ENL 203: Survey of Western Literature I, Master Syllabus

(University Studies Cluster 3A)

**Course Overview**

Content

A course aimed at discovering shared moral and social perspectives among masterpieces of Western Literature, especially with regard to the concept of Heroism. Works are examined in order to understand their organizing principles, styles and other formal attributes along with their historical contexts and ongoing relevance.

Course work

Sample readings include selections from *Literature of the Western World,* Vol. 1, ed. Brian Wilkie and James Hurt, including *The Iliad, The Odyssey, Agamemnon, Oedipus, Antigone, Lysistrata, The Aeneid, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* selected *Canterbury Tales,* excerpts from *Don Quizote* and *Paradise Lost.*

Course work includes brief daily quizzes on assigned readings along with full-length essays analyzing the concept of heroism in epic and tragic works from classical antiquity as well as essays comparing and contrasting societal issues involving government, the church and male/female relations.

**All four outcomes of University Studies Cluster 3A: Literature are addressed by this course.**

**A.** Description

In analyzing classical works, for example, particular attention is paid to developing and applying critical vocabulary for understanding the formal attributes of epics and tragedies. Concepts like “hamartia,” “hubris,” “anagnorisis,” “peripetia,” etc. are fundamental to understanding the formal structure of a play like *Oedipus Rex*.

**B**. Learning Outcomes

1. Enhance critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills through

literary analysis.

2. Use the appropriate literary terminology to explain how various writers use

their respective genres and literary forms to produce their desired effects.

3. Enlarge an understanding of individual works by thinking about their

place in their relationship to one another--e.g. Virgil's relation to Homer and

Milton's relation to Virgil.

4. Show how respective works were informed by the cultural and historical

contexts in which they were created.

5. Experience analyzing central themes comparatively: cross-culturally

formally, and/or historically.

6. Gain insight into the foundations and variety of expressions of ideas about

the world and human experience.

Cluster 3A. Literature Student Learning Outcomes (SLO's)--Students will be able to:

1. Articulate how literature both reflects and helps shape culture, society and

history.

2. Explain how a text's literary form, style and content express its meanings and

using appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary

texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach to

their experiences.

**C**. Sample Text

*Literature of the Western World,* Vol. 1, ed. Brian Wilkie and James Hurt

**D.** Example Single Assignment-From Artifact to Art (highlighting language related to University Studies SL#1, Articulate how literature both reflects and helps shape culture, society and history).

Abbreviated description of assignment:

Write a 1,500-word (6-page) essay either discussion how well Aristotle’s definition of “tragedy” in the *Poetics* (pp. 1225-1241) applies to Antigone or how well Aristotle’s concept of either “epic” or “plot” applies to *The Aeneid*?

**E.** Example Multiple-part Assignment--Group Performance (highlighting language

related to University Studies SLOs @# 2,3, and 4)

1. Abbreviated description of assignment**:**

Working in groups of 5-6 discuss what epic similes in the following passages convey about Aeneas as a hero:

p. 983, ll. 445-55

p. 1027, ll. 72-76

p. 1035, ll. 476-85

p. 1073, ll. 775-89

This assignment counts 5% toward students' grades.

2. Related University Studies learning outcomes

The group presentation project concerns Outcomes # 2,3, and 4 (See "Artifacts"

below for indication of how its components *address these learning outcomes*

*individually*):

2. Explain how a text's literary form, style and content express its meaning using

appropriate disciplinary terminology.

3. Evaluate the rhetorical and contextual elements of ideas presented by literary

texts and respond to them critically and analytically.

4. Explain the ways in which literature expresses the values that humans attach

to their experiences.

3. Artifact generated by the assignment that can be sued to measure student

learning:

Essays: 20% each:

Write a unified 6-page (1,500-word) typewritten essay on the following topic. Be sure to include acontrolling thesis and concrete supporting evidence drawn from the text. Direct quotations should mainly be limited to illustrations of style, but regardless do not count toward the word and page requirements. Discuss Chaucer’s “Pardoner’s Tale” and one other work depicting clergy, in relation to Martin Luther’s “Ninety-five Theses,” pp. 2301-02

Evaluative criteria:

Essays significantly shorter or longer than 1,500 words (6 typewritten pages) or padded with unanalyzed quotations will be penalized proportionately.

Ignoring instructions outlined on the format sheet entitled, "Manuscript Format" will result in a full letter-grade penalty. Remember to include a title that encapsulates your thesis.

A full letter-grade will be deducted for recurring errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., or generally careless appearance.

Unless your essay has a thesis and concrete supporting evidence the highest grade

it will receive is C-.

Simply re-telling the "plot," stringing together various quotations, or listing various

"objects of ridicule" will likewise earn no higher than a C-.

You may use class notes and 'outside sources'—so long as you document the latter.

Organize your essay in any fashion you wish, but make sure it does have some recognizable principle of organization.

**F**. Examinations (20% each):

Exam Advisory

Armed with the following information, a reasonably conscientious student should do reasonably well on the First Hour Exam if

(1) she or he reviews these materials carefully; and

*(2) he or she studies intelligently, practicing responses to hypothetical excerpts*

*by writing out sample essays. Reviewing for 4-5 concentrated hours should*

*be sufficient if you have kept up with the reading.*

INSTRUCTIONS: This exam is in 3 parts: 10 minutes, 25 minutes and 25 minutes--so budget your time accordingly, *skipping over excerpts* *you can't*

*immediately identify.*

PART I(10 points): Identify the following 10 excerpts by title and author.

