Fall 2019

HUM 211-001: The Pre-Modern World

William O'Sullivan

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Course: HUM 211 001  The Pre-Modern World

Instructor: William O'Sullivan  
Office: Cullimore 115  
Office Hours: Thursday 2:00–4:00 P.M.; Friday 4:00–6:00 P.M.  
Humanities Office: 431 Cullimore  
(Drop off late papers here with secretary.)  
Tel: X6303  (973-596-6303)  
Email: osulliva@njit.edu

1. General Information

This lecture course meets twice a week for fifteen weeks between 9/3/19 thru 12/10/19 for a total of just forty-five hours. In this brief period, we will attempt to survey Western cultural history from the earliest times to the Late Middle Ages. Any such daunting, or some might say foolish, undertaking requires the utmost cooperation from the students.

The English word “student” comes from the Latin verb “studere” which means “to be earnest”, “to be eager”, “to dedicate oneself to…” Everyone will therefore be expected to (1) read the assignments and (2) ask pertinent questions and otherwise participate in class. Students should avoid questions that indicate they have NOT read the assignment. The course grade will be based on a series of quizzes and three exams worth a total of 90%; class notes, class participation, and attendance will make up the final 10%.

Videos and films will be shown as an integral part of this course. While they should be enjoyed, they are not presented solely for entertainment purposes. Thus, students are advised to take notes on their content.

Since this is a required course, students should not miss more than three classes during the semester. If a student cannot attend class for any reason, s/he should contact a fellow classmate for information about what was done in the class, etc.; PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT THE INSTRUCTOR. It is important to get the names, email addresses of fellow students for this purpose. Since it disrupts the class, lateness is to be avoided. Students should not show up twenty minutes before class ends and expect to be marked “present.”

N.B. Laptops, cell phones, i-pods, blackberries, blueberries and all manner of “electronic fruit” should be turned off and put away BEFORE class begins unless the student is using the e-version of the textbook or taking course notes. Students who choose not to abide by this simple rule will be asked to leave the class for the period and will be marked absent.
2. Required Texts (Print editions also required)

Corrigan, R. *Classical Tragedy, Greek and Roman.* Applause Books.
Homer. *The Odyssey* (Penguin Classics: Fagles Translation)

The above books are available in the Campus Bookstore. Many can be rented. Students will be expected to have a copy of the texts by the second week of class. You will be expected to have the assigned version of the text. (Online versions of the Odyssey and Greek tragedies are in the public domain with translations which are often a century or more old. This makes for difficult reading.) Please do not ask the instructor’s advice about buying different editions of the Benton/ Di Yanni text and getting bargains on-line. This is not the instructor’s area of expertise. Nevertheless, students should remember the Old Latin (Roman) warning of CAVEAT EMPTOR. “Buyer Beware!”

We use Volume I of the 4th Edition of Benton/DiYanni; each edition is different in terms of readings and illustrations and, of course, pagination. There is also a combined edition of Volumes I & II, which does not have the readings at the end of the chapters. Students should avoid purchasing this edition since the readings are an important aspect of the course.

3. Course Calendar

Due to time constraints and other contingencies, every item listed below may NOT be covered. However, this calendar does provide a general outline of the course’s trajectory, which hopes to provide certain insights into the origins of contemporary Western culture. ‘B & D Chapters’ refer to the Benton & Di Yanni text. All readings from B & D unless otherwise indicated. In addition, the time schedule indicated below is approximate and may change as the course proceeds.


A- Prehistory


B- Egypt: Last Judgments/ Immortal souls/ Monotheism

1. “Egypt,” *Rick Steeves’ Europe* (PBS Doc.): combines ancient history and a look at present day life in this fascinating country
3. “The Book of the Dead” or “The How To Book on the Last Judgement: How to Pass It, How Not Get Eaten by Ammit, the Crocodile Monster, and Arrive in the Afterlife in One Piece.”

4. Hymn to the Sun: the world’s first recorded declaration of monotheism by Egypt’s most radical pharaoh, Amenophis IV, aka Akhenaten, the husband of the brilliant and gorgeous Nefertiti, and brother of the celebrated King Tut, who was “buried in his ‘jamas” according to Steve Martin’s immortal song.

C- Mesopotamia/ Agricultural Revolution/ Enter the Hero

1. “The Epic of Gilgamesh” : the world’s first “hero” in the world’s first “epic”; meet literature’s first femme fatale, the love goddess Ishtar, read the first written account of the Ark and the Flood, made famous in the Bible story of Noah.

2. “Hymn to Inanna”: prayer to the moon god Nanna, by Enheduanna (2285-2250 BCE), the daughter of the Sumerian King Sargon the Great, and first identified author in world history. It was also the first time in history that a woman’s name was recorded.

Part II  Classical World. B&D Chapters 2, 3 & 4 (Weeks 5-10) (10/19-11/8/19)

A- Greece: Early, Classical and Hellenistic


2. The Trojan War with Michael Wood. Visit the ruins of Troy, Mycenae, hometown of Agamemnon, his brother Menelaus and his sister-in-law, Helen of Sparta. Her face “launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium.” Listen to storytellers from Ireland and Turkey recite from memory tales of heroes long dead.

