

WORLD LITERATURE I—ENG 203
M. SHEA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A memorable reading of selected, memorable works of Western literature tracing their origins in ancient Mesopotamia, their career in Bronze- and Golden-age Greece, their conservation by classical Rome, their Christianizing by medieval Europe, and their rediscovery and metamorphosis by Renaissance Europe.

COURSE GOALS

By the end of the semester successful students will have enhanced their appreciation of selected works of post-Renaissance Western literature by addressing them in shared spoken and written discourse in the following ways:

*characterizing ways of speaking as they offer themselves to be heard in particular works: *“This particular way of telling this story makes this narrator sound like a narrator whose attitude toward the story he is telling might be one of . . .”*

*characterizing particular ways of speaking as narrative, dramatic, lyrical, or dialectical-philosophical: *“The speaker brought to life by these kinds of remarks makes him sound as if what prompts him to speak is. . . .”*

*showing what is distinctive about each speaker’s way of speaking—the special character and movement of a particular character or narrator’s self-configuring figures of speech, phrasings, and sentence structures; *“Such and such way of speaking is different from that of So-and-so insofar as Such-and-such’s wordings and phrasings reveal the kind of speaker who seems to be busy. . . .”*

*describing various speakers’ ways of speaking insofar as they make their speakers and the worlds they word real and believable: *“The kind of phrasing and sentence structure characteristic of Such-and-such and the kinds of remarks he makes make him sound “more and more” (or “less and less”) “real” and believable as he continues to speak, especially as compared to other speakers. . . .”*

*plotting how it is that the dynamics of a work’s various ways of speaking as they reveal themselves as each speaker speaks might be considered the real action or plot of a literary work—the action or plot that gives real, metaphoric and fictional meaning to what otherwise might be merely “fictional facts”: *“The way Such-and-such speaks to So-and-so reminds the reader of the way he has treated her in other ways. . . .”*

*describing the fictional world made real by the configuring power of its competing and complementary ways of speaking taken as the action or plot of the work as a whole: *“All in all, given what the work’s ways of speaking taken as a whole reveal and act out for the reader, this is a world where . . .”*

*re-configuring terms taken from the political, social, and literary history of the West--as well as from the history of ideas and language--as figures of speech that take on a real life of their own as they reveal their dynamics in the competing and complementary ways of speaking that make up the work as a whole: *“The headnote to this work states that this piece was written when Western culture began to treat words as if they were just labels for things—what is called nominalism. And it seems to be the case that when a reader analyzes the kinds of points Such-and-such makes and the way he addresses them to other speakers that he has little respect for the meanings of words. . . .”*

*re-configuring terms taken from political, social, and literary history of the West as well as from the history of ideas and language as figures of speech that take on a real life of their own as they reveal how one work seems to comment on another: *“The speakers brought to life by the wording of Shakespeare’s sonnets show themselves to be masters of the kind of poetry that Petrarch wrote, but they also speak as if the speakers of Petrarch’s poems have become clichés—mere cultural facts without much meaning. . . .”*

UNITS OF STUDY

Gilgamesh

Genesis—selections

Homer’s *Iliad*—selections

Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*

Virgil’s *Aeneid*—selections

“The Sermon on the Mount”

Catullus’ *Poems*--selections

Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” from *The Republic* and “The Apology”

Dante’s *Inferno*—selections

Petrarch’s *Rhymes*--selections

Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*--selections

Du Bellay’s lyrics--selections

Ronsard’s lyrics--selections

EVALUATION

To achieve a level of reading practiced enough to earn *at least* a C for

*stating in one sentence to what fictional person, place, or thing a particular word or phrase refers in a particular work and 2) stating in two or three sentences how the wording of a particular passage or *way of speaking*—not *what* it seems to say but how it is said—reveals a particular speaker and reflects the part he plays in the work as a whole. (13-point quiz);

*doing the same on a midterm examination—double the size of the quiz just described (30 points available);

*responding discerningly in writing to the wording of assignments addressed to you nine times throughout the semester, probably starting the second or third week of the semester and to be submitted (approximately) once a week. Usually these will be written outside of class, and their response to the wording of the original assignment should be thoughtful enough to require the “space” of about three typewritten pages, double-spaced and bounded by *modest* margins, and printed in font-size no larger than 12 points. Please, no tracts of space between paragraphs, and avoid submitting second or third pages presenting only a few sentences—since such few sentences do not usually indicate a second or third page of sustained and concluded discourse. This is especially true if your speaker’s “way of speaking” up to these closing words has been improvised or copied in incoherent bits and pieces from the internet. (27 points—three points each);

