Masterpieces and Masterminds: Literature and Thought of the West

Why Take This Course?

This course satisfies the General Education requirement of category I, Cultures and Civilizations I, because it offers a broad, conceptual introduction to masterpieces of Western culture from Greco-Roman antiquity to the modern age (1800 AD). The course investigates works of literature, philosophy, religion, and history—and asks why these continue to arouse interest and controversy today.

The course also satisfies major credit in the Literature Concentration of the Comparative Literature (COLT) major and minor as well as in the Global Cultures track of the COLT major and minor.

What Will You Learn in This Course?

1. You’ll obtain in-depth knowledge of major works identified as “masterpieces” and the writers and thinkers who created them. Over 15 weeks you’ll develop a solid acquaintance with 17 writers and texts that struggle with the questions, “What does it mean to be an individual, a self?” and “Is the soul an essential part of the self?”

2. Some texts take the form of the great narratives that mark the Western tradition: the epic wanderings of Odysseus and Aeneas, the tragic fate of Oedipus, the strange encounter of Cupid and Psyche, Dante’s descent into Hell, the legend of Dr. Faustus, the Princess of Clève’s psychological battle with forbidden love.

3. Other texts introduce you to original thinkers who offer analysis, polemic and enlightenment. Plato’s philosophical dialogues debate the soul’s immortality and inner dynamics. The founder of Christianity, Jesus, argues
for a radically new sense of the soul and morality, while Augustine’s spiritual autobiography dramatizes how hard this was for non-Christians to accept. Scholars and scientists like Pico della Mirandola, Faust, Nostradamus, and Descartes play the role of intellectual supermen by extending the frontiers of human knowledge. Rousseau cries out for the modern individual’s need for freedom but also meditates on the need for solitude. Mary Wollstonecraft polemicizes about women’s “rights” for self-development, and Wordsworth explores how childhood, memory and imagination are essential to a modern sense of self.

4. Some particular questions they and we consider are:

- Do we have souls? Is a soul the source of life? Of mind?
- If souls exist, are they immaterial or materially based? If immaterial, are they immortal? Do souls survive in an afterlife?
- Is the soul collective (shared) or individual (unique)? Can we distinguish the soul from the self?
- How do we acquire individual identity? Is it constant or changing over time?
- How fundamental is gender to an individual’s sense of self?
- Must the self be embodied? Must it be embedded in a society and historical moment? As social power and authority develop, how do they impact the self?
- Is the ability to tell one’s own story essential to selfhood?
- Is a concept of the soul necessary to feeling fulfilled as a human being?

5. Through discussions and writing assignments, you’ll learn to analyze these complex texts and ideas and to formulate arguments that will enhance your own performance of self in (a) personal life; (b) professional life; and (c) today’s postmodern, cosmopolitan world.

**What Are the Course Requirements?**

1. Participation and Preparedness. Two classes of lecture and one discussion section each week are essential to participating in this course. You should complete the readings assigned for each meeting and be prepared to ask, answer, and discuss questions about the material. [10% of final grade]
2. 2 quizzes (see dates below) (short-answer questions) [15%]
3. Midterm Exam (mini-essays)* [20%]
4. Two writing assignments (6 pages each; not research-oriented)* [15-15%]
5. Final Exam (not cumulative; mini-essays) [25%]

*Note: Mini-essays are 400-600 words and ask you to combine recall of factual information with evaluative judgments and interpretations. The writing assignments are evaluated on the basis of persuasive arguments, the detailed, factual information you use as evidence for your argument, and intellectual insight/creativity.

Study Aids: To help you with assigned readings, “focus questions” will be provided for certain texts. These highlight the key information and developments you should look for and the key concepts you should recognize. To help you prepare for exams, detailed study sheets will be provided for each. These materials will be posted on our course site on Blackboard.

What Are the Course Policies?

1. Policy on examinations: All students must be present for each quiz and exam. A make-up exam or quiz will be given for medical or personal/family emergency, but only if Prof. Farenga personally approves the reason for your absence. NOTE: You must take the Final Exam on Tues., Dec. 14 from 11 am-1 pm; there will be no exceptions. Please check your exam schedule now to insure you have no conflicts with other exams or travel plans.

2. Policy on writing assignments: Assignments are due at the start of your discussion section for the weeks indicated in the syllabus. If an assignment is handed in after 5 pm, it will be penalized ½ grade (5 points). An assignment will continue to receive a ½ grade penalty for up to 3 days. After 3 days an assignment may not be handed in unless Prof. Farenga personally approves this for reasons of illness or personal/family emergency. (Please do not ask your discussion section leader to approve a late submission.) Hard copy submission only: electronic submissions are not accepted. Submit assignments to your discussion section leader, not to Prof. Farenga.

3. Policy on academic integrity: We will adhere rigorously to the university's policies on academic integrity as described at www.usc.edu/student-
Violations, during exams or through plagiarism in written work, will be reported to the Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (SJACS).

