ENG 2601-003: Backgrounds of Western Literature

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Texts


Course Focus

This course is designed to provide an introduction to literary works considered central to the development of western literature. Writers throughout the centuries have responded to and incorporated aspects of works by their predecessors and their contemporaries into their own "new" creations. In this course we will especially explore various lines of artistic and topical influence that stretch from classical origins through literary works of the Renaissance. We will observe how ideas are adopted and adapted to suit the social, political, and personal situations of the writers. Furthermore, we will discuss our own late twentieth-century impressions of these works, addressing such questions as the following: What seems familiar or contemporary to us about these writers regarding their social milieu, their historical moments, and their texts? Why have these texts been so influential for so long? Why do they still fascinate? How should we, reading several of these texts in translation, think about the transitions they have gone through regarding the practices of translating and editing? Above all, by the end of the course you should have a greater understanding of the literary periods and genres of the western literary canon, as well as a sense of the historical shaping of some of your own ideas and values.

Policies

--The English Department statement on plagiarism stipulates that 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 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 assignment of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of NC for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.
--Hand papers in on time. If you're having problems, let me know. Papers a week or more late will not be accepted at all. Also plan to show up for exams. Again, if you have problems, let me know. You will have no more than one week to make up an exam, and the make-up exam will be different from the one given during class.
--If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
--Be prepared for class. You'll get a lot more out of class discussions if you are participating in them, and I'll notice if you do not seem prepared to participate.
Requirements

--Two exams .............. 30% (15% each of final grade)
--One 8-10 page paper .... 15%
--One presentation .......... 10%
--Response writings ......... 15%
--Final exam ............... 30%

The two exams and the final will cover the three units of study: the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, respectively; however, there will be interplay between these periods in our discussions and in the test questions, and the final exam will be comprehensive.

The paper topic will be chosen from subjects that arise in class, regarding the assigned texts. I will give you a list of possible topics and/or areas of study to consider. You should use at least three outside sources to support your arguments, and you will use MLA Parenthetical Style, with a Works Cited page, for documentation.

The presentation will be a short (about 5 minutes) introduction to some aspect of background material for each of the texts covered. For example, I may ask for volunteers to do reports on some of the Greek and Roman myths mentioned in our texts. I will assign topics as we go along. Before the end of the semester, everyone will have a chance to do one.

The response writings will be concerned with specific reading assignments and are meant to generate class discussion. I will give you a series of questions to answer or a short topic to address.

Tentative Schedule

Note: Readings may be shifted around during the semester to accommodate the class discussion.

The Ancient World
  Note: Always read your text's introduction to each author.
Wed., Aug. 26: Antigone
Fri., Aug. 28: Antigone

Wed., Sept. 2: Lysistrata
Fri., Sept. 4: Lysistrata

Mon., Sept. 7: no class
Fri., Sept. 11: Medea.

Wed., Sept. 16: Medea, begin Plato (handout or reserve?).
Fri., Sept. 18: Plato

Mon., Sept. 21: Plato
Wed., Sept. 23: Catch-up and Review
Fri., Sept. 25: Exam I. Begin reading *Inferno*, 1284

**The Middle Ages**
Mon., Sept. 28: Discuss papers/topics. *Inferno*
Wed., Sept. 30: *Inferno*

Mon., Oct. 5: *Decameron*
Wed., Oct. 7: *Decameron*
Fri., Oct. 9: *Decameron*. Begin reading *Sir Gawain*.

Mon., Oct. 12: *Sir Gawain*
Wed., Oct. 14: *Sir Gawain*
Fri., Oct. 16: *Sir Gawain*

Mon., Oct. 19: Catch-up and Review.
Fri., Oct. 23: Fall Break.

Fri., Oct. 30: Petrarch and sonnet survey. Begin *Courtier*, 1719

Wed., Nov. 4: *Courtier* and *Heptameron*.
Fri., Nov. 6: *Courtier* and *Heptameron*. Begin reading *Arcadia*.

Mon., Nov. 9: *Arcadia*
Fri., Nov. 13: *Arcadia* and *Urania*.

Mon., Nov. 16: *Arcadia* and *Urania*. Begin reading *Much Ado*.
Wed., Nov. 18: *Much Ado*
Fri., Nov. 20: *Much Ado*

Mon., Nov. 23-Fri., Nov. 27--Thanksgiving Recess

Mon., Nov. 30: Papers are due. *Much Ado*
Wed., Dec. 2: *Much Ado*
Fri., Dec. 4: *Much Ado*.

Mon., Dec. 7: Catch-up day/finish reports.
Wed., Dec. 9: Catch-up day/finish reports.
Fri., Dec. 11: Review for Final Exam.


Note: If time permits, we may add a few other selections from our anthology to the reading.