

# INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Arts and Science 1A06, McMaster University, 2006/2007

Course website: <http://www.annettereed.com/westciv/>

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[T.B.A.]

*Lecture* - Mondays, 12:30-14:20, A.N. Bourns Science Building 164

*Tutorials* – Wednesday, 13:30-14:20 [T03], Burke Science Building B154A

Thursdays, 13:30-14:20 [T02], A.N. Bourns Science Building 165

Fridays, 13:30-14:20 [T01], Kenneth Taylor Hall 105

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will survey the literary and cultural heritage of the modern West, considering ancient, late antique, medieval, and early modern writings that have had a formative and enduring influence on our culture. Although we will discuss the historical influence, timeless themes, and abiding value of these writings, we will focus on their exegesis: on pursuing the close readings of these texts on their own terms and in their own contexts. Accordingly, special attention will be given to the cultural history of the period. By investigating the social and historical contexts that shaped each of these writings, we will ask how Western culture was forged in the encounters (due to war and imperial expansion, no less than trade and intellectual exchange) between different peoples, religions, and nations in the regions of the eastern Mediterranean, Near East, and Europe.

The readings for the first semester revolve around the human quest to understand the cosmos and our place within it. Our readings will include stories about the creation of the world, reflections on the worlds that we construct through culture, visions of the destruction of our worlds, and speculations about what lies beyond the visible cosmos in various otherworldly realities. Readings will include ancient Near Eastern texts, classical Greek literature, selections from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and late antique and medieval Christian literature. These will be supplemented with surveys of the history of the Near East and eastern Mediterranean world from Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.

In the second semester, we will consider the theme of power and difference in history. Readings for this term will allow us to investigate the dynamics of group interactions as well as the role of individuals in society. How have nation states solved (or failed to solve) problems of conflict, justice and morality? What were the social and political effects of assumptions about racial or religious difference? How did hierarchical structures of gender and age within the family both echo and shape political relationships in society at large? While exploring these questions, we will be reading some acknowledged masterpieces of Western literature, notably Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Secondary background readings will include two controversial modern works, Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* and Simon Baron Cohen's *The Essential Difference*.

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## REQUIRED READINGS

Assigned books are available for purchase at Titles. Many of the required readings are also accessible from the course website, free in electronic form; links to assigned sources can be found on the "Schedule of Assignments" pages.

It is *imperative* that assigned readings be done prior to the weekly Lectures, during which familiarity with them will be assumed. In addition, students should remember always to bring books (or print-outs of the on-line versions) both to Lectures and to Tutorials, the latter of which will focus on close reading and analysis of assigned readings.

Please note that the course website will also feature links to copies of in-class handouts and other course-related materials, so students should make sure to check it regularly!

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Assignments will be geared towards developing and fostering [1] close reading and literary analysis, [2] historical contextualization, and [3] academic writing.

**1. Preparation and participation** = 10% - Especially in light of the broad scope of materials that we will be covering in this course, it is critical that students prepare the assigned readings in advance of the lectures and tutorials. Lectures will assume knowledge of the readings and be geared towards providing historical background and exploring their main themes. Tutorials will focus on close reading of the assigned texts, require active participation, and assume knowledge of the broader literary and historical contexts of the passages under consideration.

**2. Exams** - Exams will test knowledge of the assigned readings and the historical background discussed in lectures. All exams will be cumulative, featuring identification questions, historical timelines, etc., as well as synthetic thematic essays.

TERM I: Midyear Exam = 20%

TERM II: Final Exam = 25%?

### **3. Writing Assignments -**

TERM I:

*Paper proposal and bibliography #1* = 5% - An annotated bibliography on the text chosen for the Exegesis Paper, focusing on its socio-historical context.

*Exegesis Paper* (7-10 pp.) = 15% - A close reading and analysis of a short passage from any of the assigned readings from Term I, to be selected by the student and pursued with attention to literary form and context as well as the socio-historical context in which the text took form.