4. **Policy on Grade of “Incomplete”:** A grade of IN can only be assigned if you do not complete work after the end of the 12th week because of illness or personal emergency. Prof. Farenga must, however, approve assignment of this grade. The missed work must be completed within one academic year.

5. **Policy on Completing Requirements:** You must complete (= hand in) all 6 written requirements (2 quizzes, midterm exam, final exam, and two 6-pages writing assignments). If you do not complete one or more of these requirements, you can receive a final grade no higher than D (= 65/100).

6. **Statement on Students with Disabilities:** Any student requesting accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP, STU 301; x00776) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please have the letter delivered to Prof. Farenga ASAP.

**What Are the Required Readings? [available at University Bookstore]**


*Note: Additional required readings will be available on Ares Electronic Reserve, Blackboard, or in photocopy.

Course Instructor: Vincent Farenga, Prof. of Classics & Comparative Literature. Office: THH 256-R, x00106, farenga@usc.edu. Office hours: Tu 11-12 am and Thurs 2-3 pm, and by appointment

Discussion Section Leaders: Christian Lehmann [clehmann@usc.edu] and Carolyn O’Neill [coneill@usc.edu] Office hours TBA.

Course Syllabus [also available on Blackboard]

Please note: We will try to stay on schedule for class topics and readings assignments, but we may need to adjust our schedule from time to time. E-mail notice and announcements on Blackboard will be provided of any changes in dates when assignments are due or exams are given. This syllabus is also posted on Blackboard.

Also note that more than half the readings are in poetic or dramatic form rather than in prose. A page of poetic or dramatic text is equivalent to about half a page of prose (or less).

Week 1

Aug 24 Course Introduction: goals, description of content, policies, Q & A

Aug 26 Homer, Odyssey, Books 1-2 (pp. 1-27) and Books 5-7 (70-105). Use Focus Questions on this part of the Odyssey [on Blackboard].

Week 2

Aug 31 Homer, Odyssey, Books 9-13 (125-205)

Sep 2 Homer, Odyssey, Books 14 (206-221) and 16-17 (240-75).

Week 3

Sep 7 Homer, Odyssey, Books 19-24 (290-381).

Sep 9 Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus (pp. 63-124). Use Focus Questions on Oedipus [on Blackboard].
**Week 4**

**QUIZ IN DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK.** See Quiz Study Sheet on Blackboard. Note Course Policy on Exams and Quizzes.

**Sep 14**

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* (pp. 127-207). Use Focus Questions on Oedipus [on Blackboard]

**Sep 16**

Plato, *Phaedrus*, pp. 1-34. Use Focus Questions on the Phaedrus [on Blackboard]

**Week 5**

**FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK.** Note Course Policy on submitting Writing Assignments. See Topics and Suggestions for Writing on Blackboard.

**Sep 21**

Plato, *Phaedrus*, pp. 35-86.

**Sep 23**

Plato, *Republic*, Book 4 (94-121) and Books 7 (186-212). Use Focus Questions on the *Republic* [on Blackboard]

**Week 6**

**Sep 28**


**Sep 30**


**Week 7**

**Oct 5**

Virgil, *Aenid*, Books 4, 6 and 7 (52-117)

**Oct 7**


**Week 8**

**Oct 12**

**MIDTERM EXAM TODAY.** Note Course Policy on Exams. Use Midterm Study Sheet on Blackboard.

**Oct 14**


**Week 9**

**Oct 19**


**Week 10**


Oct 28  Augustine, *Confessions*, Books 6 (95-111) and 8-9 (141-85).

**Week 11**  *SECOND QUIZ IN DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK.* See Quiz Study Sheet on Blackboard. Note Course Policy on Exams and Quizzes.

Nov 2  Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 1-8 (pp. 3-79) [= 38 pages of English] and Canto 12-15 (109-145) [=36 pages of English] Use Focus Questions on Dante [on Blackboard]


**Week 12**

Nov 9  (1) Boccaccio, story of Tancredi & Ghismonda from *Decameron* [on Ares Reserve];

(2) Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man” (selection on Ares Reserve);

(3) Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*,(2-66).

Nov 11  Madame de La Fayette, *The Princess of Clèves*, Part I (3-42)
**Week 13**

SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK. See Topics and Suggestions for Writing on Blackboard. Note Course Policy on Writing Assignments.

**Nov 16**


**Nov 18**

No lecture today.

**Week 14**

**Nov 23**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book 1 (17-51) and *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, First, Second and Third Walks (3-27), Seventh and Eighth Walks (57-77) [Ares Reserve]

**Nov 25**

Thanksgiving Holiday

**Week 15**

**Nov 30**

No lecture today

**Dec 2**

Mary Wollstonecraft, Introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, [at http://www.bartleby.com/144/index.html and on Ares]

Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” and *The Prelude* Book 1 lines 305-441 [photocopy and Ares Reserve]

**Dec 14**

FINAL EXAM. Tuesday, 11 am – 1 pm, THH 301. See Final Exam Study Sheet on Blackboard. Note Course Policy on Exams.