

Humanities C1001x:
Masterpieces of Western Literature and Philosophy
TR 11:00am-12:50pm
Professor Katherine Biers

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Welcome to LitHum!

This course offers you a voyage of discovery through some of the most influential literary texts of the Western tradition. It also connects you to generations of Columbia undergraduates, who have read these same texts for over 60 years. During the course of this year, you will forge your own intellectual identity as an educated person living in a Western culture by grappling with the questions and problems raised by writers from Homer to Virginia Woolf. Why read these writers now? What can they offer us that might be relevant to today's world? How were these texts important in the literary historical tradition and significant in shaping cultural norms? These are precisely the questions that we will be exploring in the weeks to come.

A word on “knowing the classics”.... and on our goals in this class

The LitHum instructors and professors who have designed this course are well aware that many of you have read at least some of the texts on the LitHum syllabus before. They know that you may well be experts on the plot and themes of any of a number of our authors, and also that you may know something (or even a great deal) about their historical, linguistic and social contexts. What will be new for everyone is not *what* we read, but *how* we read it. To raise and answer questions like those mentioned above, we will use only close stylistic and textual analysis of the works on the syllabus. How is this possible? Literary texts provide an astonishing wealth of detail once you start looking very closely at how they are constructed. Our goals in this class will be to introduce you to this practice of reading, and to teach you just how much there really is to say about literature when read on its own terms. Of course, historical, linguistic, sociological, or other background sources can be very illuminating. I will provide some of this information for each text, and I welcome thoughtful contributions along these lines from others in the class. But we will not defer to these sources in order to illuminate the puzzles and conundrums we will encounter in our reading; instead, when questions arise, we will explore the texts themselves in further detail in order to try to find an answer (or, more often, a better question).

Course requirements overview

- * Attendance, preparation and participation 25%
- * Papers 35%
- * Exams 40%

(over)

Course requirements in detail

Attendance, preparation and participation 25%

- ☞ Attendance: LitHum is a discussion course. Many of your insights into the texts will come from interaction with me and with your classmates as we work together to develop our analyses and interpretations of the texts. To discuss, you must be present! Accordingly, the Core policy is that students should attend every class, except in the case of illness, religious observance, or family emergency. This year, however, we may need to make special exceptions for the sake of the flu. If you have flu-like symptoms do not come to class. All assignments will be posted online (see below). In addition, please let me know as soon as you can if you are sick and I will make arrangements to have you make up missed work.

- ☞ Preparation: You must do all the readings by the day they are due. In some cases this will be tough – you will increasingly develop other commitments as the semester goes along, and some of our texts are long. Nevertheless, because this is a discussion class it is imperative to do the reading on time. Welcome to college life! Please note: all assignments will be posted on the course website at <http://sakaipilot.cc.columbia.edu> (please note that this is probably NOT the regular address for your other classes on Courseworks). Always check the course website before class and/or if you have to miss a class.

- ☞ Participation: Your thoughtful and constructive contributions to class discussion are probably the single most important aspect of your participation in this course. This means you must have respect for and patience with others' viewpoints. I also recognize that some of you are more comfortable with speaking in class than others. Accordingly, discussion will also take place on the course website **In addition to in-class participation, you are required to post or respond to the discussion board once each week by Sunday midnight.** The goal is to encourage you to continue discussions of these texts outside our often limited class schedule, and to provide a forum for those of you who may be more comfortable expressing your views in writing than speaking in front of a group. I will read all postings before class; I very much like to get feedback from you in a more casual format as you are reading over the long weekend. Remember to extend the same courtesy and respect to others online as you would in a face-to-face interaction. Personally destructive, condescending or otherwise inappropriate postings will not be tolerated.

- ☞ A further word on in-class etiquette...
 - * For reasons of hygiene and good manners, please do not eat in class. Drinks are fine, including coffee, but please try to bring lids
 - * Please DO NOT use laptops in class, even to take notes. The internet is too tempting
 - * Please turn off cell phones while in class

Course requirements in detail (cont'd)

Papers 35%

- ☞ Three papers (2-3 pages minimum), worth 10% each and two “warm-up” writing exercises worth a total of 5%. Please note that I will take into account improvement over the course of the semester. These are short but focused and formal papers designed to strengthen your ability to analyze and compare and contrast passages from different texts on the syllabus. Care in crafting them will give you more to contribute to our in-class discussions and will be very likely to significantly improve your performance on the midterm and final. I will grant extensions in cases of significant need only if you contact me ahead of time. Late papers will be graded down (one half grade per day) and will not receive written comments.

Exams 40%

- ☞ There will be an in-class midterm (10%) on Thursday, Nov 4th, individually designed for our class, consisting of passage identification and passage analysis and/or an essay question. Missing the mid-term: If you know ahead of time that you will be unable to be present at the mid-term, please notify me, preferably at least one week in advance and no less than two days in advance, and we will make alternative arrangements. If you miss the mid-term without having notified me in advance, there will be no make-up. You will lose 10% of your final course grade. The final exam (30%) is a universal exam for all LitHum classes, and will be administered on Friday, Dec. 18th, from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Academic Integrity

I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating. If you copy the words or ideas of another without proper citation you will receive a failing grade on the paper and possibly in the course. Here is the faculty handbook's statement on Academic Integrity:

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

Please see me with questions!