TEXTS

Cervantes — Don Quixote
Descartes — Discourse on Method/Meditations on First Philosophy
Diderot — Rameau's Nephew/D'Alembert's Dream
Erasmus — Praise of Folly
Milton — Paradise Lost
Montaigne — The Essays: A Selection
Pascal — Pensées
Pico della Mirandola — On the Dignity of Man
Rousseau — The Essential Rousseau
     Reveries of a Solitary Walker
Shakespeare — King Lear
     Hamlet
Voltaire — Candide and other Stories

The Course

Overview: This is the first semester of a two semester intellectual and spiritual adventure into the Western Tradition, taking us from the infinite optimism of the Renaissance to the darker utopias that exploded across the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Taking a chronological approach, we will try, in the first semester, to gain an understanding of that development of thought and being we associate with the words Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment. Old and new forms of spirituality; old and new understandings of the self and its freedoms and responsibilities; paradises lost and found and lost (and found) again; the rise of Man, science, sentiment and reason: these themes will be our constant companions as we combine close readings of great texts with an attempt to catch the overall drift of several hundred years of Western intellectual history. However, we will seek our goal mindful of its unreachability, and this for at least two reasons: 1) thought and being remaining ineluctably separate on this earth, we can never expect to know everything about anything, mystery remains; and 2) the richness of the tradition itself is such that it requires many years of individual and collective effort in order to be grasped even superficially. The choice of texts I have made, although wide, only begins to suggest the depth of the ferment. This does not mean we will not try to understand three centuries of human development: indeed one of the chief lessons of this course and tradition is that the striving after the impossible, the invisible, and the transcendent is what gives life its richness and ultimate purpose. What's more, in my view it is the duty of each generation to attempt to come to terms, in its own way, with
the greatness—and horrors—that came before it. Indeed I hope that each one of you is already, and will continue to be, engaged in the process of establishing his or her own canon of texts, sounds, and images that will help to provide an intellectual-spiritual context in which to live.

We will begin this semester, quite appropriately, with two writers who expressed the new feeling for life in the old language, Latin: Pico della Mirandola and Erasmus. We will then proceed, as the syllabus indicates, to Luther, Machiavelli, and Montaigne, and then on to Shakespeare, the crown jewel of the English Renaissance. After that we will proceed into the more critical and daunting (and perhaps daunted) 17th century before devoting most of the second half of the semester to that crucial moment in Western history, the Enlightenment. Although our primary focus will be on the written word, we will also, at strategic moments, turn to music, architecture and visual art in order better to understand and appreciate the synchrony—and sometimes dissonance—that marks cultural development. We will also see four movies: two film versions of King Lear (Scofield’s and Kurowsawa’s Japanese interpretation, Ran), François Truffaut's The Wild Child, and Werner Herzog's The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser.

Alongside these activities we will also be reading, and occasionally discussing as a commentary on our entire course, perhaps the greatest novel of the Western Canon: Don Quixote.

Format: This course is designed as a modified seminar: discussion/dialogue will be our primary mode of interchange. As your instructor I will, I trust appropriately, serve as a seminar member, catalyst for discussion, and at times lecturer when the need arises. It is absolutely essential that you put your hearts and souls into our meetings, as I promise I will. We will be covering a large amount of material and reading masterpieces of many stripes: in order to avoid the pitfall of superficiality we must all be prepared to read, think, and converse both critically and attentively.

Course Requirements and Grading: The syllabus assumes that you will devote no less than two hours of preparation time for each hour we meet, eight hours per week in total. I will also ask each of you to 1) write a 5-7 page paper on one of Shakespeare’s plays; 2) a 7 page take-home midterm comprised of several short to medium length essays; 3) hand in over the course of the semester four two-page personal reflections on your reading 4) write a final paper of 7-10 pages (subject to be determined in consultation with the instructor); and 5) take an in-class final.

Written work will count for sixty-five percent of your grade; class attendance and participation the rest.

