SYLLABUS FOR
CLASS 350 (#20695)
CLASSICS AND CINEMA

SPRING 2011 SEMESTER
DEPT. OF CLASSICS &
HUMANITIES, SDSU

Instructor: Brett Robbins, PhD.
Class Hours: T 7-9:40 PM, Classroom: WC-201
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WELCOME TO THE COURSE!

In this course we will read literary works from ancient Greece and Rome in translation, watch and analyze films adapted from these works, and explore scholarship designed to help us better understand ancient literature in its own right as well as through the prism of modern cinema. We will also be concerned with how faithful, if at all, these films are to their corresponding ancient sources and, when they are not, whether or not we believe this poetic license to be justified.

If you’re curious about your own society, you should also be curious about the ancient Greeks and Romans, because they were the inventors of western culture and you should be curious about where so much of what you take for granted comes from. It’s inherently pleasurable to trace so much of what we think and do today to their roots in ancient Greece and Rome, to make sense of their world and our own world through their world and of both worlds through their interrelationships with each other.

There is more, however. While it’s interesting to see where the things we know (or at least think we know) today have come from, it’s also somewhat surprising to discover that, not only do we find in ancient Greece and Rome the first of so many things, we also find the best of so many things. The Greeks and Romans created their epics and tragedies and comedies and historical works not for us to study thousands of years after the fact but for their contemporaries to enjoy as selfishly and hedonistically as we enjoy the art and literature and drama and YouTube videos of today. It’s this immediacy of the works of the Greeks and Romans—in other words, their entertainment value—along with their influence on so many aspects of our own society, that I wish to explore with you in this course.
OBJECTIVES

In this course you will 1) learn about the most significant people, characters, events, ideas, monuments, and institutions of ancient Greece and Rome, 2) encounter the greatest works of art, architecture, and literature of antiquity by looking at (in the case of art, architecture, and film) and reading (in the case of literature) the primary sources themselves rather than settling for a secondhand acquaintance with them through the filter of one or another textbook, and 3) ascertain connections between these people, characters, events, ideas, monuments, institutions, and art works and their counterparts in our own society which, after all, is a direct descendent of Greco-Roman civilization. On the two exams administered throughout the semester, in addition to answering questions about the key characters and events of the films we’ve watched in class you will be expected to identify with a high degree of accuracy the author, period, context, and cultural importance of the literary passages and material artifacts of ancient Greek and Roman culture you encounter in your take-home readings and classroom lectures and discussions.

This is an Explorations course in the Humanities and Fine Arts. Completing this course will help you to do the following in greater depth: 1) analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments; 2) describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures; 3) identify issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance; 4) demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

Courses that fulfill the 9-unit requirement for Explorations in General Education take the goals and skills of GE Foundation courses to a more advanced level. Your three upper division courses in Explorations will provide greater interdisciplinary, more complex and in-depth theory, deeper investigation of local problems, and wider awareness of global challenges. More extensive reading, written analysis involving complex comparisons, well-developed arguments, considerable bibliography, and use of technology are appropriate in many Explorations courses.
INTERNET

We’ll be making occasional use of the Internet, and in particular Blackboard and e-mail, to carry out various activities necessary for conducting this course. For that reason, to participate in it you must have access to the Internet (either on- or off-campus) and must check your e-mail at least once a day (in case I make changes or clarifications or the like) and your Blackboard account at least a few times a week or whenever an e-mail message I send you urges you to log onto it.

**One Time Only:** on or before the day our class meets for the second time, please create a homepage within your Blackboard account for this course, upload a recognizable photograph of yourself onto it, and provide answers on this same homepage to the following three questions: 1) What are your five favorite films? 2) What are your five favorite books? 3) What are your five favorite websites?

FORMAT

This is primarily a cinema course and will thus consist mainly of watching movies, discussing them, and writing about them. You will also be required, however, to do some reading to prepare for the movies, and you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of the readings when you discuss and write about the movies. We’ll rely on both lectures and classroom discussions to come to terms with ancient Greece and Rome and the way they continue to exert influence on our own times (vis-à-vis the latter, your input via

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1 To get started, click on the following links: 1) the “Help” icon at the top of your personal Blackboard page, 2) “Student Help,” 3) “Frequently Asked Questions,” and 4) “My instructor said I needed to create a Homepage in the course, what do I do?”
discussion will be indispensable). I expect you to come to class prepared, which means you’ve already read and recorded in your notebook answers to questions about the assignments (see ASSIGNMENTS below) for a given day.

REQUIRED READING

Although I welcome and encourage as much outside reading as you’d like to do to help you learn the material we cover in class and in our readings (for example, Wikipedia tends to do a pretty good job of providing you with background information about the figures and events we’ll be encountering in our readings), all required readings are available online, accessible via links keyed to specific readings in the CLASS SCHEDULE portion of this syllabus.

GRADING

Your final grade for the course will be determined by 1) two non-cumulative exams (including the Final) each requiring fill-in-the-blank responses and each worth 25% of your total grade (determined objectively), 2) weekly responses (to be completed in your notebook before each class session; see details under ASSIGNMENTS) to questions that demonstrate an understanding of the assigned readings and viewed films (and, as a bonus, help you prepare for the exams), all (taken together) worth 25% of your total grade (determined subjectively), and 3) one paper (see ASSIGNMENTS below), worth 25% of your total grade.

ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION

Attendance and participation are essential for success in this course. Although you will not be graded on attendance per se, your exams will test your knowledge of both what we say in
class and of what you read, *and they do not always coincide.* So attend class regularly!

