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**English 107: War, Peace, and Ethics in Ancient Poetry and Prose
Fall 2014 (MWF 12-12:50), 246 Gerlinger**

We will read foundational works from four different ancient cultures: China, Greece, India, and Israel. We will pay particular attention to the question of the kinds of values that these foundational works were meant to instill in their ancient audiences. What, for each culture, constitutes the exemplary person, sometimes referred to as the “hero” or “heroine”? In particular, what does each work have to say about the nature of war, peace, and ethics understood as my responsibility – impossible to shirk -- for the unique and irreplaceable other in front of me?

Emphasis will be on close and attentive reading of texts. Literature during this period was meant to be taken in by the ear rather than the eye, and we will emphasize the oral [spoken aloud]/aural [heard] dimension of these works. Students will train their ears to hear and scan ancient verse, even if they do not know the ancient languages (Chinese, Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew) themselves; and to hear modern attempts at approximating the aural effects of ancient poetry and prose.

In this class, you will develop the ability to appreciate and analyze literary texts from a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions in the ancient world. You will be asked to demonstrate this ability in both written and spoken English. In our increasingly multicultural world, both in the classroom and in the workplace, you will be increasingly expected to develop what is called “intercultural competence.” This class, by exposing you to foundational texts from four ancient and very different cultures, will boost your “intercultural competence.”

Required Texts:

The Book of Songs, trans. Arthur Waley (Grove Press)

The Iliad of Homer, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Anchor/Doubleday)

The Mahabharata, trans. Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan (selections from *The World of Literature*, eds. Westling, Durrant, Kohl, Laskaya, Shankman [Prentice Hall]), available on Blackboard

Genesis, trans. Robert Alter (Norton)

*Note: It is important that you read the assignments in the specific translations chosen for the course. Literary translation is an art, and the translations chosen for this course are particularly artful and beautiful.

Assignments

I. September 29: Introduction; Problems of Translation; *Book of Songs* 1; Oct. 1:

Book of Songs 5, 20, 23, 26, 29, 30, 32, 40, 41; October 3: *Book of Songs* 40, 41, 42, 45,

Iliad and, like the ancient "rhapsodes" who recited the Homeric poems to ancient audiences, to "perform" their lines and to discuss the context and significance -- for the concerns of the course as a whole -- of the passage they have chosen to memorize, I'll expect you to make comparisons between the passage you have chosen to memorize and the other works we have read. In other words, you'll need to be able to discuss the *Book of Songs*, *Iliad*, the *Mahabharata*, and the Bible.

Your grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:

class participation: **10%**

papers: ~~60%~~ ^{175/} **60%** (15% for the first paper; 30% each for the second two papers)

final exam: **15%**