*Advice*: *With only 10 minutes for this part, you must either know the works/authors immediately or skip past those you don't know. Excerpts are neither embarrassingly obvious nor unfairly obscure.*

PART II (60 points): Discuss the significance (i.e., *meaning* and *importance*) of 3

correctly identified excerpts supplied on the exam, in relation to the larger works from which they come. The more concrete references you make both to the given excerpt and its larger context, the more credit you are likely to receive.

*Advice*: *Sometimes what depresses both the exam results and the individuals who produced them is simply ignoring directions—especially by discussing more than one passage by the same author. Thus, if you mistakenly discuss 2 Chaucerian excerpts you will automatically forfeit 20 points.*

*Beyond that, the problem is usually either not preparing well enough or else ignoring the basic requirement to discuss the SIGNIFICANCE of a given passage in relation both to its immediate context and relevant features elsewhere in the work.*

*This entails far more than just summarizing the specific passage, much less simply ‘retelling the story.’ It means finding thematic, structural and stylistic 'connections' between the given excerpt and other parts of the larger work. For the Canterbury Tales, start by making those connections to the specific tale or prologue before moving outward to the framework narrative as a whole. Responses should be in the range of 150-250 words each, writing fluency is a definite asset--but no substitute for thoughtfulness*

PART III (30 points): Write a reasonably well-organized essay on 1 of the following 3 topics comparing and contrasting a film we have discussed with a written work we have discussed. I will supply the specific topics in advance.

For maximum credit, be sure to have a THESIS and concrete SUPPORTING EVIDENCE from the works--the more, the better (within reason).

*Advice: Make an outline ahead of time, focusing on two works you understood best, and then decide which of the possible approaches best suits the materials you have selected. If you care to run some ideas by me either in person or via e-mail, by all means feel free to do so.* Just remember*: neither work used in this part of the exam may also be discussed under Part II.*

**PART III** (30 points): Write a reasonably well-organized essay on **1** of the

following 3 topics, incorporating into your discussion at least1

**work not discussed under PART II**. For maximum credit, you must have a THESIS and concrete SUPPORTING EVIDENCE from the works—the more, the better (within reason).

1. Compare and contrast the concept of “heroism” in 2 works read thus far this term,

1 of which was not discussed under Part II.

1. Compare and contrast the “moral lessons” conveyed by 2 works read thus far this term, 1 of which was not discussed under Part II.
2. Compare and contrast the “artistic control” (over organization, style, character

development, etc.) displayed by 2 works read thus far this term, 1 of which was

not discussed under Part II.

Sample past student responses to hour exams:

These sample mid-term responses provide a model for better understanding both the works discussed and a successful way of discussing them.

PART II:

# Excerpt #1: ‘When the soldier returns from the wars, even though he has white hair, he very soon finds a young wife. But a woman has only one summer; if she does not make hay while the sun shines...’

This is a woman’s complaint from *Lysistrata*, by all means an expression for the female frustration with the social sterilization that wars bring about, chiefly for women alone. That said, it can be further surmised that the criticism against war is valid on the terms of the work, in that war is initiated by men, but it is the women who lose their sons, their husbands, and effectively the prime of their life. Such a dynamic is portrayed well in the instance where a woman hides a soldier’s helmet underneath her clothing to feign pregnancy; the entanglement between sex and death, and the resulting cultural and social stagnancy, becomes undeniable in the context of the imagery. As a whole, the work equally criticizes women as lazy, gluttonous, lustful and essentially socially inept (all exemplified in their late meeting and “sacrifice of the wine bowl.”). But the comic tone of the play eclipses the aggression, and portrays them as a product of social factors rather than a malignant, conscious fault.

COMMENT: Covers all the bases quite well, but could add something about the Regenerative resolution at the end, tied in with the complaint in this passage about war’s effect on fertility. 19/20

## Excerpt #2: 'It is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth.'

That it would be a “terrible thing” for a man to find he has been telling the truth all his life is clearly a use of comic inversion, a statement exactly the opposite of what an audience would expect to hear. But Jack’s (or “Ernest’s”) assessment is at the same time ironically true, since it is terrible that he’s been telling the truth unbeknownst to him. Oscar Wilde’s play is mainly consisting of wordplay like this, using understatement and anti-climax to set a primarily verbal comic tone, though sight-gags are not altogether shunned. The reduction or understatement of death is apparent when Jack enters wearing mourning clothes (in honor of no one, of course) and Algernon’s perpetual consumption contributes to the broadest sense of the work, a commentary on the shallow nature of aristocracy, which finally winds up as a web of coincidence. Therefore, one assumes that the piece is a celebration of contrivance, that Jack’s birth from a handbag, brotherhood to Algernon, etc. display a quality of optimism in regards to artifice as a way of overcoming social faults and fallibility.

COMMENT: Perhaps could explicitly tie in the verbal inversion with the plot contrivances, but manages to convey the connection indirectly nevertheless. 20/20