ENG 2602-001: World Literature since the Renaissance

Ruth Hoberman
Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2004

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_spring2004/81

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2004 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2004 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
Goals: Although this course is entitled "World Literature," it is a continuation of Backgrounds of Western Literature in its focus on the literary tradition of western Europe. We will read mainly "masterpieces" written by European writers in languages other than English. (My assumption is that other courses provide access to English-speaking and nonwestern writers.)

Why read the "Western canon"? The traditional assumption is that these works offer unique aesthetic pleasures. Valued by generation after generation, they have "stood the test of time." In reading them, we rediscover what's wonderful about them: we respond to characters and themes of great emotional depth and intensity and of universal appeal; we recognize the insights and abilities of the writers who created them.

Recently, though, this notion of the canon has been challenged by those who reject the claim of "universal appeal" and question the existence of purely "aesthetic" pleasures. A reader's gender, race, ethnicity, or social class may affect his/her willingness to identify with the world of a particular writer. "Aesthetic greatness" may not be anything definable at all; perhaps the social elite simply defines as "great" those works that reinforce its own values.

Regardless of who's right in this debate about the canon, I continue to love reading and teaching these works. Why?
1. Historically these works have had tremendous impact on the writers and thinkers who have shaped the world as a whole. It's illuminating simply to know what they said.
2. These works are intellectually and emotionally rewarding, as they force readers to think about their own values. They are complex enough to be read in a variety of ways and therefore intrigue a wide range of readers. This complexity also makes them fun to read as a class: we will never all agree on what they mean, and we will never stop making discoveries about them.
3. The process of reading these works forces us to think about a number of issues central to literary studies. Why are works valued? What is the relationship between a "masterpiece" and the culture in which it is produced? Into what periods has literary history traditionally been divided and how valid are they? How have postcolonial writers responded to the European tradition?

By the end of the semester you should have a greater familiarity with various literary genres, literary periods, and the western literary canon, as well as with a few works by more recent, post-colonial writers. You may have opinions of your own as to the questions posed above. Most importantly, I hope you will have been engaged by and come to love at least some of the various works we'll have read.
Policies: English Department 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 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. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

Conferences: Come see me anytime you have questions/problems. I'm available most of the day MWF, by appointment Tu/Th and by e-mail other times.

Attendance: Attendance is expected, as is participation in class discussion. If you must miss class because of illness or personal emergency, let me know so you will not lose credit for work done that day. Participation and in-class writing grades will be significantly affected by excessive absences, as will exam grades, since exams will cover material presented in lectures and discussions. If you want to get an 95 for this portion of your grade, plan on always attending and speaking frequently and relevantly. Silent but reliable attendance will get you an 85. More than 4 unexcused absences will make it impossible for you to get anything higher than a 75 for this portion of your grade.

Late policy: WebCT postings must appear at least ONE HOUR before the class when assigned reading will be talked about in order to receive credit. Since the point of the posting is to help you prepare for class discussion, it's especially important you be in class to follow up on postings. Papers handed in on time may be rewritten for a new grade, which will be averaged with the first. Rewrites are due within a week of my returning the paper. Any paper more than a week late will not be accepted at all.

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.

Grades: midterm and final (20/20%)
- 2 essays: one short (2-4 pp.), one long (6-8 pp) (10/20%)
- in-class assignments, presentation, participation (15%)
- Web CT (15%)
Grading scale: 91-100=A; 81-90=B; 71-80=C. 65-70=D. Because I grade on a 100-point scale, missing assignments (which receive a 0) affect the grade tremendously.
Note that 30% of the grade is based on class participation, in-class writing, and weekly responses, activities that require keeping up with the reading and attending class.

Assignments:
Group presentation: I will divide you into groups of 2-3 according to your interests. Each group or person is responsible for presenting 10-15 minutes of information on a particular author, on the first day we read him/her. Plan on providing a hand-out (get it to me an hour before class and I'll photocopy). Presentation should focus on:
- 1-3 (MAX) life-shaping events
- 2-3 works for which s/he is best known
Why is this person important?
DO NOT GIVE A CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF EVERYTHING THIS PERSON DID. Keep in mind you need make this clear enough and focused enough so that we'll all remember it afterwards. Consult with me about sources and focus.
WebCT: Each week you will be required to comment at least once on the assigned reading for any one of the three class periods (you choose which). Your response must be about the reading due that day and should be posted at least ONE hour before class. Each posting should:
1. Comment on at least one previous posting for that reading assignment.
2. Then focus on a single issue: make and support an observation about the reading (see list of questions attached to syllabus)
3. Include at least one brief direct quotation as part of your response.
Your posting should total about 200 words. The point is to help you formulate your thinking about the reading; please follow up on your posting in class discussion that day!
I encourage you to post additional responses as well—to each other's comments and to class discussion. Fulfilling the minimum requirements well will get you an 85; to receive a 95 for this portion of your grade, post additional responses. If the computer is down when you intend to post, bring a 1-page typed response to class instead.
Check the “notes” section for my comments and links.

