ENG 3010C-001: Literary Masterworks

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Course Focus

This course is designed to provide an in-depth look at a selection of literary "masterpieces" from western literature. In general, we will discuss the question, what makes a text a "literary masterpiece"? We will also discuss the traditional canon of literary masterworks and talk about movements toward changing it, as literary scholars debate its merits. In specific, since there are far more literary masterworks than we have time to read in a semester, we will narrow our focus to concentrate on the concept of dialogue, especially as it relates to topics of love and relations between the sexes.

We will explore several facets of dialogue: we will be interested in dialogues between characters in the texts, between ideas and ideologies in the texts, between the author and his or her historical, social, and political moment, and in intertextual dialogues. Additionally, in our examination of each text, we'll discuss how it is put together, how both contemporary and late 20th-century audiences might react to it, and why its themes are so central to western literature--in other words, why have these works endured?

Two of the works I've chosen from earlier eras, Much Ado About Nothing, and Emma, have so endured that during the late 20th century they have been adapted for the cinema. Making a Shakespearean play into a film doesn't seem to be such a great feat of adaptation, perhaps, but making a Romantic novel of manners into one is another story. I would argue, however, that for film-makers, much of the attractiveness of these two works lies in the fact that they have great dialogue, which plays a key role in the development of relations between the sexes in the stories. In performance, this particular quality especially shines. In each case, we will read the literary work first, analyzing it in the above-mentioned manner, then we will discuss adaptation of literature to film, and, finally, we will be film and literary critics, as we view current productions of each work.

By the end of the semester, you should be more familiar with a variety of periods of western literature and some of the "masterworks" of those periods. You should also have improved your skills of close reading, doing literary research, and thinking and writing critically. Above all, I hope that you find yourself well-equipped and eager to strike out on your own as you continue to explore the literary masterworks that especially appeal to you.

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 will cover the units of the semester; however, there will be interplay between these units of study 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 minute) 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 to 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 class discussion.

Unit I--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.

Mon., Sept. 14: Medea
Fri., Sept. 18: Plato

Mon., Sept. 21: Plato
Wed., Sept. 23: Catch-up and Review.

Unit II The Middle Ages
Mon., Sept. 28: Discuss papers/topics. Inferno
Wed., Sept. 30: Inferno
Fri., Oct. 2: Inferno; Begin Ausassin and Nicolette, 1230

Mon., Oct. 5: Ausassin and Nicolette
Wed., Oct. 7: Ausassin and Nicolette

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.

Unit III Renaissance

Mon., Nov. 2: Much Ado.
Wed., Nov. 4: Much Ado. Notes on Film.
Fri., Nov. 6: Much Ado

Unit IV From Text to Film
Mon., Nov. 9: Much Ado
Fri., Nov. 13: Emma.

Mon., Nov. 16: Emma.
Wed., Nov. 18: Emma.
Fri., Nov. 20: Emma.

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

Mon., Nov. 30: Papers are due. Emma.
Fri., Dec. 4: Emma.

Mon., Dec. 7: Catch-up day/finish reports.
Wed., Dec. 9: Catch-up day/finish reports.