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ENG 2601-001: Backgrounds of Western Literature

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This course will take us back to a world we still live in. War is still the means by which conflicts between states and peoples are too often settled. The trauma of war still brings about the undoing of human character. We still remember the dead by memorializing their names. We still experience the complicated feelings of returning home and becoming reconnected to people and a place. We still live in a world of imperial ambitions. In our pursuit of desire we still make ourselves and others ridiculous.

We'll travel Backwards in Western Lit to read Homer, Virgil, and Ovid (epic and anti-epic poetry); Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes (tragedy and comedy); and Sappho and Catullus (lyric poetry). The point of reading these writers is not grimly practical; the point of reading, say, Homer or Ovid is not to be able recognize references and borrowings in later works of literature. The point, rather, is to begin to understand these writers in all their imaginative and emotional power and to think about why they have had such an enduring hold on the western literary imagination.

Our reading will allow us to talk about many topics: myth, storytelling, epic poetry, tragedy and comedy, love poetry, literary and cultural values, gender, patriarchy, the sorrows of war, suicide, empire, orality and writing, authorship, translation, parody, literary influence.

TEXTS

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, trans. Meineck
Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Powell; *The Odyssey*, trans. Fitzgerald
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Humphries
Sappho, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Lombardo
Sophocles, *Four Tragedies, Theban Plays*, trans. Meineck and Woodruff
Steiner, *Homer in English*

ENGLISH 2601 BACKGROUNDS of WESTERN LITERATURE PROFESSOR M. LEDDY FALL 2014



Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Lombardo

Also: Michael Harvey's *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*, a great book for student-writers.

You should have access to a hardcover collegiate (college-level) dictionary when reading.

The works we're reading contain material that some readers may find offensive or disturbing (language, sex, violence).

REQUIREMENTS

The course will require dedicated daily work (reading, note-taking, talking), several pieces of writing, and a final examination.

ATTENDANCE

Be here, on time, every time. You're responsible for all assignments, whether or not you're here when they're announced. Frequent absences will affect your grade, not through a system of points and deductions but simply because not being here will make it difficult to do the work of thinking and learning that a college course is meant to involve.

If you must miss a class, you should get in touch with me beforehand to find out what you will miss. Photocopied pages to go with our reading will be available from an envelope on my office door.

LATE WORK, MAKE-UP WORK

Missed writing cannot be made up. Late writing is acceptable only if you have my approval in advance.

OFFICE HOURS

Talking to professors is one of the smartest things a college student can

do. Please, come in to ask questions and talk about your work in the class. If office hours don't work for you, make an appointment.

If you feel uneasy about talking to professors, read "How to talk to a professor" for potentially helpful advice: goo.gl/VYSkv.

E-MAIL

Before you e-mail me, please read and follow the guidelines in "How to e-mail a professor": goo.gl/4n6EH. These guidelines are read all over the world and will serve you well in e-mailing any professor (assuming that your professor answers e-mail).

One guideline that you don't need to follow: you need not add your class number and meeting time to your signature. I'll know who you are.

DECORUM

The atmosphere in our class should be serious—not somber or pretentious, but collegiate and genuinely intellectual. No eating, sleeping, talking, texting, or doing work for other classes. No headphones, iPods, or phones. Electronic devices should be turned off and out of sight. Please show proper respect for our small community of learning.

DISCUSSION

Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired (Mark Van Doren, Columbia University):

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before.

I like to ask questions that invite thinking. I also like it when people ask me such questions. Try to think of an in-class question not as having an answer you're already supposed to know but as an invitation to think. I know that this suggestion might go against the grain of much of your

experience in classrooms. You should be asking relevant questions too, of me and perhaps of one another. That helps to make the class less like a quiz show and more like a conversation.

One more observation on discussion, from the cultural critic Randolph Bourne:

A good discussion increases the dimensions of every one who takes part. Being rather self-consciously a mind in a group of minds means becoming more of a person.

As you can see, I'm optimistic about discussion. For more on questions and discussion, read "How to answer a question": goo.gl/DIzaG.

GRADING

Your grade will be based on your written work (60%), your participation in the work of the class (20%), and a final examination (20%).

Essays receive letter grades. Other assignments receive numerical grades, from zero to 100. Missing work receives a zero. Participation receives an numerical grade, an overall evaluation of the extent to which you're prepared and contributing: 100 (always), 85 (frequently), 75 (usually), 50 (sometimes), 0 (rarely or never).

To calculate semester grades, I use numerical equivalents for letter grades:

A	95	A-	92	B+	87	B	85
B-	82	C+	77	C	75	C-	72
D+	67	D	65	D-	62	F	55

Sometimes when I grade writing I'll give a grade that falls between two grades—e.g., B+/A- (89.5).

