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ENG 2601-003: Backgrounds in Western Literature

J Campbell
Eastern Illinois University

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Course Description
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 cultural and political times of the writers. Furthermore, we will discuss our own early twenty-first-century impressions of these works, addressing such questions as the following: What seems familiar or contemporary to us about these writers regarding their social milieux, 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 assignments in on time. If you're having problems, let me know. Papers more than two class days late without a university-approved excuse will not be accepted. If you miss an exam, and you have a university-approved excuse, you may make up that exam. You will have no more than one week to do so, 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

--Three exams ............................. 45\% (15\% each of final grade)
--One 7-10-page research paper ........ 20\%
--Preliminary research report with
  annotated bibliography ........ 15\%
--Final presentation ...................... 10\%
--Conferences .............................. 5\%
--Response Reports ...................... 5\%

Total: 100\%

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

The paper topic will be chosen from the assigned texts and issues related to them. I will give you a list of possible topics and/or areas of study to consider early in the semester because you will be expected to select a topic and begin research early on. The paper will be 7-10 pages long. You will use at least 3-5 outside sources to support your arguments, and they should consist of scholarly books, journal articles, and Internet sources of well-known scholarly repute (You may not cite Wikipedia). You will use MLA Parenthetical Style, with a Works Cited page, for documentation. Just after midterm, you will have a research report with an annotated bibliography due to show the progress that you have made regarding your research project. At some point after that, you will also schedule a conference over a rough draft of the paper. Do not worry that we haven’t covered the topic that interests you in class by the time you start your research—this portion of our study is meant to be independent exploration of a topic that may be completely new to you. The goal is that your independent study will augment what is covered in class and will broaden the scope of the course as a whole for you. You, in turn, will share with the class what you have learned in your research near the end of the semester.

The preliminary research report and annotated bibliography will cover the research that you do for your research paper and presentation. The report will address the topic, why you chose the topic, and the avenues of research that you chose to explore. The annotated bibliography will consist of bibliographic citations of at least five sources with your notes on each work that describe the document, summarize why it may be useful to your project, and include possible quotations that you might use in the paper.

The final presentation will be a 7-10 minute oral report over your research project, due near the end of the semester. After conducting your research, discussing your findings with me, and writing your paper, you will be able to present to the class what you have learned. The goal is to provide, via your and your fellow students’ reports, both a “big picture” look at the subjects we have covered over the course of the semester, as well as introduce specialized information that you have focused on during your own independent reading.

The response reports will be concerned with specific reading assignments and are meant to generate class discussion. I will give you topics to research and you will briefly present your findings to class (a maximum of five minutes) and turn in the report.
Tentative Schedule
Note: Readings may be shifted around during the semester to accommodate class discussion.

The Ancient World
T. Aug. 26—Introduction to course.
Read Antigone. (Note: Always read your text’s introduction to each author or section.)
Th. Aug. 28—Antigone. (Reports on Dionysus and the Dionysia and Lenaea.)

T. Sept. 2—Antigone. (Report on Oedipus.)
Read Lysistrata.
Th. Sept. 4—Lysistrata. (Reports on Amazons and Lemnians.)

T. Sept. 9—Lysistrata. (Report on Sauromatae.)
Read Medea.
Th. Sept. 11—Medea. (Report on Jason and Argonauts.)

T. Sept. 16—Medea
Th. Sept. 18—Catch up on Greek dramas. Review for Exam I.

T. Sept. 23—Exam I.
Read Lanval and Laüstic.

The Middle Ages
Th. Sept. 25—Intro. to Medieval Period. Lanval and Laüstic. (Reports on Lais and Courtly Love.)

T. Sept. 30—Lanval and Laüstic.
Read poetry selections, pp. 1387-1395.
Th. Oct. 2—Poetry selections. (Reports on Notker Balbulus and Arabic poetry.)

T. Oct. 7—Poetry selections. (Reports on William IX, Halevi, and Hildegard of Bingen.)
Read Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.
Th. Oct. 9—Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. (Report on Oral Formulaic tradition.)

Read Inferno.
Th. Oct. 16—Inferno. (Report on dream vision.)

T. Oct. 21—Inferno. Review for Exam II.
Th. Oct. 23—Catch up day; study for Exam II.

T. Oct. 28—Exam II.
Read Petrarch and Sonnet handout.

The Renaissance
Th. Oct. 30—Intro. to Renaissance. Discuss papers/topics and the preliminary research report. Begin Petrarch. (Reports on Troubadour poetry and the blazon.)
T. Nov. 4—Petrarch and Sonnet Handout. (Reports on the Italian and English sonnets.)

Read *Heptameron*'s Prologue, Story 3, and Story 8.

Th. Nov. 6—*Heptameron*. (Reports on framework story and *Decameron*). **Preliminary reports with annotated bibliographies are due.**

Read *Much Ado About Nothing*.

T. Nov. 11—*Much Ado about Nothing*. (Reports on sprezzatura and dramatic foils.)

Th. Nov. 13—*Much Ado about Nothing*. (Report on Renaissance marriage customs.)

T. Nov. 18—*Much Ado*

Th. Nov. 20—*Much Ado*

T. Nov. 25—Thanksgiving.

Th. Nov. 27—Thanksgiving

T. Dec. 2—Final Presentations.

Th. Dec. 4—Final Presentations. **Research papers are due.**

T. Dec. 9—Final Presentations.

Th. Dec. 11—Review for Exam III (Final).

**Final Exam (Exam III):** Wed., Dec. 17, 2:45-4:45pm