

## READINGS IN WORLD LITERATURE: THE EPIC

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to epic poetry and, more broadly, to the study of the Humanities. We will examine epic texts from different times and cultures in order to develop your skills in textual analysis, critical thinking, and expository writing. In our readings, we will pay particular attention to poetic and narrative form as well as the cultural values, social hierarchies, and existential anxieties articulated in the texts. On the one hand, this will allow us to consider how notions of death, power, and sexuality shift culturally and historically. On the other, we will be able to think about the relevance of these texts for our present day—and recognize that which is “epic” among us.

### COURSE READINGS:

The following books should be purchased. Copies are available at the Seminary Co-op.

1. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Penguin Classics, trans. Andrew George), ISBN 9780140449198.
2. *The Odyssey* (Penguin Classics, trans. Robert Fagles), ISBN 9780143039952.
3. *The Mahabharata* (trans. J. Smith, Penguin, 2009), ISBN: 978-0140446814.
4. *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (trans. Daniela María Ugaz and John Washington), ISBN: 1781682976.

### REQUIREMENTS:

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#### 1. PREPARATION

On average, I would anticipate the need to allot at least two hours per class session to reading and preparation. You should take notes (whether marginal or in a separate notebook), keep track of personal and place names, look up unfamiliar words, and mark interesting passages.

Starting from Week 2, you are requested to make **a short post** (150-200 words) on the Canvas “Discussions” thread. You will be divided into two groups. Group 1 postings are due by **11:59pm on Mondays**, Group 2 postings by **11:59pm on Wednesdays**. These posts will help you think of potential material for in-class discussion and allow you to keep track of ideas and keywords that you find interesting and may develop in your papers. The posts can be about a keyword you would like to develop, a specific passage that you would like to suggest for close reading, or any other idea related to the assigned readings for that given day—feel free to get creative. In any case, your post should contain a **precise reference to the passages they relate to** (page number in the book).

#### 2. ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance and participation are essential. You are expected to attend the online sessions during which we will hold our class discussions. In addition to regular attendance, this course requires thoughtful reading of assigned texts and active participation in class discussions. In addition to our scheduled meetings on Monday and Wednesday, this course will also require your participation in at least **three writing seminars** conducted by our

writing specialist. Please note that these seminars are **mandatory** parts of the course and **are not optional**.

### 3. TERM PAPERS

The course requires **one shorter essay** of 2 pages on *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and **three short essays** of 3-4 pages, one each on of our other three texts. Additional research for these papers is **neither expected nor required**, but you must provide full bibliographic information for all sources used, whether you cite them directly or merely consult them in your work on the paper. I prefer the MLA Citation Style (8<sup>th</sup> Edition). If you are unfamiliar with this citation style, please see:

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style)

Use double space and 12pt Times New Roman with one-inch margins. Include your name, my name, and the course number at the top. Always give your paper a substantial title. Your paper should include page numbers at the bottom of each page. You are required to turn in **your paper electronically on CANVAS—assignments sent over email will not be accepted**.

#### **BREAKDOWN OF GRADES:**

Attendance & Participation %25

Term Papers %75 (%25 each)

### **COURSE POLICIES**

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#### **1. ACCOMMODATIONS**

**Your success in this class is important to me.** We all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

If you have a documented disability (**or think you might have a disability**) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in complete course requirements or benefit from the University's programs or services, please contact **Student Disability Services** as soon as possible. To receive an accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at **773-702-6000** or **disabilities@uchicago.edu**, or visit the website at <http://disabilities.uchicago.edu>.

#### **2. UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

You are allowed **one unexcused absence** per quarter. Additional absences will result in the loss of 3.33 points off of your final grade. If you find yourself facing a major illness, family emergency, or other situation that threatens to affect your ability to attend and participate in the class, it is crucial that you get in touch with me as soon as possible. Please note that after any absence, it is your responsibility to talk with classmates about what you missed so that you will be well prepared for the next class.

#### **3. LATE SUBMISSION**

It is your responsibility to submit each writing assignment by its due date and time. If you turn in your term paper late, it will be marked down **half a letter grade** for every day it is late.

#### **4. PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

Acts of plagiarism are serious violations of university policy. Taking the words of others and passing them off as your own undermines both your learning process and the academic community of which you are a member. If you are caught plagiarizing you will receive a failing grade for this course and further administrative action may be taken. To avoid plagiarism you must give credit to the proper sources for any ideas that are not your own and avoid turning in papers written for another class.

#### **5. QUESTIONS:**

If you have any questions, **do not hesitate to “visit” me in office hours**, which will be held on Zoom M/W 3:50-4:40pm CDT. If you cannot come to my office hours because of a scheduling conflict or time zone difference, we can always arrange to meet at another time.

### **COURSE CALENDAR**

(Please note that the due dates for papers are provisional and will be updated)

#### Week 1

September 30            Wed            Introduction

#### Week 2

October 5                Mon            *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, “Introduction,” pp. xiii-xxxii  
Tablets I-III, pp.1-30  
Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (excerpt)

October 7                Wed            *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablets IV-IX, pp. 30-70  
“From Tablet to Translation,” 209-221

#### Week 3

October 12               Mon            *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablets IV-IX, pp. 30-70

October 14               Wed            *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablets IX-XII, pp. 70-100  
**Gilgamesh Assignment due  
and Paper #1 (Odyssey) assigned**

#### Week 4

October 19               Mon            *The Odyssey*, Books 1-5, pp. 77-168  
‘Introduction’, 1-28

October 21               Wed            *The Odyssey*, Books 6-10, pp. 168-249

#### Week 5

October 26	Mon	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books 11-15, pp. 249-338
October 28	Wed	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books 16-20, pp. 338-410
<u>Week 6</u>		
November 2	Mon	<i>The Odyssey</i> , Books 21-24, pp. 410-489
November 4	Wed	<i>The Mahabharata</i> , 'Introduction': xi-xxi, xxxiv-xlvi, lxx-lxx; 'The Beginnings,' 1-83
<b>Paper #1 (Odyssey) due and Paper #2 (Mahabharata) assigned</b>		
<u>Week 7</u>		
November 9	Mon	<i>The Mahabharata</i> , 'The Hall', pp. 84-163
November 11	Wed	<i>The Mahabharata</i> , 'Savitri' and 'The Taking of the Earrings', pp. 214-241; 'Virata', pp. 243-292
<u>Week 8</u>		
November 16	Mon	'The Sermon of the Blessed Lord', pp. 353-366 'The Killing of Bhishma', pp. 367-412 'The Duel with the Clubs', pp. 549-562
November 18	Wed	'The Women', pp. 582-596 'The Great Journey' and 'Ascent to Heaven', pp. 771-791.
<b>Paper #2 (Mahabharata) due and Paper #3 (Beast) assigned</b>		
<u>Week 9</u>		
November 23	Mon	THANKSGIVING BREAK (NO CLASS)
November 25	Wed	THANKSGIVING BREAK (NO CLASS)
<u>Week 10</u>		
November 30	Mon	<i>The Beast</i> , 'Foreword', Ch. 1,2,3 (1-67)
December 2	Wed	<i>The Beast</i> , Ch. 4,5,6,7 (67-143) + Conclusion <b>Paper #3 (Beast) due <u>DECEMBER 11TH</u></b>