**ASSIGNMENTS**

In addition to your two exams (see **GRADING** above), each week you’ll be expected to complete two kinds of assignments *before* attending class:

**READINGS:** You will read the assignments specified in the syllabus for a given class session thoroughly enough to be able to discuss what you’ve read in class. That’s why the reading assignments are so short: so you can savor them, give them the time and attention they deserve so they yield the meaning they have to offer and inspire you to talk about them in class.

**NOTEBOOK:** each week you will write the following in a composition notebook you will hand in, along with your paper, on May 10: a) a one- or two-sentence answer to the following questions about each of the readings assigned for the week: i) What is the main theme of the passage in question? ii) What aspect or aspects of the passage do you find most interesting and why? and b) a one- or two-sentence answer to the following questions about the film we watched most recently in class: i) In general, what is this film about? ii) Who are the main characters in the film, who was your favorite, and why? iii) Did you like the film? Why or why not? iv) What aspect or aspects of the film do you find most interesting and why?

Be sure to 1) label your responses clearly with the name of the corresponding literary work and film you’re writing about and 2) to avoid confusion, leave a few lines of space between the work you enter into your notebook each week.
ALTHOUGH YOU WILL BE ADDING TO THIS NOTEBOOK EACH WEEK, YOU WON’T RECEIVE A GRADE FOR IT UNTIL THE FINAL WEEK OF CLASS.

I don’t expect extensive answers to these questions; just enough to demonstrate that you’ve done the readings (as I’ve said, a short sentence or two per question per passage, and a paragraph or two per film should be enough; if you wish to write more, feel free: it can only help you to retain the material come exam time). If you achieve this simple objective you should get an A or B for this component of your grade without a problem. Anything lower than that will mean you went out of your way to brush it off. This is an easy way to boost your grade!

PAPER: You are also responsible for one 4-6 page response paper (due via email attachment [NOT hard-copy] by 5/10/11; subject of email must read: "PAPER FOR CLASSICS & CINEMA COURSE, SPRING 2011"; no late papers accepted) on a topic (to be announced well before the due date both in class and on Blackboard) pertaining to the literary and cinematic works read and watched in class during the most recent course unit. This is not a research paper, so you will express your own thoughts rather than the thoughts of others. You will be graded, not on whether I agree with your opinions or not, but rather on how deeply you go into your thought process and how well you express your thesis. You will also be graded, however, on technical matters such as formatting (use typewriter or printer; white, 8 1/2 x 11" paper; include a separate title page), grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., so be sure to craft a clear, well-organized paper and to proofread it carefully clicking on the "Send" button.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Tuesday, January 25

Introduction to the course; overview of Greco-Roman Civilization; introduction to ancient Greece and next week’s film

Movie: "In Search of the Trojan War," segment: "The Singer of Tales" (Wood)

Part One: Ancient Greece

UNIT ONE: PRIORITY ("WHAT MATTERS MOST?")

Tuesday, February 1

Movie: “Troy” (Petersen)

Preparatory reading: Homer, Iliad (Book 1)
Link: http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.1.i.html

Tuesday, February 8

Movie: “Odyssey," Part I (Konchalovsky)

Preparatory reading: Homer, Odyssey (Book 1)
Link: http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.1.i.html

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² I reserve the right to change anything in this schedule—or, for that matter, in this syllabus as a whole—during the semester for whatever reason. If I do so, I’ll be sure to inform you of it via e-mail, Blackboard announcement, and in class at least twice, so you can make the appropriate changes to your copy of this syllabus.
Tuesday, February 15

Movie: “Odyssey," Part II (Konchalovsky)

Preparatory reading: Homer, *Odyssey* (Book 9)
Link: http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.9.ix.html

Tuesday, February 22

NO CLASS

Tuesday, March 1

Movie: “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?” (Coen Brothers)

Preparatory reading: Steffen Vater: "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" vs. The Odyssey:
http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1212588/o_brother__where_art_thou_vs_the_odyssey.html?cat=38

**UNIT TWO: IDENTITY ("WHO AM I?")**

Tuesday, March 8

Movie: “Oedipus Rex” (Guthrie)

Preparatory reading: Oedipus Tyrannus (lines 300-379):
http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0192%3Acard%3D300

Tuesday, March 15

Movie: “Memento” (Nolan)

Preparatory reading: Dave Clayton: "Dave's Other Movie Log:
Memento"
http://www.angelfire.com/movies/davesothermovielog/memento.htm
Tuesday, March 22

Exam #1--MIDTERM

Part Two: Ancient Rome

UNIT THREE: HUMANITY ("WHAT DOES IT MEAN?")

Tuesday, April 5

Movie: "Spartacus," Part I (Kubrick)

Preparatory reading: Jona Lendering, “Spartacus”
Link: http://www.livius.org/so-st/spartacus/spartacus.html

Tuesday, April 12

Movie: "Spartacus," Part II (Kubrick)

Preparatory reading: Jona Lendering, “Spartacus (2)"
Link: http://www.livius.org/so-st/spartacus/spartacus2.html

Tuesday, April 19

Movie: "Gladiator" (Scott)

Preparatory reading: Allen Ward: "The Movie 'Gladiator' in Historical Perspective"

Tuesday, April 26

Movie: "Ben-Hur," Part I (Wyler)

Tuesday, May 3

Movie: "Ben-Hur," Part II (Wyler)

Preparatory reading: None

UNIT FOUR: BEAUTY ("IS IT MORE THAN SKIN DEEP?")

Tuesday, May 10

Movie: "The Shape of Things" (La Bute)

Preparatory reading: Ovid, "Pygmalion"
Link:
http://www.theholidayspot.com/valentine/stories/pygmalion_galatea.htm

Tuesday, May 17

Exam #2--FINAL (WC-201): 7-9 PM