Tuesday, September 3
Introduction / Movie: A Man for all Seasons

Thursday, September 5
Pico de la Mirandola — On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One
Machiavelli (handout)
Tuesday, September 10
Erasmus — The Praise of Folly

Thursday, September 12
Erasmus — On the Philosophy of Christ (handout), Letter to Maarten van Dorp
Luther — Freedom of a Christian & excerpt from Bondage of the Will (Handout)

Tuesday, September 17
Montaigne — The Essays — Book 1, essays no. 1, 20, 27, 31, 32, 39, 56, 57, Book2, Essays 1 & 2

Thursday, September 19
Montaigne — The Essays — Book 2, essays no. 5, 8, 11, Book 3, essays no. 2, 3, 6, 11

Tuesday, September 24
Shakespeare — King Lear, Acts 1-3

Thursday, September 26
Shakespeare — King Lear, Acts 4-5

Tuesday, October 1
Shakespeare — Hamlet, Acts 1-3

Thursday, October 3
Shakespeare, Hamlet, Acts 4-5

Tuesday, October 8
Pascal — from Les Pensées — Misère de l'homme sans dieu, De la nécessité du pari, La Morale et la Doctrine, and Les fondements de la religion chrétienne. There is something of a problem here: I prefer Brunschvig's order to Lafuma's. Thus the order of readings requires some page turning. Here is the order:
The Memorial: pp. 285-286

Thursday, October 10
Montaigne — On Experience

Tuesday, October 15
Descartes — Discourse on the Method, Meditations on the First Philosophy
Bacon — The Great Instauration (Handout)

Thursday, October 17
Descartes — Meditations & Letter to the Translator

Tuesday, October 22
Milton — Paradise Lost, Books 1-3

Thursday, October 24
Milton — Paradise Lost, Books 4-5

FIRST PAPER DUE Wednesday October 23

Tuesday, October 29
Milton — Paradise Lost, Books 8-10

Thursday, October 31
Milton — Paradise Lost, Books 11-12
Take home MIDTERM

Tuesday, November 5
Voltaire and the Enlightenment —
Kant, D’Alembert, Condorcet, Newton (Handout), Voltaire (On Bacon and Newton)
Voltaire — On Pascal (Handout), Micromegas

Thursday, October 31
Voltaire — Zadig, plus excerpt from "Letters Concerning the English Nation" (Handout)
Tuesday, November 5  
Voltaire — Candide

Thursday, November 7  

Tuesday, November 12  
Rousseau — The First Two Discourses  
MIDTERM DUE

Thursday, November 14  
Rousseau — The Profession of a Faith of a Savoyard Vicar  
Correspondance, Voltaire and Rousseau (Handout)

Tuesday, November 19  
Diderot — Rameau's Nephew

Thursday, November 21  
Diderot — D'Alembert's Dream

Tuesday, November 26  
Kant — Handout

Tuesday, December 3  
Rousseau — Reveries of the Solitary Walker

Thursday, December 5  
The Portable Enlightenment Reader, pp. 591-670  
Diderot: A Conversation Between A Father and His Children, The Encyclopedia (Handout)

Tuesday, December 10  
Summation

Friday December 13 — Final Paper Due

ALL 4 two-page journal entries Due — Tuesday, December 10  
Final Exam — Saturday December 14, 12:30

Reading hors série: Don Quixote  
Besides being one of the greatest works of literature of all time, Don Quixote is a direct influence on Dostoevsky’s The Idiot, which we will read during the second semester.  
Moreover, as you know, the Honors Program is one of the last bastions not only of great
books, but LONG great books. With these things in mind, we are going to read *Don Quixote* over a semester and a half, with monthly discussions of our reading culminating in a discussion of *Don Quixote* and the Tradition in March. Here are the readings:

September 9-16: Author’s Preface and Chapters 1-6
September 16-23: Chapters 7-13
September 23-30: Chapters 14-18
September 30-October 7: Chapters 19-21 DISCUSS Thursday October 3
October 7-14: Chapters 22-25
October 14-21: Chapters 26-28
October 21-28: Chapters 29-32
October 28-November 4: Chapters 33-34 DISCUSS Thursday November 7
November 4-11: Chapters 35-38
November 11-18: Chapters 39-41
November 18-25: Chapters 42-45
November 25-December 2: Chapters 46-50 DISCUSS Thursday December 5
December 2-9: Chapters 51-2
December 9-16: Chapters 3-8
December 16-23: Chapters 9-13
December 23-30: Chapters 14-18
December 30-January 6: Chapters 19-22
January 6-January 13: Chapters 23-27 DISCUSS Tuesday January 14
January 13-20: Chapters 28-32
January 20-27: Chapters 33-39
January 27-February 3: Chapters 40-44
February 3-10 Chapters 45-49 DISCUSS Thursday February 13
February 10-17: Chapters 50-54
February 17-24: Chapters 55-59
February 24-March 3: Chapters 60-63
March 4-10: Chapters 64-69
March 10-17: Chapters 70-end (hurrah) DISCUSS Thursday March 20