For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

EWP

You may include work from the course in your Electronic Writing Portfolio. Please make sure that you understand the requirements for the Electronic

Writing Portfolio and that you fulfill them in a timely way. For more information: www.eiu.edu/~assess/.

DISABILITIES

If you have a documented disability and need accommodations to participate fully in our class, please make an appointment with the Office of Student Disability Services, Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, 581-6583.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time-management, test-taking, note-taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills. To make an appointment, call 581-6696, or go to Ninth Street Hall, Room 1302.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University's statement on academic integrity:

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

The English Department's 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 the representation of them as one's original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

And my statement concerning academic integrity:

Any breach of academic integrity—from lifting words or ideas without

attribution to submitting a wholly unoriginal essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty. The Student Standards office recommends an F for the course. You will also be required to take a course in ethics administered by Student Standards, whose staff will keep your misconduct on record and notify your other professors that one of their students has violated academic integrity.

You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. But because the work of the course is to be an expression of your ideas in your words, aside from words and ideas from properly acknowledged sources, questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise. Do not "borrow" work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course).

PROVISIONAL OUTLINE (WEEKS)

- 1: Reading in translation, backgrounds
- 2-4: Homer, *Iliad*
- 4-6: Homer, *Odyssey*
- 6-7: Virgil, *Aeneid*
- 7-9: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
- 9-10: Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
- 11-12: Sophocles, *Ajax*, *Philoctetes*, *Antigone*
- 13: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (PDF)
- 14-15: Sappho and Catullus

Essays should run four typed pages. Provisional due dates: 9/22, 10/27, 11/21, 12/10.

Other modest pieces of writing, one to two pages, will be assigned as in-class writing or on a due-next-class basis.

Final examination: 12/16, 8:00 a.m.

As of Fall 2014, syllabi must include catalogue descriptions and a statement of Eastern Illinois University Learning Goals:

ENG 2601 - Backgrounds of Western Literature.

(3-0-3) F, S. A reading of major world masterpieces through the Renaissance, works that have influenced literature in English, by such writers as Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, Ovid, Marie de France, Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes. Required of English majors, open to others. (Group 1) WI

Prerequisites & Notes: ENG 1002G. Credits: 3

EIU graduates reason and communicate clearly as responsible citizens and leaders in diverse personal, professional, and civic contexts.

Critical Thinking

EIU graduates question, examine, evaluate, and respond to problems or arguments by:

Asking essential questions and engaging diverse perspectives.

Seeking and gathering data, information, and knowledge from experience, texts, graphics, and media.

Understanding, interpreting, and critiquing relevant data, information, and knowledge.

Synthesizing and integrating data, information, and knowledge to infer and create new insights

Anticipating, reflecting upon, and evaluating implications of assumptions, arguments, hypotheses, and conclusions.

Creating and presenting defensible expressions, arguments, positions, hypotheses, and proposals.

Writing and Critical Reading

EIU graduates write critically and evaluate varied sources by:

Creating documents appropriate for specific audiences, purposes, genres, disciplines, and professions.

Crafting cogent and defensible applications, analyses, evaluations, and arguments about problems, ideas, and issues.

Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive.

Using appropriate vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure.

Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex textual, numeric, and graphical sources.

Evaluating evidence, issues, ideas, and problems from multiple perspectives.

Collecting and employing source materials ethically and understanding their strengths and limitations.

Speaking and Listening

EIU graduates prepare, deliver, and critically evaluate presentations and other formal speaking activities by:

Collecting, comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing and ethically incorporating source material.

Adapting formal and impromptu presentations, debates, and discussions to their audience and purpose.

Developing and organizing ideas and supporting them with appropriate details and evidence.

Using effective language skills adapted for oral delivery, including appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

Using effective vocal delivery skills, including volume, pitch, rate of speech, articulation, pronunciation, and fluency.

Employing effective physical delivery skills, including eye contact, gestures, and movement.

Using active and critical listening skills to understand and evaluate oral communication.

Quantitative Reasoning

EIU graduates produce, analyze, interpret, and evaluate quantitative material by:

Performing basic calculations and measurements.

Applying quantitative methods and using the resulting evidence to solve problems.

Reading, interpreting, and constructing tables, graphs, charts, and other representations of quantitative material.

Critically evaluating quantitative methodologies and data.

Constructing cogent arguments utilizing quantitative material.

Using appropriate technology to collect, analyze, and produce quantitative materials.

Responsible Citizenship

EIU graduates make informed decisions based on knowledge of the physical and natural world and human history and culture by:

Engaging with diverse ideas, individuals, groups, and cultures.

Applying ethical reasoning and standards in personal, professional, disciplinary, and civic contexts.

Participating formally and informally in civic life to better the public good.

Applying knowledge and skills to new and changing contexts within and beyond the classroom.