*responding discerningly to three comprehensive questions as a final examination. Note that the examination *questions* are *quests*: they do not ask you to produce a “document” of improvised opinion or feeling or recollected, incoherent bits of information. Rather, in the spirit of the writing assignments offered throughout the semester—only more retrospectively—each asks you to consider or venture a responsive and responsible reading of the propositions it makes and the question it ultimately poses. If in humanities study genuine thinking is a matter of cultivated, appreciative remembrance rather than computation and calculation, then these last three quests are one last opportunity to make your semester’s reading even more memorable and authoritative as you remember these works and their ways of speaking in the company of the colleagues with whom you have studied for one final time. And, indeed, that is the experience promised in the opening course description. (30 points available)

ATTENDANCE-ATTENTION-COLLEGIALITY-RESPECT

The following is the English Department attendance policy:

“Students—including athletes—are expected to attend all classes. A student who misses six class hours (four meetings)—including athletes—may be withdrawn from the course or, after the withdrawal deadline, be failed.” Please, no notes from doctors or deans or coaches or athletic directors. Instead, let us talk in my office. **And, of course, leaving phone or email messages is not the same as being present as our shared words trace the meaning-making of a work’s wordings.**

Alternatively, at the instructor’s discretion, a student who has missed four or more meetings and who is not thereby in danger of earning a D or F **may lose**

ten percent of his or her final grade. Similarly, **papers handed in late** may lose ten percent of their grade.

More importantly, students who do *not* miss any classes will be awarded 4 points to be added to their final average; 3 if they miss one; 2 if they miss two; 1 if they miss the maximum number, three.

Simply don't miss class more than three times--especially not during the first two-thirds of the semester.

LATENESSES, ABSENCES DURING CLASS, AND EARLY DEPARTURES

If you enter the classroom after I have taken roll, I will count you as late. If you leave class early, I will count your leaving as an early departure. Four of these partial absences will add up to an absence. Please keep track of these so that you will not be surprised should several absences and early departures add up and be added to a number of absences, thus generating a withdrawal or a grade lower than the one you expected. Partial absences include lengthy absences in the middle of classes. Also, please avoid arriving on time—or worse, late—putting your books down, and then going to the restroom or to fetch refreshment.

Please turn off cell phones and remove them from sight so that you are not constantly staring at your lap, checking for messages like: “Did you get my message?”

COLLEGIALITY

All of you are unique human beings with unique histories. Therefore, we can learn much from one another as we inquire about the works and topics that we will come to understand as we address and respond to them together in written and spoken word. Sometimes you will be working together in pairs and small groups. I hope that when you gather together, you will introduce yourselves to one another and from then on to call one another by name whenever you address one another. I hope in other words that you will be thoughtful and respectful in all your dealings with one another, taking on your responsibilities as a member of a group—a college.

We should not have to earn one another's respect; we should simply grant one another the respect each of us deserves as that wonderful thing called a human being.

Please come to my office during office hours—or a mutually chosen, more convenient time—if you'd like to discuss the language of a writing topic, one of your essays, or any worries or challenges you are facing. Just keep in mind that every course should be more advanced and more challenging than the previous one, especially if you are preparing to transfer. I am ready to listen and help to the extent that I can as long as you do not expect me to act as if you are fulfilling the course requirements as specified when you are not doing so. Right after

class is not a good time to discuss such important and serious matters since both of us will be tired and—probably—on our way to another class or some other place.

I hope that you will always excuse yourself from class rather than in anyway interfere with your fellow students' learning and my trying to help them learn and learn from them, especially it takes the form of passive-aggressive behavior.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The following is the faculty policy on academic integrity:

Students are required to perform all the work specified by the faculty and are responsible for the content and integrity of all academic work submitted, such as papers, reports and examinations. A student will be guilty of violating the Rule Academic Integrity if he or she:

- * Knowingly represents the work of others as his or her own**
- * Uses or obtains unauthorized assistance in any academic work;*
- * Gives fraudulent assistance to another student.*

** this includes, but is not limited to, inadequate documentation in term papers.*

I am sorry to mention this, but please be warned: I am sometimes forced—especially out of obligation to my faculty colleagues--to make use of search engines and software to discover whether a “student” has stolen or bought all or parts of piece submitted and lied by presenting it as his or her own.

Such pieces usually also fail to address the question posed, presuming that erudite information stolen from the internet and presented as one's own is the same as thoughtful response to the wording of the assigned topic.

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