ENG 2601-003: Backgrounds In Western Literature

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Eastern Illinois University

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Course Description

The catalogue description of this course reads, "A reading of major world masterpieces through the of Renaissance, works that have influenced literature in English, by such writers as Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, Ovid, Marie de France, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes." I intend to make the course far more interesting than this rather dry catalogue copy. To that end, I will be asking for a lot input from you—your beliefs, ideas, desires, goals, and interests in taking this class.

In terms of format, we like to see a lively class. I will do whatever I can to keep you awake and involved and interested. Don't be surprised to see a lot of small group interaction and a variety of activities. I do not want to hear myself talk for 150 minutes a week and I doubt you do either.

I make certain assumptions about students: among these are that you are self-motivated, that you come to class prepared, and that I can trust you enough not to give quizzes. If I am proved wrong in these assumptions, I will resort to reading quizzes! There will be times when the subject matter for discussions will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the texts, and we will not always all be reading the same material.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, I expect you to know... 
- How literature builds on earlier traditions
- How "quality" and "importance" of literature are defined
- The significance of verbal art produced in non-literature cultures and the impact of the rise of literacy on western tradition
- The social, political, and aesthetic contexts of literature
- How to synthesize and analyze information from scholarly sources
- How to communicate research findings in oral and written form
- How you learn
- How to think independently and reflectively

With this knowledge I expect you to be able to... 
- Use appropriate literary terms correctly when discussing texts
- Identify strategies for retaining information and reflect on your progress as a reader of literature
- Recognize and identify motifs, storylines, and images that are sustained over time, and evaluate how they change in various temporal and cultural contexts
- Recognize the hallmarks of a literary masterpiece
- Think critically about what you read
- Apply what you know about ancient and medieval traditions to later works of literature
- Analyze the significance of the social, political, performance, and aesthetic contexts of literature
- Enjoy!
Texts
Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces
Homer, Iliad (tr. Lombardo)
Ovid, Metamorphoses (tr. Mandelbaum)
The Arabian Nights (tr. Haddawy)
Cervantes, Don Quixote (tr. Ormsby)

There is a lot of reading in this course, some selections easier than others. Thus, discipline will be rewarded, procrastination will get you into trouble. I believe that you will enjoy most of the selections.

Grade Breakdown:

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning self-assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final</td>
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Course Grade:

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<td>801-900</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>701-800</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>601-700</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-600</td>
<td>F</td>
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Words of Advice on Grades
Adequate, Average work will earn you a 'C' in this course. If you merely go through the motions, but do so with a certain amount of skill, you are an average (i.e. 'C') student. Good work, i.e. extra effort leading to a good quality product will earn you a 'B.' Excellent work, i.e. going above and beyond the requirements for assignments, using both skill and creativity, should earn you an 'A.' I do not care what grade you need; I will do whatever we can to help you earn the grade you want, including returning much work for your revision and resubmission.

Students with Disabilities
If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 581-6583 (9th Street Hall).

Policy on Plagiarism
Any teacher who discovers plagiarism—"the appropriation 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 assignments of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

A Few Notes on the Syllabus
- Readings are listed on the day by which they must be completed
- Assignments due dates are recommendations; we will change them if/when necessary, but consider doing what you can early.

Questions? Feel free to drop by my office or make an appointment via e-mail.
SYLLABUS

1. Please note that the reading is listed on the day by which it must be completed.
2. While not assigned, the little introductions to the works in the Norton Anthology are quite informative, and you may want to read them.
3. In addition to discussing the individual works of literature, we will also discuss the following—your approach to reading and writing, relationships among the various arts, how you learn, and the relationship between literature and its contexts—at any time during the semester.
4. Many days have a theme listed that will guide discussion and might be a good idea for you to address in your journal; discussion on these days will not be limited to just the topics listed, however.
5. Depending on your abilities and interests, this schedule may be subject to change.

Tu Aug 23  Introduction
            Class overview
            Theme: what is a “masterpiece” and why should we care?

Th Aug 25  Gilgamesh and the Old Testament: Creation and flood
            Themes: How to read a sacred text; how sacred texts influence literary texts.
            Norton, pp. 16-18, 41-44, 51-58
            Close Reading Cooperative (iTunes): Imagery
            Journal due

Tu Aug 30  Iliad, Books 1-4, 6
            Themes: Honor; rage; what is the relationship between gods and human beings?
            Journal due

Th Sept 1  Iliad, Books 9, 11, 15-16
            Close Reading Cooperative (iTunes): Allegory and Symbolism
            Theme: How to read an oral poem; how does the Iliad mean?
            Journal due

Tu Sept 6  Iliad, Books 17-19, 21
            Close Reading Cooperative (iTunes): Simile
            Themes: Friendship and loyalty; audience and performance
            Journal due

Th Sept 8  Iliad, Books 22-24
            Themes: Sacrifice and celebration
            Journal due

Tu Sept 13 Odyssey, Books 1 and 8 (starting on page 300, line 486)-12
            Themes: the role of hospitality; leadership vs. heroism.
            Journal due

Th Sept 15 Odyssey, Books 19, 21-24
            Themes: family and loyalty; crime and punishment.
            Journal due

Tu Sept 20 Greek Drama
Group 1: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (*Norton*, pp. 521-566)

Close Reading Cooperative (iTunes): Irony or Irony and Paradox

**Journal due**

**Th Sept 22**  Greek Drama discussion

**Paper 1 online draft due**

**Tu Sept 27**  Greek Drama discussion

**Journal due**

**Th Sept 29**  Virgil, *Aeneid*

*Norton*, pp. 817-847

**Paper 1 due**

**Journal due**

**Tu Oct 4**  Virgil, *Aeneid*

*Norton*, pp. 847-894

**Journal due**

**Th Oct 6**  Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Close Reading Cooperative (iTunes or YouTube): Metaphor

**Journal due**

**Tu Oct 11**  Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

**Journal due**

**Th Oct 13**  Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

**Journal due**

**Tu Oct 18**  Sacred Texts: New Testament and the Qur’an

*Norton*, pp. 960-975, 1040-1057

Dr. Irwin out of town – online discussion

**Online Journal due**

**Th Oct 20**  Dr. Irwin out of town – Reading day

**Tu Oct 25**  Dante, *Inferno*

*Norton*, pp. 1293-1409

**Journal due**

**Th Oct 27**  Dante, *Purgatorio & Paradiso*

*Norton*, pp. 1409-1429

**Paper 2 online draft due**
<table>
<thead>
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<td>Tu Nov 1</td>
<td>1001 Nights</td>
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<td>Th Nov 3</td>
<td>1001 Nights</td>
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<td>1001 Nights</td>
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<td>Dr. Irwin out of town – Reading day</td>
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<td>Tu Nov 15</td>
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<td>Th Nov 17</td>
<td>Cervantes, <em>Don Quixote</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu Nov 22</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING BREAK</td>
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<td>Th Nov 26</td>
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<td>Tu Nov 29</td>
<td>Cervantes, <em>Don Quixote</em></td>
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