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LS 152L.80: Introduction to the Humanities - Honors

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Introduction to the Humanities (LS 152): Spring 2013

The second course in the Introduction to the Humanities sequence (though 151 is not a prerequisite), LS 152 examines selected works of literature and political and philosophical thought from the later Middle Ages to the twentieth century. The course is intended to give students a sense of the contours of Western culture and history over the past seven or so centuries, with emphasis on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, so notable for its fusion of imagination and intellect; the return to the roots of piety known as the Reformation; the revival of classical culture known as the Renaissance; the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century; the Enlightenment and French Revolution; the rise of romanticism and the triumph of the novel in the nineteenth century; and the shock of totalitarianism in the twentieth. In a sense, the course is bounded by Dante's vision of hell on the one side and the living hell of the Holocaust on the other.

Emphasis in LS 152.80 is on critical thinking, close reading of primary sources, analytical writing, and historical understanding.

Learning Goals

*To achieve an understanding of the shape of the Western humanistic tradition from the later Middle Ages through the 20th century by reading selected masterworks of the tradition from Dante to Dostoevsky (or Tolstoy) and beyond.

*To be able to read masterworks of different times, places, genres, and categories with understanding.

*To be able to place such diverse literary and philosophical works, whether the *Inferno* or Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, in a tradition.

*To appreciate the influence of this tradition on one's own ways of thinking and seeing.

*To learn to ask good questions of and write cogently about literary and philosophical texts.

Writing Goals

*To formulate, state and support a sound thesis

*To organize and develop ideas logically

*To cite evidence persuasively

*To employ correct and appropriate usage of the English language

Consult the Liberal Studies Writing Standards (to be distributed)

Texts

Dante's *Inferno*

More, *Utopia*

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*

Blake, *Poems* (Dover edition)

Wordsworth, *Poems* (Dover edition)

Tolstoy, *Death of Ivan Ilych*

Additional Readings

Many additional readings are posted on electronic reserve (ERes), for which the password for LS 152 is "erasmus." Interspersed among the readings from our texts, we will read selections from the following authors (probably in this order): Pico, Erasmus, Luther, Montaigne, Donne, Marvell, Swift, Madison, Wollstonecraft, Arendt. The reading schedule for each week, including ERes readings if any, will be given in class.

Plenary Lectures

On each Thursday from 11:00 to noon, a lecture is presented to all sections of LS 152 in the NORTH Underground Lecture Hall (Urey). Lectures are more or less synchronized with our readings. Attendance is mandatory, if only because the lectures constitute the fourth hour and fourth credit of this four-credit course.

Requirements

1. Attendance, including at Thursday lectures. Students are allowed three absences per term; a paper will be lowered one grade for each absence over the maximum. Use your absences wisely.
2. Each week, on Monday if you are A-H, Wednesday if you are I-P, Friday if you are Q-Z, you are to submit four typed questions regarding the reading for that day. *I will credit questions only if they're written in clear and correct English, properly spelled, and cogent.* If your questions aren't credited on any given week, don't take it personally but simply try to do better the next time. At the end of the term I will total your credits, with 10 or more counting as an A, 8-9 as a B, 6-7 as a C, 4-5 as a D, and less than 4 as an F. *This is a W (Writing) class. Take the composition of questions seriously and consider it as part of the course's W component.* I will teach to the questions to a good degree.
3. The philosopher Colin McGinn has observed of Hamlet that he "seems to transform himself almost every time he appears on the stage, so variable is his temperament." **On March 13, submit a double-spaced paper of at least 1500 words on this observation. Writing must be clear and correct.** Quote the text accurately, taking care to cite verse as verse (with line breaks) and prose as prose (no line breaks). **Students may submit a revision within five days of the paper's return, though grades will be revised only if revision is appropriately substantial.**
4. **On May 8, submit a paper, also of at least 1500 words, examining what Tolstoy seems to be saying in *The Death of Ivan Ilych* about the way a human life is to be lived.**
5. A final exam consisting of short essays will be given at the scheduled time. Your weekly questions, first paper, second paper, and final exam will each count for ¼ of your grade. Note that in one way or another all of your grade depends on writing.

Caveat

Don't pluck information about the readings off the Web. By no means is everything posted on the Web reliable. Academic books, like scientific articles, undergo a peer-review that postings on the Web bypass completely. Additionally, the date and even the author of information posted on the Web aren't always clear.

Plagiarism

Strictly forbidden. See the prohibition of plagiarism in the UM Catalog.

Stewart Justman
Director, Liberal Studies Program; x5793