TERM II:

*Paper Proposal and bibliography #2* = 5% - A preliminary outline of, and rationale for, the proposed paper accompanied by an annotated bibliography on the two texts chosen for the Final Paper

*Final Paper* (7-10 pp.) = 25% - Further details to be announced at the beginning of Term II!

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## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS FOR TERM I

Sept. 11th: Introduction

### **I. Creation and Un-Creation in ancient Near Eastern and Israelite traditions**

Sept. 18th: Gilgamesh

Sept. 25th: Enuma Elish

Oct. 2nd: Genesis 1-11 (Hebrew Bible)

Oct. 9th: *No Lecture - Thanksgiving!*

Oct. 16th: Ezekiel (Hebrew Bible)

### **II. Cosmos and culture in ancient Greek literature**

Oct. 16th: Hesiod, *Theogony*

Oct. 23rd: (Ps.-)Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* + BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Oct. 30th: Herodotus, *Histories*, books I-III

Nov. 6th: Plato, *Timaeus*

### **III. The end(s) of Creation: Christian perspectives on earthly and heavenly realities**

Nov. 13th: Revelation (New Testament) + Apocalypse of Paul

Nov. 20th: EXEGESIS PAPER DUE!

Nov. 27th: Augustine, *City of God*, selections T.B.A.

Dec. 4th: Dante, *Inferno*, selections T.B.A.

**MIDYEAR EXAM - date T.B.A.**

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## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS FOR TERM II

### I. Power and justice among nation-states

Jan. 8th: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Jan. 15th: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Jan. 22nd: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Jan. 19th: excerpts from T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* and N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*

*Secondary source readings:* Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdorf, *Justice among Nations : on the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*; Daniel Mendelsohn, "Theatres of War," *New Yorker* 1/12/04 pp. 79-84

### 2. Power and difference

Feb. 5th: Usamah, "An Arab Opinion of the Crusaders" [*Portable Medieval Reader* pp. 447-52]; Montaigne, "On Cannibals" [1588]; Captain John Smith on the Algonquians and Pocahontas

Feb. 12th: Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* [1688]; John Locke: on slavery [*Two Discourses on Government*, 1690]; Robert Boyle, "The Blackness of the Skin, and Hair of Negroes" [Experiment XI in *Considerations and Experiments Touching Colours*]

Feb. 19th: **WINTER BREAK!**

Feb. 26th: Behn, *Oroonoko* [1688]; Locke: on slavery [*Two Discourses on Government*, 1690]; Boyle, "The Blackness of the Skin, and Hair of Negroes" [Experiment XI in *Considerations and Experiments Touching Colours*] + **PROPOSAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

Mar. 5th: documentary excerpts on slavery from the US and French revolutions

*Secondary source reading:* Jared Diamond, *Guns Germs and Steel*

### 3. The politics of gender and the family

Mar. 12th: Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Wife of Bath's "Prologue" and "Tale" [c. 1400]

Mar. 19th: *King Lear* [1605]; Margaret Cavendish, Preface to *The World's Olio* [1655] and *Female Orations* [1662] + **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS PAPER DUE!**

Mar. 26th: *King Lear*; Cavendish, Preface to *The World's Olio* [1655] and *Female Orations* [1662]

Apr. 2nd: J-J Rousseau, excerpts from *Emile* [1762]; Olympe de Gouges, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* [1791]

*Secondary source reading:* Simon Baron Cohen, *The Essential Difference*

FINAL EXAM – date T.B.A.

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## STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: (1) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained. (2) Improper collaboration in group work. (3) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Please be aware that Plagiarism includes quoting and paraphrasing other people’s writings or ideas – whether from a book, commentary, website, etc. – without proper citation of the author, book, URL, or so on. Whenever in doubt, always add a reference (whether in a footnote or in parentheses in the body of your paper) making clear the source of your information! If you have any doubts about what constitutes Plagiarism and/or how, why, and when to cite references (esp. for your papers) – or if you just wish to learn how to use secondary sources more effectively in your own writing – you are encouraged to peruse Gordon Harvey, *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Harvard Students*: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/>