Tentative Syllabus
I. The Enlightenment
for Wed Jan 14: Read Moliere, Tartuffe in Western Literature, 110-135 (Acts I-II)
Fri. Jan 16: Tartuffe [post to WebCT W or F]

Mon. Jan 19: no class
Wed Jan 21: Read Voltaire, Candide (separate book)
Fri Jan 23: Voltaire [WebCT W or F]

Mon Jan 26: Voltaire

II. Romanticism
Wed Jan 29: Goethe, Sorrows
Fri Jan 31: Goethe [Web CT M, W, or F]

Mon Feb 2: Goethe
Wed Feb 4: Sand, Indiana
Fri Feb 6: Sand [WebCT M, W, or F]

Mon Feb 9: Sand
Wed Feb 11: Sand [WebCT M or W]
Fri Feb 13: no class

Mon Feb 16: Sand

III. Realism
Wed Feb 18: Flaubert. Essay #1 due [conversation, comparison]
Fri Feb 20: Flaubert [Web CT M, W, or F]

Mon Feb 23: Flaubert
Wed Feb 25: Flaubert
Fri Feb 27: Flaubert [Web CT M/W/F]
Mon March 2: Ibsen, “Ghosts”  
Wed March 4: Ibsen  
Fri March 6: Tolstoy, “Kreutzer” [Web CT M/W/F]

Mon March 9: Tolstoy  
Wed March 11: Exam

IV. Modernism  
Fri March 14: Kafka, “Metamorphosis” (anthology)

March 16-20: Spring Break

Mon March 22: Camus  
Wed March 24: Camus  
Fri March 26: Camus [WebCT M, W, or F]

Mon March 29: Camus.

V. Postmodernism/Postcolonialism  
Wed March 31: Borges (in anthology)  
Fri. Ap2: Borges [WebCT M, W, or F]

Mon. Ap5: Cheik Hamidou Kane  
Wed. Ap 7: Kane  
Fri. Ap 9: Kane [Web CT M, W, or F]

Mon. Ap 12: Ba  
Fri Ap 16: Saadawi [Web CT M, W or F]

Mon Ap 19: Saadawi  
Wed Ap 21: Saadawi  

Mon Ap 26: Duras  
Wed Ap 28: Duras  
Fri Ap30: Review.

There will be a noncumulative exam during finals week.
In writing your response to a text, consider answering any ONE of the following questions. ALWAYS begin by responding to earlier poster(s) and ALWAYS include a direct quotation (with parenthetical page number) as part of your response.

**Structure/plot**
1. what's the significance of the title?
2. what themes or images get set up by the opening paragraph?
3. is there an epigraph or are there allusions to other writers? What is its/their significance?
4. is there a recurring word or image? What is its significance?
5. Is there a passage of particular density or difficulty? What do you make of it?
6. What event happens at the exact center of the work? Is there a turning point? What changes?
7. Look closely at the work’s final lines: what loose ends do they tie together? What values do they seem to reinforce?

**Characterization**
1. What kind of person does a major character seem to be? How like or unlike other characters?
2. Contrast or compare two characters to each other or discuss a conflict between 2 characters.
3. Does a character seem to serve as authorial mouthpiece?
4. Does a character change or gain insight during the course of the story? How?
5. Is there a character who is presented as particularly despicable? In what sense?
6. Look at a character who seems insignificant: why is he/she there?
7. Is there a character who suffers from an internal conflict? explain

**Setting**
1. where does the story take place? What role does this location play in the plot?
2. what mood is created by descriptions of the setting?
3. what contrasts do shifts in setting set up (inside/outside? City/country? Night/day? Rainy/sunny?)
4. to what extent is the story about the time period in which it was set? Any relevant historical events you need to know about to make sense of it?
5. is there a conflict between a character and his/her environment?

**Narrative method**
1. who tells the story? How does this affect our understanding of it? Is the narrator omniscient? Aligned with a particular character’s viewpoint? Reliable or unreliable?
2. Is it told in chronological order? If not, what leaps take place, and how do they affect our understanding?
3. What personality traits does the narrator have?
4. Imagine a different character telling the story: how might the story change?

**Theme, symbols, style**
1. what, finally, do you think the story is saying? What insights do we gain, having finished reading it?
2. is there an object or phrase or word that takes on symbolic meaning during the course of the story?
3. What do you notice about sentence length, word choice, descriptiveness, concrete vs. abstract language, the use of fragments, lists, run-ons . . . ? Why might the writer want to write about this particular topic in this way?