedicated daily work (reading, note-taking, talking), several pieces of writing, and midterm and final examinations.

#### ATTENDANCE

Be here, on time, every time. You're responsible for all assignments, whether or not you're here when they're announced. Frequent absences will affect your grade, not through a system of points and deductions but simply because not being here will make it difficult to do the work of thinking and learning that a college course is meant to involve.

If you must miss a class, you should get in touch with me beforehand to find out what you will miss.

Photocopied pages to go with our reading will be available from an envelope on my office door.

#### LATE WORK, MAKE-UP WORK

Missed writing cannot be made up. Late writing is acceptable only if you have my approval in advance.

#### DISABILITIES

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581–6583) as soon as possible.

#### OFFICE HOURS

Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can do. Please, come in to ask questions and talk about your work in the class. If office hours don't work for you, make an appointment.

If you feel uneasy about talking to professors, read "How to talk to a professor" for potentially helpful advice: <http://bit.ly/6u0IcD>.

#### E-MAIL

Before you e-mail me, please read and follow the guidelines in "How to e-mail a professor": <http://bit.ly/x379y>. These guidelines are read all over the world and will serve you well in e-mailing any professor (assuming that your professor answers e-mail).

One guideline that you don't need to follow: you need not add your class number and meeting time to your signature. I'll know who you are. But do include *English 2601* in your subject line. That makes it easier for me to sort mail and respond to it in a timely way.

#### DECORUM

The atmosphere in our class should be serious—not somber or pretentious,

but collegiate and genuinely intellectual. No eating, sleeping, talking, texting, or doing work for other classes. No headphones, hoods, iPods, or phones. Electronic devices should be turned off and out of sight. Please show proper respect for our small community of learning. Any student who establishes a pattern of troublesome behavior will be asked to leave on a class-by-class basis.

## DISCUSSION

Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired (Mark Van Doren, Columbia University):

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before.

I like to ask questions that make people think. I also like it when people ask me such questions. Think of a question not as something whose answer you're already supposed to know but as an invitation to think. I know that this suggestion might go against the grain of much of your experience in school.

You should be asking relevant questions too, of me and perhaps of one another. Asking questions is what's involved in critical inquiry.

## GRADING

Your grade will be based on your written work (60%), midterm (20%), and final examination (20%).

Writing assignments receive letter grades. Missing writing receives a zero.

To calculate semester grades, I use numerical equivalents for letter grades:

A	95	A-	92	B+	87	B	85
B-	82	C+	77	C	75	C-	72
D+	67	D	65	D-	62	F	55

Sometimes when I grade writing I'll give a grade that falls between two grades—e.g., B+/A- (89.5).

For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

## EWP

Please make sure that you understand the requirements for the Electronic Writing Portfolio and that you fulfill them in a timely way. For more information: <http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/>.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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 the representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

And my statement concerning academic integrity:

Any breach of academic integrity—from lifting words or ideas without attribution to submitting a wholly unoriginal essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty. The Student Standards office recommends an F for the course. You will also be required to take a course in ethics administered by Student Standards, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other professors that one of their students has violated academic integrity.

You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. But because the work of the course is to be an expression of your ideas in your words, aside from words and ideas from properly acknowledged sources, questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise. Do not "borrow" work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course).

## PROVISIONAL OUTLINE (WEEKS)

- 1: Reading in translation, backgrounds
- 2-4: Homer, *Iliad*
- 5-7: Homer, *Odyssey*
- 8-9: Virgil, *Aeneid*
- 10-11: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
- 12-13: Sophocles, *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*
- 13: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
- 14: Sappho, selected poems
- 15: Last things

Provisional due dates for writing:  
 September 17 (in-class writing)  
 October 4  
 October 22 (in-class writing)  
 November 19  
 December 8

Other modest pieces of writing may be assigned as in-class writing or on a due-next-class basis.

Midterm examination: October 13  
 Final examination: December 15, 2:45