3. Homer. Paired with the Iliad, which gives a blow by blow description of the Trojan War, the Odyssey (selections) describes Odysseus’ long voyage home from Troy to Ithaca, his many adventures along the way including encounters with powerful women, both divine and human. Often called the “first novel,” we witness the hero’s transformation from cunning soldier, pirate, and plunderer to the exhausted “man of sorrows” whose only desire is to “go home.” A few critics maintain that at least part of the Odyssey was written by a Greek speaking woman named Nausicaä, who lived in Sicily and whose hero was called Ulysses. Interestingly, a character by the name of Nausicaä appears in the story as a fitting candidate to marry Odysseus.

*************** Midterm Exam 10/19/18 ***************

4. Origin of Philosophy. Greek thought created the basic concepts and framework that we take for granted today; matter, form, self, and mechanical causality these ideas did not exist and had to be discovered by early Greek thinkers. The first group of these thinkers are referred to as the Presocratics since they came before Socrates and his disciple Plato who changed the trajectory of Greek philosophy. Famous among these early thinkers were: the engineer, Thales; Anaximander & Anaximenes; the mathematician and musician, Pythagoras; the poet of paradox, Heraclitus; Parmenides & Zeno; and finally
Democritus. This last thinker who devised the atomic theory of matter, declared “Nothing exists but atoms and the void.”

a-Heraclitus, “Maxims and Sayings”: a materialist yet often mystical philosopher whose famous statement, “war is the father of all things,” has often been willfully misinterpreted.

5. Plato from “The Apology.” Socrates’ most brilliant student describes his master’s final hours and explains why Socrates chose death over a life in exile. Socrates is often referred to as the first martyr of Western history, the second, of course, is Jesus Christ.

____. from “The Allegory of the Cave.”: Plato rejects the evidence of the five senses as unreliable and misleading; he asserts in analogical form his theory that the philosopher’s task is to attain entry into the world of eternal “ideas” as well as liberate the “inborn” knowledge already present in his pupils’ souls. Our “world of mathematics” is part of Plato’s world of ideas, a realm that exists at a “higher” level of reality than that of everyday life and the body.

6. “The Classical Ideal” from Art of the Western World (video); Michael Wood examines the Hellenic origins of our Western ideas and ideals of beauty, truth, and virtue.

B- Tragedy

1. Aristotle, from “The Poetics”: if you’ve read a good movie review lately, you can thank Aristotle, the man who “invented” literary criticism; creator of the syllogism, his Logic did not teach people what to think but how to think correctly. He also organized the first recorded biology field trips; Politics, his examination of existing governments laid the foundation for present-day political science and his description of the primacy of economics & class in the politics of the Greek city state first outlined the idea of class war. His Nicomachean Ethics aims to explain and develop “good character” in the pursuit of a happy life; his aim to collect and rationally organize all knowledge laid the foundation for the medieval and modern concepts of the university.

2. “Tragedy,” Greek Fire (video): the Greek concept of “tragedy” versus the modern idea, the very different approach to drama and acting which characterized ancient Athens. Tragedy comes from the Greek word, “tragoidia” meaning “goat song.” It was originally part of a peasant village ritual which honored Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication. His statue was carried from his temple to the theatre in Athens and deposited in a place of honor during the yearly festival called the “Great Dionysia.”

2. Sophocles, the tragedy of Antigone (Corrigan text) and film (Cornell U. Players): “speaking truth to power”, dissent, reasons of state versus traditional morality, the role of women, this play can and has been interpreted from many points of view.

C- Rome: Engineers, Epicureans, Stoics & Satirists

1. Catullus, “Selected Poems”

2. Julius Caesar, from The Gallic War (handout). Republican Rome’s greatest politician and a gifted military commander recounts the building of a temporary bridge across the Rhine
(a) “Caesar’s Rome” *Rick Steves’ Europe* (video)


5. “Pompeii,” *Rick Steves’ Europe* (video)

6. Juvenal, from “Life in Rome” (handout)

7. “The Classical Ideal” (video excerpt)


A- Judaism, Christianity , Byzantium /Constantinople, Islam

1. Genesis

2. Isaiah 1&2 (handout)


4. Plotinus & Neoplatonism

5. Augustine, “Student at Carthage” (Chapter 4)


8. “When the Moors Ruled Europe” (Acorn video)


A- The Middle Ages: Romanesque & Gothic

1. Prehistory of Northern Western Europe: from “In Search of Ancient Ireland”

2. “Pax Romana” from *The Germanic Tribes* (Kultur) (video)

3. “The Gothic Cathedral” (Video)

4. Gröning, *Into Great Silence* (Video)


6. Boccaccio, from *The Decameron*

7. Chaucer, from “The Canterbury Tales”

8. “White Garment of Churches” (video)


**Semester Review: Week beginning 12/9/19**

**Last Day of Class (Course): 12/10/19**

**Last Day of Classes (NJIT): 12/11/19**

**Final Exams: 12/14/19-12/20/19**

**Grades Due 12/22/19**
INCIPIANT SATURNALIA!